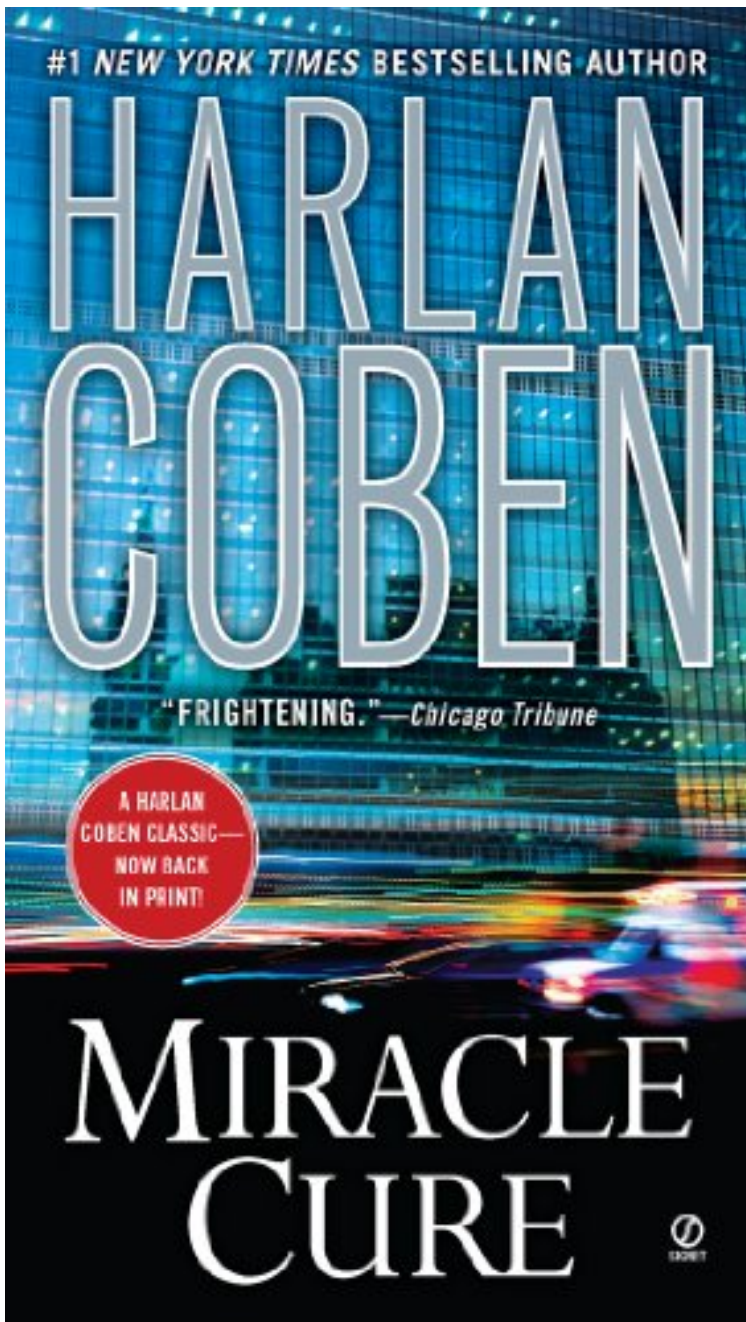


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Miracle Cure



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Par Harlan Coben : Miracle Cure before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Miracle Cure:

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA husband and wife race to find a cure for the disease that has inspired a serial killer to terrorize Manhattan in this classic medical thriller from #1 New York Times bestselling author Harlan Coben.Theyre one of the countrys most telegenic couples: beloved TV journalist Sara Lowell and New Yorks hottest basketball star, Michael Silverman. Their family and social connections tie them to the highest

echelons of the political, medical, and sports worldsthreads that will tangle them up in one of the most controversial and deadly issues of our time.In a clinic on Manhattans Upper West Side, a doctor has dedicated his life to eradicating a divisive and devastating disease. One by one, his patients are getting well. One by one, theyre being targeted by a serial killer. And now Michael has been diagnosed with the disease.

Theres only one cure, but many ways to die...ExtraitTable of ContentsTitle PageCopyright

PageDedicationChapter 1Chapter 2Chapter 3Chapter 4Chapter 5Chapter 6Chapter 7Chapter 8Chapter 9Chapter 10Chapter 11Chapter 12Chapter 13Chapter 14Chapter 15Chapter 16Chapter 17Chapter 18Chapter 19Chapter 20Chapter 21Chapter 22Chapter 23Chapter 24Chapter 25EPILOGUETeaser chapterA Note from the AuthorOkay, if this is the first book of mine youre going to try, stop now. Return it. Grab another. Its okay. Ill wait.If youre still here, please know that I havent read Miracle Cure in at least twenty years. It is my second published novel, one I wrote in my early twenties when I was just a naive lad working in the travel industry and wondering if I should follow my father and brother go to (shudder) law school.Im hard on it, but arent we all hard on our early stuff? Remember that essay you wrote when you were in school, the one that you got an A plus on, the one your teacher called inspiredand one day youre going through your drawer and you find it and you read it and your heart sinks and you say, Man, what was I thinking?Thats how it is with early novels sometimes. This one is a bit preachy in spots and sometimes dated (though in truth, I wish the medical stuff was more dated, but thats another matter). You might think I based part of this on a real-life situation. I didnt. This book predates that event. I wont say more because it could be a spoiler.Finally, flawed and all, I love this book. There are an energy and risk-taking in Miracle Cure that I wonder if I still have. Im not this guy anymore, but thats okay. None of us is stagnant with our passion and our work. Thats a good thing.EnjoyPRAISE FOR HARLAN COBEN AND HIS BESTSELLING NOVELSCoben again keeps the reader off-balance with innovative story lines and diabolical bad guys.PeopleMore twists and turns than an amusement park ride.USA TodayEvery time you think Harlan Coben couldnt get any better at uncoiling a whip snake of a page-turner, he comes along with a new novel that somehow surpasses its predecessor.San Francisco ChronicleAn exhilarating, bang-up Porsche Turbo of a novel that you absolutely will not put down.Dennis LehaneCoben twists story lines into psychological thrill rides. The pages flip so fast, its a wonder you dont develop paper cuts.The Orlando SentinelTruly surprising.Entertainment WeeklyThe action unfolds with the intensity of TVs 24. . . . Nobody writes them better than Coben.The Associated PressLively, fast-moving entertainment, jam-packed with the bizarre plot twists that are his stock-in-trade.The Washington PostCoben is one of the best authors around at writing page-turning suspense.... He has a knack for hooking readers right away and holding their interest as they zoom through his plots.Chicago Sun-TimesMost thriller authors only wish they could write like Coben. The guy has a way of grabbing you from the first paragraph and never turning you loose till the ashes have settled. Coben takes chances; he pulls no punches.The Madison County Herald (MS)Harlan Coben thrillers are precision-tooled pageturners. If youre looking for immediate immersion in a book that will not let go until its done, then Cobens your man.London LiteALSO BY HARLAN COBENPlay Dead Deal Breaker Drop Shot Fade Away Back Spin One False Move The Final Detail Darkest Fear Tell No One Gone for Good No Second Chance Just One Look The Innocent Promise Me The Woods Hold Tight Long Lost Caught Live WireSIGNETPublished by New American Library, a division ofPenguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street,New York, New York 10014, USAPenguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto,Ontario M4P 2Y3, Canada (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)Penguin Books Ltd., 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, EnglandPenguin Ireland, 25 St. Stephens Green, Dublin 2,Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd.)Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty. Ltd.)Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park,New Delhi - 110 017, IndiaPenguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, Auckland 0632,New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd.)Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty.) Ltd., 24 Sturdee Avenue,Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South AfricaPenguin Books Ltd., Registered Offices:80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, EnglandPublished by Signet, an imprint of New American Library, a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. Previously published in an SPI Books edition. Published by arrangement with the author.First Signet Printing, October 2011Copyright Harlan Coben, 1991, 1992ISBN: 9781101544440Excerpt from Live Wire copyright Harlan Coben, 2011All rights reservedThe Edgar name is a registered service mark of the Mystery Writers of America, Inc. REGISTERED TRADEMARKMARCA REGISTRADAWithout limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means

(electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book. PUBLISHERS NOTE This is a work of fiction.

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PROLOGUE FRIDAY, AUGUST 30 D R. Bruce Grey tried not to walk too fast. He slowed his pace, fighting off the temptation to sprint across the soiled floor of Kennedy Airports International Arrivals Building, past the customs officials, and out into the humid night air. His eyes shifted from side to side. Every few steps he would feign a soreness in his neck to give himself the opportunity to glance behind him and make sure he was not being followed. Stop it! Bruce told himself. Stop lurking around like a poor mans James Bond. Youre shaking like a malaria patient, for chrissake. You couldnt look more conspicuous if you wore a sign. He strolled past the luggage carousel, nodding politely at the little old lady who had sat next to him on the flight. The old woman had not shut her mouth during the entire trip, gabbing on about her family, her love of flying, her last trip overseas. She was sweet enough, just somebodys grandmother, but Bruce still closed his eyes and pretended to be asleep in order to get a little peace and quiet. But, of course, sleep had not come to him. It would not come for some time yet. But maybe she wasnt just some sweet, little old lady, Bruce boy. Maybe she was following you . . . He dismissed the voice with a nervous shake of the head. This whole thing was turning his brain into sewer sludge. First, he was sure that the bearded man on the plane had been following him. Then it was the big guy with the slicked-back hair and Armani suit at the telephone booth. And dont forget the pretty blonde by the terminal exit. She had been following him too. Now it was a little old lady. Get a grip on yourself, Bruce. Paranoia is not what we need right now. Clear thinking, old pal thats what were looking for. Bruce moved past the luggage carousel and over to the customs official. Passport, please. Bruce handed the man his passport. No luggage, sir? He shook his head. Only this carry-on. The customs officer glanced at the passport and then at Bruce. You look quite different from your photograph. Bruce tried to force a tired smile to his lips but it would not hold. The humidity was almost unbearable. His dress shirt was pasted against his skin, his tie loosened to the point of being nearly untied. Beads of perspiration dotted his forehead. I . . . Ive gone through a few changes. A few? Youre a dark-haired man with a beard in this picture. I know Now youre a clean-shaven blond. Like I said, I went through a few changes. Luckily, you cant tell eye color from a passport photo or you would want to know why I changed my eyes from brown to blue. The customs official did not appear convinced. Were you traveling on business or pleasure? Pleasure. You always pack this lightly? Bruce swallowed and managed a shrug. I hate waiting for checked luggage. The customs official swung his line of vision from the passport photograph to Bruces face and then back again. Would you open your bag, please? Bruce could barely keep his hands steady enough to set the combination. It took him three tries before it finally snapped open. There you go. The customs officials eyes narrowed into thin slits as he rummaged through the belongings. What are these? he asked. Bruce closed his eyes, his breath coming in short gasps. Some files. I can see that, the official replied. What are they for? Im a doctor, Bruce explained, his voice cracking. I wanted to review some of my patients charts while I was away. Do you always do that when youre on vacation? Not always. What type of doctor are you? An internist at Columbia Presbyterian, Bruce replied, telling a half-truth. He decided to leave out the fact that he was also an expert in public health and epidemiology. I see, the official replied. I wish my doctor was that dedicated. Again Bruce tried to smile. Again it was a failed attempt. And this sealed envelope? Bruce felt his whole body quake. Excuse me? What is in this manila envelope? He willed a casual look on his face. Oh, thats just some medical information Im sending to a colleague, he managed. The customs officials eyes locked onto Bruces bloodshot ones for a few long moments. I see, he said, slowly putting the envelope back in the bag. When the customs official finished going through the rest of the carry-on, he signed Bruces customs declaration and handed him back his passport. Give the card to the woman on your way out. Bruce reached for the bag. Thank you. And, Doctor? Bruce looked up. You might want to visit one of your colleagues, the customs official said. If you dont mind a layman giving medical opinions, you look awful. Ill do that. Bruce lifted the bag and glanced behind him. The little old lady was still waiting for her luggage. The man with the beard and the pretty blonde were nowhere in sight. The big guy in the Armani

suit was still talking on the phone. Bruce moved away from the customs desk. His right hand gripped his bag with excessive vigor; his left hand rubbed his face. He handed the customs declaration to the woman and walked through the sliding glass doors into the waiting area. A sea of anxious faces greeted him. People stood on their toes, peering out from all points with each swish of the glass doors before lowering their heads in disappointment when an unfamiliar face approached the threshold. Bruce moved steadily past the waiting friends and relatives, past the bored limousine drivers with name signs held up against their chests. He made his way to the Japan Airlines ticket counter on the right. Is there a mailbox near here? he asked. To your right, the woman replied. By the Air France desk. Thank you. He walked by a garbage can and casually dropped his torn-up boarding pass into it. He had considered himself very clever to book the flight under an assumed name every clever, that was, until he got to the airport and was informed that you could not have an international ticket issued under a different name from the one on your passport. Whoops. Luckily, there had been plenty of space on the flight. Even though he had to purchase another ticket for himself, reserving one under an alias had not been such a dumb idea. Before his actual departure date, no one could have found out what flight he was booked on because his name was not in the computer. Pure genius on his part. Yessiree, Brucie. You are a regular genius. Yeah, right. Genius. Bullshit. He located the mail slot near the Air France desk. A few passengers spoke to the airline representative. None of them paid him the slightest attention. His eyes quickly checked the room. The old lady, the bearded man, and the pretty blonde had either left or were still going through customs. The only spy he could still see was the big guy in the Armani suit, who now moved hurriedly through the sliding glass doors and out of the terminal. Bruce let loose a sigh of relief. No one was looking at him now. He turned his attention back to the mail slot. His hand reached into his bag and quickly slipped the sealed manila envelope down the chute. His insurance policy was safely on its way. Now what? He certainly could not go home. If anyone was searching for him, his apartment on the Upper West Side would be the first place they would look. The clinic was no good at this hour of the night, either. Someone could nab him there just as easily. Look, I'm not very good at this. I'm just your average run-of-the-mill doctor who went to college, went to medical school, got married, had a kid, finished residency, got divorced, lost custody of the kid, and now works too hard. I'm not up to playing I Spy. But what other choice did he have? He could go to the police, but who would believe him? He had no real evidence yet. Hell, he wasn't even sure what was going on himself. What could he tell the police? Try this on for size, Brucie: Help! Protect me! Two people have already been murdered and countless others may join them including me! Maybe true. Maybe not. Question: what did he really know for sure? Answer: not a hell of a lot. More like nothing. By going to the police, Bruce knew he would do little more than destroy the clinic and all the important work they had accomplished there. He had dedicated the last three years to that research and he was not about to give those damn bigots the weapon they needed to kill the project. No, he would have to handle it a different way. But how? He checked once more to make sure he was not being followed. All his enemy spies were gone now. That was good. That was a nice bit of relief. He hailed a yellow taxi and jumped into the backseat. Where to? Bruce thought for a moment, mulling over every thriller he had ever read. Where would George Smiley go, or better still, Travis McGee or Spenser? The Plaza, please. The taxi pulled away. Bruce watched out the back window. No cars seemed to be following as the taxi began its journey down the Van Wyck Expressway toward Manhattan. Bruce settled back, letting his head rest against the seat. He tried to breathe deeply and relax, but he still found himself trembling in fear. Think, goddamn it. This is no time to catnap. First, he needed a new alias. His eyes moved left and right, finally resting on the taxi driver's name on the displayed license. Benjamin Johnson. Bruce turned the name around. John Benson. That would be his name until tomorrow. John Benson. Just until tomorrow. Now, if he could just stay alive until then . . . He dared not think that far ahead. Everyone at the clinic thought he was still on vacation in Cancn, Mexico. No one absolutely no one knew the whole vacation idea was merely a diversion. Bruce had played the role of happy traveler to the utmost. He had bought beachwear, flown down to Cancn last Friday, checked into the Cancn Oasis Hotel, prepaid for the week, and told the concierge that he would be renting a boat and could not be reached. Then he shaved his beard, cut and bleached his hair, and put on blue-tinted contact lenses. Even Bruce had trouble recognizing the image in the mirror. He returned to the airport, left Mexico, checked in at his true destination under the name Rex Veneto, and began to investigate his horrible suspicions. The truth, however, appeared to be more shocking than he had imagined. The taxi slowed now in front of the Plaza Hotel on Fifth Avenue. The lights of Central Park twinkled from across the street and to the north. Bruce paid the driver, tipping him no more or less than the proper amount, and strolled into the lush lobby of the hotel. Despite his designer suit, he felt conspicuously sloppy. His jacket was heavily

creased, his pants completely wrinkled. He looked like something left in the bottom of a laundry hamper for a week hardly what his mother would have called presentable. He began to walk toward the reception desk when something he barely spotted out of the corner of his eye made him stop. Its just your imagination, Bruce. Its not the same guy. It cant be. Bruce felt his pulse quicken. He spun around, but the big guy in the Armani suit was nowhere in sight. Had he really seen the same man? Probably not, but there was no reason to take chances. He left the hotel by the back entrance and walked toward the subway. He purchased a token, took the 1 train down to Fourteenth Street, switched to the A train to Forty-second Street, cut cross town on the 7 train, jumping off the car seconds before the doors closed at Third Avenue. He changed trains haphazardly for another half an hour, jumping on or off at the last possible second each time, before ending up on Fifty-sixth Street and Eighth Avenue. Then John Benson walked a few blocks and checked into the Days Inn, a hotel where Dr. Bruce Grey had never stayed. When he got up to his room on the eleventh floor, he locked the door and slid the chain into place. Now what? A phone call was risky, but Bruce decided to take the chance. He would speak to Harvey for only a few moments, then hang up. He picked up the phone and dialed his partners home phone. Harvey answered on the second ring. Hello? Harvey, its me. Bruce? Harvey sounded surprised. Hows everything in Cancn? Bruce ignored the question. I need to speak to you. Christ, you sound awful. Whats wrong? Bruce closed his eyes. Not over the phone. What are you talking about? Harvey asked. Are you still? Not over the phone, he repeated. Ill talk to you tomorrow. Tomorrow? What the hell is going? Dont ask me any more questions. Ill meet you tomorrow morning at six thirty. Where? At the clinic. Jesus, are you in danger? Is this about the murders? I cant talk anymo Click. Bruce froze. There was a noise at his door. Bruce? Harvey cried. What is it? Whats going on? Bruces heart began to race. His eyes never left the door. Tomorrow, he whispered. Ill explain everything then. But He gently replaced the receiver, cutting Harvey off. Im not up for this. Oh, please, God, let my mind be playing tricks on me. Im not up for this. Im really not up for any of this.... There was no other sound, and for a brief moment Bruce wondered if his overactive brain cells had indeed imagined the whole thing. Maybe there had been no sound at all. And if there had been a noise, what was so strange about that? He was staying in a New York hotel, for chrissake, not a soundproof studio. Maybe it was just a maid. Maybe it was just a bellhop. Maybe it was just a big guy with slicked-back hair and a custom-made, silk Armani suit. Bruce crept toward the door. The right leg slid forward; then the left tagged along. He had never been much of an athlete, had never been the most coordinated guy in the world. Right now, it looked like he was doing some kind of spastic fox-trot. Click. His heart slammed into his throat. His legs went weak. There was no mistaking where the sound had come from this time. His door. He stood frozen. His breathing reverberated in his ears so damn loudly that he was sure everyone on the floor could hear it. Click. A short, quick click. Not a fumbling sound, but a very precise click. Run, Bruce. Run and hide. But where? He was in a small room on the eleventh floor of a hotel. Where the hell was he supposed to run and hide? He took another step toward the door. I can open it quickly, scream my brains out, and run down the hall like an escaped psych patient. I could The knock came so suddenly that Bruce nearly screamed. Who is it? he practically shouted. Towels, a mans voice said. Bruce moved closer to the door. Towels, my ass. Dont need any, he called out without opening the door. Pause. Okay. Good night, sir. He could hear Mr. Towels footsteps move away from his door. Bruce pressed his back against the wall and continued to make his way to the door. His whole body shook. Despite the rooms powerful air-conditioning, sweat drenched his clothing and matted his hair down against his forehead. Now what? The peephole, Mr. James Friggin Bond. Look through the peephole. Bruce obeyed the voice within his head. He slowly turned and put his eye against the peephole. Nothing. Nada, as the Mexicans say. There was no one there, not a damn thing. He tried to look to his left and then his right. And that was when the door flew open. The chain broke as though it were a thread. The metal knob slammed against the point of Bruces hip. Pain shot through the whole area. Instinctively he tried to cover his hip with his hand. That proved to be a mistake. From behind the door a large fist came flying toward Bruces face. He tried to duck, but his reflexes were too slow. The knuckles landed with a horrid thud against the bridge of Bruces nose, crushing the bones and cartilage. Blood flowed quickly from his nostrils. Oh, Jesus, oh, sweet God . . . Bruce stumbled back, reaching for his nose. The big guy in the Armani suit stepped into the room and closed the door. He moved with a speed and grace that defied his great bulk. Please Bruce managed before a powerful hand the size of a boxers glove clamped over his mouth, silencing him. The hand carelessly knocked against the flattened nostrils, pushing them upward and sending hot surges of pain through his face. The man smiled and nodded politely as if they had just been introduced at a cocktail party. Then he lifted his foot and threw a kick with expert precision. The blow shattered Bruces kneecap. Bruce heard the sharp cracking noise as the bone

below the knee snapped. His scream was muffled by the mans hand tightening against his mouth. Then the giant hand pulled back just slightly before slamming up into Bruces jaw, fracturing another bone and cracking several teeth. Gripping the broken jaw with his fingers, the man reached into Bruces mouth and pulled down hard. The pain was enormous, overwhelming. Bruce could feel the tendons in his mouth ripping away. Oh, God, please . . . The big man in the Armani suit let Bruce slide to the floor like a sack of potatoes. Bruces head swam. He watched through a murky haze as the big man examined a bloodstain on his suit. The man seemed annoyed by the stain, upset that it would not come out at the dry cleaner. With a shake of his head, the man moved toward the window and pulled back the curtain. You picked a nice, high floor, he said casually. That will make things easier. The big man turned away from the window. He strolled back toward where Bruce lay writhing. He bent down, took a solid hold on Bruces foot and gently lifted Bruces shattered leg into the air. The agony was unbearable. Jolts of pain wracked his body with each slight movement of the broken limb. Please, God, please let me pass out . . . Suddenly Bruce realized what the man was about to do. He wanted to ask him what he wanted, wanted to offer the man everything he had, wanted to beg the man for mercy, but his damaged mouth could produce only a gurgling noise. Bruce could only look up hopelessly with pleading, terror-filled eyes. Blood streamed down his face and onto his neck and chest. Through a cloud of pain Bruce saw the look in the mans eyes. It was not a wild-eyed, crazed look; not a hateful, bloodthirsty look; not the stare of a psychotic killer. The man was calm. Busy. A man performing a tedious task.

Detached. Unemotional. This is nothing to this guy, Bruce thought. Another day at the office. The man reached into his jacket pocket and tossed a pen and a piece of paper on the floor. Then he gripped Bruces foot, one hand on the heel, the other on the toes. Bruce bucked in uncontrollable agony. The mans muscles flexed before he finally spoke. Im going to twist your foot all the way around, the big man said, until your toes are pointed toward your back and that broken bone rips through the skin. He paused, gave a distracted smile, and repositioned his fingers in order to get a better grip. Ill let go when you finish writing your suicide note, okay? Bruce made the note brief. 1. SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14. SARA Lowell glanced at her wristwatch. In twenty minutes she would make her national television debut in front of thirty million people. An hour later her future would be decided. Twenty minutes. She swallowed, stood slowly, and readjusted her leg brace. Her chest hitched with each breath. She had to move around, had to do something before she went nuts. The metal of the brace rubbed against her, chafing the skin. After all these years Sara still could not get used to the clumsy artificial constraint. The limp, yes. The limp had been with her for as long as she could remember. It felt almost natural to her. But the bulky brace was still something she wanted to toss in a river. She took a deep breath, willed herself to relax, and then checked her makeup in the mirror. Her face looked somewhat pale, but that was nothing new. Like the limp, she was used to that. Her honey blond hair was swept back from her beautiful, delicate features and large doll-like green eyes. Her mouth was wide, her lips sensual and full to the point where they looked almost swollen. She took off her wire-rimmed spectacles and cleaned the lenses. One of the producers walked over to her. Ready, Sara? he asked. Whenever you are, she said with a weak smile. Good. Youre on with Donald in fifteen minutes. Sara looked at her costar, Donald Parker. At sixty he was double her age and a billion times more experienced. He had been on NewsFlash since the early years, before the fantastic Nielsen ratings and a market share that no news show had ever seen before or since. Simply put, Donald Parker was a legend in television journalism. What the hell do I think Im doing? Im not ready for something like this. Sara nervously scanned her material for the millionth time. The words began to blur. Once again she wondered how she had gotten this far so fast. Her mind flashed through her college years, her column in the New York Herald, her work on cable television, her debates on public TV. With each step up the ladder, Sara had questioned her ability to climb any higher. She had been enraged by the jealous chatter of her colleagues, the cruel voices that whispered, I wish my relatives were famous . . . Who did she sleep with? . . . Its that damn limp. But no, the truth of the matter was much more simple: the public adored her. Even when she got rough or sarcastic with a guest, the audience could not get enough of her. True, her father was the former surgeon general and her husband was a basketball star, and maybe her childhood pain and her physical beauty had also helped her along the way. But Sara remembered what her first boss had told her: No one can survive in this business on looks alone. If anything theyre a drawback. People will have a preconceived notion that because youre a beautiful blonde you cant be too bright. I know its unfair, Sara, but thats the way it is. You cant just be as good as the competition you have to be better. Otherwise theyre going to label you an airhead. Youll get blown off the stage if youre not the brightest person out there. Sara repeated the words like some battle cry, but her confidence refused to leave the trenches. Her debut tonight featured a report on the financial improprieties of

Reverend Ernest Sanders, the televangelist, founder of the Holy Crusade a big, slippery (read: slimy) fish. In fact, the Reverend Sanders had agreed to appear for a live interview after the report was aired to answer the charges on the condition, of course, that NewsFlash display his 800 number on the screen. Sara had tried to make her story as evenhanded as possible. She merely stated facts, with a minimum of innuendo and conclusions. But deep inside Sara knew the truth about the Reverend Ernest Sanders. There was just no avoiding it. The man was pure scum. The studio bustled with activity. Technicians read meters and adjusted lights. Cameramen swung their lenses into place. The teleprompter was being tested, no more than three words to a line so that the audience at home would not see the anchor's eyes shifting. Directors, producers, engineers, and gofers scrambled back and forth across a set that looked like a large family room with no ceiling and only one wall, as though some giant had ripped apart the outside so he could peer in. A man Sara did not recognize rushed toward her. Here you go, he said. The man handed her several sheets of paper. What's this? she asked. Papers. No, I mean what are they for? He shrugged. To shuffle. Shuffle? Yeah, you know, like when you break for a commercial and the camera pulls away. You shuffle them. I do? Makes you look important, he assured her before rushing off. She shook her head. Alas, so much to learn. Without conscious thought, Sara began to sing quietly. She usually restricted her singing to the shower or the car, preferably accompanied by a very loud radio, but occasionally, when she was nervous, she began to sing in public. Loudly. When she got to the chorus of Tattoo Vampire (Vampire photo suckin the skin), her voice rose and she started playing the air guitar. Really into it now. Getting down. A moment later she realized that people were staring at her. She lowered her hands back to her sides, dropping her well-tuned air guitar into oblivion. The song faded from her lips. She smiled, shrugged. Uhsorry. The crew returned to work without so much as a second glance. Air guitar gone, Sara tried to think about something both distracting and comforting. Michael immediately came to mind. She wondered what Michael was doing right now. He was probably jogging home from basketball practice. She pictured all six feet five of him opening the door, a white towel draped around his neck, sweat bleeding through his gray practice jersey. He always wore the craziest shorts—loud orange or yellow or pink Hawaiian ones that came down to his knees, or some whacko-designed jams. Without breaking stride, he would jog past the expensive piano and into the den. He would turn on a little Bach, veer toward the kitchen, pour himself a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice, and then drink half of it in one gulp. Then he would collapse into the reclining chair and let the chamber music sweep him away. Michael. Another tap on her shoulder. Telephone call. The same man who had handed her the sheets of paper handed her a portable telephone. She took the phone. Hello? Did you start singing yet? She broke into a smile. It was Michael. Blue Oyster Cult? he asked. Yeah. Let me guess. Michael thought a moment. Don't Fear the Reaper? No, Tattoo Vampire. God, how awful. So what are you up to now? Sara closed her eyes. She could feel herself beginning to relax. Not much. I'm just hanging around the set, waiting to go on. Play any air guitar? Of course not, she said. I'm a professional journalist, for God's sake. Uh-huh. So how nervous are you? I feel pretty calm actually, she replied. Liar. All right, I'm scared out of my mind. Happy? Ecstatic, he replied. But remember one thing. What? You're always scared before you go on the air. The more scared you are, the more you kick ass. You think so? I know so, he said. This poor guy will never know what hit him. Really? she asked, her face beginning to beam. Yeah, really, he said. Now let me ask you a quick question: do we have to go to your father's gala tonight? Let me give you a quick answer: yes. Black tie? Michael asked. Another yes. These big stuffy affairs can be so boring. Tell me about it. He paused. Can I at least have my way with you during the party? Who knows? Sara answered. You may get lucky. She cradled the phone between her neck and shoulder for a moment. Is Harvey coming to the party tonight? I'm going to pick him up on my way. Good. I know he doesn't get along with my father. You mean your father doesn't get along with him, Michael corrected. Whatever. Will you talk to him tonight? About what? Don't play games with me, Michael, she said. I'm worried about your health. Listen, with Bruce's death and all the problems at the clinic, Harv has enough on his mind right now. I don't want to bother him. Has he spoken to you yet about Bruce's suicide? Sara asked. Not a word, Michael said. To be honest, I'm kind of worried about him. He never leaves the lab anymore. He works all day and night. Harvey has always been that way. I know, but it's different this time. Give him a little more time, Michael. Bruce has been dead only two weeks. It's more than just Bruce. What do you mean? I don't know. Something to do with the clinic, I guess. Michael, please talk to him about your stomach. Sara . . . Talk to him tonight . . . for me. Okay, he agreed reluctantly. Promise? Yes, I promise. And, Sara? What is it? Kick some Southern-fried reverend ass. I love you, Michael. I love you too. Sara felt a tap on her shoulder. Ten minutes. I have to go, she said. Until tonight, then, he said. When I have my way with a famous TV star in her childhood bedroom. Dream on. A sharp pain

ripped across Michael Silvermans abdomen again as he replaced the receiver. He bent over, his hand clutched under his rib cage, his face scrunched into a grimace. His stomach had been bothering him on and off for weeks now. At first he had thought it was just a flu, but now he was not so sure. The ache was becoming unbearable. Even the thought of food now made his stomach perform backflips. Beethovens Seventh Symphony drifted across the room like a welcome breeze. Michael closed his eyes, allowing the melody to work like a gentle masseur against his aching muscles. His teammates gave him unlimited shit about his musical taste. Reece Porter, the black power forward who cocaptained the New York Knicks with Michael, was always goofing on him. How can you listen to this shit, Mikey? he would ask. Theres no beat, no rhythm. I realize that the musical ear of a Chopin does not compare with that of MC Hammer, Michael would reply, but try to be open-minded. Just listen, Reece. Let the notes flow over you. Reece paused and listened for a moment. I feel like Im trapped in a dentists office. How does this shit get you psyched for a big game? You cant dance to it or anything. Ah, but just listen. It doesnt have lyrics, Reece said. And your noise pollution does? You can understand the words over all that racket? Reece laughed. Mikey, youre a typical whitey snob, he said. I prefer the term pompous honky ass, thank you. Good ol Reece. Michael held a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice, but the thought of even a sip nauseated him. Last year the knee, and now the stomach. It didnt make sense. Michael had always been the healthiest guy in the league. He had gone through his first ten NBA seasons without a scratch before tearing apart his knee a little more than a year ago. It was tough enough trying to bounce back from reconstructive knee surgery at his age . . . The last thing he needed was this mystery stomach ailment. Putting down his glass, Michael moved across the room and made sure the VCR was set. Then he turned off the stereo and turned on the television. Sara would be making her NewsFlash debut in a matter of minutes. Michael fidgeted in his seat. He twisted his wedding band around and around and then rubbed his face. He tried to relax, but, like Sara, he couldnt. There was no reason to be nervous, he reminded himself. Everything he had said to Sara on the phone was true. She was an amazing reporter, the best. Very sharp and quick. Well prepared and yet spontaneous. A bit of a wise-ass sometimes. A sense of humor when it was called for. A bulldog almost always. Michael had learned firsthand how tough an interviewer Sara could be. They had met six years ago when she was assigned to interview him for the New York Herald two days before the start of the NBA finals. She was supposed to do a personal, non-sports-related piece on his life off the court. Michael did not like that. He did not want his personal life, especially his past, splashed across the headlines. It was none of anybodys business, Michael told Sara, resorting to more colorful terms to get his point across and then slamming down the phone for emphasis. But Sara Lowell was not so easily thwarted. To be more precise, Sara Lowell did not know how to give up. She wanted the interview. She went after it. A jolt of pain knocked aside the memory. Michael clenched his lower abdomen and doubled over on the couch. He held on and waited. The pain subsided slowly. What the hell is wrong with me? He leaned back, glancing at the photograph of Sara and himself on the shelf behind the TV. He stared at the picture now, watching himself hunched over Sara with his arms locked around her small waist. She looked so tiny, so achingly beautiful, so goddamn fragile. He often wondered what it was that made Sara appear so innocent, so delicate. Certainly not her figure. Despite the limp, Sara worked out three times a week. Her body was small, taut, athletic dynamite might be a better way to describe it. Sexy as hell. Michael examined the photograph again, trying to look at his wife objectively. Some would say it was her pale porcelain complexion that accounted for her unaffected appearance, but that wasnt what it was. Her eyes, Michael thought now, those large green eyes that reflected frailty and gentleness while maintaining the ability to be cunning and probing. They were trusting eyes and eyes you could trust. A man could bathe in those eyes, disappear forever, lose his soul for all eternity. They were also sexy as hell. The phone interrupted his thoughts. Michael reached behind him and grabbed the receiver. Hello? Hi, Michael. Hows it going, Harvey? Not bad. Look, Michael, I dont want to keep you. I know the show is about to go on. We got a couple of minutes. There was a crashing sound in the background. Whats all that noise? You still at the clinic? Yep, Harvey replied. When was the last time you got some sleep? You my mother? Just asking, Michael said. I thought I was going to pick you up at your apartment. I didnt have a chance to get out of here, Harvey said. I had one of the nurses rent me a tux and bring it here. Its just so busy right now. Eric and I are swamped. Without Bruce here. Harvey stopped. There was a moment of silence. I still dont get it, Harv, said Michael carefully, hoping his friend was finally ready to talk about Bruces suicide. Neither do I, Harvey said flatly. Then he added, Listen, I need to ask you something. Shoot. Is Sara going to be at the benefit tonight? Shell be a little late. But shell be there? Michael recognized the urgency in his old friends voice. He had known Harvey almost twenty-four years, since a second-year intern named Dr.

Harvey Riker took care of an eight-year-old Michael Silverman, who had been rushed to Saint Barnabas Hospital with a concussion and broken arm. Of course she'll be there. Good. I'll see you tonight, then. Michael stared at the receiver, puzzled. Is everything all right, Harv? Fine, he mumbled. Then what's with the cloak-and-dagger phone call? It's just . . . nothing. I'll explain later. What time you picking me up? Nine fifteen. Is

Eric coming? No, Harvey said. One of us has to run the store. I have to go, Michael. I'll see you at nine fifteen. The phone clicked in Michael's ear. DR. Harvey Riker replaced the receiver. He sighed heavily and put a hand through his long, unruly, gray-brown hair, a cross between Albert Einstein's and Art Garfunkel's.

He looked every bit of his fifty years. His muscle had turned to flab from lack of exercise. His face was average to the point of tedium. Never much of a hunk to begin with, Harvey's looks had soured over the years like a two-dollar Chianti. He opened his desk drawer, poured himself a quick shot of whiskey, and downed it in one gulp. His hands shook. He was scared. There is only one thing to do. I have to talk to Sara.

It's the only way. And after that . . . Better not to think about it. Harvey swiveled his chair around to look at the three photographs on his credenza. He picked up the one on the far right, the picture of Harvey standing next to his partner and friend, Bruce Grey. Poor Bruce. The two police detectives had listened to Harvey's suspicions politely, nodded in unison, jotted down notes. When Harvey tried to explain that Bruce Grey would never have committed suicide, they listened politely, nodded in unison, jotted down notes. When he told them Bruce had called him on the phone the same night he leaped from the eleventh-floor window at the Days Inn, they listened politely, nodded in unison, jotted down notes . . . and concluded that Dr. Bruce Grey

had committed suicide. A suicide note had been found at the scene, the detectives reminded him. A handwriting expert had confirmed that Bruce Grey had written it. This case was open and shut. Open and shut. The second picture frame on the credenza held a photograph of Jennifer, his former wife of twenty-six years, who had just walked out on him forever. The third photograph was that of his younger brother, Sidney, whose death from AIDS three years ago had changed Harvey's life forever. In the picture Sidney looked healthy, tan, and a touch on the chubby side. When he died two years later, his skin was pasty white where it was not covered with purple lesions, and he weighed less than eighty pounds. Harvey shook his head. All gone. He leaned forward and picked up the photograph of his ex-wife. He knew he had been as much to blame (more) for the failed marriage as she was. Twenty-six years. Twenty-six years of marriage, of shared and shattered dreams, rushed through his mind. For what? What had happened? When had Harvey let his personal life crumble into dust? His fingertips gently passed over her image. Could he really blame Jennifer for getting fed up with the clinic, for not wanting to sacrifice herself to a cause? In truth, he did. It's not healthy, Harvey. All that time working. Jennifer, don't you understand what I'm trying to do here? Of

course I do, but it's gone beyond the point of obsession. You have to take a break. From Publishers Weekly Coben (*Play Dead*) adroitly applies the fundamental rules of thrillerdom (offer a raft of potential villains; keep the action moving at breakneck speed) in this highly entertaining novel about a conspiracy apparently designed to prevent the development of a cure for AIDS. When one of a trio of research scientists on the brink of coming up with an AIDS antidote dies, it looks like suicide, but TV journalist Sara Lowell and her husband, NBA star Michael Silverman, who are friends of the clinic's founder, think otherwise.

Their suspicions are confirmed when several clinic patients, including the son of a U.S. senator, are murdered. A televangelist with his own agenda, Sara's prominent physician father, and a high-ranking government official all seem intent upon derailing the AIDS research, a situation that becomes most personal when Michael is diagnosed with the disease. Police lieutenant "Twitch" Bernstein, a closet homosexual, ultimately comes face-to-face with the person responsible for the killings. The final revelation of the identity of the master conspirator comes as a real surprise. This page-turner also raises some interesting questions about medical research and its funding. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.