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CHEVY  
STEVENS

THAT  
NIGHT

A NOVEL

# THAT NIGHT

CHEVY STEVENS

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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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*For all the people around the world  
who dedicate their lives to helping animals,  
whether it be working in shelters, volunteering,  
forming rescue groups, or fostering animals in need.  
Thank you.*

## CHAPTER ONE

ROCKLAND PENITENTIARY, VANCOUVER

APRIL 2012

I followed the escorting officer over to Admissions and Discharge, carrying my belongings in a cardboard box—a couple pairs of jeans, some worn-out T-shirts, the few things I'd gathered over the years, some treasured books, my CD player. The rest, anything I had in storage, would be waiting for me. The release officer went through the round of documents. My hand shook as I signed the discharge papers, the words blurred. But I knew what they meant.

“Okay, Murphy, let's go through your personals.” The guards never called you by your first name on the inside. It was always a nickname or your last name.

He emptied out a box of the items I'd come into the prison with. His voice droned as he listed them off, making notes on his clipboard. I stared at the dress pants, white blouse, and blazer. I'd picked them out so carefully for court, had thought they'd make me feel strong. Now I couldn't stand the sight of them.

The officer's hand rested for a moment on the pair of my underwear.

"One pair of white briefs, size small."

He looked down at the briefs, checked the tag, his fingers lingering on the fabric. My face flushed. His eyes flicked to mine, gauging my reaction. Waiting for me to screw up so he could send me back inside. I kept my expression neutral.

He opened an envelope, glanced inside, then checked his clipboard before dumping the envelope's contents into my palm. The silver-faced watch my parents had given me on my eighteenth birthday, still shiny, the battery dead. The necklace Ryan had given me, the black onyx cool to the touch. Part of the leather cord had worn smooth from my wearing it every day. I stared at it, felt its weight in my hand, remembering, then closed my fingers around it, tucking it securely back in the envelope. It was the only thing I had left of him.

"Looks like that's it." He held out a pen. "Sign here."

I signed the last of the documents, put the belongings into my box.

"You got anything to dress out in?" the officer said.

"Just these." The officer's eyes flicked over my jeans and T-shirt. Some inmates' families send clothes for them to wear on their release day. But no one had sent me anything.

"You can wait in the booking room until your ride gets here. There's a phone if you need to call anyone.

I sat on one of the benches, boxes by my feet, waiting for the volunteer, Linda, to pick me up. She'd be driving me to the ferry and over to Vancouver Island. I had to check into the halfway house in Victoria by seventeen hundred hours. Linda was a nice lady, in her forties, who worked with one of the advocacy groups.

I'd met her before, when she'd taken me to the island for my unescorted temporary absences.

I was hungry—I'd been too excited to eat that morning. Margaret, one of my friends inside, had tried to get me to choke something down, but the oatmeal sat like a lump in my stomach. I wondered if Linda could stop somewhere. I imagined a Big Mac and fries, hot and salty, maybe a milkshake, then thought of Ryan again, how we used to take burgers to the beach. To distract myself from the memory, I watched an officer bring in a new inmate. A young girl. She looked scared, pale, her brown hair long and messy, like she'd been up all night. She glanced at me, her eyes drifting from my hair, down to the tattoos around my upper arm. I got them in the joint—a thin tribal bar for each year behind bars, forming one thicker, unbroken band that circled my right biceps, embracing me.

The officer yanked the girl's arm, pulled her to Booking.

I rubbed my hands across the top of my head. My hair was short now, the middle spiked up in a faux-Mohawk, but it was still black. I closed my eyes, remembered how it was in high school. Feathered and long, falling to the middle of my back. Ryan liked to wrap his hands in it. I'd cut it in prison after I looked in the mirror one day and saw Nicole's hair, thick with blood, and remembered holding her broken body in my arms after we found her that night.

"You ready to get out of here, Toni?" A friendly female voice.

I opened my eyes and looked up at Linda. "Can't wait."

She bent down and picked up one of my boxes, grunting a little as she lifted it. Linda was a small woman, not much taller than me. I was just a shorty at five feet—Margaret used to say a mouse fart could blow me over. But Linda was about as round as she was tall. She had dreadlocks and wore long flowing dresses and Birkenstocks. She was always railing at the prison system. I

followed her out to her car, my box in my arms, as she chatted about the ferry traffic.

“The highway was clear all the way out to Horseshoe Bay, so we’ll make good time. We should be there around noon.”

As we pulled away, I watched the prison grow smaller in the distance. I turned back around in my seat. Linda rolled the window down.

“Phew, it’s a hot one today. Summer will be here before you know it.”

I traced the lines of my tattoos, counting the years, thinking back to that summer. I was thirty-four now and had been in custody since I was eighteen, when Ryan and I were arrested for my sister’s murder. We’d been alone with her that night, but we hadn’t heard Nicole scream. We hadn’t heard anything.

I wrapped my hand around my arm, squeezed hard. I’d spent almost half of my life behind bars for a crime I didn’t commit.

The anger never really leaves you.