

A THOUSAND DOORS

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A Thousand Doors

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>The Day She Died</i>	7
<i>The Murder</i>	11
<i>What Could Have Been</i>	28
<i>The Happily Married Wife and Mother</i>	29
<i>The Author</i>	51
<i>The Lawyer</i>	77
<i>The Archaeologist</i>	104
<i>The Homeless Woman</i>	128
<i>The Spy</i>	149
<i>The Actress</i>	170
<i>The Suicide</i>	196
<i>The Primatologist</i>	220
<i>The Senator's Wife</i>	245
<i>The Professor</i>	265
<i>The Seeker</i>	311
<i>The Singer/Songwriter</i>	334
<i>The Widow</i>	357
<i>What Is</i>	376
<i>All Her Lives</i>	377
<i>How It Ends</i>	382
<i>Mia .Just, Mia</i>	383
<i>A Note from the Editor</i>	386
<i>Contributors</i>	388

“Death hath a thousand doors to let out life .”

—Massinger

THE DAY SHE DIED

J.T. ELLISON

THE DAY MIA JENSEN DIED dawned cold and harsh under a brittle sun that barely warmed the streets. Clouds like frothy ash never released their hold on the sky, and people were angry with each other and the world. It was that sort of day, the kind when nothing is right, everything is wrong, and people long for evening, for the gentle cradle of their beds and dreams. *Ah, well. Tomorrow is another day*, they said to one another, nodding, everyone a sage, everyone holding out that small bit of hope that yes, tomorrow would be a new day, tomorrow can and will bring something new and better and good to our lives.

This was not the case for Mia.

For Mia, there was no warm, soft bed and chirpy dreams, no reading of the latest chapter of the latest book, no brushing of teeth or braiding of hair or relaxing soak in the tub before slipping into pajamas. No glass of red wine with dinner, pot roast started in the slow cooker

before she left the house, with multicolored carrots and potatoes because eating the colors of the rainbow will make her healthy. No trip to the gym after work to burn off the calories of lunch and the frustrations of her day. No texts to friends about cocktails, no kisses, no hugs. No sex on the desk. No shrugging off camel-hair coats in the green room, no powder and pancake before the 3 p.m. promo slot.

None of it, because at 8:03 p.m., after unexpectedly quitting her lawyer's office and fleeing to the ironic safety of her home, Mia Jensen was stabbed to death in her kitchen.

The question, outside of why did this happen, obviously, is thus: Does Mia even care that she won't experience these things? That her day was interrupted by the edge of a knife? You might even ask her: Mia, if you knew you were going to die today, what would you think?

A good run?

Too much left to do?

You blew it, sister?

We are rarely ready to leave this world, but when the sameness rears its awful head, one may wonder, is it even worth it? The existential crisis that comes for us all at one point or another—what is the point of this life?

Mia was experiencing that very crisis the day she died.

There was a sameness to her days that bred a desultory disinterest in her surroundings. Her habits, her work, her friends and family, her life was repeating itself, touchstoning again and again: wake, prep dinner, go to work,

the gym, cocktails, eat, bathe, sleep. Mia was bored. Dissatisfied. Unhappy.

She thought it was Keats who said *sameness breeds jealousies*, but lately she'd been seeing it as *sameness breeds mediocrity*, in those memes that float around on the social media networks and showed up in her email from well-meaning friends who think they're intellectual but are really just boring proselytizers who don't even know what mediocrity means without right-clicking and looking it up and certainly haven't read Keats, though they have a point. Mediocrity is what she's been feeling for quite some time, and she's too embarrassed by this to discuss it with her friends who do understand her lassitude and might even counsel her in how to shake her self-imposed constrictions.

All the decisions of her life, all the *what ifs*, the *what about this*, the *if only I had*, the *I should*; the missed flights and near miss accidents; loves and deaths and tears and joy; the opportunities lost and found, the chances taken and not; the smile on the train that led to the date that led to the ring; the sense of being trapped, of running, of drowning; every moment of every day since she was born has led her to this moment, the moment of her death. *There but for the grace of God go I*—Mia thought too many times to count, seeing the homeless woman on the street, the tattooed teenager sulking on the stoop, the over-Botoxed Klingon forehead drinking wine across the table, the bedraggled gray-rooted woman with no ring and four screaming children in the grocery line—all the things she's grateful not to have become. And just

as often, the wishes—the graceful author whose book she'd had signed last week, the witty astrophysicist she spoke with last year who'd developed a new interpretation for black holes, the blond archaeologist with her booming laugh that she met in a hotel bar, the delicate actress, bones like bird wings, who was trying on clothes in Barneys.

Regrets. Joys. Mistakes. So many lives to lead, to have led. So many lives to lose, and so many to gain.

At 8:03 this evening, the seesaw of Mia's years of *could have, should have, would have, did* finally collided.

The day Mia Jensen died, she finally got to live.

You know you want to read the rest.

Pre-order your copy now!

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Kimberly Belle is the *USA Today* and *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author of four novels: *The Last Breath*, *The Ones We Trust*, *The Marriage Lie*, and *Three Days Missing*. Her third novel, *The Marriage Lie*, was a semifinalist in the 2017 Goodreads Choice Awards for Best Mystery & Thriller and has been translated into a dozen languages. A graduate of Agnes Scott College, Kimberly worked in marketing and nonprofit fundraising before turning to writing fiction. She divides her time between Atlanta and Amsterdam.

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Laura Benedict is the Edgar- and ITW Thriller Award- nominated author of eight novels of mystery and suspense, including *The Stranger Inside* (February 2019). Her *Bliss House* gothic trilogy includes *The Abandoned Heart*, *Charlotte's Story* (*Booklist* starred review), and *Bliss House*. Her short fiction has appeared in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, and in numerous anthologies.

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novel, *Only Ever You*, was chosen by Barnes & Noble as a top thriller of the month. *Library Journal* gave it a starred review, calling it a “gripping domestic thriller.” She’s also the author of *Don’t Be Afraid*, *The Next Killing*, and *The Dead Place*, as well as “Loaded,” which appeared in the anthology *Pittsburg Noir*. Rebecca is a Penn State grad and an instructor in Seton Hill University’s Writing Popular Fiction MFA program. A native New Yorker, she currently lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with her husband, two children, a tiny dog, and a feisty cat. Rebecca loves to talk with readers.

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X

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