

A hand holding a lit cigarette is the central focus, with the smoke rising. The background is a sunset over a city, with a car's headlights visible on a road in the distance. The overall color palette is dominated by warm oranges, yellows, and purples.

L A U R A
L I P P M A N

A Tess Monaghan Novel

Baltimore
Blues

Baltimore Blues

Until her paper, the Baltimore Star, crashed and burned, Tess Monaghan was a damn good reporter who knew her hometown intimately — from historic Fort McHenry to the crumbling projects of Cherry Hill. Now gainfully unemployed at twenty-nine, she's willing to take any freelance job to pay the rent — including a bit of unorthodox snooping for her rowing buddy, Darryl “Rock” Paxton.

In a city where someone is murdered almost everyday, attorney Michael Abramowitz's death should be just another statistic. But the slain lawyer's notoriety — and his noontime trysts with Rock's fiancée — make the case front page news...and points to Rock as the likely murderer. But trying to prove her friend's innocence could prove costly to Tess — and add her name to that infamous ever-growing list.

"A TERRIFIC WRITER! As far as I'm concerned,
she can't write fast enough." Ridley Pearson

LAURA LIPPMAN

Edgar Award-winning author of *Every Secret Thing*



THE FIRST TESS MONAGHAN NOVEL

Baltimore Blues

BALTIMORE BLUES



Laura Lippman

Tess Monaghan Series, Book 1

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PROMINENT LAWYER DEAD; BIOLOGIST HELD

According to sources close to the investigation, Mr. Abramowitz was squeezed in a python-like grip, then beaten viciously. He had bruises on his face, presumably from a fight with Darryl Paxton, a 33-year-old researcher at Johns Hopkins medical school, who visited the victim at his office just after 10 P.M., according to a security guard's log. The body was discovered by a custodian...

There was nothing new beyond that, only boilerplate on Abramowitz and his career. Certainly nothing was new to Tess. The style and reporting were as familiar to her as a lover's kiss. All the trademarks were there—unnamed sources, a memorable description of the death at hand, over-the-top prose, a damning detail. Still, she felt genuine admiration at the guard's log; she bet no one else in town had that.

"But I know more," she said out loud.

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Epigraph

Of all escape mechanisms, death is the most efficient.

—H.L. Mencken, *A Book of Burlesques*

[W]hile I love the dear old City of Baltimore much, and many of her people more, past experience has taught that, in their collective or municipal capacity, they are the most silly, unreflective, procrastinating, impracticable and perverse congregation of bipeds to be found any where under the sun. Wise in their own conceits they are impatient of advice, no matter how thoughtful and well matured, from any one, preferring always their own crude extemporaneous conjectures to the suggestions of sound common sense, which can only be elicited by the patient exercise of judgment, observation and reflection.

—Dr. Thomas Hepburn Buckler of Baltimore, in a letter home from his self-imposed exile in Paris, published in “Baltimore: Its Interests —Past, Present, and Future,” 1873

And down in lovely muck I've lain,
Happy till I woke again.
Then I saw the morning sky:
Heighho, the tale was all a lie;
The world, it was the old world yet,
I was I, my things were wet,
And nothing now remained to do

But begin the game anew.

—A. E. Housman “Terence, This is Stupid Stuff”

Chapter 1

On the last night of August, Tess Monaghan went to the drugstore and bought a composition book—one with a black-and-white marble cover. She had done this every fall since she was six and saw no reason to change, despite the differences wrought by twenty-three years. Never mind that she had a computer with a memory capable of keeping anything she might want to record. Never mind that she had to go to Rite Aid because Weinstein's Drugs had long ago been run into the ground by her grandfather. Never mind that she was no longer a student, no longer had a job, and summer's end held little relevance for her. Tess believed in routines and rituals. So she bought a composition book for \$1.69, took it home, and opened it to the first page, where she wrote:

Goals for Autumn:

1. Bench press 120 pounds.
2. Run a 7-minute mile.
3. Read *Don Quixote*.
4. Find a job, etc.

She sat at her desk and looked at what she had written. The first two items were within reach, although it would take work: She could do up to ten reps at a hundred pounds and run four miles in thirty minutes. *Don Quixote* had defeated her before, but she felt ready for it this fall.

Number 4 was more problematic. For one thing it would require figuring out what kind of job she wanted, a dilemma that had been perplexing her for two years, ever since Baltimore's penultimate newspaper, the *Star*, had folded, and its ultimate paper, the *Beacon-Light*, had not hired her.

Tess slapped the notebook closed, filed it on a shelf with twenty-two others—all blank except for the first page—set her alarm, and was asleep in five minutes. It was the eve of the first day of school, time for the city to throw off its August doldrums and move briskly toward fall. Maybe it could carry Tess with it.

The alarm went off seven hours later, at 5:15 A.M.. She dressed quickly and ran to her car, sniffing the breeze to see if fall might be early this year. The air was depressingly thick and syrupy, indifferent to Tess's expectations. Her eleven-year-old Toyota, the most dependable thing in her life, turned over instantly. "Thank you, precious," she said, patting the dashboard, then heading off through downtown's deserted streets.

On the other side of the harbor, the boat house was dark. It often was at 5:30, for the attendant did not find minimum wage incentive enough to leave his bed and arrive in Cherry Hill before first light. The neighborhood, a grim place at any time of day, had long ago been stripped of its fruit trees. And though its gentle slopes offered a sweeping view of Baltimore's harbor and skyline, no one came to Cherry Hill for the views.

Fortunately Tess had her own boat house key, as did most of the diehard rowers. She let herself in, stashed her key ring in a locker in the ladies' dressing room, then ran downstairs and grabbed her oars, anxious to be on the water before the college students arrived. She didn't like being lumped in with what she thought of as the J. Crew crews, callow youths with hoarse chatter of tests they had aced and kegs they had tapped. But she also felt out of place among the Baltimore Rowing Club's efficient grown-ups, professionals who