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*Uncommon*  
CRIMINALS

A HEIST SOCIETY NOVEL

Ally Carter

Disney • HYPERION BOOKS  
NEW YORK

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Summary: Fifteen-year-old Kat Bishop and her fellow talented teenagers work together to find and steal the “Cleopatra Emerald” from an unscrupulous dealer and return it to its rightful owner, while a former love of her Uncle Eddie tries to get the gem for herself.

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For Vanessa



## CHAPTER 1

**M**oscow can be a cold, hard place in winter. But the big old house on Tverskoy Boulevard had always seemed immune to these particular facts, the way that it had seemed immune to many things throughout the years.

When breadlines filled the streets during the reign of the czars, the big house had caviar. When the rest of Russia stood shaking in the Siberian winds, that house had fires and gas-light in every room. And when the Second World War was over and places like Leningrad and Berlin were nothing but rubble and crumbling walls, the residents of the big house on Tverskoy Boulevard only had to take up a hammer and drive a single nail—to hang a painting on the landing at the top of the stairs—to mark the end of a long war.

The canvas was small, perhaps only eight by ten

inches. The brushstrokes were light but meticulous. And the subject, the countryside near Provence, was once a favorite of an artist named Cézanne.

No one in the house spoke of how the painting had come to be there. Not a single member of the staff ever asked the man of the house, a high-ranking Soviet official, to talk about the canvas or the war or whatever services he may have performed in battle or beyond to earn such a lavish prize. The house on Tverskoy Boulevard was not one for stories, everybody knew. And besides, the war was over. The Nazis had lost. And to the victors went the spoils.

Or, as the case may be, the paintings.

Eventually, the wallpaper faded, and soon few people actually remembered the man who had brought the painting home from the newly liberated East Germany. None of the neighbors dared to whisper the letters *K-G-B*. Of the old Socialists and new socialites who flooded through the open doors for parties, not one ever dared to mention the Russian mob.

And still the painting stayed hanging, the music kept playing, and the party itself seemed to last—echoing out onto the street, fading into the frigid air of the night.

The party on the first Friday of February was a fund-raiser—though for what cause or foundation, no one really knew. It didn't matter. The same people were invited. The same chef was preparing the same food. The men stood smoking the same cigars and drinking the same vodka. And, of course, the same painting still hung at the top of the stairs, looking down on the partygoers below.

But one of the partygoers was not, actually, the same.

When she gave the man at the door a name from the

list, her Russian bore a slight accent. When she handed her coat to a maid, no one seemed to notice that it was far too light for someone who had spent too long in Moscow's winter. She was too short; her black hair framed a face that was in every way too young. The women watched her pass, eyeing the competition. The men hardly noticed her at all as she nibbled and sipped and waited until the hour grew late and the people became tipsy. When that time finally came, not one soul watched as the girl with the soft pale skin climbed the stairs and slipped the small painting from the nail that held it. She walked to the window.

And jumped.

And neither the house on Tverskoy Boulevard nor any of its occupants ever saw the girl or the painting again.

## CHAPTER 2

**N**o one visits Moscow in February just for fun.

Perhaps that is why the customs agent looked so curiously at the shorter-than-average teenage girl who stood in line behind the business people and expatriates who were arriving in New York that day, choosing to flee the Russian winter.

“How long was your visit?” the agent asked.

“Three days,” was the girl’s reply.

“Do you have anything to declare?” The customs agent lowered her head, studied the girl from over the top of her half-moon glasses. “Are you bringing anything home with you, sweetie?”

The girl seemed to consider this, then shook her head. “No.”

When the woman asked, “Are you traveling by yourself?”

she sounded less like a government official doing her due diligence and more like a mother concerned that such a young girl could be traveling the world alone.

But the girl seemed perfectly at ease as she smiled and said, “Yes.”

“And were you traveling for business or for pleasure?” the woman asked, looking from the pale blue customs form to the girl’s bright blue eyes.

“Pleasure,” the young girl said. She reached for her passport. “I had to go to a party.”

Even though she’d just landed in New York, when Katarina Bishop walked through the airport that Saturday afternoon, her mind couldn’t help but drift to all the places she still had to go.

There was a Klimt in Cairo, a very nice Rembrandt rumored to be hidden in a cave in the Swiss Alps, and a statue by Bartolini last seen somewhere on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. Altogether, there were at least a half dozen jobs that could come next, and Kat’s thoughts wandered through them like a maze. And still the part that weighed heaviest on her were the jobs she didn’t know about—the plundered treasures no one had found yet. The Nazis had needed an army, she told herself, to steal them all. But she was just one girl—one thief. She felt exhausted, remembering it might take a lifetime to steal them all back.

When she stepped onto the long escalator and began her descent, Kat was completely unaware of the tall boy with the broad shoulders behind her until she felt the weight of her bag rise gently off her shoulder. She turned and looked up, but didn’t smile.

“You’d better not be trying to steal that,” she said.

The boy shrugged and reached for the small rolling suitcase at her feet. “I wouldn’t dare.”

“Because I’m an excellent yeller.”

“I don’t doubt it.”

“And fighter. My cousin gave me this nail file . . . the thing’s just like a switchblade.”

The boy nodded slowly. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

When they reached the bottom of the escalator, Kat stepped onto the smooth floor and realized how insane—and incredibly sloppy—it was for her not to have seen the boy that every other woman in the terminal was openly staring at. It wasn’t because he was handsome (though he was); it wasn’t because he was wealthy (though that too was undeniable); there was simply something about W. W. Hale the Fifth—a confidence that Kat knew could not be bought (and almost certainly could never be stolen).

So she let him carry her bags. She didn’t protest when he walked so close that her shoulder brushed against the arm of his heavy wool coat. And yet, beyond that, they did not touch. He didn’t even look at her as he said, “I would have sent the jet.”

“See”—she glanced up at him—“I’m trying to build up the miles.”

“Oh, well, when you put it that way . . .” A split second later, Kat saw her passport appear in Hale’s hands as if by magic. “So, how was Moscow, Ms. . . . McMurray.” He eyed her. “You don’t look like a Sue.”

“Moscow was cold,” Kat answered.

He flipped the page of the passport and examined the stamps. “And Rio?”

“Hot.”

“And—”

“I thought my dad and Uncle Eddie summoned you to Uruguay?” She stopped suddenly.

“Paraguay,” he corrected. “And it was more *invitation* than summons. I regretfully declined. Besides, I really wanted to do a Smash and Grab job in a mansion with half the former KGB.” He gave a long sigh. “Too bad I never got that invitation.”

Kat looked at him. “It was more like a *Gab* and Grab.”

“That’s too bad.” Hale smiled, but Kat felt very little warmth in the gesture. “You know, I’ve been told that I can really wear a tuxedo.”

Kat did know. She’d actually been there when her cousin Gabrielle had told him. But tuxedos, Kat knew, weren’t really the issue.

“It was an easy job, Hale.” Kat remembered the cold wind in her hair as she’d stood in the open window. She thought about the empty nail that had probably gone unnoticed until morning, and she had to laugh. “Totally easy. You would have been bored.”

“Yeah,” he said. “Because *easy* and *boring* are two words I frequently associate with the KGB.”

“I was fine, Hale.” She reached for him. “I’m serious. It was a one-person job. If I’d needed help I would have called, but—”

“I guess you just didn’t need the help.”

“The family is in Uruguay.”

“Paraguay,” he corrected.

“The family is in *Paraguay*,” Kat said louder, but then she felt herself go quiet. “I thought you were with the family.”

He stepped toward her, reached out, and slid the passport

into her jacket pocket, just above her heart. “I’d hate to see you lose this.”

When he started outside, Kat watched the big glass doors slide open. She braced herself against the freezing wind, but Hale seemed immune to the cold as he turned and called behind him, “So—a Cézanne, huh?”

She held two fingers inches apart. “Just a little one. . . . Weatherby?” she guessed, but Hale merely laughed as a long black car pulled to the curb. “Wendell?” Kat guessed again, hurrying to catch up. She slid between the boy and the car, and standing there, with his face inches from hers, the truth about what the *W*’s in his name stood for didn’t seem to matter at all. The reasons she’d been working all winter were blowing away with the breeze.

Hale’s *here*.

But then he inched closer—to her and to a line that couldn’t be uncrossed—and Kat felt her heart change rhythms.

“Excuse me,” a deep voice said. “Miss, excuse me.”

It took a moment for Kat to actually hear the words, to step back far enough to allow the man to reach for the door. He had gray hair, gray eyes, and a gray wool overcoat, and the effect, Kat thought, was that he was part butler, part driver, and part literal man of steel.

“You missed me, didn’t you, Marcus?” she asked as he took her bags and carried them to the open trunk with a graceful ease.

“Indeed,” he said in a thick British accent, the origin of which Kat had long ago stopped trying to pinpoint. Then, with a tip of his hat, he finished, “Welcome home, miss.”

“Yeah, Kat,” Hale said slowly. “Welcome home.”

The car, no doubt, was warm. The roads to Uncle Eddie’s

brownstone or Hale's country house were all free from snow and ice, and the two of them might have been settled someplace dry and safe within the hour.

But Marcus's hand lingered on the door handle a second too long. Kat's fifteen years as Uncle Eddie's great-niece and Bobby Bishop's daughter had left her senses a bit too sharp. And the wind was blowing in just the right direction, perfectly calibrated to carry the word on the air as a voice screamed, "Katarina!"

In all of Kat's life, only three people routinely called her by her full first name. One had a voice that was deep and gruff, and he was currently giving orders in Paraguay. Or Uruguay. One had a voice that was soft and kind and he was in Warsaw, examining a long-lost Cézanne, preparing plans to take it home. But it was the last voice that Kat feared as she spun away from the car, because the last voice, let's face it, belonged to the man who most likely wanted to kill her.

Kat stared down the long line of taxis picking up fares, travelers hugging and saying hello. She waited. She watched. But none of those three people came into view.

"Katarina?"

There was a woman walking toward her. She had white hair and kind eyes and wore a long tweed coat and a hand-knit scarf wrapped around her neck. The young man at her side kept his arm around the woman's shoulders, and the two of them moved slowly—as if Kat were made out of smoke and she might float away on the breeze.

"Are you *the* Katarina Bishop?" the woman asked, eyes wide. "Are you the girl who robbed the Henley?"

