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of the largest fire in Maine's history—from the author of
THE PILOT'S WIFE

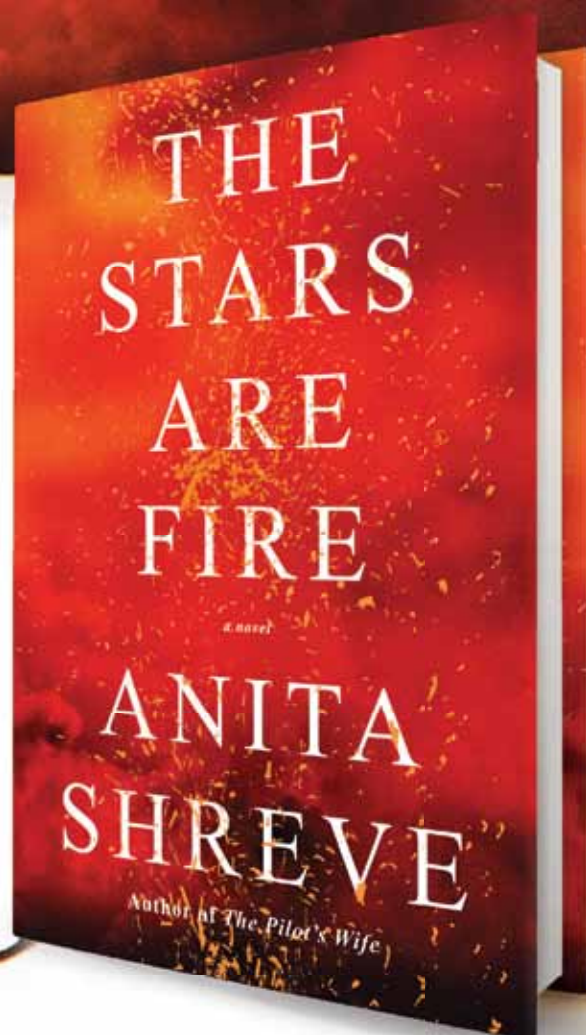
ANITA SHREVE



ELENA SHEBERT

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An exquisitely
suspenseful new novel
about an extraordinary
young woman tested
by a raging fire and its
devastating aftermath.

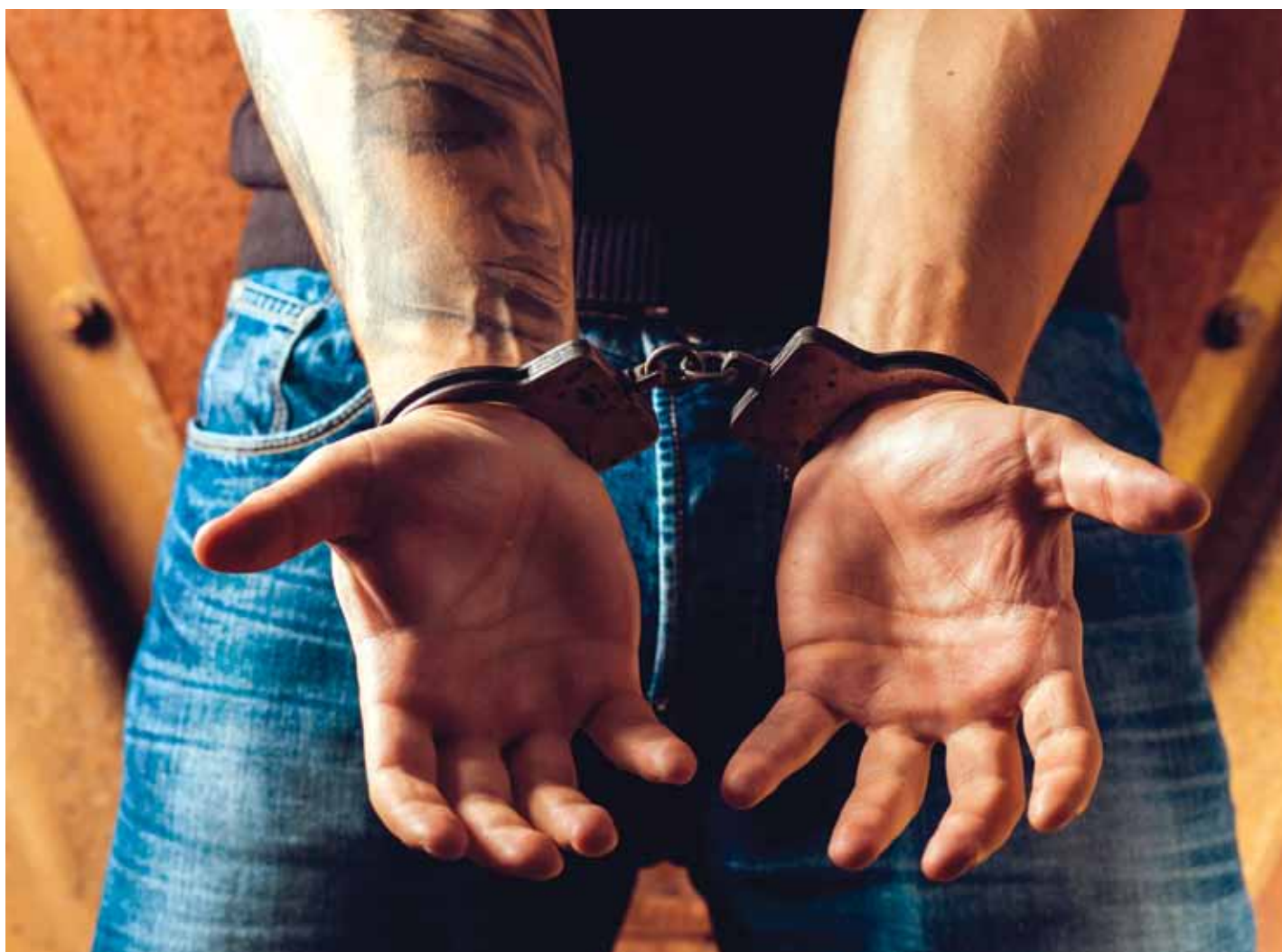
**“TOTALLY
IRRESISTIBLE”**
—Kate Christensen,
Portland Press Herald

Knopf 
AnitaShreve.com

Who would you be if you could begin again?

Post Traumatic

BY WREN PEARSON



“CALL 911. I think I’m going to kill someone.”

Jeff was prone to exaggeration. I walked the length of the parking lot to his apartment. He was standing on the curb, staring at my approach.

“Did you call?”

“No. I’m not calling 911 without knowing why.”

He glared at me.

“A guy at the bar was getting in my face. He kept pushing me, shooting off his

mouth. I left, but it’s not going away, so call 911 and tell them to send the fucking cops before I end up hurting you, too.”

He’d never threatened me before. I was his consigliere. We took care of each other.

I dialed the number.

As I tried to explain the situation to the operator, Jeff kept interrupting.

“Tell them to send the cops now!”

The operator repeatedly asked if I were being threatened. Was I in danger? She wouldn’t listen to the backstory. They both

kept talking over me. I set the phone down, not knowing what to do.

“Stay on the fucking line!” Jeff hollered at me. “You don’t hang up!”

A fire truck was the first to arrive. High up in the cab, the two occupants looked down on the scene.

Jeff stormed to the engine as the uniforms descended.

“So what’s going on here?” the woman asked from the step of the truck while the driver rounded the front. Her tone was dis-

FICTION

missive as she took in Jeff's tattoos.

"I need to be handcuffed!" Jeff shouted. "I need to be cuffed and restrained now!" He was pacing back and forth by the truck, wrists out in front of him.

"Just calm down," the woman said.

"Take it easy, man," the driver said.

"Calm down."

Calming down wasn't an option.

Blue lights bounced off the brick walls as the next vehicle arrived. Jeff kept moving, stalking up the lot toward the cruiser and the emerging officers. The firemen followed him. Jeff was pleading now.

"Please, officers, cuff me. Handcuff me before I lose it."

The young cop on the left put his hands on his hips, on his belt.

"Sir, tell us what's going on with you."

Suddenly Jeff was looking around wildly.

"Where's Sharon?" he bellowed. "I can't see Sharon! Where is she?"

I started running, calling to him.

"I'm here, Jeff. Hold on. I'm right here!"

"Tell them!" he screamed as he caught sight of me.

"I'm his caregiver. He's an Iraq war combat veteran with severe PTSD. He's got a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star, and he lost men in Baghdad. He's unarmed, and he's asking for your help! Please handcuff him now before this goes bad."

Jeff stood still, wrists out, arms shaking. The older cop nodded at me, stepped forward, and clicked the cuffs. Jeff let out a long breath then drew in more air and roared up at the night sky, straining against the the cuffs with all his might. His body seemed to swell in size like Bruce Banner transforming into the Hulk. He didn't move from his spot. Every muscle in his body contracted, forcing the fury against the cage of his skin.

A stretcher appeared. A paramedic with a syringe. The needle went in, but still he roared, straining against the handcuffs. Another syringe. He collapsed on the stretcher, and all six uniforms rushed forward to strap him down. Fully restrained, he stopped his howling, replaced by a small voice of tears as the gurney was rolled to the back of the ambulance.

"I didn't kill that child. I didn't kill that child."

"Where to?" the ambulance driver asked me.

"Mercy."

I could hear him swearing at people as I filled out forms with the nurses and police. They were trying to intubate him to pump his stomach, though I knew there were no drugs and not much alcohol in there. He hadn't been downtown long enough.

"This may take a while," a nurse said. "Those two shots barely lasted the ambulance ride."

I sat in the open doorway, reading by the corridor light as two people slept on rows of chairs in the darkened lounge. The swearing faded away. Hours later, I moved to Jeff's room, sitting at the foot of his bed. I watched the drainage bag slowly fill up with urine while he snored peacefully.

He was released in the morning under the condition that he go immediately to the VA and meet with his psychiatrist, who was expecting him.

"Sharon will take me," Jeff said.

The doctor saw the quick flash of panic on my face. I didn't know what to expect anymore.

"We can call the sheriff," the doctor offered. "You don't have to transport him." But I knew I did.

In the car, Jeff reclined the seat, making the journey in silence with his eyes closed.

At the VA, I sat in the psych unit waiting room with combat vets from different wars. I'd been here before. A young guy behind me pulled out a Ziploc bag containing a dozen peeled, hard-boiled eggs and offered them to anyone within earshot. When Jeff came out of the locked hallway that led to his shrink's office he was all smiles. His ride home was jubilant.

"Doc said I handled this all real well. I got out of the situation to a safe place. I asked for help. No violence. No arrest. I did it all right."

"I'm proud of you."

As I parked the car, Jeff took out his cell phone.

"I'm gonna call Brita and see if she wants to go roller skating. You wanna come?"

I shook my head no.

He got out and walked toward his place, already dialing the phone. I climbed the stairs to my apartment, locked the door behind me and cried myself to sleep. ■

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