

RUNNING nameless

DON BISSETT

a Nathan Parker novel part 1 of a trilogy

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Chapter 1

The police called her Jane Doe. That's the name often given to an unidentified female fugitive.

Frank simply called her a bitch.

As much as I hated that word, I had to admit that it did describe her offensive behavior. I got a taste of that behavior when we first met, just a few days ago.

It started as an intense sensation in the back of my neck, a feeling that someone was staring at me. I had never put much stock in ESP, sixth sense, telepathy, or psychic abilities. In spite of that, I turned my head and saw her eyes focused on me. Not a casual glance. This was a penetrating stare. Her unwavering gaze left me with the feeling that she knew who I was. Not personally. But it felt like she had expected to find me here. Yet she chose to stand at a distance, not making any effort to come closer.

About fifty feet away from me, she stood rigidly among a cluster of small trees. Average height, dressed entirely in black. Black jacket, black jeans, black boots, black sunglasses parked on top of her head. A black backpack hung loosely off one shoulder. The color choice seemed to say I'm in mourning. Might she be here for the same reason that brought me to this spot? Did she also want to pay her respects?

Her hands were stuffed into the pockets of the jacket. Her collar-length black hair surrounded a pale expressionless face. A chilly breeze whipped a few strands across her chin, obscuring the lower part of her face. She didn't move to adjust those errant strands. She just continued to stare in my direction.

So I stared back. I expected her to turn away. That's what people normally do when you stare back. Not this one. She looked right at me, not wavering. We stood like that for several more seconds.

I didn't expect to solve any crime by being here. But I felt a need to return, to pay my respects, and to show that someone did care. Soon, though, I would begin solving this crime. And just maybe I could find who did this, and thus make a difference in the world.

Perhaps this woman, this girl dressed in black, felt the same need to be here. And just maybe she knew something that could help. I held her gaze. She stared back, expressionless.

Her focus wavered a bit, just for a second, as if she had come to a decision. Maybe she had decided to speak to me. Maybe she decided we should share our feelings about what was discovered here. When she didn't move, I took the lead, walking slowly toward her. It couldn't hurt to introduce myself. We might have a common bond, a shared concern for needless deaths.

As I got closer, I saw her face and neck clearly. Young, probably in her early twenties. No jewelry, no visible tattoos, no makeup, no distinguishing marks. Her face was long and narrow, with slightly hollowed cheeks. The skin was smooth. Attractive, in spite of the sad look in her dark eyes. And very thin, with narrow hips. She looked so slight of build that it seemed a strong gust of wind might knock her over.

She removed her hands from the jacket pockets. Her fingers were long, slender, and unadorned with rings. Taking a half step backward with one foot, she seemed to have assumed a defensive posture. I stopped several feet away.

"I'm Nathan," I said. "Nathan Parker." She said nothing. Her sullen expression revealed nothing.

I continued. "Did you see the news about what happened here? Right over there? I don't know how anyone could do that."

Her lips parted a fraction. She seemed on the verge of saying something. But she clamped her mouth shut and remained silent.

I spoke again. "I had to come back out here. It just seemed like there has to be something I can do to make things right." I paused. "Is that why you're here? Because you care, too?"

No response, though I saw a hint of recognition in her eyes, like my statement had rung true.

"I know it can be hard to talk about these things. If you want to talk or if you know anything about what happened, please give me a call." I reached out toward her, offering one of my business cards. "I'm an investigator. My email and cell phone number are on there. Call anytime."

She shifted her weight onto her front foot, hesitated for a moment, then swiftly snatched the card from my fingers. Turning away sharply, she took a step to leave.

“Please,” I said as she passed by me. “If you know something about this, tell me.” I desperately reached out and lightly touched the sleeve of her jacket, hoping to persuade her to stay and talk.

In the next instant, I went from standing, to flipping uncontrollably, to being slammed to the cold hard ground. Lying on my back, I looked up into her angry dark eyes. She had jammed the heel of one boot into my gut, pressing it upward against my rib cage. The other boot was planted firmly on the fingers of my right hand. I was helpless, pinned to the ground and looking up at her.

I always thought of myself as capable in self defense. And I had no clue if her moves were part of training in one of the martial arts. But she had taken me completely by surprise and put me on my back in a fraction of a second. How in the hell had this frail girl done that?

Staring down at me with her fierce dark eyes, she hissed, “Don’t touch me!” Then she lifted her boot from my gut, stepped off my compressed fingers, and briskly walked away, taking long purposeful strides down the path.