

Tell No One
Author: Harlan Coben

Book Review - by John Esposito - 07-06-2001

Readers who revel in books of the mystery and suspense genre need search no farther this summer for one of the year's more exhilarating thrillers. From a chilling opening through the surprising denouement, *Tell No One* is an intense page-turner filled with all the major ingredients of a bona fide winner.

David Beck and Elizabeth Parker are twenty-five-year-old sweethearts, married for only seven months. They are vacationing in the solitude of Lake Charmaine, Pennsylvania, returning to the very spot where, at the age of twelve, they shared their first real kiss.

The short-lived enchanted weekend turns to horror as David is knocked unconscious and Elizabeth is abducted and murdered following a romantic evening swim beneath a pallid and gray night sky. Her battered corpse is discovered in a ditch off the highway and a serial killer is apprehended and brought to justice. Case closed.

Eight painful years have since passed in the life of Dr. David Beck, now a Manhattan pediatrician, who works at a clinic in the inner city neighborhood of Washington Heights. He lives with his ill grandfather in a plush suburban town across the river in New Jersey. Despite his attempts to regain control of his life, he remains grief-stricken. There is no getting over his beloved Elizabeth, reliving the terrifying night at the gleaming lake, hearing his young wife's piercing screams and his guilt for failing to rescue her from the savage attack.

Dr. Beck's unstable world suddenly changes once again on the eighth anniversary of Elizabeth's death. Working at the clinic one afternoon, he receives the first in a mysterious series of cryptic e-mails with a Subject heading: *E.P. + D.B //////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////*; and a message which reads: *Click on this hyperlink, kiss time, anniversary*. Kiss time? Is this a cruel joke? The doctor wonders. How would anyone else know about kiss time? This phrase is one that could only be known to Elizabeth and him. The following day would actually mark the anniversary of the very first time they kissed. The heart-pounding sensation within his chest now only intensifies when an error appears while he unsuccessfully attempts to open the broken link. Beck assumes correctly that he must wait until tomorrow - on their anniversary date - before the link will open and provide him with some answers.

The following day brings about the most unimaginable and chilling events in his already tormented life. When he clicks the hyperlink this next time, it opens to a street cam revealing a crowded street scene filled with pedestrians. The doctor is unable to determine the city or state locale. There is nothing revealing or significant until...someone steps out from directly under the camera. It seems as if the person has been hiding there the entire time. The person's back is to the camera. Beck can now only make out that it is the back of a woman's head. She begins to move slowly towards the center of the screen, head down. She is still, and then proceeds to turn around, look directly upwards, and face the camera head on. He immediately recognizes the individual - it is his wife, Elizabeth, presumed dead for 8 years. She looks directly into the face of the cam and mouths the words, "I'm sorry." Several second later, the woman turns and walks

away, out of view of the cam, and out of his life again.

A subsequent email message soon arrives, but not without a clear warning: *Tell no one. They're watching.* Beck's own sanity is tested as he embarks upon his latest nightmare, attempting to uncover the faint prospect that she never died on that moonlit night - that Elizabeth is somehow alive! Or is she?

Arriving home that same evening, Dr. Beck receives an additional shock. Two unidentified bodies, entombed for eight years, along with the baseball bat used in the attack on him, are uncovered in the nearby vicinity of the lake. He is called in for questioning by the local sheriff. It is only a short time before the young doctor finds himself a hunted man fighting to survive.

Harlan Coben successfully builds upon this skillfully crafted plot with many compelling twists and turns, enabling the reader to delve inside the psyche of all the major characters.

The author, a New Jersey native and resident, makes good use of his state's landscape, including New York and Pennsylvania. He transports us on a heart-pounding roller coaster journey across the familiar travel haunts of Route 80, the George Washington Bridge, J.F.K. Airport and Metropark Train Station. Interwoven are riveting and heart-wrenching scenes in Washington Square Park and the all too quiet, fictional, Lake Charmaine. His protagonist faces off with an intolerant father-in-law, a drug dealer, and an enigmatic billionaire, all while running from the NYPD, the FBI, and two hired gangsters.

Harlan Coben's latest tome should provide the talented writer with even greater recognition. It is not surprising that the motion picture rights for this classic tale of loss and redemption have recently been acquired. Since his critically-acclaimed *Myron Bolitar* series debuted in 1995, he has won the *Mystery Writers of America's Edgar Allan Poe Award*, the *Shamus Award*, and the *Anthony Award*.

Dr. Beck can sense the eerie darkness gathering around him. So will his readers.

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