

LISA
SCOTTOLINE



MISTAKEN IDENTITY

'The female John Grisham' People Magazine



Synopsis:

Accused of murder, Alice Connolly wants crack trial lawyer Bennie Rosato to represent her. Bennie refuses the case, until the incarcerated woman claims to be her long-lost twin sister. Disbelieving but somehow convinced, Bennie agrees, only to discover corruption and cover-up.

"Dynamite . . . a master's touch."—David Baldacci

LISA SCOTTOLINE

NATIONAL BESTSELLER

mistaken identity

Mistaken Identity

Lisa Scottoline

The sixth book in the Rosato and Associates series

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*For J., new-found,
and for Peter and Kiki, as always*

BOOK ONE

Doctor of Medicine: What is truth?

Doctor of Law: Whatever can be proved by two witnesses.

— **August Strindberg**, *A Dream Play*

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Bennie Rosato shuddered when she caught sight of the place. The building stretched three blocks long and stood eight stories tall. It lacked conventional windows; instead, slits of bulletproof glass scored its brick façade. Spiked guard towers anchored its corners and a double row of cyclone fencing topped with razor wire encircled its perimeter, attesting to its maximum security status. Exiled to the industrial outskirts of the city, Philadelphia's Central Corrections housed murderers, sociopaths, and rapists. At least when they weren't on parole.

Bennie pulled into a parking space in the half-empty visitors' lot, climbed out of her Ford Expedition, and walked down the sidewalk in June's humidity, wrestling with her reluctance. She'd stopped practicing criminal law and had promised herself she'd never see the prison again until the telephone call from a woman inmate who was

awaiting trial. The woman had been charged with the shooting murder of her boyfriend, a detective with the Philadelphia police, but claimed a group of uniforms had framed her. Bennie specialized in prosecuting police misconduct, so she'd slid a fresh legal pad into her briefcase and had driven up to interview the inmate.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE read a metal plaque over the door, and Bennie managed not to laugh. The prison had been designed with the belief that vocational training would convert heroin dealers to keypunch operators and since nobody had any better ideas, still operated on the assumption. Bennie opened the heavy gray door, an inexplicably large dent buckling its middle, and went inside. She was immediately assaulted by stifling air, thick with sweat, disinfectant, and a cacophony of rapid-fire Spanish, street English, and languages Bennie didn't recognize. Whenever she entered the prison, Bennie felt as if she were walking into another world, and the sight evoked in her a familiar dismay.

The waiting room, packed with inmates' families, looked more like day care than prison. Infants in arms rattled plastic keys in primary colors, babies crawled from lap to lap, and a toddler practiced his first steps in the aisle, grabbing a plastic sandal for support as he staggered past. Bennie knew the statistics: nationwide, seventy-five percent of women inmates are mothers. The average prison term for a woman lasts a childhood. No matter whether Bennie's clients had been brought here by circumstance or corruption, she could never forget that their children were the ultimate victims, ignored at our peril. She couldn't fix it no matter how hard she'd tried and she couldn't stop trying, so she had finally turned away.

Bennie suppressed the thought and threaded her way to the front desk while the crowd socialized. Two older women, one white and one black, exchanged recipes written on index cards. Hispanic and white teenagers huddled together, a bouquet of backward baseball caps laughing over photos of a trip to Hershey Park. Two Vietnamese boys

shared the sports section with a white kid across the aisle. Unless prison procedures had changed, these families would be the Monday group, visiting inmates with last names A through F, and over time they'd become friends. Bennie used to think their friendliness a form of denial until she realized it was profoundly human, like the camaraderie she'd experienced in hospital waiting rooms, in the worst circumstances.

The guards at the front desk, a woman and a man, were on the telephone. Female and male guards worked at the prison because both sexes were incarcerated here, in separate wings. Behind the desk was a panel of smoked glass that looked opaque but concealed the prison's large, modern control center. Security monitors glowed faintly through the glass, their chalky gray screens ever-changing. A profile moved in front of a lighted screen like a storm cloud in front of the moon.

Bennie waited patiently for a guard, which cut against her grain. She questioned authority for a living, but she had learned not to challenge prison guards. They performed daily under conditions at least as threatening as those facing cops, but were acutely aware they earned less and weren't the subject of any cool TV shows. No kid grew up wanting to be a prison guard.

While Bennie waited, a little boy with bells on his shoelaces toddled over and stared up at her. She was used to the reaction even though she wasn't conventionally pretty; Bennie stood six feet tall, strong and sturdy. Her broad shoulders were emphasized by the padding of her yellow linen suit, and wavy hair the color of pale honey spilled loose to her back. Her features were more honest than beautiful, but big blondes caught the eye, approving or no. Bennie smiled at the child to show she wasn't a banana.

"You an attorney?" asked the female guard, hanging up the phone. She was an African-American woman in a jet-black uniform and pinned to her heavy breast had been a badge of gold electroplate. The

guard's hair had been combed back into a tiny bun from which stiff hairs sprung like a pinwheel, and her short sleeves were rolled up, macho style.

"Yeah, I'm a lawyer," Bennie answered. "I used to have an ID card but I'll be damned if I can find it."

"I'll look it up. Gimme your driver's license. Fill out the request slip. Sign the OV book for official visitors," the guard said on autopilot, and pushed a yellow clip ID across the counter.

Bennie produced her license, scribbled a request slip, and signed the log book. "I'm here to see Alice Connolly. Unit D, Cell 53."

"What's in the briefcase?"

"Legal papers."

"Put your purse in the lockers. No cell phones, cameras, or recording devices. Take a seat. We'll call you when they bring her down to the interview room."

"Thanks." Bennie hunted for a chair and spotted one in front of the closed window for the cashier and clothing exchange. The families had left the seat vacant because it was the equivalent of a table by the front door in a busy restaurant; when it opened, the exchange would be mobbed with families dropping off personal items, such as plastic rosaries the inmates liked to wear and do-rags necessary for gang identification. And the inmates always welcomed extra cash; for what, Bennie didn't want to speculate. She wedged into the seat next to a stocky grandmother, who smiled when she spotted Bennie's briefcase. A prison waiting room is the only place where a lawyer is a welcome sight.

"You're up, Rosato," called the guard.

Bennie rose and went through the metal detector to the other side of the front desk. She set her briefcase down on the gritty tile floor and raised her arms while the female guard ran a professionally intrusive

hand down her arms and sides. "Tell me I'm the only one," Bennie said, and the guard half smiled.

"Go on up, girl."

"Fine, but next time I expect dinner." Bennie picked up her briefcase as a male guard unlocked another gray metal door, double-thick. Attorneys signed a "no-hostage waiver" to get an initial ID; a misnomer, it meant that their release would not be negotiated if they were taken hostage. Once she passed through the door, Bennie would be locked in with a general population of violent inmates packing knives, straight-edge razors, garrotes, shanks, forks twisted into spikes, and possibly a blowtorch or two. Bennie's only weapons were a canvas briefcase and a Bic ballpoint. Anybody who believes the pen is mightier than the sword hasn't been inside a maximum security prison.

Bennie crossed the threshold with a nonchalance that fooled no one and walked down a narrow gray corridor, as stifling as the waiting room but mercifully quiet. The only sounds were echoes of faraway shouting and the clatter of her pumps down the hall. She hit a battered button and rode the empty cab to the third floor. On the landing was a smoked glass window that obscured the guard sitting behind, who accepted the request slip Bennie passed through a slot. "Room 34," said the guard's muffled voice, and the door to Bennie's right unlocked with a mechanical *ca-thunk* and opened a crack.

She walked through the door to another gray corridor, this one with a set of doors on the left, each leading to a gray cubicle. Inmates entered the cubicles from doors off a secured hallway on the other side, and all the doors locked automatically when they closed. Each cubicle, about four feet by six, contained two chairs facing each other and a beige wall phone for calling the guard. Only a Formica counter divided felon from lawyer. Though it had never bothered Bennie before, it felt oddly inadequate today. She walked to the end of the corridor, opened the door to Room 34, and did a double take when