

THE
HUMAN
BODY

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Pamela Dorman Books

VIKING

Shots in the Night

"I'm thinking of a prank," Cederna announces to Ietri as they're shaving early in the morning.

"What prank?"

"First tell me if you'll go along, then I'll tell you about it."

They rinse their razors in the same basin of warm water resting on the ground. The shaving lather floats like cream on the surface. Cederna shaves carefully, because a few pimples have broken out and he has to pay attention. He can't explain the frenzy that seizes him on certain days like today. All he knows is that he wakes up with a wild urge to do something, to pick a fight, smash things, knock people around, wreak havoc. He's been that way since he was a kid and his memories of every one of those days are partly appalling and partly glorious. If there were someone he could beat up, it would be perfect, but the enemy doesn't show its face, so he has to improvise.

"How can I tell you I'm in if I don't know what it involves?" Ietri objects.

"Don't you trust me, *verginella?*"

Ietri thinks it over. Cederna knows very well he has him in the palm of his hand. Ietri is his disciple. If he asked him to run naked toward a group of Taliban, he'd probably do it.

"Sure, I trust you," Ietri says.

"Then tell me you'll go along."

"It's not dangerous, is it?"

"Nope. You just have to keep watch."

"Okay, then. I'm in."

Cederna moves closer. He stops Ietri's hand that's holding the razor. He slides his own blade over his buddy's cheek. Ietri's eyes widen; he stiffens.

"What are you doing?"

"Sssh . . ."

Ietri holds his breath as his eyes follow the razor's path.

"Listen," Cederna says. "Tonight, when the others are in the mess hall, we'll take the snake out of the Wreck."

"I'm not touching that thing."

"I'll do it. I told you, you're the lookout—you just have to make sure no one approaches."

"What are you going to do with the snake?"

"Put it in Mitrano's sleeping bag."

"Holy shit."

"Dead right. Wait till you see how he jumps when he finds it."

"But didn't you see how scared he was last night? He couldn't even look at it."

"Exactly."

Cederna draws the blade along his friend's jaw, carefully following the curve of the bone. Their mouths are so close that if they each pursed their lips, they'd touch. Never in a million years would Cederna ever think about kissing a man on the lips.

"What if he gets really pissed?"

"Who? Mitrano? That's just the beauty of it."

The beauty of it also has to do with getting back at Mitrano once and for all for how he made Cederna feel the night of the attack, sniveling like a woman to try to get his place back inside the bunker—but Cederna doesn't say that.

"And what if René gets mad?"

"René never gets mad. Besides, who gives a shit? If we followed his