



## The Séance (Harrison Investigation Book 5)

By Heather Graham

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Summoned by the Ouija board, the restless spirit of Beau Kidd, the lead detective—and chief suspect—on the original case, seeks Christina's help: the latest killing isn't a copycat crime, and he wants his name cleared. Back in the real world, cop-turned-writer Jed Braden is skeptical of Christina's ghostly encounters, but his police sources confirm all the intimate details of the case—her otherworldly source is reliable, and the body count is growing. The spirits are right. The Interstate Killer is still out there, and Christina's life is hanging in the balance between this world and the next.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Bestseller Graham's latest begins with Christina Hardy, writer of commercial jingles and reluctant communicator with the dead, moving into her grandparents' old Victorian home, just outside of Orlando, Fla. After some Ouija board experimentation at a housewarming party, Christina starts hearing from the ghost of a dead police officer, Beau Kidd, believed to be the Interstate Killer whose murder spree came to an end when the officer was shot 12 years ago. A new rash of highway killings has thrown doubt on Kidd's guilt, and the ghost is looking for Christina to clear his name; with the help of ex-cop Jed Braden, they may be able to stop the real killer before he murders again. Graham peoples her novel with genuine, endearing characters and keeps the grisly murders tactfully backgrounded, though more fastidious readers will note some holes in the busy plot. Graham uses the bond between Christina and the intelligent, charming ghost as an intriguing parallel to the evolving Christina-Jed relationship, giving a unique paranormal twist to this able romantic suspense. (Oct.)

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### About the Author

*New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author **Heather Graham** has written more than a hundred novels. She's a winner of the RWA's Lifetime Achievement Award, and the Thriller Writers' Silver Bullet. She is an active member of International Thriller Writers and Mystery Writers of America. For more information, check out her websites: [TheOriginalHeatherGraham.com](http://TheOriginalHeatherGraham.com), [eHeatherGraham.com](http://eHeatherGraham.com), and [HeatherGraham.tv](http://HeatherGraham.tv). You can also find Heather on Facebook.

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An autopsy room always smelled like death, no matter how sterile it was.

And it was never dark, the way it was in so many movies. If anything, it was too bright. Everything about it rendered death matter-of-fact.

Facts, yes. It was the facts they were after. The victim's voice was forever silenced, and only the eloquent, hushed cry of the body was left to help those who sought to catch a killer.

Jed Braden could never figure out how the medical examiner and the cops got so blasé about the place that they managed not only to eat but to wolf down their food in the autopsy room.

Not that he wasn't familiar enough with autopsy rooms himself. He was, in fact, far more acquainted with his current surroundings than he had ever wanted to be. But eating here? Not him.

This morning, it was doughnuts for the rest of them, but he'd even refused coffee. He'd never passed out at an autopsy, even when he'd been a rookie in Homicide, and he didn't feel like starting now.

Even a fresh corpse smelled. The body—any body—released gases with death. And if it had taken a while for someone to discover the corpse, whether it was a victim of natural, self-inflicted or violent death, growing bacteria and the process of decay could really wreak havoc with the senses.

But sometimes he thought the worst smells of all were those that just accompanied the business of discovering evidence: formaldehyde and other tissue preservers and the heavy astringents used to whitewash death and decay. Some M.E.'s and their assistants wore masks or even re-breathers—since the nation had

become litigation crazy, some jurisdictions even required them.

Not Doc Martin. He had always felt that the smells associated with death were an important tool. He was one of the fifty percent of people who could smell cyanide. He was also a stickler; he hated it when a corpse had to be disinterred because something had been done wrong or neglected the first time around.

There wasn't a better man to have on a case. Whenever a death was suspicious, there had to be an autopsy, and it always felt like the last, the ultimate, invasion. Everything that had once been part and parcel of a living soul was not just spread out naked, but sliced and probed.

At least an autopsy had not been required for Margaritte. She had been pumped full of morphine, and at the end, her eyes had opened once, looked into his, then closed. A flutter had lifted her chest, and she had died in his arms, looking as if she were only sleeping, but truly at rest at last.

Doc Martin finished intoning the time and date into his recorder and shut off the device for a moment, staring at him.

He didn't speak straight to Jed, though. He spoke to Jerry Dwyer, at his side.

"Lieutenant. What's he doing here?"

Inwardly, Jed groaned.

"Doc..." Jerry murmured unhappily. "I think it's his...conscience."

The M.E. hiked a bushy gray eyebrow. "But he's not a cop anymore. He's a writer."

He managed to say the word writer as if it were a synonym for scumbag.

Why not? Jed thought. He was feeling a little bit like a scumbag this morning.

Doc Martin sniffed. "He used to be a cop. A good one, too," he admitted gruffly.

"Yeah, so give him a break," Jerry Dwyer told him.

"And he's got his private investigator's license, too. He's still legit."

This time Martin made a skeptical sound at the back of his throat. "Yeah, he got that license so he could keep sticking his nose into other people's business—so he could write about it. He working for the dead girl? He know her folks? I don't think so."

"Maybe I want to see justice done," Jed said quietly.

"Maybe the entire force was wrong twelve years ago."

"Maybe we've got a copycat," Martin said. "And maybe we got the wrong guy," Jed said.

"Technically, we didn't get any guy, exactly," Jerry reminded them both uncomfortably.

"And you feel like shit for having written about it, as if the cop who was killed really did do it, huh?" Doc Martin asked Jed.

"Yeah, if that's the case, I feel like shit," Jed agreed. Jerry came to his defense again. "Listen, the guy's own

partner thought he was guilty. Hell, he was the one who shot him. And Robert Gessup, the A.D.A., compiled plenty of evidence for an arrest and an indictment." Jerry cleared his throat. "And so far, no one has been proved wrong about anything. We all know about copycats."

"Thing about copycats is, they always miss something, some little trick," Doc Martin said. "Unfortunately, I wasn't the M.E. on the earlier victims. Old Dr. Mackleby was, but he passed away last summer from a heart attack, and the younger fellow who was working the case, Dr. Austin, was killed in an automobile accident. But don't worry, if there's something off-kilter here, I'll find it. I'm good. Damned good."

"Yeah," Jerry Dwyer said, adding dryly, "Hell, Doc, we knew that before you told us."

Martin grunted and turned the tape recorder back on. Jerry gave Jed a glance, shrugging. He'd warned Jed that they might have trouble. He'd told him right out that if Martin said he had to leave, he had to leave.

An autopsy was a long, hard business, and Jed knew it. In his five years in Homicide, he'd learned too well just how much had to be done meticulously and tediously. And messily.

He'd never expected to attend one when his presence wasn't necessary in solving a case, but the truth was, he didn't have to be here today.

Except in his own mind.

The woman on the table was already out of her body bag. There had been no need to inspect her clothing. She hadn't been found with any.

The discovery of her body on the I-4 had been not just a tragedy but a shock to the police and anyone who had been in the area for the original killings twelve years ago. Her name was Sherri Mason; she had come to what the locals called Theme Park Central in the middle of the Florida peninsula because she'd wanted to be a star. The police knew her identity because her purse—holding not just her ID but fifty-five dollars and change and several credit cards—had been found discarded near her naked body.

She had been found not just lying there but carefully displayed, arranged, stretched out on her back as if she were sleeping, her arms crossed over her chest, mummy-style. They were assuming, an assumption to be verified during the autopsy, that she had been sexually assaulted.

Just like the other five victims—those who'd been slain twelve years ago.

The problem was, everyone had spent the past twelve years assuming that the killer of those five young women—found beside the same highway and left in the exact same position—had perished himself. He had been a cop named Beau Kidd, shot by his own partner, who had discovered him with the body of the fifth woman. Beau had drawn his own weapon, giving his partner no choice but to fire. He'd never gone to trial, since he'd been pronounced dead at the site, exhaling his last breath over the body of his final victim.

Assuming he really had been the killer. Certainly the remaining detectives working the case and the D.A.'s office had thought so, and there had been enough circumstantial evidence to make the case.

That evidence had been sound, Jed knew. He had investigated the case himself after he left the force. He had interviewed as many people who'd been involved as he could find. His first book, the one that had made his reputation as an author, had been about the case. A work of fiction, names changed, but it had been clearly based on the career of the Interstate Killer.

Like everyone else, he'd unquestioningly blamed the deaths on the man who had died, one of the detectives

assigned to the case.

Jed put the past and all his doubts out of his mind as Doc Martin went on to make observations and take photographs. The body showed signs of rough handling, with abundant bruising. As expected, she had been sexually assaulted, but, as in the past, the killer had been careful. More testing would be necessary, but every one of them was glumly certain there would be no fluids found from which to extract DNA.

The majority of the bruising was around her neck. Like the original victims, she'd been strangled.

Occasionally the M.E. had a question for Jerry, who explained that Sherri had last been seen at a local mall, and that her car had been found in the parking lot there. She had met friends to see a movie, then left alone. When she hadn't shown up for work the following day, a co-worker had reported her missing and filed the report when the requisite twenty-four hours had passed. On the third day after her disappearance, she had been found alongside the highway.

Jed realized that Jerry was staring at him. "The same?" he inquired.

"I didn't attend any of the original autopsies, remember?" Jed replied.

"You did the research," Jerry reminded him. Jed hesitated, shook his head grimly, and spoke. "The previous victims disappeared and were discovered within a few days. They bore bruises, as if they'd fought with their captor. There were signs of force, but no slashes, no cigarette burns or anything like that. No DNA was ever pulled from beneath fingernails, and no DNA was acquired from the rape kits. That was one of the reasons for thinking the killer was a cop. Whoever killed those girls knew how to commit a murder without leaving evidence."

"None of you were on the case, or even near it?" Doc Martin asked, looking up.

Both men shook their heads. "I wasn't here, either, at the time. I was working Broward County back then," Doc Martin murmured. "Hell, come to think of it, Jed, you weren't much more than a kid at the time."

"Eighteen, and in the service," Jed told him.

Doc Martin settled down to work then. After the back of the body had been inspected, it was bathed and any trace evidence collected in the drain. Tools clicked against the stainless steel of the autopsy table. Scrapings were taken from beneath Sherri's nails, but Jed was already certain that they would find nothing. Next came the scalpel, the Y incision, the removal of organs and fluids for testing. Everyone went quiet. Jed found himself thinking abou...

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**Chelsie Salls:**

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