

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

J.T. ELLISON

LIE

T

THEY
APPEARED
TO BE THE
PERFECT
COUPLE...

M

ME

A NOVEL

LIE TO ME

AN EXCERPT

J.T. ELLISON



PRAISE FOR J.T. ELLISON'S LIE TO ME

"[An] exceptional domestic thriller from bestseller Ellison... this standalone may be Ellison's best work to date."

—★ *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"Wonderful ... a one-more-chapter, don't-eat-dinner, stay-up-late sensation."

—**Lee Child**, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of NO
MIDDLE NAME

"Fans of GONE GIRL will gobble up this thriller about a marriage from hell, which moves at a blazing-fast pace and smoothly negotiates more twists and turns than the backroads of Tennessee. J.T. Ellison will keep you guessing every step of the way to the surprise ending!"

—**Lisa Scottoline**, *New York Times* bestselling author of
ONE PERFECT LIE

"A wickedly good thriller about a picture-perfect marriage that is anything but, LIE TO ME has it all: murder, lies and betrayal. J.T. Ellison will have readers hanging onto the edge of their seats with her latest cunning tale."

—**Mary Kubica**, *New York Times* bestselling author of
EVERY LAST LIE

"LIE TO ME twists you up, throws you into nail-biting action and unexpected revelations. Belt yourself in for this roller coaster ride."

—**Catherine Coulter**, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author
of ENIGMA

"LIE TO ME brilliantly combines a domestic noir thriller with a searing portrait of two writers trapped in a web of lies, betrayals, and murder. Sharply written and masterfully plotted, full of hard truths about the creative life and modern marriage, Ellison has written her finest novel- a breakout page-turner certain to win her a wide audience."

—**Jeff Abbott**, *New York Times* bestselling author of BLAME

"Secrets, secrets, who has more secrets? Writers or wives?"

With more surprises than a kitchen sink casserole, in LIE TO ME, J.T. Ellison lets us in on what goes on behind the closed doors of both."

—**Helen Ellis**, *New York Times* bestselling author of
AMERICAN HOUSEWIFE

"Ellison knows how to deliver gripping psychological suspense... Appearances can be deceiving, but Ellison's writing is not."

—*Library Journal*, on LIE TO ME

"This is the book that will be on everyone's eyes --- and lips --- for weeks and months to come."

—*Bookreporter.com*

LIE TO ME

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PROLOGUE

IN WHICH INTRODUCTIONS ARE MADE

You aren't going to like me very much. Oh, maybe in your weaker moments, you'll feel sorry for me, and use those feelings of warmth and compassion and insightful understanding to excuse my actions. You'll say to yourself, "Poor little girl. She couldn't help herself." Or, "Can you blame her? After all she's been through?" Perhaps you'll even think, "She was born to this. It is not her fault."

Of course it's my fault. I chose this path. Yes, I feel as if I have no choice, that I'm driven to do it, that there are voices in my head that push me to the dark side.

But I also know right from wrong. I know good from evil. I may be compelled to ruin the lives in front of me, but I could walk away if I wanted.

Couldn't I?

Never mind that. Back to you.

Truly, deep down, you are going to despise me. I am the rot that lives in the floorboards of your house. I am the spider that scuttles away when you shine light in my

corner, ever watching, ever waiting. I am the shard of glass that slits the skin of your bare foot. I am all the bad things that happen to you.

I steal things.

I kill things.

I leave a trail of destruction in my wake that is a sight to behold, wave after wave of hate that will overwhelm you until you sink to the bottom of my miserable little ocean, and once you've drowned I will feed on your flesh and turn your bones to dust.

You're mine now. You are powerless against me. So don't bother fighting it.

I hope you enjoy the show.

ETHAN

“Chaos is a name for any order that produces confusion in our minds.”

— GEORGE SANTAYANA

WE FIND A BODY

The body was in the woods off a meandering state road that led into a busy, charming historical downtown. It was completely obscured from view, deeply hidden, under several pine boughs and a thick layer of nature's detritus. Synthetic clothing was melted to the flesh, making it difficult to tell the body's race or gender at a glance. Closer investigation showed hair that was long and a curious shade: not blonde, not red, possibly chemically-treated. The left hand held evidence of rings, possibly a wedding set, and so the body was eventually determined as female.

The shroud of melt and bough had not stopped the forever daisy-chain progression of decay. Instar maggots and adult flies delighted in their found treat. A genus party started soon after. Diptera and Coleoptera were evident three days in, paving the way for the coming colonization of Calliphoridae. Though the body was burned beyond ready recognition, the insects didn't seem to mind; it was simply a barbecue feast to them.

Outside of this natural progression, the body lay undisturbed for two days. Birds of prey flew in long, lazy circles overhead. Cars drove past less than fifty yards away, drivers unknowing, uncaring, that one of their own lay rotting nearby.

Three Days Gone, a stray but severe thunderstorm knocked free several of the funereal branches, allowing the body to be exposed, pelted by hail breaking through the leafy canopy. The heavy rains wet the ground and allowed the body to sink deeper into the muck, where it canted on its side.

Four Days Gone, the body was ravaged by a starving coyote, forty-two razor teeth shredding everything available.

Five Days Gone, the body disarticulated, the fire and the heat and the wet and the insects and the coyote and the natural progression of things breaking it down quickly and without thought to the effects this would have on the loved ones. The idea of a non-intact body was sometimes more than people could take.

Six Days Gone, they found her.

SOMETHING'S MISSING

Franklin, Tennessee

Now

Ethan found the note ten minutes after he rolled out of bed that Tuesday, the Tuesday that would change everything. He came downstairs yawning, scratching his chest, to... nothing. Empty space, devoid of wife.

Sutton always began her morning at the table with a bowl of cereal, a piece of fruit, and a cup of tea and read the paper, scoffing at the innumerable typos—the paper was going under, paying for decent copyediting was the least of their worries. A bowl full of cereal, a glass of milk and a spoon would be laid out for him, the sports page folded neatly by his seat. Always. Always.

But this morning, there was no evidence Sutton had been in the kitchen. No newspaper, no bowl. No wife.

He called for her. There was no answer. He searched through the house. Her bag was in her office, her cellphone,

her laptop. Her license was stashed in her small wallet, all her credit cards present and accounted for, a twenty folded in half shoved behind them.

She must have gone for a run.

He felt a spark of pleasure at the thought. Sutton, once, had been a health nut. She'd run or walked or done yoga every day, something physical, something to keep her body moving and in shape. And what a shape—the woman was a knockout, willowy and lithe, strong legs and delicate ankles, tendons tight and gleaming like a thoroughbred. A body she sculpted to match his own, to fit with him.

Ethan Montclair couldn't have a dog for a wife, no. He needed someone he could trot out at cocktail parties who looked smashing in a little black dress. And not only looked good, but sounded good. He needed a partner on all levels—physical and intellectual. Maybe it was shallow of him, but he was a good looking man, drew a lot of attention, and not only did he want his wife to be stunning, he wanted her to be smart, too. And Sutton fit the bill.

He knew they made a powerful, attractive couple. Looks and brains and success, so much success. That was their thing.

After Dashiell, she'd bounced back into shape like the champion racehorse she was, though later, when their world collapsed, she'd become tired and bloated and swollen with medications and depression, and she no longer took any interest in being beautiful and fit.

That she'd decided to start running again gave him hope. So much hope.

Spirits lifted, he went back to the sunny, happy kitchen and got his own bowl, his own milk. Made a pot of tea,

whistling. Went for the stevia—no sugar for the health-conscious Montclairs, no, never.

That was when he saw it. Small. White. Lined. Torn from a spiral bound notebook, a Clairefontaine, Sutton's favorite for the smooth, lovely paper.

This... thing... was incongruous with the rest of their spotless kitchen. Sutton was above all things a pathological neatnik. She'd never just leave something lying about.

All the happiness fled. He knew. He just knew. He'd been all wrong. She hadn't gone running.

He picked up the note.

Dear Ethan,

I'm sorry to do this to you, but I need some time away. I've been unhappy, you know that. This shouldn't come as a big surprise. Forgive me for being a coward. Forgive me, for so many things.

Don't look for me.

S

She was gone.

He felt something squeezing in his chest, a pain of sorts, and realized that his heart had just broken. He'd always thought that a stupid, silly term, but now he knew. It could happen, it was happening. He was being torn in two, torn to shreds. No wonder there were rites warning against this—*What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*

God was ripping him apart in punishment, and he deserved it. He deserved it all.

He didn't cry. There were no tears left for either of them to shed.

He put the note down carefully, as if it were a bomb that might go off with the wrong touch. Went to their bedroom. Nothing seemed out of place. Her brush, her makeup case, her toothbrush, all lined up carefully on the marble. Her suitcase was in the closet.

He went back downstairs to her office, at the back of the house. Doubled checked.

Her laptop was on her desk.

Her cellphone was in the charger.

Her purse was on the floor next to her chair.

Her wallet inside, the smiling DMV photo that made her look like a model.

Like a zombie, he moved back to the kitchen. He opened the refrigerator and got out the milk. Poured cereal in the bowl. Dropped the stevia into his tea. Sat at the empty table, stared at the spot where his wife's head should have been.

What was he supposed to do now? Where could she be? He ran through the possibilities, the places she loved, discarding one after another. Surely he was wrong in his thinking. Surely she'd simply run away, to one of her friends. That's where she'd gone. Should he call Ivy and see if Sutton was camped in her kitchen, instead of his? Should he give her some time, and space, like she asked?

She left without her things, Ethan. Sutton's lifelines are her laptop and phone. It's her office, her world.

A dawning realization. Sutton hadn't shaken the depression, not completely. She was still prone to fits of melancholy. She might have done something stupid, crazy. She'd tried once before, after... Oh, God. Her words. Perhaps she was telling him exactly what she'd done.

I'm a coward. Forgive me. Don't look for me.

He threw the bowl of cereal across the room.

"Bloody fucking hell. You selfish, heartless bitch."

YOU KNOW YOU WANT TO READ THE REST.

GET YOUR COPY NOW!

ALSO BY J.T. ELLISON

Standalone Thrillers

LIE TO ME

NO ONE KNOWS

Lieutenant Taylor Jackson Series

FIELD OF GRAVES

WHERE ALL THE DEAD LIE

SO CLOSE THE HAND OF DEATH

THE IMMORTALS

THE COLD ROOM

JUDAS KISS

14

ALL THE PRETTY GIRLS

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WHAT LIES BEHIND

WHEN SHADOWS FALL

EDGE OF BLACK

A DEEPER DARKNESS

A Brit in the FBI Series co-written with Catherine Coulter

THE DEVIL'S TRIANGLE

THE END GAME

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THE FINAL CUT

Taylor Jackson novellas

(in anthologies with Erica Spindler and Alex Kava)

STORM SEASON

SLICES OF NIGHT



photo credit: Krista Lee Photography

New York Times bestselling author J.T. Ellison writes dark psychological thrillers starring Nashville Homicide **Lt. Taylor Jackson** and medical examiner **Dr. Samantha Owens**, and pens the international thriller series "A Brit in the FBI" with #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Catherine Coulter. Cohost of the EMMY Award-winning television show, *A Word on Words*, Ellison lives in Nashville with her husband and twin kittens.

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