

DEAD
GIRL
WALKING

ROBERTA GATELY

bookouture

In loving memory of my cherished brother Jim Gately, an adored husband, father, brother, uncle and friend. Gone too soon. Forever Missed. Forever Loved. ♥

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I worked in the Boston City Hospital Emergency Room for many years (now the Boston Medical Center) just as Jessie Novak does in this series, but this book is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual events or people is purely coincidental.

PROLOGUE

“Nine-one-one. This call is being recorded. What’s your emergency?”

Silence, except for a distant smattering of sound, impossible to discern, and other than that—nothing but a chilling kind of quiet.

“Nine-one-one. What’s your emergency?” the dispatcher repeated, an unmistakable hint of tension in her voice.

“I... I need help.”

“We’ll get help to you right away, sir, but first, what is your emergency?”

There was a pause, for minutes it seemed, though it was only eight seconds.

“Sir? Are you there?”

“Help me,” the caller cried again.

“Where are you, sir? What’s your emergency?”

“I... I’ve been shot. My wife, too. I think she might be dying. We were robbed. He had a gun.”

“Can you tell me where you are?”

“I don’t know for sure. It’s so dark. But we’ve been shot. Both of us.”

“Is the person who shot you still there?”

“No, no. I don’t think so.”

“What’s your location?” This time there was a crispness to her voice, a practiced, almost calming response.

“I... I don’t know. Just come. Please.” The caller’s words were punctuated by rapid breathing.

“We will. We’re here to help. What’s your name?” This time her voice was low and soothing.

“Umm... my name’s Rob.”

“Rob, can you tell me what happened, where you are?”

“We were out... celebrating... and I don’t know. A man came up behind us. Just get here. Please. There’s so much blood.”

“Rob, I need your location. I can send help as soon as you help me.”

“We’re in an alley. The one by the theater on Warrenton Street, I think. I’m not sure. A man just robbed us and then he shot us. Both of us...”

“We have a hit on your location now. Help is on the way, but stay with me. Where is the bleeding?”

“My side. He shot me in the side.” He let out a short whimper.

“And your wife?” There was an urgency to the dispatcher’s voice.

“Her head,” he answered in a strong, impatient voice. “She’s not speaking. She hasn’t answered me. Ann?” he called. “I don’t think she’s breathing either.”

“Rob, I have units on the way. Can you check your wife for a pulse?”

No answer. Just silence. Maybe he was doing that, checking for a pulse. The tension was palpable.

“Rob? Are you there? I’ll stay on the line with you. The ambulance will be there in just a minute or two.”

There was only silence, as though a mute button had been hit. Suddenly, in the distance came the familiar drone of approaching sirens. “Rob? I can hear the sirens now. Are you strong enough to get to the street so they’ll see you?”

And then there was a click, and the drone of a dial tone.

CHAPTER ONE

The ER's C-Med radio crackled to life, the static almost blocking the transmission.

"Paramedic one-thirty-two calling base. Are you there? Pick up."

"Oh, no," Jessie mumbled to herself as she ran for the radio. Her ER shift was over, she'd been busy clearing out a couple of patients who'd been waiting for beds, but a paramedic call could keep her over into the night shift and it was already well past midnight. She'd promised to stay until the understaffed night shift was settled and then she'd planned to head to Foley's. It was the late-night bar of choice for ER nurses and the policemen who patrolled Boston's streets, though her favorites of those were the undercover guys who always had great stories. That was probably a lost cause tonight. She sighed and lifted the receiver. "Boston City Hospital here. What do you have? Over."

"We're en route with two gunshots. The first is a male with a gunshot wound to his right flank. The other is a woman with a gunshot to the head. Male is stable. Female had ineffective, agonal respirations, intubated at the scene, pulse forty, no blood pressure. We are three minutes out. Copy?"

"Trauma rooms One and Two. We'll be ready." *Forget fun tonight*, she thought, pressing the intercom. "Two, yes two, GSWs en route. ETA of three minutes, more like two now. Trauma teams to Trauma One and Two please." Jessie swept her shiny chestnut-colored, shoulder-length curls up hoping to restrain them with a clip. She'd only just let her hair down and run her fingers through

it in preparation for going out. At least she hadn't done eyeliner yet. She'd get grief for that in the trauma room though they'd never mention her ever-present lipstick. "What's the difference between a Pitbull and a triage nurse?" She'd often posed the question to the newest EMTs, those emergency medical technicians who looked as though they might faint. They invariably stood there, not sure what to say. "Lipstick," she'd answer with a laugh. "Now, tell me about your patient."

No time for fresh lipstick tonight, she thought as she raced to the trauma hallway calling out to Neil Doherty, the surgeon on duty. "I'll take the woman into Trauma One with you. As long as the male's stable, the team can get lines in and get him X-rayed. Okay?"

Neil nodded as he pulled on a pair of sterile gloves and hurried along the hallway. Jessie turned and headed to the ambulance bay, the sudden screech of sirens announcing the arrival of at least one ambulance and an assortment of police vehicles. She stepped through the doors, the biting wind, or perhaps the blackness of the night, sending a shiver through her spine. A policeman, sweat beading along his forehead despite the chill, reached her first. He seemed familiar but she couldn't quite place him.

"There's press just behind us. You should probably close the entrance off. Okay?"

"Close the entrance? The whole ambulance bay? Who was shot?"

"An aide to the mayor. Some wunderkind, a Harvard guy, and the mayor's chief of staff."

And suddenly, she recognized the impish grin, the steady blue eyes that could stare you down or make you melt, all in the same glance. "Ahh, Nick," she said, remembering one very late night at Foley's.

"One and only. I know I still owe you a beer."

"More than that if my memory serves me."

The backup beep of the ambulance interrupted their conversation, and before the vehicle came to a full stop, the doors flew

open and a medic jumped out. "Give me a hand, will you?" he shouted to Nick.

"Which one is this?" Jessie asked.

"Male, age thirty-two, gunshot wound to the right flank," the medic said.

Jessie had a quick look. The patient looked stable enough: good color, awake, eyes open wide. "Trauma Two," she said pointing to the long hallway. The medic and Nick set off at a jog, the stretcher between them. Jessie turned back as a stream of flashes and people filled the ambulance bay. The second ambulance had pulled in and the medics were trying to move their patient into the ER but a crowd of reporters and television cameras surrounded them, the few cops trying in vain to push them back. She elbowed her way through the pack and got hold of one end of the stretcher, pulling it behind her. "Trauma One," she shouted over the din as she raced through the entrance, the noise of the crowd dimming as the automatic doors closed behind her. "Lock those doors down, will you?" she directed the security guard on duty. "And check all IDs at the walk-in entrance. No reporters, got it?" The guard nodded.

As they approached Trauma One, Jessie got a look at her patient—young, pretty, thick brown hair tumbling around her face, rose petals tangled in the loose strands, her appearance so like Jessie's she might have been her twin. But this poor woman was intubated—the tube snaking through her lips into her trachea; a medic was pumping oxygen into her lungs through a football-shaped bag, an ambu bag. They worked quickly to move the patient to the ER stretcher as the medic began his report.

"Gunshot wound to the back of the head, no exit wound," he said. "We don't have much more than that. It happened downtown. A robbery, dispatch said. Anyway, her husband said she's twenty-eight years old, no significant medical history, healthy until tonight. She's unresponsive, pulse is forty-two, blood pressure back after

IV fluids, now she's eighty over zero. Name is Ann Hart. That's it? Questions?"

The medics pulled off their gloves and began to tap away at their iPads. A medical aide hooked the patient to the ER's wall monitors while a respiratory tech checked the placement of the breathing tube and connected the woman to a ventilator. The remaining staff, another nurse and an intern, began to cut away the patient's clothes—a pink wool jacket and matching dress, a pearl necklace, a Tiffany bracelet—all cut away leaving Ann Hart naked under the glaring lights. Jessie threw a sheet over her patient and slipped off the woman's diamond ring and wedding band, her fingers as cool and lifeless as though she was dying from her fingertips on up. Jessie squeezed her hand, a rose petal inexplicably clutched there as well. She brushed it to the floor. "Ann," she said softly, "you're safe now. You're in the emergency room. If you can hear me, squeeze back or wiggle your fingers." There was nothing, no response, not that Jessie had really expected one, but it always paid to hope. Sometimes, you could be pleasantly surprised, and this was one of those times she prayed for just that.

She busied herself once again with trying to save this woman. She wrapped a tourniquet on her limp arm. She was going to need more fluids, maybe blood. She snaked an IV catheter through the best vein, drew the necessary vials of blood and hooked her patient up to a bag of fluid. "Call Radiology. Tell them we're going to need a stat CT scan," she shouted to no one in particular, but someone would do it. That's the way the ER worked. What seemed chaotic to an outside observer was actually a well-oiled machine. The team worked quickly on the woman who lay on the stretcher, her skin as pale as the sheet, the only evidence of her gunshot wound the gauze bandage that covered her head.

"How long ago did this happen?" the surgeon asked as he waved a flashlight in front of the woman's eyes.

The medic looked up. “Not long ago. Don’t have an exact time. The husband was pretty upset. He didn’t have a good grip on the timeline, but it wasn’t long ago. Once the assailant left the scene, the poor guy waited to make sure it was safe before he even moved. The shooter took his phone, so he had to go through her stuff,” he said, pointing to the patient as though she was already dead. “So, I don’t know, maybe thirty minutes. We were a while at the scene. The press was all over the place. It’s like they have radar for the bad stuff. Anyway, that’s all I have. Heard the mayor’s on his way in, so we’re outta here.”

“Fixed and dilated,” Neil announced referring to Mrs. Hart’s eyes’ reaction to the flashlight, a sure sign of brain injury. He stood up, rubbing his back. “We’ll need a head CT, an EEG to check brain activity, and a word with the family. Did someone page Neurosurgery?” he asked.

“On the way,” Carol, the second nurse, answered, pushing her eyeglasses up on her nose. “Chief’s on his way too.” There was a low murmur in the room. Tim Merrick, the Chief of Surgery, could be a real pain; he could be arrogant, insulting and rude, though never to nurses. He was a darn good surgeon and when he was on call, people seemed to have a better chance of surviving their injuries. He’d served in Afghanistan after nine-eleven, and Iraq after that. He knew gunshots like nobody else, which was why he could get away with sometimes being such an insufferable windbag.

“Glasgow Coma Scale is three,” Carol said, shaking her head. The Glasgow Coma Scale was a fifteen-point scale designed to estimate and categorize the extent of brain injury and likely outcome for a patient. A score of three, they all knew, likely meant a dire outcome. “She’s so young.”

Jessie leaned in closer and snipped away the gauze bandage that the medics had wound around the woman’s head. The woman’s mascara and eyeliner had run, tracking black streaks along her face. Maybe she’d cried when they were being robbed, maybe

she'd begged for her life, and the makeup she'd applied for a happy night on the town had smudged with her tears, the flowers she'd clutched breaking apart as she fell. Jessie bit back the lump in her throat and snipped the last bits of gauze away.

Neil continued his exam, gently rotating Ann Hart's body to have a look at the back of her head, the area of the wound where another cluster of rose petals was tangled in her hair. Jessie brushed them away. "Can you shave that area?" he asked as he poked and prodded the woman's lower back looking for any wounds the medics might have missed. A razor appeared and Jessie carefully shaved along the back of the woman's scalp until they spotted the entry wound—a small oval-shaped indentation, hair and bits of tissue stuck to the wound. There was little blood and what there was, was already drying.

"At least there are no other injuries, but that bullet likely ricocheted around her brain," Neil said with a sigh. "Just wrap her head back up and we might as well start a Mannitol drip and maybe diminish the swelling a bit. We'll let Neurosurgery deal with the rest of this." Jessie grabbed a new gauze roll and wrapped it round her patient's head as Carol connected the Mannitol to the patient's IV fluids.

"CT scan is ready," the secretary said, popping her head into the room. The team disconnected the monitors and lines and hooked everything to portable machines. The respiratory tech unhooked the ventilator and began pumping oxygen into the patient with the ambu bag once again. Jessie checked the wall clock. They'd been in this room only fifteen minutes.

"I'll go," Carol said. "You should try to go home. This is going to be a long night."

"Which is exactly why I'm stuck here," Jessie answered. "I'm going to check on her husband. Let me know if you need help."

Carol nodded and the team guided the stretcher and their equipment along the hallway to CT scan.

Jessie turned and looked at the room, the gloves and remnants of their work scattered on the floor, and then she saw it—the woman’s jacket and dress, the pearls and bracelet and rings laid gently on top of the EKG machine. She picked them up, the woman’s perfume—a sweet lavender scent—wafted to her nose, and she felt a sudden and unexpected sadness. She’d always managed to distance herself from the misery that happened here; that was how she’d managed to survive and even thrive as a nurse in this busy inner-city ER. But this woman wasn’t much older than she was. At twenty-eight, Ann Hart was only a year older than Jessie’s twenty-seven, though tonight, she felt older, much older. Maybe she’d seen too much already. Too much of what she did see in the ER was life at its worst, the unfairness of it all rarely getting to her. Until tonight. But there was something about Ann Hart, or maybe it was just that Jessie saw herself when she looked at Ann, the dark hair tumbling out, the clear skin, the pert nose, all of it so much like her own. And the flowers, was she celebrating something? Jessie’s shoulders sagged as she gently folded the clothes and ran her fingers along the pearls, their glossy smoothness somehow soothing. She sighed and dropped the jewelry—the rings and pearls and bracelet—into a small manila envelope, sealing it and recording the contents before slipping it, along with the clothes, into a plastic patient belonging bag. There was still work to be done. Jessie peeled off her gloves and hit the intercom button.

“Housekeeping to Trauma One, please.”