

Sample text for The museum of Dr. Moses : tales of mystery and suspense / Joyce Carol Oates.

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Hi! Howya Doin!

Good-looking husky guy, six foot four, in late twenties or early thirties, Caucasian male as the initial police report will note, he's as solid-built as a fire hydrant, carries himself like an athlete, or an ex-athlete, just perceptibly thickening at the waist, otherwise in terrific condition, like a bronze figure in motion, sinewy arms pumping as he runs, long muscled legs, chiseled-muscled calves, he's hurtling along the moist wood-chip path at the western edge of the university arboretum at approximately 6 p.m. Thursday evening and there comes, from the other direction, a woman jogger on the path, in her late thirties, flushed face, downturned eyes, dark hair threaded with gray like cobwebs, an awkward runner, fleshy lips parted, holds her arms stiff at her sides, in a shrunken pullover shirt with a faded tiger on its front, not large but sizable breasts shaking as she runs, mimicked in the slight shaking of her cheeks, her hips in carrot-colored sweatpants, this is Madeline Hersey, frowning at the wood-chip path before her, Madeline's exasperating habit of staring at the ground when she runs, oblivious of the arboretum though at this time in May it's dazzling with white dogwood, pink dogwood, vivid yellow forsythia, Madeline is a lab technician at Squibb, lost in a labyrinth of her own tangled thoughts (career, lover, lover's learning-disabled child), startled out of her reverie by the loud aggressive-friendly greeting *Hi! Howya doin!* flung out at her like a playful slap on the buttocks as the tall husky jogger passes Madeline with the most fleeting of glances, big-toothed bemused smile, and Madeline loses her stride, in a faltering voice *Fine, thank you* but the other jogger is past, unhearing, and now on the gravel path behind the university hospital, now on the grassy towpath beside the old canal, in the green lushness of University Dells Park where, from late afternoon to dusk, joggers are running singly and in couples, in groups of three or more, track-team runners from the local high school, college students, white-haired older runners both male and female, to these the husky jogger in skintight mustard yellow T-shirt, short navy blue shorts showing his chiseled thigh muscles, size-twelve Nikes, calls out *Hi! Howya doin!* in a big bland booming voice, *Hi! Howya doin!* and a flash of big horsey teeth, long pumping legs, pumping arms, it's his practice to come up close behind a solitary jogger, a woman maybe, a girl, or an older man, so many "older" men (forties, fifties, sixties and beyond) in the university community, sometimes a younger guy who's sweated through his clothes, beginning to breathe through his mouth, size-twelve Nikes striking the earth like mallets, *Hi! Howya doin!* jolting Kyle Lindeman out of dreamy-sexy thoughts, jolting Michelle Rossley out of snarled anxious thoughts, there's Diane Hendricks who'd been an athlete in high school, now twenty pounds overweight, divorced, no kid, replaying in her head a quarrel she'd had

with a woman friend, goddamn she's angry! goddamn she's not going to call Ginny back this time! trying to calm her rush of thoughts like churning, roiling water, trying to measure her breaths Zen-fashion, inhale, exhale, inhale, and out of nowhere into this reverie a tall husky hurtling figure bears down on her, toward her, veering into her line of vision, instinctively Diane bears to the right to give him plenty of room to pass her, hopes this is no one she knows from work, no one who knows her, trying not to look up at him, tall guy, husky, must weigh two-twenty, works out, has got to be an athlete, or ex-athlete, a pang of sexual excitement courses through her, or is it sexual dread? even as *Hi! Howya doin!* rings out loud and bemused, like an elbow in Diane's left breast, as the stranger pounds past her, in his wake an odor of male sweat, acrid-briny male sweat and an impression of big glistening teeth bared in a brainless grin, or is it a mock grin, death's-head grin?—thrown off stride, self-conscious and stumbling, Diane manages to stammer *Fine—I'm fine* as if the stranger brushing past her is interested in her or in her well-being in the slightest, what a fool Diane is!—yet another day, moist-bright morning in the University Dells along the path beside the seed-stippled lagoon where amorous-combative male mallards are pursuing female ducks with much squawking, flapping of wings and splashing water, there comes the tall husky jogger, Caucasian male, six foot four, two-twenty pounds, no ID as the initial police report will note, on this occasion the jogger is wearing a skintight black Judas Priest T-shirt, very short white nylon shorts revealing every surge, ripple, sheen of chiseled thigh muscles, emerging out of a shadowy pathway at the edge of the birch woodsto approach Dr. Rausch of the university's geology department, older man, just slightly vain about being fit, dark-tinted aviator glasses riding the bridge of his perspiring nose, Dr. Rausch panting as he runs, not running so fast as he'd like, rivulets of sweat like melting grease down his back, sides, sweating through his shirt, in baggy khaki shorts to the knee, Dr. Rausch grinding his jaws in thought (departmental budget cuts! his youngest daughter's wrecked marriage! his wife's biopsy next morning at 7 a.m., he will drive her to the medical center and wait for her, return her home and yet somehow get to the tenure committee meeting he's chairing at 11 a.m.) when *Hi! Howya doin!* jolts Dr. Rausch as if the husky jogger in the black Judas Priest T-shirt has extended a playful size-twelve foot onto Dr. Rausch's path to trip him, suddenly he's thrown off stride, poor old guy, hasn't always been sixty-four years old, sunken-chested, skinny white legs sprouting individual hairs like wires, hard little potbelly straining at the unbelted waistline of the khaki shorts, Dr. Rausch looks up squinting, is this someone he knows? should know? who knows *him*? across the vertiginous span of thirty years in the geology department Dr. Rausch has had so many students, but before he can see who this is, or make a panting effort to reply in the quick-casual way of youthful joggers, the husky jogger has passed by Dr. Rausch without a second glance, legs like pistons of muscle, shimmering sweat-film like a halo about his body, fair brown, russet brown hair in curls like woodshavings lifting halolike from his large uplifted head, big toothy smile, large broad nose made for deep breathing, enormous dark nostrils that look as if thumbs have been shoved into them, soon again this shimmering male figure appears on the far side of the Dells, another afternoon on the institute grounds, hard-pounding feet, muscled arms

pumping, on this day a navy blue T-shirt faded from numerous launderings, another time the very short navy blue shorts, as he runs he exudes a yeasty body odor, sighting a solitary male jogger ahead he quickens his pace to overtake him, guy in his early twenties, university student, no athlete, about five eight, skinny guy, running with some effort, breathing through his mouth and in his head a swirl of numerals, symbols, equations, quantum optics, quantum noise, into this reverie *Hi! Howya doin!* is like a firecracker tossed by a prankish kid, snappishly the younger jogger replies *I'm okay* as his face flushes, how like high school, junior high kids pushing him around, in that instant he's remembering, almost now limping, lost the stride, now life seems pointless, you know it's pointless, you live, you die, look how his grandfather died, what's the point? there is none, as next day, next week, late Friday afternoon of the final week in May along the canal towpath past Linden Road where there are fewer joggers, looming up suddenly in your line of vision, approaching you, a tall husky male jogger running in the center of the path, instinctively you bear to the right, instinctively you turn your gaze downward, no eye contact on the towpath, you've been lost in thought, coils of thought like electric currents burning hot, scalding hot, the very pain, anguish, futility of your thoughts, for what is your soul but your thoughts? upright flame cupped between your hands silently pleading *Don't speak to me, respect my privacy please* even as the oncoming jogger continues to approach, in the center of the path, inexorably, unstopably, curly hairs on his arms shimmering with a bronze roseate glow, big teeth bared in a smile *Hi! Howya doin!* loud and bland and booming mock-friendly, and out of the pocket of your nylon jacket you fumble to remove the snub-nosed .22-caliber Smith & Wesson revolver you'd stolen from your stepfather's lodge in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, three years before, hateful of the old drunk asshole, you'd waited for him to ask if you'd taken it, were you the one to take his gun that's unlicensed? and your stepfather never asked, and you never told, and you lift the toylike gun in a hand trembling with excitement, with trepidation, with anticipation, aim at the face looming at you like a balloon face up close, and fire, and the bullet leaps like magic from the toylike weapon with unexpected force and short-range accuracy and enters the face at the forehead directly above the big-nostriled nose, in an instant the husky jogger in the mustard yellow T-shirt drops to his knees on the path, already the mustard yellow T-shirt is splashed with blood, on his belly now, brawny arms outspread, face flattened against the path, fallen silent and limp as a cloth puppet when the puppeteer has lost interest and dropped the puppet, he's dead, *That's how I'm doin.*

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