

**TRIAL  
AND  
ERROR**

*A Novel*

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# CHAPTER ONE

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**SHE STARED DOWN** into the casket at the placid face of her 19-year-old daughter. For years, she had a premonition that this day would come. Somehow, she just knew it. She knew that she would get that call. She knew she would be forced to listen to the halting voice at the other end struggling to find the right words. She knew that she would have to identify the body, pick out the clothes that would be her daughter's last fashion statement, pull old photographs from yellowed albums for the looping reel of pictures now flashing on the wall. She just knew it, she felt it coming the way an Alaskan sled dog senses a blizzard forming miles away.

But not like this. No, this was all wrong.

Jack gently nudged her elbow. "Are you ready?" he said, the tenor of his voice low and apologetic.

She remained perfectly still, arms crossed tightly across the front of her body, head slightly downturned, scowling into the casket. In response to his question, she merely lifted her eyes and shot him an angry, irritated look from under her lowered brow. Jack had been married to Katie long enough to know that this particular glare was not aimed at him.

"You know how I feel about all this, right? The wake, the funeral, the whole thing?" Katie said. "It's stupid, completely stupid." Jack nodded, small, barely perceptible nods because he knew Katie would continue. He had heard this rant from her many times before and he did not disagree.

When Jack and Katie were first dating, a distant relative of his had died and, because Jack is Italian (birth name—Giacomo), he was obligated to pop in at the wake, even though he had no idea who the deceased was or even how they were related. Katie had accompanied him because it was early in their courtship and she was still on her best behavior. However, it only took an offhand remark from

Jack about the absurdity of funerals for Katie to feel free enough to spew out her distaste for the whole macabre event. After she had wrapped up her virulent diatribe and Jack had not run screaming for the door, she had suggested that they play her favorite funeral game – deciding which of the attendees would be the next to go. That was when he knew he loved her.

“It’s ridiculous,” Katie sputtered. “Who thought this whole process up? Who decided that it was perfectly reasonable for us to dress up a dead body, lay it out in a fancy box, and have people come stare at it? Who thought that was a good idea, huh? Who decided that was the best way to work through our grief? It’s idiotic.”

Jack pressed his lips together in a tight line, and rubbed Katie’s back, trying to calm her down but it was too late, she was on a roll.

“And then we have to dig a big hole somewhere, drop this entire box in it and leave it there. For what? So we can come back every year on her birthday and stare at the ground? Or buy those tacky little crosses made of flowers to lay on the headstone?”

Katie thought about the acres and acres of graves that spanned both sides of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway near her old apartment in Queens. “What a massive waste of prime real estate,” she spat, her irritation growing at the colossal inefficiency of it all. “When are people going to wake up and see what an asinine practice this is?” Katie shook her head and snorted in disgust.

“This—” she waved her arm to indicate the funeral parlor, the flowers, the casket, “all this is supposed to make me feel better, supposed to ease my sorrow, supposed to give me closure? Well, I don’t want closure,” she said, her voice rising hysterically in pitch and volume, almost to a scream. “I want...I want...” Her throat caught and she dropped her head into her hands.

“I want a do-over” she whimpered.

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