

Echo Park

Michael Connelly

Published by Orion

Extract

All text is copyright of the author

This opening extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

THE HIGH TOWER

1993

IT WAS THE CAR they had been looking for. The license plate was gone but Harry Bosch could tell. A 1987 Honda Accord, its maroon paint long faded by the sun. It had been updated in '92 with the green Clinton bumper sticker and now even that was faded. The sticker had been made with cheap ink, not meant to last. Back when the election was a long shot. The car was parked in a single-car garage so narrow it made Bosch wonder how the driver had been able to get out. He knew he would have to tell the Forensics people to be extra diligent while checking for prints on the outside of the car and the garage's inner wall. The Forensics people would bristle at being told this but he would become anxious if he didn't.

The garage had a pull-down door with an aluminum handle. Not good for prints but Bosch would point that out to Forensics as well.

“Who found it?” he asked the patrol officers.

They had just strung the yellow tape across the mouth of the cul-de-sac which was made by the two rows of individual garages on either side of the street and the entrance of the High Tower apartment complex.

“The landlord,” the senior officer replied. “The garage goes with an apartment he’s got vacant, so it’s supposed to be empty. A couple days ago he opens it up because he’s got to store some furniture and stuff and he sees the car. Thinks maybe it’s somebody visiting one of the other tenants so he lets it go a few days, but then the car stays put and so he starts asking his tenants about it. Nobody knows the car. Nobody knows whose it is. So then he calls us because he starts thinking it might be stolen because of the missing plates. Me and my partner have got the Gesto bulletin on the visor. Once we got here we put it together pretty fast.”

Bosch nodded and stepped closer to the garage. He breathed in deeply through his nose. Marie Gesto had been missing ten days now. If she was in the trunk he would smell it. His partner, Jerry Edgar, joined him.

“Anything?” he asked.

“I don’t think so.”

“Good.”

“Good?”

“I don’t like trunk cases.”

“At least we’d have the victim to work with.”

It was just banter as Bosch’s eyes roamed over the car, looking for anything that would help them. Seeing nothing, he took a pair of latex gloves out of his coat pocket, blew them up like balloons to stretch the rubber and then pulled them onto his hands. He held his arms up like a surgeon coming into the operating room and turned sideways so that he could try to

slide into the garage and get to the driver's door without touching or disturbing anything.

He slid into darkness as he moved into the garage. He batted spider threads away from his face. He moved back out and asked the patrol officer if he could use the Maglite on his equipment belt. Once he was back in the garage he turned the light on and put its beam through the windows of the Honda. He saw the backseat first. The riding boots and helmet were on the seat. There was a small plastic grocery bag next to the boots with the Mayfair Supermarket insignia on it. He couldn't tell what was in the bag but knew that it opened an angle on the investigation they hadn't thought of before.

He moved forward. On the front passenger seat he noticed a small stack of neatly folded clothing on top of a pair of running shoes. He recognized the blue jeans and the long-sleeved T-shirt, the outfit Marie Gesto was wearing when last seen by witnesses as she was heading to Beachwood Canyon to ride. On top of the shirt were carefully folded socks, panties and bra. Bosch felt the dull thud of dread in his chest. Not because he took the clothing as confirmation that Marie Gesto was dead. In his gut he already knew that. Everybody knew it, even the parents who appeared on TV and pleaded for their daughter's safe return. It was the reason why the case had been taken from Missing Persons and reassigned to Hollywood Homicide.

It was her clothes that got to Bosch. The way they were folded so neatly. Did she do that? Or had it been the one who took her from this world? It was the little questions that always bothered him, filled the hollow inside with dread.

After surveying the rest of the car through the glass, Bosch carefully worked his way out of the garage.

"Anything?" Edgar asked again.

“Her clothes. The riding equipment. Maybe some groceries. There’s a Mayfair at the bottom of Beachwood. She could’ve stopped on her way up to the stables.”

Edgar nodded. A new lead to check out, a place to look for witnesses.

Bosch stepped out from beneath the overhead door and looked up at the High Tower Apartments. It was a place unique to Hollywood. A conglomeration of apartments built into the extruded granite of the hills behind the Hollywood Bowl. They were of Streamline Moderne design and all linked at the center by the slim structure that housed the elevator — the high tower from which the street and complex took its name. Bosch had lived in this neighborhood for a time while growing up. From his home on nearby Camrose he could hear the orchestras practicing in the bowl on summer days. If he stood on the roof he could see the fireworks on the Fourth and at the close of the season.

At night he had seen the windows on the High Tower glowing with light. He’d see the elevator pass in front of them on its way up, delivering another person home. He had thought as a boy that living in a place where you took an elevator home had to be the height of luxury.

“Where’s the manager?” he asked the patrol officer with two stripes on his sleeves.

“He went back up. He said take the elevator to the top and his place is the first one across the walkway.”

“Okay, we’re going up. You wait here for SID and the OPG. Don’t let the tow guys touch the car until Forensics takes a look.”

“You got it.”

The elevator in the tower was a small cube that bounced with their weight as Edgar slid the door open and they stepped

in. The door then automatically closed and they had to slide an interior safety door closed as well. There were only two buttons, 1 and 2. Bosch pushed 2 and the car lurched upward. It was a small space, with enough room for four people at the most before everybody would start tasting each other's breath.

"Tell you what," Edgar said, "nobody in this place has a piano, that's for sure."

"Brilliant deduction, Watson," Bosch said.

On the top level they-pulled the doors open and stepped out onto a concrete runway that was suspended between the tower and the separate apartments built into the hillside. Bosch turned and looked past the tower to a view that took in almost all of Hollywood and had the mountain breeze to go with it. He looked up and saw a red-tailed hawk floating above the tower, as if watching them.

"Here we go," Edgar said.

Bosch turned to see his partner pointing to a short set of stairs that led to one of the apartment doors. There was a sign that said *MANAGER* below a doorbell. The door was opened before they got to it by a thin man with a white beard. He introduced himself as Milano Kay, the manager of the apartment complex. After they badged him Bosch and Edgar asked if they could see the vacant apartment to which the garage with the Honda in it was assigned. Kay led the way.

They walked back past the tower to another runway that led to an apartment door. Kay started working a key into the door lock.

"I know this place," Edgar said. "This complex and the elevator, it's been in the movies, right?"

"That's right," Kay said. "Over the years."

It stood to reason, Bosch thought. A place as unique as this could not escape the eye of the local industry.

Kay opened the door and signaled Bosch and Edgar in first. The apartment was small and empty. There was a living room, kitchen with a small eat-in space and a bedroom with an attached bathroom. No more than four hundred square feet and Bosch knew that with furniture it would look even smaller. But the view was what the place was about. A curving wall of windows looked out on the same view of Hollywood seen from the walkway to the tower. A glass door led to a porch that followed the curve of glass. Bosch stepped out and saw the view was expanded out here. He could see the towers of downtown through the smog. He knew the view would be best at night.

“How long has this apartment been vacant?” he asked.

“Five weeks,” Kay answered.

“I didn’t see a FOR RENT sign down there.”

Bosch looked down at the cul-de-sac and saw the two patrol officers waiting for Forensics and the flatbed from the police garage. They were on opposite sides of their cruiser, leaning on the hood with their backs to each other. It didn’t look like a thriving partnership.

“I never need to put up signs,” Kay said. “The word that we have a vacancy usually gets out. A lot of people want to live in this place. It’s a Hollywood original. Besides, I’ve been in the process of getting it ready, repainting and small repairs. I haven’t been in any hurry.”

“What’s the rent?” Edgar asked.

“A thousand a month.”

Edgar whistled. It seemed high to Bosch, too. But the view told him there would be somebody who would pay it.

“Who would have known that that garage down there was empty?” he asked, getting back on track.

“Quite a few people. The residents here, of course, and in

the last five weeks I've shown the place to several interested parties. I usually point out the garage to them. When I go on vacation there's a tenant here who sort of watches things for me. He showed the apartment, too."

"The garage is left unlocked?"

"It's left unlocked. There's nothing in it to steal. When the new tenant comes in they can choose to put a padlock on it if they want to. I leave it up to them but I always recommend it."

"Did you keep any kind of records on who you showed the apartment to?"

"Not really. I might have a few call-back numbers but there is no use in keeping anybody's name unless they rent it. And as you can see, I haven't."

Bosch nodded. It was going to be a tough angle to follow. Many people knew the garage was empty, unlocked and available.

"What about the former tenant?" he asked. "What happened to him?"

"It was a woman, actually," Kay said. "She lived here five years, trying to make it as an actress. She finally gave up and went back home."

"It's a tough town. Where was home?"

"I sent her deposit back to Austin, Texas."

Bosch nodded.

"She live here alone?"

"She had a boyfriend who visited and stayed a lot but I think that ended before she moved out."

"We'll need that address in Texas from you."

Kay nodded.

"The officers, they said the car belonged to a missing girl," he said.

"A young woman," Bosch said.

He reached into an inside pocket of his jacket and pulled out a photograph of Marie Gesto. He showed it to Kay and asked if he recognized her as someone who might have looked at the apartment. He said he didn't recognize her.

"Not even from TV?" Edgar asked. "She's been missing ten days and it's been in the news."

"I don't have a TV, Detective," Kay said.

No television. In this town that qualified him as a free thinker, Bosch thought.

"She was in the newspapers, too," Edgar tried.

"I read the papers from time to time," Kay said. "I get them out of the recycle bins downstairs. They're usually old by the time I see them. But I didn't see any story about her."

"She went missing ten days ago," Bosch said. "That would have been Thursday the ninth. You remember anything from back then? Anything unusual around here?"

Kay shook his head.

"I wasn't here. I was on vacation in Italy."

Bosch smiled.

"I love Italy. Where'd you go?"

Kay's face brightened.

"I went up to Lake Como and then over to a small hill town called Asolo. It's where Robert Browning lived."

Bosch nodded like he knew the places and knew who Robert Browning was.

"We've got company," Edgar said.

Bosch followed his partner's gaze down to the cul-de-sac. A television truck with a satellite dish on top and a big number 9 painted on the side had pulled up to the yellow tape. One of the patrol officers was walking toward it.

Harry looked back at the landlord.

“Mr. Kay, we’ll need to talk more later. If you can, see what numbers or names you can find of people who looked at or called about the apartment. We’ll also need to talk to the person who handled things while you were in Italy and get the name and forwarding address of the former tenant who moved back to Texas.”

“No problem.”

“And we’re going to need to talk to the rest of the tenants to see if anybody saw that car being dropped off in the garage. We will try not to be too intrusive.”

“No problem with any of that. I’ll see what I can dig up on the numbers.”

They left the apartment and walked with Kay back to the elevator. They said good-bye to the manager and went down, the steel cube lurching again before smoothing out on the descent.

“Harry, I didn’t know you love Italy,” Edgar said.

“I’ve never been.”

Edgar nodded, realizing it had been a tactic to draw Kay out, to put more alibi information on record.

“You thinking about him?” he asked.

“Not really. Just covering the bases. Besides, if it was him, why put the car in his place’s own garage? Why call it in?”

“Yeah. But then, maybe he’s smart enough to know we’d think he’d be too smart to do that. See what I mean? Maybe he’s outsmarting us, Harry. Maybe the girl came to look at the place and things went wrong. He hides the body but knows he can’t move that car because he might get pulled over by the cops. So he waits ten days and calls it in like he thinks it might be stolen.”

“Then maybe you should run his Italian alibi down, Watson.”

“Why am I Watson? Why can’t I be Holmes?”

“Because Watson is the one who talks too much. But if you want, I’ll start calling you ‘Homes.’ Maybe that would be better.”

“What’s bothering you, Harry?”

Bosch thought of the clothing neatly folded on the front seat of the Honda. He felt that pressure on his insides again. Like his body was wrapped in wire being tightened from behind.

“What’s bothering me is that I’ve got a bad feeling about this one.”

“What kind of bad feeling?”

“The kind that tells me we’re never going to find her. And if we never find her, then we never find him.”

“The killer?”

The elevator jerked to a hard stop, bounced once and came to a rest. Bosch pulled open the doors. At the end of the short tunnel that led to the cul-de-sac and the garages, he saw a woman holding a microphone and a man holding a television camera waiting for them.

“Yeah,” he said. “The killer.”