

Dying To Be Beautiful
Mystery Series:

Book 4 'Fat Free'

By

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New Year's Day

7:10 A.M.

Every New Year's Day morning, Marcus walked back and forth along the beach with his metal detector, back and forth, forming meticulous parallel lanes. In the past, he had discovered jewelry, watches—once even a woman's Rolex watch, coins, keys and even a few sex toys.

He did this with his father from the time he was five until he was fourteen—when his father went to pick up the morning paper outside their front door, keeled over and died. Since then, each year, Marcus went kept that tradition alive.

This New Year's morning was unusually mild. Back and forth across the sand walked Marcus, as waves gently pushed onto the shore. The metal detector beeped, then wailed. He stopped. He pulled out his portable shovel and dug into the sand. The beeping got louder.

Marcus froze. It was a body covered in a large gold satin scarf. It was hard to tell if it was a man or a woman.

He took out his cell phone and called 911. "I-I-I found a d-d-dead body on the b-b-beach," he stuttered as he always did when he was nervous or scared. Certainly he never expected to find a dead body! He gave directions to his location. Then, he sat down on the sand, shaking, to wait for the police.

Murder in The Hamptons was becoming all too common, especially with so many people *Dying To Be Beautiful*.

Chapter 1

Murder

“Jenna, it’s Troy, I’ll pick you up in fifteen minutes. A dead body was found buried in the sand at Cove Beach. I’ll bring coffee.”

Between the winter holidays and spring break, Christmas and Chanukah to Easter and Passover, Hamptons locals appreciate months of limited invasion by the summer people. By early spring, the income of the tradespeople significantly increases as they work on pools, lawns, new construction, remodeling, interior decorating and more to beautify the already costly, overpriced homes.

Each season, the providers of services for the rich and their mostly-summer homes head out on the highway going east. Known as the Trade Parade, often a couple dozen of them, one behind the other, appear to be marching toward the opportunity to make money off the obsession of those who want to have better, bigger, grander homes. To the locals, it seemed more was never enough for many of these seasonal residents.

Over the past year, Private Investigator Jenna Preston had been hell-bent on seeking answers for her own obsession and struggling to face her inner turmoil and demons. They had stopped her from making a marriage commitment even though she had finally faced her father about her grandmother’s secret. Still, she was reluctant to say yes.

For months, she had met in person or spoke with Dr. Gold by phone. A New York psychiatrist, he had previously helped her explore and examine the behavior of a murderer and pedophile. She had confided to him: "It's difficult for me to take that leap of faith into a marriage. Maybe I'm meant to live only with my dogs."

She laughed, knowing she was acting not so much childish as foolish. He had told her, practically insisted, "You need to talk to your father about his mother and her secret. Your secret." Dr. Gold had told her it was time to let go of the past if she hoped for a future that included love and possibly even marriage.

"I don't want to cause my father any pain."

"Trust him."

When she finally sat down to tell her father the secret she had held on to for so long, he stopped her mid-sentence, got a letter out of his desk drawer and handed it to her to read.

Dear Mathew,

I feel you deserve to know what I'm about to tell you. Your mother and I fell in love the summer I visited Italy. We were both not yet 20. She agreed we would marry the following year, and she would come to live with me in the States.

After I left, she was raped by a young man. He was furious that she had refused to marry him. He told his parents and hers that he felt she should be forced to marry him.

Your mother became pregnant and wrote me, believing it was over between us.

"Not so!" I wrote her. My parents paid for me to go back to Italy and for us to

come back together and be married in the States. You know, we have been happily and lovingly married all these many years.

Matthew, none of us ever talked about what happened to her and the circumstances of your birth. You're my son, and I need you to know your mother and I love you deeply and dearly.

Always be happy,

Your Father

Jenna and her father had never been aware the other knew this story.

Matthew Preston locked the letter back in the desk drawer, went over to his daughter—his only child—and hugged her.

Still, something else was bothering him. He was a prominent Manhattan attorney who had certainly handled some very high-profile cases.

“Dad, what’s wrong?”

“I can’t tell you. Not now, Jenna. But I may need your help.”

“You’re scaring me. I hope you know that.”

“Not now, Jenna, not now,” was all he repeated, struggling to stay calm.

Jenna was in bed, alone, on New Year’s Day. Her boyfriend, Dave Carter, was still angry with her. A veterinarian and breeder of Irish setters, he was indeed more than a little annoyed with Jenna. Her renewed friendship with her old boyfriend, Raace Scanlon, didn’t help matters any.

She was still concerned about her father, in fact, *very* concerned. No matter how much she had urged him the past few weeks to tell her what was wrong, he kept saying, "I can't. Not now." He refused to talk about it and explain himself, leaving Jenna concerned for him.

Rightfully so.

As she reached for the phone to answer Troy's call, her Irish setter, Watson, hopped into bed with her, his tail wagging as he rolled over for tummy rubs. Aggie, her Irish setter puppy, was still being trained and staying at Dave's place, known as *The Farm*.

She had started her private investigation firm over five years ago after being fired as a reporter from the local daily newspaper where her good friend Patricia Tilton was now senior editor. The paper had received warnings, more like threats, from a senator about Jenna's investigating reporting, which seemed to seriously annoy one of his wealthy backers who was a big advertiser for the paper.

Senator Lawrence Thomas Quinn, now in his second term, never realized once she had left the paper she would be even more of a thorn in his side. Jenna was not one to back off a case even if it meant annoying the senator and some of his supporters.

Detective Troy Johnson's call had deprived Watson of anything more than a few hugs. She dressed quickly, gave him food and fresh water, and unlocked the doggie door before leaving. Watson would lie in the sun in the yard of the cottage that faced the bay. At night, the sunsets were often spectacular colors of blue and pink and pink and gold. Well, it *was* The Hamptons. Even the sky was beautiful!

Detective Johnson was already outside waiting. Handing her a cup of coffee, “Hey, I thought for sure you stayed overnight at Dave’s.”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Don’t bite off my head. What did you do now?”

“You assume I did something?”

Troy rolled his eyes, shook his head, and got back into the police car with Jenna silently slipping in on the other side.

Slamming the door shut, she grabbed her coffee from him and practically growled, “Drive.” The early morning light was too bright for the beginning of such a dark day.

It truly was warm for January, New Year’s Day. Well, that is warm for the Northeast. Jenna wore a black wool jacket, black leather gloves and knee-high black boots. She thought the color suited her mood. Plus, she had left her favorite red boots at Dave’s.

Jenna Preston grew up wealthy and privileged without becoming a brat. However, she absolutely loved the world of fashion, beautiful clothes and the touch of great fabrics. She didn’t let the casual dress style of The Hamptons prevent her from being casual and still a bit classy. Cold weather meant a lot of cashmere for her. Including her favorite red cashmere scarf even on this day.

When they got out of the car at the beach, which was cooler than town, she wrapped the red scarf around her neck a couple of times. Ocean breezes blew across the sand. With her red hair flying and no makeup, she was grateful that Troy had brought coffee.

Jenna and Detective Troy Johnson had grown up on the North Fork of Long Island and lived there all his life [their lives?]. They had worked together solving crimes including fraud, child predators and especially murders. The local police department was small compared to any big city, so fortunately for Jenna they welcomed her participation. She had her wonderful cottage by the bay, although more often than not she stayed over at Dr. Dave Carter's Veterinarian Center on the North Fork, along with her Irish setters.

"Jenna, you know Marcus D'Elroy? He's lived out here since he was five or six. Poor guy found the body this morning." Troy was sharing information with her as they approached the entrance to the beach lot.

"Doc and Lara know?"

"They're on their way, along with James." He paused to look at her, "By the way, I stopped for you at Dave's."

"That's nice!"

"Sarcasm doesn't suit you this early in the day."

"Then let's concentrate on who is buried in the sand."

"Yeah, and maybe how he or she got here."

As Troy pulled into the beach parking lot, they saw D'Elroy's old pickup truck. Sergeant Miller's police car and the coroner's van were already in the beach lot, next to the sign, "For Residents Only."

Talk about a source of annoyance! Day-trippers, as daily visitors were called, were basically denied access to most of the East End beaches between Memorial

Day and Labor Day. Although, the authorities did allow them access after 5 or 6 P.M., when summer residents had left for drinks and parties

Many questioned why anyone had the right to “own” the beach, as security guards stopped cars without summer permits from entering.

Jenna and Troy had no trouble entering this day. Unfortunately there was a dead body on the beach calling them to enter.

Trudging through the winter sand, moist from a light snowstorm the week before, they saw everyone about one-quarter mile [style?]down on their right.

“Dave’s still kind of mad at me since I told him at the end of the summer that marriage was for idiots.”

“I thought you said you apologized to him about that lovely remark.”

“I did.”

“So?”

“So, he recently saw me having drinks out with Raace Scanlon.”

“Nice.”

“There’s nothing going on between us. We’ve known each other for years. In fact, we’ve hardly spoken to each other for close to twenty years. He wanted to talk about two setter puppies he adopted from Dave.”

“And you bought that story?”

“You know you can be darn mean spirited?”

“Well partner, apparently Dave doesn’t see it that way. I’m not really sure you do either.”

“Let’s just enjoy a nice murder in The Hamptons.”

Approaching the crime scene, Jenna saw Miller and D'Elroy standing next to the body with the long-time local coroner, Doc Bishop. He was more than glad to be known as Doc.

"Excuse me, if you two could come over here to take a look at this body, it would be very helpful." Doc was being unusually sarcastic. He normally took all this murder and mayhem in stride. Being a coroner did require a bit of calm demeanor.

Leaning over the body, Doc pulled off a gold satin cloth leaving the face covered for the moment. He had brushed off some of the sand on the body. The rest could be removed at the morgue.

"Happy New Year," said Doc.

Marcus stood quietly, almost seeming afraid to move. Jenna put her arm around this small Italian man she had known for most of the twenty years she lived in The Hamptons. They were not really friends, yet they always had a friendly hello at Burger Bar and other places frequented by locals.

Marcus was chubby with few social graces and stuttered when he was nervous. He had dark hair, deep brown eyes and a nose apparently broken a couple of times. Jenna had always been fond of him, probably because he was very polite to her whenever they saw each other. Even Jenna was considered *sort of local* after twenty years.

"M-m-m-morning, Jenna. Seems I found more than I was searching for."

"Certainly does, Marcus."

A moment later, Johnson kneeled down in the sand, glanced up at Doc, who nodded okay for him to pull the gold scarf away from the face.

Marco gasped and walked over to the water's edge.

Jenna covered her mouth to stop from crying out.

Lara and James who had arrived on the scene had no idea why there was such a response.

The dead person lying in a grave of sand in the beautiful Hamptons had a huge hole in his chest.

"Had to be someone he knew, being shot at such close range." Johnson leaned over to cover the dead man's face again.

Detective Johnson, himself stunned, immediately set up police protocol for the crime scene. "Miller, you and Lara search the area, at least a half mile each direction. See if you find anything we can use as evidence. James, I want photos of the body, around the body, footprints nearby and those marks in the sand that appear to be blades from something that looks like a sled. Take the photos before anything else. The tide will be coming in is soon. Lara, when you get back to the lab, check the type of bullet and any other evidence you might collect."

Everyone did as was expected, as was needed.

"Jenna, let's get Marcus out of here. I'll go back with Doc... Marcus, I'd appreciate it if you could go with Jenna to the police station while we finish here."

Everyone knew this was something big.

It was going to get much bigger.

Heading towards them was a photographer from the local paper. "Hey," he shouted, "I heard on the police scanner a body was found here."

"Not now!" Troy shouted back. "The body is being taken back to the morgue. The police will have some details later."

"Miller, I don't want anyone commenting to the media until we have some answers." Sergeant Miller nodded yes as he started walking the area for possible evidence.

Detective Johnson, his jaw clenched tight, went over to help Doc put the victim in a body bag. Then, they carried the bag to the parking lot for the ride to the morgue.

Doc had no intern on duty with him this New Year's morning.

Marcus picked up his metal detector, and the bag he always used to collect his findings, and walked sadly with Jenna.

"Marcus, are you sure you didn't touch anything?" Detective Johnson pointed to the body.

"No way! I was scared."

"What did you think caused the metal detector to beep?"

"Maybe he was wearing a watch."

"Did you see anyone else as you were walking the beach this morning?"

"Nope."

"Any other cars or trucks in the lot when you got here?"

“None.” Looking terrified and nervously blinking, Marcus turned to Jenna, “A-m-m I in trouble?” I-I-I hadn’t seen anyone or anything until all of you got out to the beach... and the b-b-b-body.”

“Marcus, it’s okay. You did nothing wrong. In fact you did everything right: calling the police right away and being so cooperative.”

“I-I-I still feel scared.”

“Why?”

“W-w-w-what if the person who k-k-k-killed him saw me and now wants to h-h-h-hurt me?”

“I’m sure the police will see that you’re protected.” “Poor Marcus,” she thought. “Happy New Year.”

“T-t-t-t-this is no way to start the New Year,” Marcus whispered to Jenna.

“No Marcus, it certainly is not.”

The murdered man was John Porter, editor of the popular weekly newspaper.