

You loved your last book...but what
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, **Love**reading will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Deeper than the Dead

Written by Tami Hoag

Published by Orion Books Ltd

All text is copyright © of the author

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

DEEPER THAN THE DEAD

TAMI HOAG



AN ORION PAPERBACK

First published in Great Britain in 2009
by Orion

This paperback edition published in 2010
by Orion Books Ltd,
Orion House, 5 Upper St Martin's Lane,
London WC2H 9EA

An Hachette UK company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Indelible Ink, Inc 2009

The right of Tami Hoag to be identified as the author
of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with
the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted,
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior
permission of the copyright owner.

All the characters in this book are fictitious, and any
resemblance to actual persons living or dead
is purely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 0 7528 8328 1

Printed and bound in Great Britain by GGP

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers that
are natural, renewable and recyclable products and
made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging
and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to
the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

www.orionbooks.co.uk

I

My Hero

My hero is my dad. He is a great person. He works hard, is nice to everyone, and tries to help people.

His victim would have screamed if she could have. He had seen to it she could not open her mouth. There would have been terror in her eyes. He had made certain she could not open them. He had rendered her blind and mute, making her the perfect woman. Beautiful. Seen and not heard. Obedient. He had immobilized her so she could not fight him.

Sometimes he helps me with my homework because he is good at math and science. Sometimes we play catch in the backyard, which is really fun and cool. But he is very busy. He works very hard.

Her uncontrollable trembling and the sweat that ran down the sides of her face showed her terror. He had locked her inside the prison of her own body and mind, and there would be no escape.

The cords stood out in her neck as she strained against the bindings. Sweat and blood ran in thin rivulets down the slopes of her small, round breasts.

My dad tells me no matter what I should always be polite and respect people. I should treat other people the way I would like to be treated.

She had to respect him now. She had no choice. The power was all his. In this game, he always won. He had stripped away all of her pretense, the mask of beauty, to reveal the plain raw truth: that she was nothing and he was God.

It was important for her to know that before he killed her.

My dad is a very important man in the community.

It was important that she had the time to reflect on that truth. Because of that, he wouldn't kill her just yet. Besides, he didn't have the time.

My dad. My hero.

It was nearly three o'clock. He had to go pick up his child from school.

Five Days Later

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1985

‘You suck, Crane.’

Tommy Crane sighed and stared straight ahead.

Dennis Farman leaned over from his desk, right across from Tommy’s, his fat face screwed up into what he probably thought was a really tough look.

Tommy tried to tell himself it was just a stupid look. Asinine. That was his new word of the week. Asinine: marked by inexcusable failure to exercise intelligence or sound judgment. Definition number two: of, relating to, or resembling an ass.

That was Dennis, all the way around.

He tried not to think about the fact that Dennis Farman was bigger than he was, a whole year older than he was, and just plain mean.

‘You suck donkey dicks,’ Farman said, laughing to himself like he thought he was brilliant or something.

Tommy sighed again and looked at the clock on the wall above the door. Two more minutes.

Wendy Morgan turned around in her seat and looked at him with frustration. ‘Say something, Tommy. Tell him he’s a dork.’

“‘Say something, Tommy,’” Farman parroted, making his voice really high, like a girl’s. ‘Or let your girlfriend talk for you.’

‘He doesn’t have a girlfriend,’ Cody Roache, Farman’s

scrawny toady, chimed in. 'He's gay. He's gay and she's a lesbo.'

Wendy rolled her eyes. 'Shut up, Cockroach. You don't even know what that means.'

'Yes, I do.'

'Because you are.'

Tommy watched the clock tick one minute closer to freedom. At the front of the room, Miss Navarre walked back to her desk from the door with a yellow note in her hand.

If someone had tortured him, held fire to his feet, or stuck bamboo shoots under his fingernails, he would have had to admit he was kind of in love with Miss Navarre. She was smart and kind, and really pretty with big brown eyes and dark hair tucked behind her ears.

'Twat,' Cockroach said, just loud enough that the bad word shot like a poisoned dart straight to Miss Navarre's ear, and her attention snapped in their direction.

'Mr. Roache,' she said in that tone of voice that cut like a knife. 'Would you like to come to the front of the room now and explain to the rest of the class exactly why you will be staying in the room for recess and lunch hour tomorrow?'

Roache wore his most stupid expression behind his too-big glasses. 'Uh, no.'

Miss Navarre arched an eyebrow. She could say a lot with that eyebrow. She was sweet and kind, but she was no pushover.

Cody Roache swallowed hard and tried again. 'Um . . . no, ma'am?'

The bell rang loudly, and everyone started to bolt from their seats. Miss Navarre held up one finger and they all froze like they were in suspended animation.

'Mr. Roache,' she said. It was never a good thing when she called someone Mr. or Miss. 'I'll see you first thing tomorrow morning at my desk.'

‘Yes, ma’am.’

She turned her attention to Dennis Farman, holding up the note in her hand. ‘Dennis, your father called to say he won’t be able to pick you up today, and you should walk home.’

The second Miss Navarre dropped her hand, the entire fifth-grade class bolted for the door like a herd of wild horses.

‘Why don’t you stand up to him, Tommy?’ Wendy demanded as they walked away from Oak Knoll Elementary School and toward the park.

Tommy hiked his backpack up on one shoulder. ‘‘Cause he could pound me into a pile of broken bones.’

‘He’s all talk.’

‘That’s easy for you to say. He hit me once in dodgeball and I didn’t breathe for like a week.’

‘You have to stand up for yourself,’ Wendy insisted, blue eyes flashing. She had long, wavy blonde hair like a mermaid’s, which she was always wearing in the styles of rock stars Tommy had never heard of. ‘Otherwise, what kind of man are you?’

‘I’m not a man. I’m a kid, and I want to stay that way for a while.’

‘What if he went after me?’ she asked. ‘What if he tried to hit me or kidnap me?’

Tommy frowned. ‘That’s different. That’s you. Sure, I’d try to save you. That’s what a guy is supposed to do. It’s called chivalry. Like in the Knights of the Round Table or *Star Wars*.’

Wendy flashed a smile and wound one blonde braid into a shape like a cinnamon roll pressed against her ear. ‘Does that make me Princess Leia?’ she said, batting her eyelashes.

Tommy rolled his eyes. They turned off the sidewalk and onto a trail that cut through Oakwoods Park.

Oakwoods was a big park with part of it clipped and cleared and set up with picnic pavilions and a bandstand and playground. The rest of it was more wild, like a forest with simple trails cut through it.

A lot of kids wouldn't cut through the park because there were stories about it being haunted and homeless weirdos living in it, and someone claimed they once saw Bigfoot. But it was the shortest way home, and he and Wendy had been going this way since they were in the third grade. Nothing bad had ever happened.

'And you're Luke Skywalker,' Wendy said.

Tommy didn't want to be Luke Skywalker. Han Solo had all the fun, blasting around the galaxy with Chewbacca, breaking the rules and doing whatever they liked.

Tommy had never broken a rule in his life. His day-to-day existence was orderly and scheduled. Up at seven, breakfast at seven fifteen, to school by eight. School let out at three ten. He had to be home by three forty-five. Sometimes he walked. Sometimes one of his or Wendy's parents picked them up, depending. When he got home he would have a snack and tell his mother everything that happened that day. From four until six fifteen he could go out and play – unless he had a piano lesson – but he had to be cleaned up and at the dinner table at six thirty sharp.

It would have been a lot more fun to be Han Solo.

Wendy had moved on to other topics, chattering about her latest favorite singer, Madonna, who Tommy had never heard of because his mother insisted they only listen to public radio. She wanted him to grow up to be a concert pianist and/or a brain surgeon. Tommy wanted to grow up to be a baseball player, but he didn't tell his mother that. That was between him and his dad.

Suddenly, behind them, came a blood-curdling war cry and what sounded like wild animals crashing through the woods.

‘CRANE SUCKS!!!!’

‘RUN!!’ Tommy yelled.

Dennis Farman and Cody Roache came leaping over a fallen log, their faces red from shouting.

Tommy grabbed Wendy’s wrist and took off, dragging her along behind him. He was faster than Dennis. He’d outrun him before. Wendy was fast for a girl, but not as fast as he was.

Farman and Roache were catching up to them, their eyes bugging out of their heads like a gargoyle’s. Their mouths were wide-open. They were still yelling, but Tommy could only hear the pounding of his heart and the crashing sound they made as they bounded through the woods.

‘This way!’ he yelled, veering off the trail.

Wendy looked back, yelling, ‘FART-MAN!!’

‘JUMP!!’ Tommy shouted.

They went over the edge of an embankment and flew through the air. Farman and Roache came flying after them. They landed like so many stones, hitting the ground and tumbling.

All the colors of the forest whirled past Tommy’s eyes like a kaleidoscope as he rolled, until he finally came to a stop on a soft mound of dirt.

He lay still for a moment, holding his breath, waiting for Dennis Farman to jump on him. But he could hear Dennis moaning loudly somewhere behind him.

Slowly Tommy pushed himself up on his hands and knees. The ground he was on had been turned over recently. It smelled like earth and wet leaves, and something else he couldn’t name. It was soft and damp and crumbly like someone had dug it up with a shovel. Like someone had buried something . . . or somebody.

His heart jumped into the back of his throat as he raised his head . . . and came face-to-face with death.

3

At first, all Tommy could see was that the woman was pretty. She looked peaceful, like in *The Lady of the Lake*. Her skin was pale and kind of blue. Her eyes were closed.

Then slowly other things came into focus: blood that had drizzled down her chin and dried, a slash mark across one cheek, ants marching into and out of her nostrils.

Tommy's stomach flipped over.

'Holy shit!' Dennis exclaimed as he came to stand beside the grave.

Cody Roache, dirt on his face, glasses askew, screamed like a girl, bolted, and ran back the way they had come.

Wendy was as white as a sheet as she stared at the dead woman, but, as always, she had her wits about her. She turned to Dennis and said, 'You have to go call your dad.'

Dennis wasn't listening to her. He got down on his hands and knees for a closer look. 'Is she really dead?'

'Don't touch her!' Tommy snapped as Dennis reached out a grubby finger to poke at the woman's face.

He had only ever seen one dead person in his whole life – his grandmother on his father's side – and she was in a coffin. But he knew it just wasn't right to touch this woman. It was disrespectful or something.

'What if she's just asleep?' Dennis said. 'What if she was buried alive and she's in a coma?'

He tried to push up one of the woman's eyelids, but it wouldn't budge. He couldn't seem to take his eyes off the woman's face.

To Tommy it looked as if something had been digging at the grave. One of the woman's hands was out of the dirt,

as if she had been trying to reach out for help. The hand was mangled, like maybe some animal had chewed on her fingers, tearing flesh and exposing bones.

He had fallen right on top of a dead woman. His head swam. He felt like someone had just poured cold water over him.

As Dennis reached out to touch the woman again, a dog stepped out of some bushes on the other side of the body and growled deep in its throat.

None of them moved then. The dog was mean-looking, white with a big black spot around one beady eye and over the small ear. The dog moved forward. The kids moved backward.

‘He’s protecting her,’ Tommy said.

‘Maybe he killed her,’ Dennis said. ‘Maybe he killed her and buried her like a bone, and now he’s back to eat the body.’

He said it as if he hoped that was the case, and he couldn’t wait to watch the next gruesome scene.

Then as suddenly as it had appeared, the dog stepped back into the bushes and was gone.

In the next second, a man in a sheriff’s deputy’s uniform appeared at the top of the bank the kids had tumbled over. He looked like a giant looking down at them, his hair buzzed flat on top, his eyes hidden by mirrored sunglasses. He was Dennis Farman’s father.

Tommy stood well back from the deputies who had come with yellow crime-scene tape to mark off the area around the shallow grave. He should have been home by now. His mother was going to be really mad. He had a piano lesson at five. But he couldn’t seem to make himself leave, and he thought maybe he wasn’t supposed to.

The light was fading in the thick woods. Somewhere out there was a mad dog, and maybe even a murderer. He didn’t want to walk home anymore.

The adults on the other side of the tape weren't paying any attention to him or Wendy. Dennis hung around just outside the tape, trying to get a better look as the deputies did their jobs.

Cody Roache had run all the way back to the street and nearly got himself run over by Dennis's father in his squad car. Tommy had heard the deputies telling each other. Mr. Farman had come straight to the scene, but Cody had not come back.

'I wonder who she is,' Wendy said quietly. She sat on the stump of a tree that had been cut down over the summer. 'I wonder how she died.'

'Somebody killed her,' Tommy said.

'I think I want to go home now,' Wendy said. 'Don't you?'

Tommy didn't answer her. He felt like he was inside of a bubble, and if he tried to move the bubble would burst and all sorts of feelings would wash over him and drown him.

People had come into the park to see what was going on. They stood up on the bank – teenagers, a mailman, one of the janitors from school.

As he watched them, Miss Navarre appeared at the edge of the group. She spotted him and Wendy right away and made her way down to them.

'Are you guys all right?' she asked.

'Tommy fell on a dead person!' Wendy said.

Tommy said nothing. He had started to shake all over. Inside his head all he could see was the dead woman's face – the blood, the gash in her cheek, the ants crawling on her.

'A deputy came into the school and said something had happened,' Miss Navarre said, looking over at the place where the dead lady was. She turned back then and touched Tommy's forehead and brushed some dead leaves out of his hair. 'You're really pale, Tommy. You should sit down.'

Dutifully he sat down on the stump beside Wendy. Miss

Navarre looked as pale as either of them, but there was no more room on the stump.

‘Tell me what happened,’ she said.

The tale spilled out of Wendy like rushing water. When she came to the part where Tommy fell on the grave, Miss Navarre closed her eyes and said, ‘Oh my God.’

She bent down to Tommy’s level and looked him straight in the eyes. ‘Are you all right?’

Tommy gave the smallest nod. ‘I’m okay.’

His voice sounded like it came from far away.

‘Wait here,’ she said. ‘I’m going to ask the deputies if I can take you home.’

She walked over to the yellow tape stretched between the trees and tried to get the attention of Dennis Farman’s dad, who seemed to be the big shot on the scene.

The two exchanged words. Miss Navarre gestured toward Dennis. Farman’s father shook his head. They were arguing. Tommy could tell by the way they were standing – Miss Navarre with her hands on her hips, Mr. Farman puffing himself up and leaning over her. Then Miss Navarre raised a hand and ended the discussion.

She was angry when she came back, although she did her best to hide it. Tommy could feel it all around her like frozen air.

‘Come on,’ she said, reaching out her hands to them. ‘I’m taking you home.’

At ten Tommy generally considered himself too old to hold hands with an adult. He couldn’t remember the last time his mother had held his hand. Kindergarten, maybe. But he didn’t feel so grown-up now, and he took Miss Navarre’s soft, smooth hand and held on tight as she led them away from the terrible scene and out of the woods.

But the scene came with Tommy, stuck in his head; he felt sick at the idea that it might never go away.