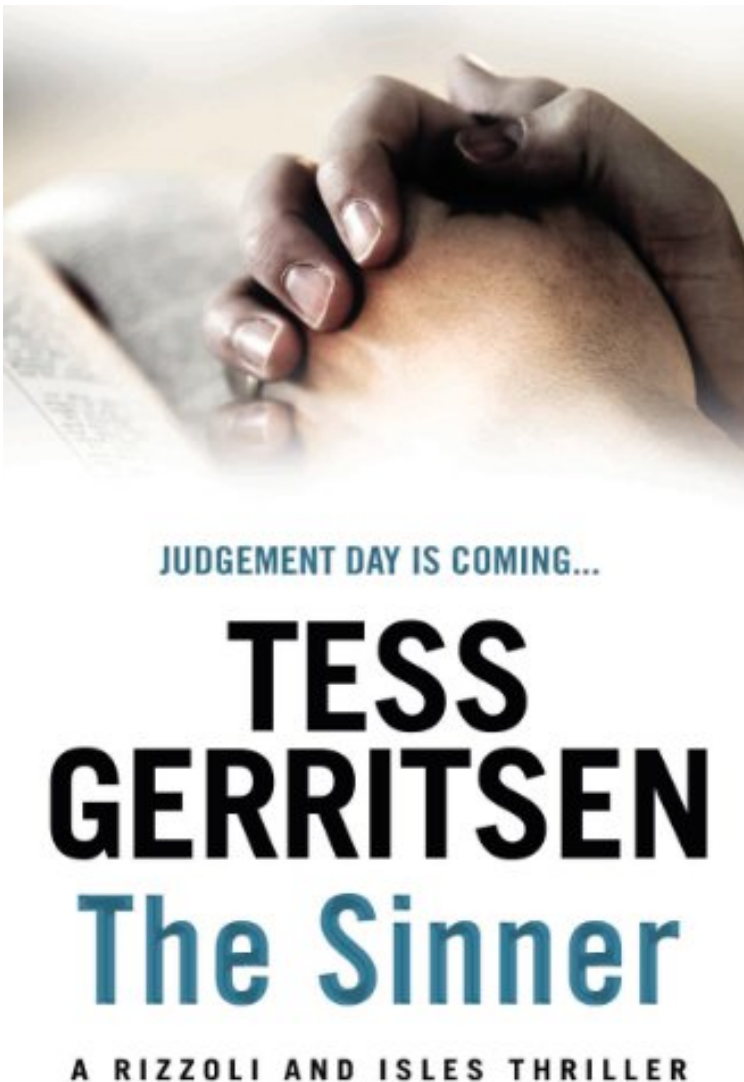


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## The Sinner: (Rizzoli Isles series 3)



*Par Tess Gerritsen  
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**Description :** Description du produitFrom the New York Times bestselling author of *The Surgeon* and *The Apprentice* comes a chilling new novel of suspense featuring Boston medical examiner Dr. Maura Isles, on the deadly trail of an anonymous madman whos committed an unholy crime. . . .THE SINNERNot even the icy temperatures of a typical New England winter can match the bone-chilling scene of carnage discovered in the early morning hours at the chapel of Our Lady of Divine Light. Within the sanctuary walls of the cloistered convent, now stained with blood, lie two nunsone dead, one critically injuredvictims of an unspeakably savage attacker.The brutal crime appears to be without motive, and the elderly nuns in residence can offer little help in the police investigation. But medical examiner Maura Isles autopsy of the dead woman yields a shocking surprise: Twenty-year-old Sister Camille, the orders sole novice, gave birth before she was murdered. Then the disturbing case takes a stunning new turn when another woman is found murdered in an abandoned building, her body mutilated beyond recognition.Together, Isles and homicide

detective Jane Rizzoli uncover an ancient horror that connects these terrible slaughters. As long-buried secrets come to light, Maura Isles finds herself drawn inexorably toward the heart of an investigation that strikes closer and closer to home and toward a dawning revelation about the killers identity too shattering to consider. As spine-tingling as it is mind-jolting, *The Sinner* showcases Tess Gerritsen in peak form bringing her intimate knowledge of the dark depths of criminal investigation brilliantly to bear. Beneath its layers of startling insight into the souls of its characters, and the richly wrought depiction of the everyday war between good and evil, beats the unstoppable heart of an irresistible thriller. Tess Gerritsen left a successful practice as an internist to raise her children and concentrate on her writing. She gained nationwide acclaim for her first novel of medical suspense, the New York Times bestseller *Harvest*. She is also the author of the bestsellers *Life Support*, *Bloodstream*, *Gravity*, and *The Surgeon* and *The Apprentice*. Tess Gerritsen lives in Maine.

**PRAISE FOR TESS GERRITSEN**  
*The Surgeon* A briskly paced, terrifically suspenseful work that steadily builds toward a tense and terrifying climax. *People* (Page-Turner of the week) Creepy . . . [The Surgeon] will exert a powerful grip on readers. *Chicago Tribune* Grabbed me by the throat and didn't let go. *TAMI HOAG* The Apprentice Skillful and scary. *The Washington Post Book World* An adrenaline rush from start to finish. *IRIS JOHANSEN* Masterful . . . Gerritsen moves into the Thomas Harris class, though with a style all her own. *Kirkus Reviews* (starred review) From the Hardcover edition.

**Presentation de l'auteur**  
**JUDGEMENT DAY IS COMING . . .** Absolutely riveting - you won't be able to put this down. *Mo Hayder* Two nuns are brutally attacked within the walls of their convent. There seems to be no shred of motive. But during the autopsy Forensic Pathologist Maura Isles discovers something entirely unexpected. And when a second, heavily mutilated body is found and linked to the case, she and Detective Jane Rizzoli find themselves in the midst of a terrifying investigation that seems to implicate everyone. Because who can really say they're free from sin? *Extrait* One They called her the Queen of the Dead. Though no one ever said it to her face, Dr. Maura Isles sometimes heard the nickname murmured in her wake as she traveled the grim triangle of her job between courtroom and death scene and morgue. Sometimes she would detect a note of dark sarcasm: Ha ha, there she goes, our Goth goddess, out to collect fresh subjects. Sometimes the whispers held a tremolo of disquiet, like the murmurs of the pious as an unholy stranger passes among them. It was the disquiet of those who could not understand why she chose to walk in Death's footsteps. Does she enjoy it, they wonder? Does the touch of cold flesh, the stench of decay, hold such allure for her that she has turned her back on the living? They think this cannot be normal, and they cast uneasy glances her way, noting details that only reinforce their beliefs that she is an odd duck. The ivory skin, the black hair with its blunt Cleopatra cut. The red slash of lipstick. Who else wears lipstick to a death scene? Most of all, it's her calmness that disturbs them, her coolly regal gaze as she surveys the horrors that they themselves can barely stomach. Unlike them, she does not avert her gaze. Instead she bends close and stares, touches. She sniffs. And later, under bright lights in her autopsy lab, she cuts. She was cutting now, her scalpel slicing through chilled skin, through subcutaneous fat that gleamed a greasy yellow. A man who liked his hamburgers and fries, she thought as she used pruning shears to cut through the ribs and lifted the triangular shield of breastbone the way one opens a cupboard door, to reveal its treasured contents. The heart lay cradled in its spongy bed of lungs. For fifty-nine years, it had pumped blood through the body of Mr. Samuel Knight. It had grown with him, aged with him, transforming, as he had, from the lean muscle of youth to this well-larded flesh. All pumps eventually fail, and so had Mr. Knight as he sat in his Boston hotel room with the TV turned on and a glass of whiskey from the minibar sitting beside him on the nightstand. She did not pause to wonder what his final thoughts might have been, or whether he had felt pain or fear. Though she explored his most intimate recesses, though she flayed open his skin and held his heart in her hands, Mr. Samuel Knight remained a stranger to her, a silent and undemanding one, willingly offering up his secrets. The dead are patient. They do not complain, nor threaten, nor cajole. The dead do not hurt you; only the living do. She worked with serene efficiency, resecting the thoracic viscera, laying the freed heart on the cutting board. Outside, the first snow of December swirled, white flakes whispering against windows and slithering down alleys. But here in the lab, the only sounds were of running water and the hiss of the ventilator fan. Her assistant Yoshima moved in uncanny silence, anticipating her requests, materializing wherever she needed him. They had worked together only a year and a half, yet already they functioned like a single organism, linked by the telepathy of two logical minds. She did not need to ask him to redirect the lamp; it was already done, the light shining down on the dripping heart, a pair of scissors held out and waiting for her to take them. The darkly mottled wall of the right ventricle, and the white apical scar,

told her this hearts sad story. An old myocardial infarction, months or even years old, had already destroyed part of the left ventricular wall. Then, sometime in the last twenty-four hours, a fresh infarction had occurred. A thrombus had blocked off the right coronary artery, strangling the flow of blood to the muscle of the right ventricle. She resected tissue for histology, already knowing what she would see under the microscope. Coagulation and necrosis. The invasion of white cells, moving in like a defending army.

Perhaps Mr. Samuel Knight thought the discomfort in his chest was just a bout of indigestion. Too much lunch, shouldnt have eaten all those onions. Maybe Pepto-Bismol would do the trick. Or perhaps there'd been more ominous signs which he chose to ignore: the weight on his chest, the shortness of breath. Surely it did not occur to him that he was having a heart attack. That, a day later, he would be dead of an arrhythmia. The heart now lay open and sectioned on the board. She looked at the torso, missing all its organs. So ends your business trip to Boston, she thought. No surprises here. No foul play, except for the abuse you heaped on your own body, Mr. Knight. The intercom buzzed. Dr. Isles? It was Louise, her secretary. Yes? Detective Rizzoli on line two for you. Can you take the call? Ill pick up. Maura peeled off her gloves and crossed to the wall phone. Yoshima, who'd been rinsing instruments in the sink, shut off the faucet. He turned to watch her with his silent tiger eyes, already knowing what a call from Rizzoli signified. When at last Maura hung up, she saw the question in his gaze. Its starting early today, she said. Then she stripped off her gown and left the morgue, to usher another subject into her realm. The mornings snowfall had turned into a treacherous mix of both snow and sleet, and the city plows were nowhere in sight. She drove cautiously along Jamaica Riverway, tires swishing through deep slush, windshield wipers scraping at hoar-frosted glass. This was the first winter storm of the season, and drivers had yet to adjust to the conditions. Already, several casualties had slid off the road, and she passed a parked police cruiser, its lights flashing, the patrolman standing beside a tow truck driver as they both gazed at a car that had tipped into a ditch. The tires of her Lexus began to slide sideways, the front bumper veering toward oncoming traffic. Panicking, she hit the brakes and felt the vehicles automatic skid control kick into action. She pulled the car back into her lane. Screw this, she thought, her heart thudding. Im moving back to California. She slowed to a timid crawl, not caring who honked at her or how much traffic she held up. Go ahead and pass me, idiots. Ive met too many drivers like you on my slab. The road took her into Jamaica Plain, a west Boston neighborhood of stately old mansions and broad lawns, of serene parks and river walks. In the summertime, this would be a leafy retreat from the noise and heat of urban Boston, but today, under bleak skies, with winds sweeping across barren lawns, it was a desolate neighborhood. The address she sought seemed the most forbidding of all, the building set back behind a high stone wall over which a smothering tangle of ivy had scrambled. A barricade to keep out the world, she thought. From the street, all she could see were the gothic peaks of a slate roof and one towering gable window which peered back at her like a dark eye. A patrol car parked near the front gate confirmed that she had found the correct address. Only a few other vehicles had arrived so far the shock troops before the larger army of crime-scene techs arrived. She parked across the street and braced herself against the first blast of wind. When she stepped out of the car, her shoe skidded right out from under her, and she barely caught herself, hanging onto the vehicle door. Dragging herself back to her feet, she felt icy water trickle down her calves from the soaked hem of her coat, which had fallen into the slush. For a few seconds she just stood there, sleet stinging her face, shocked by how quickly it had all happened. She glanced across the street at the patrolman sitting in his cruiser, and saw that he was watching her, and had surely seen her slip. Her pride stung, she grabbed her kit from the front seat, swung the door shut, and made her way, with as much dignity as she could muster, across the rime-slicked road. You okay, Doc? the patrolman called out through his car window, a concerned inquiry she really did not welcome. Im fine. Watch yourself in those shoes. Its even more slippery in the courtyard. Wheres Detective Rizzoli? Theyre in the chapel. And wheres that? Cant miss it. Its the door with the big cross on it. She continued to the front gate, but found it locked. An iron bell hung on the wall; she tugged on the pull rope, and the medieval clang slowly faded into the softer tick, tick of falling sleet. Just beneath the bell was a bronze plaque, its inscription partially obscured by a strand of brown ivy. Graystones Abbey The Sisters of Our Lady of Divine Light The harvest is indeed great, but the laborers are few. Pray, therefore, to send laborers Into the harvest. On the other side of the gate, a woman swathed in black suddenly appeared, her approach so silent that Maura gave a start when she saw the face staring at her through the bars. It was an ancient face, so deeply lined it seemed to be collapsing in on itself, but the eyes were bright and sharp as a birds. The nun did not speak, posing her question with only her gaze. Im Dr. Isles from the Medical Examiners office, said Maura. The police called me here. The gate squealed open. Maura stepped into the courtyard. Im looking for Detective Rizzoli. I believe shes in the

chapel. The nun pointed directly across the courtyard. Then she turned and shuffled slowly into the nearest doorway, abandoning Maura to make her own way to the chapel. Snowflakes whirled and danced amid needles of sleet, like white butterflies circling their lead-footed cousins. The most direct route was to cross the courtyard, but the stones were glazed with ice, and Maura's shoes, with their gripless soles, had already proven no match for such a surface. She ducked instead beneath the narrow covered walkway that ran along the courtyard's perimeter. Though protected from the sleet, she found little shelter here from the wind, which sliced through her coat. She was shocked by the cold, reminded yet again of how cruel December in Boston could be. For most of her life, she had lived in San Francisco, where a glimpse of snowflakes was a rare delight, not a torment, like these stinging nettles that swirled under the overhang to nip her face. She veered closer to the building and hugged her coat tighter as she passed darkened windows. From beyond the gate came the faint swish of traffic on Jamaica Riverway. But here, within these walls, she heard only silence. Except for the elderly nun who had admitted her, the compound seemed abandoned. So it was a shock when she saw three faces staring at her from one of the windows. The nuns stood in a silent tableau, like dark-robed ghosts behind glass, watching the intruder make her way deeper into their sanctuary. Their gazes swerved in unison, following her as she moved past. The entrance to the chapel was draped with a strand of yellow crime scene tape, which had sagged in the doorway and hung crusted with sleet. She lifted the tape to step beneath it and pushed open the door. A camera flash exploded in her eyes and she froze, the door slowly hissing shut behind her, blinking away the afterimage that had seared her retinas. As her vision cleared, she saw rows of wooden pews, whitewashed walls, and at the front of the chapel, an enormous crucifix hanging above the altar. It was a coldly austere room, its gloom deepened by the stained glass windows, which admitted only a murky smear of light. Hold it right there. Be careful where you step, said the photographer. Maura looked down at the stone floor and saw blood. And footprints—a confusing jumble of them, along with medical debris. Syringe caps and torn wrappings. The leavings of an ambulance crew. But no body. Her gaze moved in a wider circle, taking in the piece of trampled white cloth lying in the aisle, the splashes of red on the pews. She could see her own breath in this frigid room, and the temperature seemed to drop even colder, her chill deepening as she read the bloodstains, saw the successive splashes moving up the rows of benches, and understood what had happened here. The photographer began to click off more shots, each one a visual assault on Maura's eyes. Hey Doc? At the front of the chapel, a mop of dark hair popped up as Detective Jane Rizzoli rose to her feet and waved. The vics up here. What about this blood here, by the door? That's from the other victim, Sister Ursula. Med-Q boys took her to St. Francis. There's more blood along that center aisle, and some footprints were trying to preserve, so you'd better circle around to your left. Stick close to the wall. Maura paused to pull on paper shoe-covers, then edged along the perimeter of the room, hugging the wall. Only as she cleared the front row of pews did she see the nun's body, lying faceup, the fabric of her habit a black pool blending into a larger lake of red. Both hands had already been bagged to preserve evidence. The victim's youth took Maura by surprise. The nun who had let her in the gate, and those she had seen through the window, had all been elderly. This woman was far younger. It was an ethereal face, her pale blue eyes frozen in a look of eerie serenity. Her head was bare, the blond hair shorn to barely an inch long. Every terrible blow was recorded in the torn scalp, the misshapen crown. Her name: Camille Maginnes. Sister Camille. Hometown, Hyannisport, said Rizzoli, sounding Dragnet-cool and businesslike. She was the first novice they've had here in fifteen years. Planned to take her final vows in May. She paused, then added: She was only twenty, and her anger cracked through the facade. She's so young. Yeah. Looks like he beat the shit out of her. Maura pulled on gloves and crouched down to study the destruction. The death instrument had left raggedly linear lacerations on the scalp. Fragments of bone protruded through torn skin, and a clump of gray matter had oozed out. Though the facial skin was largely intact, it was suffused a dark purple. She died facedown. Who turned her onto her back? The sisters who found her, said Rizzoli. They were looking for a pulse. What time were the victims discovered? About eight this morning. Rizzoli glanced at her watch. Nearly two hours ago. Do you know what happened? What did the sisters tell you? It's been hard getting anything useful out of them. There are only fourteen nuns left now, and they're all in a state of shock. Here they think they're safe. Protected by God. And then some lunatic breaks in. There are signs of forced entry? No, but it wouldn't be all that hard to get into the compound. There's ivy growing all over the walls—you could hop right over without too much trouble. And there's also a back gate, leading to a field, where they have their gardens. A perp could get in that way, too. Footprints? A few in here. But outside, they'd be pretty much buried under snow. So we don't know that he actually broke in. He could have been admitted through that front gate. It's a cloistered order, Doc. No one's allowed inside the gates except for the parish priest, when

he comes in to say Mass and hear confession. And theres also a lady who works in the rectory. They let her bring her little girl when she cant get child care. But thats it. No one else comes in without the Abbess approval. And the sisters stay inside. They leave only for doctors appointments and family emergencies. Who have you spoken to so far? The Abbess, Mother Mary Clement. And the two nuns who found the victims. What did they tell you? Rizzoli shook her head. Saw nothing, heard nothing. I dont think the others will be able to tell us much, either. Why not? Have you seen how old they are? It doesnt mean they dont have their wits about them. One of them gorked out by a stroke and two of them have Alzheimers. Most of them sleep in rooms facing away from the courtyard, so they wouldnt have seen a thing. At first Maura simply crouched over Camilles body, not touching it. Granting the victim a last moment of dignity. Nothing can hurt you now, she thought. She began to palpate the scalp, and felt the crunch of shifting bone fragments beneath the skin. Multiple blows. All of them landed on the crown or the back of the skull. . . . And the facial bruising? Is that just lividity? Yes. And its fixed. So the blows came from behind. And above. The attacker was probably taller. Or she was down on her knees. And he was standing over her. Maura paused, hands touching cool flesh, arrested by the heartbreaking image of this young nun, kneeling before her attacker, blows raining down on her bowed head. What kind of bastard goes around beating up nuns? said Rizzoli. What the fuck is wrong with this world? Maura winced at Rizzolis choice of words. Though she couldnt remember the last time shed set foot in a church, and had ceased believing years ago, to hear such profanity in a sanctified place disturbed her. Such was the power of childhood indoctrination. Even she, for whom saints and miracles were now merely fantasies, would never utter a curse in full view of the cross. But Rizzoli was too angry to care what words came tumbling out of her mouth, even in this sacred place. Her hair was more disheveled than usual, a wild, black mane glistening with melted sleet. The bones of her face jutted out in sharp angles beneath pale skin. In the gloom of the chapel, her eyes were bright coals, lit with rage. Righteous anger had always been Jane Rizzolis fuel, the essence of what drove her to hunt monsters. Today, though, she seemed feverish with it, and her face was thinner, as though the fire was now consuming her from within. Maura did not want to feed those flames. She kept her voice dispassionate, her questions businesslike. A scientist dealing in facts, not emotions. She reached for Sister Camilles arm and tested the elbow joint. Its flaccid. No rigor mortis. Less than five, six hours then? Its also cold in here. Rizzoli gave a snort, exhaling a puff of vapor in the frigid air. No kidding. Just above freezing, Id guess. Rigor mortis would be delayed. How long? Almost indefinitely. What about her face? The fixed bruising? Livor mortis could have happened within half an hour. It doesnt help us all that much with time of death. Maura opened her kit and set out the chemical thermometer to measure ambient temperature. She eyed the victims many layers of clothing and decided not to take a rectal temperature until after the body had been transported to the morgue.

The room was poorly lit not a place in which she could adequately rule out sexual assault prior to the insertion of the thermometer. Wrestling off clothes might also dislodge trace evidence. Instead she took out syringes to withdraw vitreous fluid for postmortem potassium levels. It would give her one estimate for time of death. Tell me about the other victim, Maura said as she pierced the left eye and slowly withdrew vitreous fluid into the syringe. Rizzoli gave a groan of disgust at the procedure and turned away. The vic found by the door was Sister Ursula Rowland, sixty-eight years old. Must be a tough old bird. They said she was moving her arms when they loaded her into the ambulance. Frost and I got here just as they were driving away. How badly injured was she? I didnt see her. Latest report we got from St. Francis Hospital is that shes in surgery. Multiple skull fractures and bleeding into the brain. Like this victim. Yeah. Like Camille. The anger was back in Rizzolis voice. Maura rose to her feet and stood shivering. Her trousers had wicked freezing water from the soaked hem of her coat, and her calves felt encased in ice. She had been told on the phone that the death scene was indoors, so she had not brought her scarf or wool gloves from the car. This unheated room was scarcely warmer than the sleet-swept courtyard outside. She shoved her hands into her coat pockets, and wondered how Rizzoli, who was also without warm gloves and scarf, could linger so long in this frigid chapel. Rizzoli seemed to carry her own heat source within her, the fever of her outrage, and although her lips were turning blue, she did not seem in a hurry to seek a warmer room anytime soon. Why is it so cold in here? asked Maura. I cant imagine theyd want to hold Mass in this room. They dont. This part of the buildings never used in winter its too expensive to heat. There are so few of them still living here, anyway. For Mass, they use a small chapel off the rectory. Maura thought of the three nuns shed seen through the window, all of them elderly. These sisters were dying flames, flickering out one by one. If this chapel not used, she said, what were the victims doing in here? Rizzoli gave a sigh, exhaling a dragons breath of vapor. No one knows. The Abbess says the last time she saw Ursula and Camille was at prayers last night, around

nine. When they didnt appear at morning prayers, the sisters went looking for them. They never expected to find them in here. All these blows to the head. It looks like sheer rage. But look at her face, said Rizzoli, pointing to Camille. He didnt hit her face. He spared her face. That makes it seem a lot less personal. As if hes not swinging at her specifically, but at what she is. What she stands for. Authority? said Maura.

Power? Funny. I would have said something along the lines of faith, hope, and charity. Well, I went to a Catholic high school. You? Rizzoli gave a snort. Never wouldve guessed. Maura took a deep breath of chilly air and looked up at the cross, remembering her years at Holy Innocents Academy. And the special torments meted out by Sister Magdalene, who had taught history. The torment had not been physical but emotional, dispensed by a woman who was quick to identify which girls had, in her opinion, an unseemly excess of confidence. At the age of fourteen, Mauras best friends had not been people, but books. Shed easily mastered all her classwork, and had been proud of it, too. That was what had brought Sister Magdalenes wrath down upon her shoulders. For Mauras own good, that unholy pride in her own intellect needed to be beaten into humility. Sister Magdalene went about the task with vicious gusto. She had held Maura up to ridicule in class, had written cutting comments in the margins of her immaculate papers, and sighed loudly whenever Maura raised her hand to ask a question. In the end, Maura had been reduced to conquered silence. They used to intimidate me, said Maura. The nuns. I didnt think anything scared you, Doc. Lots of things scare me. Rizzoli laughed. Just not dead bodies, huh? There are far scarier things in this world than dead bodies. They left the body of Camille lying on her bed of cold stone and moved back around the rooms perimeter, toward the bloodstained floor where Ursula had been found, still alive. The photographer had completed his work and departed; only Maura and Rizzoli remained in the chapel, two lone women, their voices echoing off stark walls. Maura had always thought of chapels as universal sanctuaries, where even the spirit of the unbeliever might be comforted. But she found no comfort in this bleak place, where Death had walked, contemptuous of holy symbols. They found Sister Ursula right here, said Rizzoli. She was lying with her head pointed toward the altar, her feet toward the door. As though prostrating herself before the crucifix. This guys a fucking animal, said Rizzoli, the angry words clipped off like shards of ice. Thats what were dealing with. Out of his mind. Or some coked-up asshole looking for something to steal. We dont know its a man. Rizzoli waved toward the body of Sister Camille. You think a woman did that? A woman can swing a hammer. Crush a skull. We found a footprint. There, halfway up the aisle. Looked to me like a mans size twelve. One of the ambulance crew? No, you can see the Med-Q teams footprints here, near the door. That one in the aisles different. That ones his. The wind blew, rattling the windows, and the door creaked as though invisible hands were tugging at it, desperate to get in. Rizzolis lips had chilled to blue, and her face had taken on a corpselike pallor, but she showed no intention of seeking a warmer room. That was Rizzoli, too stubborn to be the first to capitulate. To admit she had reached her limit. Maura looked down at the stone floor where Sister Ursula had been lying, and she could not disagree with Rizzolis instincts, that this attack was an act of insanity. This was madness she saw here, in these bloodstains. In the blows slammed into Sister Camilles skull. Either madness, or evil. An icy draft seemed to blow straight up her spine. She straightened, shivering, and her gaze fixed on the crucifix. Im freezing, she said. Can we get warm somewhere? Get a cup of coffee? Are you finished here? Ive seen what I need to. The autopsy will tell us the rest. From the Hardcover edition. From Publishers Weekly A grisly murder at a convent baffles Medical Examiner Maura Isles and Det. Jane Rizzoli at the start of this assured, richly shaded seventh novel from bestseller Gerritsen (*The Apprentice*; *The Surgeon*, etc.). The popular duo are called to Boston's Graystones Abbey when two nuns are discovered in an abandoned chapel, one dead and the other near death, both brutally bludgeoned. Red herrings are everywhere: Isles's discovery that one of the murdered nuns had recently given birth (followed shortly by the discovery of the baby's body in a pond near the convent); the murder of a homeless derelict with her face and extremities removed by her killer; and the lurking menace of a multinational chemical company. Complicating matters further is the sudden arrival of Isles's ex-husband, Victor, a celebrity humanitarian with his own suspicious connection to the case, and Rizzoli's old flame, FBI agent Gabriel Dean, who's responsible for the baby now growing in Rizzoli's belly. The investigation is rather low-key, but Gerritsen gives atmospheric depth to her tale with descriptions of snowbound Boston and an exotic past tragedy. Isles's pleasantly bitchy coldness ("Go ahead and pass me, idiots. I've met too many drivers like you on my slab") gives a welcome edge to the proceedings, and the struggles of both Isles and Rizzoli to balance their tough professional acts with romantic drama are satisfyingly gritty. Copyright 2003

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