

'Say it with me now: Caroline Kepnes is the master of the depraved love story. *Providence* is a novel that kept me up at night with characters that made my heart a little bigger. A dark beauty of a book.'

—JESSICA KNOLL, author of *The Luckiest Girl Alive*

Providence

a novel

Caroline
Kepnes

author of *You*

Advance praise for *Providence*

“A dark beauty of a book, *Providence* kept me up at night with characters that made my heart a little bigger.”—**Jessica Knoll**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Luckiest Girl Alive*

“*Providence* is a novel that doesn’t fit into one box—it’s tender and dark, eerie and cool, heartbreaking but also an affirmation of the power of love. Kepnes perfectly captures each character’s struggle and pain in such a unique, unconventional way that every page—every sentence—is a delightful surprise.”—**Sara Shepard**, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Pretty Little Liars*

“Caroline Kepnes is cool right this minute. . . . [*Providence* is] terrifically conceived and executed. . . . Kepnes has an exhilarating, poppy, unexpected voice.”—*The New York Times Book Review*

“[*Providence*] is equal parts love story, thriller, and horror tale. . . . Kepnes, whose previous novels deftly dealt with obsessive love, changes gears here and injects into this ‘Beauty and the Beast’-like story a deeper allegory about how far we’ll go to protect the things we love the most.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“[An] engrossing supernatural thriller . . . Kepnes provides readers with a spellbinding examination of what keeps people human.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“The infinite talent of Caroline Kepnes shines through every page of this extraordinary tale. *Providence* is sure to be one of the best thrillers of the year.”—**Mary Kubica**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Good Girl*

“An artist, a mutated vigilante, a charming hunter, a sickly detective, and a literary lunatic: Caroline Kepnes brings them together in this propulsive and original story. It kept me up at night, scared and thinking.”—**E. Lockhart**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Genuine Fraud* and *We Were Liars*

“There is something for every reader in these pages—thrills, chills, and a complex love story. Kepnes is a writer to add to your must-read pile.”—**Tess Gerritsen**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *I Know a Secret*

“A compulsively readable novel about the complexity of love, relationships, and the monsters we allow ourselves to become . . . Plus I have a new favorite character, named Eggs.”—**Paul Tremblay**, author of *A Head Full of Ghosts* and *The Cabin at the End of the World*

“Kepnes, in her unique style, has stretched and reimagined what a paranormal thriller can be. . . . Creepy and entertaining.”—**Iain Reid**, bestselling author of *I’m Thinking of Ending Things*

“Romantic, thrilling, and thoughtful in its examination of power, love, and goodness, *Providence* will haunt readers long after they’ve finished reading, and they’ll be better for it.”—**Andrea Dunlop**, author of *Losing the Light* and *She Regrets Nothing*

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“It is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world;
but on that account we shall be more attached to one another.”

—MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY, *Frankenstein*

JON

I brung Pedro home for Thanksgiving break and tomorrow I have to bring him back to school. You're not supposed to say brung. You're supposed to say brought. But I like the way brung sounds, like you're cold and ringing a bell. *Brrrrungggggg*. Nobody can kick your ass for what you think in your mind, not even your mom. Mine is stirring spaghetti sauce on the stove and shaking her head at me.

"Get that rat outta my kitchen," she says.

"Pedro's not a rat," I say. "He's a hamster."

My mom doesn't budge. "Whatever he is, he's not staying in my kitchen. I'm not gonna keep repeating myself, Jon. Take that thing outside. Now."

She always calls it *my* kitchen, same way my dad calls the TV *my* TV and the puffy chair *my chair*. My only territory is my bedroom. I guess my shed too, but that's in the woods and technically it belongs to Mrs. Curry. Everything else, in the house, indoors, belongs to my parents.

I take Pedro outside to the swing set even though I'm too old for it. He shivers.

"Come on, little guy," I say. "You're from New Hampshire. You can handle it."

The truth is, I don't know if Pedro was born here. Maybe he was born in Bermuda and got shipped here. This is my home, where I started. I was born at Derry Hospital outside of Nashua. Three days before Carrig Birkus. Sometimes, when he's kicking my ass, I think about how we were in the hospital at the same time. I picture us as newborns in nearby cribs. I see our dads waving at us. We were equals in a way. Back then you probably couldn't tell us apart. But now we're opposite. Carrig is a jock. One of those guys with *buddies*. His life is keg parties and girls. He cracks a joke and everyone laughs, and he knows how to speak to people, how to get to them. Last month his picture was in the window at Rolling Jack's, the sports store in the mall. He was ATHLETE OF THE MONTH.

I'm not anything of the month. Chloe laughed when I said that to her.

"That's a good thing," she said. "The worst thing you can do is peak in middle school."

She always says the right thing, the nice thing. I can picture her photo and her name up at another store, PERSON OF THE MONTH. I'd never say that though. I know that much.

Tomorrow we go back to school, which means seeing her again, Chloe Smells Like Cookies. That's what I call her in my head. Every time my mom makes cookies, no matter what they are, oatmeal raisin or chocolate chip or caramel, they smell like Chloe. Chloe Smells Like Cookies doesn't make fun of me. She sits with me at lunch even though the other girls laugh at her and the other guys tell her she is wasting her time on a *faggot*.

Chloe hates that word. She says after high school she's gonna live in New York City where nobody uses that word. She thinks the people in our school have small brains and small hearts. She says New

York is like *Sesame Street* for grown-ups, everyone has big hearts and you can be anything you want to be. She was there for Thanksgiving this week. Her parents took her to see the parade. She saw all the floats when they were shriveled and flat on the ground.

We've been texting a lot all week. She says I'd love New York.

It's so much bigger than New Hampshire even though it's smaller, you know?

I get it, Chloe. I wish I was there.

Of course you do. You always get it!

My mom yells: "Dinner!"

I write back fast: *See you tomorrow.*

She sends me a smiley face. That's code for *Me too, Jon.*

The house smells like spaghetti and broccoli, and my mom asks if I left Pedro outside and I tell her I did even though he's in my pocket. My dad picks up the broccoli and puts it in the microwave.

"What are you doing?" my mom asks. "It's cooked just fine."

"I can't stand that smell," he says.

"It's good for you, that smell."

My dad grunts. He's a burly guy who does drywall and plays pool. A lot of the guys around here think he's weird because he has a Scottish accent.

I sneak bits of spaghetti into my pocket. I almost get away with it but Pedro nips at my finger and I yelp and my mom slams her fork down.

"These damn schools. What the hell is there to be learned from taking a *rat* home at your age? Aren't you a little old for this nonsense?"

"We're mentoring a class at the elementary school," I tell her. "None of the kids in third grade could take him so I volunteered."

My parents look sad, like all this time they thought Pedro was

here because he *had* to be here, not because I wanted him.

“A lot of people have pets,” I say. “Carrig Birkus has a dog.”

I shouldn’t have said his name. They know I’m not friends with Carrig Birkus anymore. The last time he invited me to a birthday party was in fourth grade, when people still had parties with invitations, when your mom made you invite every kid. It was a Batman invitation so I showed up in my Spider-Man outfit but everybody else was in normal clothes. Sometimes I feel bad for my parents, like they’d do better with one of the other babies from that day, the kind who plays sports and wears the right clothes to a stupid party.

I look at my mom, right at her, like you do when you want something. “He’s a clean animal,” I say. “I promise he will stay in my room.”

My mom cuts her spaghetti. She doesn’t roll it around her fork like people in New York do on TV. Her name is Penny and she’s from New Hampshire, so she talks the way people here talk and she grew up on a farm where the animals stay *outside*.

“It’s your room,” she says. “You want to live in a disgusting pig sty and let animals poop about your things, that’s your business. Just don’t go coming to me to clean up.”

On the way upstairs I sneak a box of Oreos out of the cupboard. My dad is talking to my mom about the Patriots and the Super Bowl and my mom is talking about Giselle and how beautiful she is. They speak the same language only different. What comes out of my mom’s mouth never affects what comes out of my dad’s mouth. I think Chloe and I are better at talking. What Chloe says always affects what I say.

Upstairs, I put Pedro on my bed and bring an Oreo up to my nose and inhale, but Chloe smells like homemade cookies. I take out today’s *Nashua Telegraph* and reread Pedro the headlines from this morning. Today is Sunday, the biggest paper of the week. I can’t read the whole thing to Pedro, but I do my best. We make it to Section C, Lifestyles, and I think he likes it.

I love news. It reminds you that there’s a whole world out there,

a world of people who've never even heard of Carrig Birkus. Every day is new, every paper, every story. In a book or a movie you only get one story. But in a newspaper, you get happy stories, sad stories, stories that you can't understand about mortgages, scary stories about robberies, meth heads, that kid who got kidnapped in Dover.

Last Christmas my parents got me a subscription to the *Telegraph*. It was all I wanted. I was nervous they weren't gonna get it for me and I opened my last present, a sweater box. I was bummed. But I tore away the tissue paper and found a receipt for a subscription. I cheered and my mother laughed. I love it when she laughs, and it doesn't happen a lot. She said she will never understand me.

"I hate newspapers," she said. "Who wants to know about all the terrible things people are doing?"

"I want to know about everything," I told her.

"But it has absolutely nothing to do with you whatsoever, Jon," she said, befuddled. "Nothing in there is your business at all."

My dad was tearing the tag off his Patriots jersey. "Well," I said, "those Patriots don't have anything to do with Dad."

I never heard my mom laugh so hard. She hit the couch, and my dad flew into a light rage, telling me it's not *those Patriots*. It's *The Patriots*. We had ham and cake and peppermint ice cream and the only thing wrong about that day was that there was no newspaper. They don't publish on Christmas. Then again, it only added to the joy of the next day, when I woke up early to get the paper out of the special box my dad had installed next to our mailbox. It was good to see that the world was back on again.

When it's time to go to bed, I make a special place for Pedro. I use advertising flyers to build him a cozy bed. My mom is crazy. There's nothing dirty about him. If and when he poops, it won't even get on my sheets. "Good night, Pedro," I say. I close my eyes and I like the sound of him breathing, like it's a hard thing to do.

The next morning my mom hits my door once. "School!"

It's what she says every morning. Pedro pooped in his advertising

bed and I crumple it up and bring it downstairs and throw it in the trash in the kitchen. My mom points at the trash with a spatula. “Is there poop in there?”

“Yes,” I say.

“Then bring it outside.”

“But it snowed.”

“And since when are you allergic to snowflakes?”

I take Pedro and his bed outside and look at the trees at the edge of our yard. My mom and dad don’t know that it takes double the time for me to get to school every day because I have to go the back way, through Mrs. Curry’s yard, with the thorns that branch out, then alongside her fence and through the mud clearing near the Dumpsters and then back through the Shawnee family’s yard, by their swing set, and then finally down their driveway and onto Carnaby Street where my school is. It would be so much faster to walk out the front door of our house and turn left and walk down Birch all the way to Carnaby. That’s what everyone on my street does. But I can’t. Carrig and Penguin and those other guys, they come after me if I go the short way, they pound on me. They take my newspaper and smack me with it or they throw snowballs at me, black and brown and icy, the kind that hurt. When it’s hot out, they jump me or knock my bag onto the ground.

Chloe Smells Like Cookies takes the bus. She knows about my back way bramble route to avoid Carrig Birkus. She knows everything, more than my mom or my dad or the teachers. She’s the only person who knows about my shed, our shed.

I go there every single day after school and I bring Fluffernutters. Some days I hear her coming and my heart beats fast and then she comes in, throws her backpack down and starts complaining. Other days she doesn’t come and it starts to get dark and I go online and see that she’s busy with her other friends. But those days she does come, when I hear her in the woods, charging toward me, those are the ones that count.

Chloe always says we get along because we're both *only children*. She hates that phrase. "It's bad any way you cut it," she said once. "It's either like, 'Oh you, what do you matter? You're only a kid.' Or it's like you're just not enough because there's only one of you." And then she licked her lips and looked away. "We're not only anything," she said. "We're *great*." See, I have that going for me, being an only child. Carrig Birkus, he has four brothers and a couple sisters. Imagine living with all those kids. I can't, not really. Me and Chloe, we have more in common.

My mom opens the slider. She yells, "Breakfast!"

Inside, she made burned eggs and bacon and my dad is reading the paper. He gets to have it first and he gives it to me section by section. I put the pages back together so that it feels new, like nobody has looked through it. The good thing is that most days he only reads the sports section.

"So, at the end of the year somebody gets to keep Pedro," I say.

My mom looks at my dad and my dad puffs out his cheeks and my mom groans and my dad looks at me. "You keep him out of your mother's kitchen, yes?"

"Yes!" I say, and I can't wait to get to school and tell Mrs. McMurphy that I want to keep Pedro. I can't wait to tell Chloe Smells Like Cookies. I think you can invite a girl over without weirding her out if you have a pet. I think that's why Carrig Birkus has a dog.

I can't get to school fast enough. I tear through the brambles and I'm out of breath as if I'm running from bad guys. I run too fast and a thorn snags me. My cheek bleeds. I stop. I take off my glove and put my hand on my face. There is bright red blood. Pedro is in my pocket, shifting. I take him out and now there is blood on him. I apologize.

I hear something in the bushes though there is never anyone else here. I turn around and my whole life doesn't flash before my eyes, just the past few hours, the headline on the cover of today's paper—CYBER MONDAY: IS IT WORTH IT?—and the smell of last night's broc-

coli against the morning eggs, Pedro's heavy breathing, the snow, my blood on Pedro's Ovaltine-colored fur.

But it isn't one of the kids from school coming at me. It's a sub we had last year or the year before. *Mr. Blair*. Nobody liked him. He wore his phone on his belt and he was losing his hair on the top of his head and people laughed at him all the time. But I didn't. I didn't.

He's coming at me fast and it turns out I am not the kind of kid who springs into action when it's time to fight. I freeze. I choke. Same way I do on the baseball field at recess.

The blow comes from high above and something hits my head. *Brrrrungggg*. Pedro runs when I hit the ground. He can't send help. He's an animal, and like my mom says, he belongs out here. I don't.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CAROLINE KEPNES is the author of *You*, *Hidden Bodies* and numerous short stories. Her work has been translated into a multitude of languages, and a television series adaptation of *You* will debut on Lifetime in 2018. Kepnes graduated from Brown University and previously worked as a pop culture journalist—*Entertainment Weekly*—and a TV writer—*7th Heaven*. She grew up on Cape Cod, Massachusetts and now lives in Los Angeles.



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A propulsive novel that is part love story, part detective story, and part supernatural thriller – from the acclaimed author of *You*, whose work Stephen King describes as ‘hypnotic and totally original’.

Best friends in small-town New Hampshire, Jon and Chloe share a bond so intense that it borders on the mystical. But before Jon can declare his love for his soul mate, he is kidnapped, his plans for a normal life permanently dashed.

Four years later, Chloe has finally given up hope of ever seeing Jon again. Then, a few months before graduation, Jon reappears. But he is different now: bigger, stronger, and with no memory of the time he was gone. Jon wants to pick up where he and Chloe left off . . . until the horrifying instant he realises that he possesses strange powers that pose a grave threat to everyone he cares for. Afraid of hurting Chloe, Jon runs away, embarking on a journey for answers.

Meanwhile, in Providence, Rhode Island, healthy college students and townies with no connection to one another are suddenly, inexplicably dropping dead. A troubled detective prone to unexplainable hunches, Charles ‘Eggs’ DeBenedictus suspects there’s a serial killer at work. But when he starts asking questions, Eggs is plunged into a whodunit worthy of his most outlandish obsessions.

In this dazzling new novel – and with an intense, mesmerising voice – Caroline Kepnes makes keen and powerful observations about human connection and how love and identity can dangerously blur together.

‘Caroline Kepnes is cool right this minute . . . [*Providence* is] terrifically conceived and executed . . . Kepnes has an exhilarating, poppy, unexpected voice.’ —*New York Times*

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