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KILL

**FOR
YOU**

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LISA REGAN

Kill For You

Lisa Regan

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This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

KILL FOR YOU

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Written by Lisa Regan.

For my parents--you did it right!

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DEDICATION

For my parents—you did it right.

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CHAPTER

1

Kassidy

It was a blitz attack. Cowardly. He hit me over the head with the baseball bat I kept next to my bedroom door. I was asleep. I never even heard him. The next thing I knew, I was tied to a chair in my dimly lit dining room. I woke suddenly to a high-pitched keening. He was shooting me up with something. My left forearm pricked and burned. My head felt heavy, achy. My eyelids weighed a ton each, but I lifted them and looked at him.

He smiled. A cranked-out, toothy smile, his wide lips peeling back from his teeth. He held up an empty syringe.

“Crank, bitch,” he sneered.

I thought, *where was that needle before tonight?* That was my first thought. Whether or not he just infected me with HIV or hepatitis. I didn’t wonder how he got in, if I had a concussion, how long I’d been unconscious, or if he had raped me while I was out.

I wiggled in my seat, but there was not much give. My hands were bound to the armrests of the chair. My feet were tied in the same fashion to the front legs of the chair. I glanced at my dining room table and saw a knife, a ball of twine, and my standard-issue Glock nine millimeter.

He paced back and forth in front of me. He was waiting for the crank to kick in. Waiting for me to become completely awake. He wanted me to be fully cognizant during the torture he was about to inflict. My head lolled. I don’t know how long it was before he got impatient and slapped me hard across the face. White-hot pain streaked through my jaw.

“Wake the fuck up,” he growled.

I swallowed. “I’m awake.”

He picked up the knife, flipped it open, and used the tip of it beneath my chin to hold my head up. I looked into his eyes. Wild eyes. Green and brown. I’d seen them before.

“You thought you had me, didn’t you?” he said.

He needled the knife until I felt a small puncture. A drop of blood slid down, pooling in the hollow of my throat. As I became more alert, the blurred edges of the room turned sharp, one by one. My heart thumped furiously in my chest, rattling my rib cage. Soon I’d be fully awake, conscious of every last detail of my death.

It wasn’t how I thought I’d go. I thought—okay, I’d hoped—I’d be shot in the line of duty or killed in a car wreck. Maybe even cancer or simply old age. Too much to hope for.

It had to be this. Torture, rape, death, and probably dismemberment at the hands of a violent criminal. I knew I was going to die. It was just a matter of how fast or how slow.

I thought of my parents. Well, mostly I thought of my dad. This would kill him. He’d always been so worried about this sort of thing. I had always assured him that these things never happened. Never. They only happened in books, movies, or on TV. Real life wasn’t like this. Real FBI agents didn’t have to worry about collars coming after them.

He pulled the knife away with a sound of disgust. He continued to pace. My head felt full. The crank made my spine ramrod straight. I held my head up and looked at him. He wore khakis, loafers, and a muted green shirt. The sleeves were rolled up, revealing muscular forearms. His greasy, black hair was in disarray. Even so, he didn’t look like a killer.

They never do, Kass.

That’s what my SAC at the Baltimore field office said when I closed my first string of homicides. The FBI didn’t normally handle homicides, but several state and city police departments had asked for our help tracking a particularly malicious serial killer whose work spanned three states. Again, I

thought of Ted Bundy. He had been handsome and a charmer from all I heard.

The man before me was a charmer, but he had the blackened heart of a demon. As if sensing my thoughts, he looked right at me. A sneer slithered across his face. I wondered if this was how he'd looked to his previous eighteen victims.

“Remember me, bitch?”

“Nico Sala,” I said. “I wish I didn't remember you.”

For that, I caught a wild punch to the face. His fist landed close to my left eye. Again I felt sharp pain. This time it seared across my forehead. I could practically hear my eye swelling.

“I told you, you stupid bitch. I told you I'd find you. I'm gonna gut you alive.”

I believed him. I'd talked to lots of victims of violent crime during my career, and many of them said the same thing: There comes a point where you know your attacker is going to kill you.

Well, here I was. Nico Sala had broken into my home. He'd shot me up, bound me to a chair, hit me. Fear crept along my body with thin, icy fingertips. I moved my arms and legs, trying to figure out how much room I had to work with to free a hand or foot. There wasn't any.

“Don't bother,” Nico said. “You're not going anywhere.”

I rested and watched him with my good eye. I tried to tamp down the fear bubbling up inside, making my already thundering heart race faster. My ears filled with the sound of it, like a train roaring down the tracks. My whole body vibrated. I wondered fleetingly if it was possible for my heart to actually burst right out of my chest. It felt like it might. I drew a deep breath.

He gave me a few more slaps for good measure, grunting as he did so.

Stay calm. The fear will only escalate his violent tendencies.

It was the FBI agent in me, a ridiculously calm voice in my head. I tried to hold onto that part of me. In that moment I wanted to be the clinical behavioral analyst, not the terrified woman I was in reality.

“Aren’t you gonna scream?” he asked.

It wouldn’t do any good, I realized, tears gathering behind my eyes. People in this neighborhood screamed all the time. Everyone heard, but nobody listened.

Calm, the voice urged again. *Your life depends on it.* I managed to force some bravado. “What?” I said. “And forego hours of torture? Nah.”

Nico grinned and pulled a chair out from the dining room table. He faced it toward him, straddling it so he could fold his arms over its back. “I’m not going to kill you fast,” he said.

Oh great.

“I hate bitches like you. You think you’re so superior. So much better than me.”

There it was—inadequacy. The hallmark of violent criminals.

“Well, I’m not a raping murderer, if that’s what you mean,” I said.

The chair flew. His fists rained down on me. He struck me everywhere with thirty-five years of pent-up rage. I tucked my chin against my chest to avoid more blows to my face. Reflexively, my hands tried to fly upward to block his attack.

Finally he pulled away, breathing heavily. Sweating. “You’re trying to make me do it fast,” he said. “But I won’t.”

Nico picked up the chair and resumed his seat. I recovered from his flying fists as best I could. My head and chest stung. I pushed my feet against the floor to see if there was any slack.

“What’s the point of this again?” I asked, trying to make my tone casual. If I was going down, acting as scared as I felt wouldn’t change that. Blood trickled out of the side of my mouth. I felt like I had just got back from the dentist; the left side of my mouth was huge and numb. Soon the slobbering would start.

“The point is you’re a stupid cunt,” he said, the petulance in his voice incongruous with his maniacal appearance.

“I just don’t see the point in killing me,” I said. “You got off.”

He grinned then, his pearly whites as big as the moon. He rubbed his crotch, raised an eyebrow. “Yeah,” he drawled. “I sure did.”

I ignored him. If he had in fact raped me, I was glad I didn’t remember it. Though I doubted he had. Nico Sala had made his criminal career as a serial rapist in two states. He had started out in Wilmington, Delaware, preying on single women between eighteen and fifty. Neither their age nor their features were particularly important to Sala. Fat, short, tall, thin, brunette, blonde, black, white, Asian—it didn’t matter. He just looked for women who lived alone in first-floor apartments. In Wilmington, he had raped seven women. Then he moved on to Baltimore where he raped eleven more.

Since local police in both Baltimore and Wilmington believed they were dealing with the same rapist, they had asked for FBI assistance, which my field office gladly lent. I came onto the case after the fifth Baltimore victim. Eventually, I was put undercover, living in a shitty first-floor apartment for almost a month before Sala broke in with the intention of raping me, only to be swarmed and arrested by most of the task force assigned to catch him.

I’d worked the case, seen the files, talked to the victims. Nico Sala was what investigators referred to as a sadistic rapist. He couldn’t get it up unless his victims were visibly overcome by fear. Fear that made their eyes wide, their cries strangled. Fear forming a beaded tiara across their foreheads. He liked them fully conscious and very afraid.

My reckoning would come when I was wide awake. “They let you go,” I said.

After months of investigative work and a hard-won arrest, Nico was set free on a legal technicality. The night of the arrest, two of my Bureau coworkers had been on scene alongside two Baltimore sex crimes detectives and four uniformed Baltimore PD officers. Somehow, in spite of all that law enforcement, no one had read Sala his rights. No one had Mirandized him, thus making his arrest illegal. There was nothing the district attorney could do. We had to watch him go free and try to pick up the pieces while our superiors passed blame around like an office memo no one wanted to read. That was two months ago.

Nico spit on the floor. “Yeah, that’s right. They let me go so I could come find you.”

I shook off a fresh wave of pain. My whole body felt like an angry, throbbing vein. “Why?” I asked, my voice the sound of a creaking chair. I had to keep him talking. The more talking he did, the less hitting or possibly stabbing would occur. He obviously had quite a few complaints to lodge against me.

“Because you fucked me,” he said, his face screwing up in twisted lines of indignation.

“Hardly,” I said.

He threw the knife at me. I turned my head and tucked my chin. My amber hair fell across my neck, my only meager defense. The blade punctured the skin just above my right breast but not with enough force to stick. It clattered to the floor. The noise seemed to reverberate through the entire house. It must have been the crank. Again, tears stung my eyes. I blinked them back and swallowed hard, willing my composure to remain intact.

“Yeah, well I’ll fuck you tonight before I gut you, bitch.”

“You’ve never killed anyone before, Nico,” I pointed out.

“You don’t know I never killed anyone before,” Nico challenged.

With the patience a mother shows her child I said, “Yes, Nico, I do know.”

He was already on his feet again.

“I profiled you, jerk-off. You’re just an angry little boy whose mother was too overbearing.” He drew closer. “You just want to be in control. You get off on making women feel afraid, on overpowering them, humiliating them.”

My jaw broke with a loud crack. Another fist followed. “Shut the fuck up,” he screamed.

Another punch. Skin cracking skin. Lips splitting against teeth. Eyes watering, nose crumpling. His voice was unnaturally high. “You thought you

were so clever, you worthless whore. Moving into my territory, leaving your window open. Waiting for me. Yeah, well I got off.”

The room tipped, descending out of sight like two halves of a broken ship sliding into the ocean.

“You fucked me,” he said. “Now I’m gonna fuck you.”

I tried to speak, but my jaw didn’t work. I couldn’t see him anymore. I felt his hands close around my throat. I tried to tuck my chin, but I was too late. The darkness came from the inside out.

I don’t know how long it was. Each time I went out, I thought it was the last time. But I kept floating back up to consciousness. It was always dark. Both my eyes swelled shut. I don’t remember much of it. He tore at my hair, stabbed me in the thighs, struck me again and again. Then he groped me, licked me, tried to kiss my broken mouth.

The pain was a dull undercurrent. I had gone to another place. A stone fortress in my head. My twin sister, Lexie, was there, hand outstretched, ten years younger as she had been at the time of her death. She smiled at me. A mirror image.

I reached out to take her hand, but I never made it. There was a chime, a familiar ding-dong that brought me back. My doorbell. Silence. I must have been alone then. I felt my hands come loose. They were heavy and weakened by hours of restraint.

I thought I was hallucinating. Maybe this was it. Death. Precious death. I wanted to go to it, rise up to it, and I did, legs suddenly free. I staggered, sinking back onto the chair. Death had a male voice. “You have to stand,” it said. I could feel death’s hushed breath on my ear as it pulled me up.

My gun was in my hands then, as familiar as a hot bath. Death lifted my arms. They trembled with the weight of the firearm. “There’s a round in the chamber,” death whispered. I stumbled backward until my skin touched the chair for feeble support.

“He’s coming,” death said. “You have to do this. Listen for him.”

And I did.

Death was gone. When Nico Sala came back for me, I brought the gun

up level with my shoulders and aimed straight in front of me. I fired. I heard three footfalls, the crash of wood against wood. I squeezed off two more shots before I heard the thud of his body on the floor.

I sank with him, until the back of my head rested against the chair. I breathed.

In the movies, after the villain is destroyed and the heroine lies battered and spent, the sirens are already sounding in the distance. It doesn't work that way in real life. The sirens come later, much later.

They told me that a pizza boy called the police. He'd been sent to the wrong address. He rang my doorbell and Nico Sala answered, wild-eyed, looking pretty frightening covered in my blood. Nico told the kid in no uncertain terms to get lost.

My face, before it underwent reconstructive surgery to repair the damage Nico Sala had done, was splashed all over the media. I was interviewed and interrogated. I met the President. I received a special commendation from the Bureau. After my recovery, I was offered a position as a Criminal Investigative Analyst in the Behavior Analysis Unit at the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, which I accepted.

I know what they told me. I know what I remember from that night. I know that someone saved my life that night.

But it wasn't me.

CHAPTER

2

Wyatt

Five Years Later, July 4th-5th

Wyatt Anderton held his Smith & Wesson 22A in his right hand—tucked close to his body—and waited for Martin Sorenson to answer his doorbell. The morning sun beat down on the back of his neck. Sweat pooled inside the collar of his oxford shirt. He glanced over his shoulder, down the long driveway to Sorenson’s palatial Tudor-style house. He had parked his rental van close to the house; it was well hidden by a hedgerow that looked as though it hadn’t been trimmed in weeks. The nearest neighbors were far enough away that even if they saw him on the step, they wouldn’t be able to pick him out of a lineup.

He rang the bell three more times before Sorenson finally answered. The door swung open slowly, a stale smell wafting out. Sorenson stood before him in a white cotton T-shirt that had seen better days. Yellow stains peeked from beneath the large man’s armpits. His stomach hung below the shirt’s hem and over the top of his gray sweatpants. Food stains dotted his wrinkled clothes and crumbs littered his beard. He was chewing something. Atop hooded eyes, lines of annoyance creased his forehead.

“What do you want?” he asked. Then he saw the gun.

His eyes widened. His whole face went slack, his jaw hanging open. Before he could react, Wyatt thrust the gun into Sorenson’s face and used his free hand to push the man inside the door. Sorenson didn’t put up a fight. He backed away from Wyatt, stumbling, hands thrown up. His mouth worked,

partially chewed food flying from it as he spoke, “Who are you? What are you doing? Stop, stop, stop.”

Wyatt tripped over a pair of loafers laying in the foyer but managed to keep his balance. He pressed the barrel of the gun into Sorenson’s considerable girth. “Shut up,” he barked.

He looked to the left and saw a parlor with a sofa and recliner. Books, newspapers, and unopened mail littered the coffee table. He motioned to the room, and Sorenson went into it.

“Sit,” Wyatt commanded.

Sorenson moved slowly, as if the parlor floor was made of ice and he might slip on it and fall. His knees cracked loudly when he sat on the couch. He kept his eyes on Wyatt, both eyebrows arched as if in perpetual surprise. He raised his hands again, but this time he motioned toward the foyer.

“I don’t know who you are,” Sorenson said, his tone more angry than afraid. “But take whatever you want and go. Go, get out of my house.”

Wyatt stood over him. He glanced again at the coffee table and noticed a half-eaten piece of pie atop the mess of papers. “Were you eating?” he said.

Sorenson’s bushy brows drew together. “What?”

Wyatt had an unwanted flash. His grandfather’s beer breath. *Were you eating my food, boy?* Wyatt was three when he found out what it felt like to have his hand slammed in the refrigerator door. Somehow, his parents never noticed the bruising or how hungry he was when they picked him up. He blinked rapidly and took a deep breath. He had to focus.

“What do you want?” Sorenson asked.

Wyatt smiled, baring his teeth, and Sorenson’s upper body drew back, as if trying to put more distance between them. “I want you to finish your pie,” Wyatt said.

“I don’t—I don’t—”

“Shut up.”

Wyatt kept the gun pointed at Sorenson. He pulled a baggie filled with a powdery substance out of his pants pocket and tossed it into Sorenson’s lap.

The man held it up. “What’s this?”

“Put it on your pie.”

“I’m not putting this on my food,” Sorenson said, petulance adding an edge to his tone.

Wyatt leaned over and pressed the barrel of the gun into Sorenson’s forehead. “Put that on your pie and eat it,” he snapped.

Again the flash came, weakening Wyatt’s knees. He tried to push it away, but it came anyway. *Eat it, boy. Eat it or I’ll kill you. His grandfather’s thick fingers dug into Wyatt’s throat until his vision began to fade. Wyatt thought of the stray cat his grandfather had squeezed the week before. Squeezed the air out of it until the cat’s eyes went all funny and it stopped moving. It never moved again. His grandfather burned it in a rusted tire ring in his yard.*

Panic had made Wyatt’s stomach flutter—like a hundred butterflies inside him. Quickly, he licked the tile floor, trying to capture the smushed glob of apple pie with his tongue. It stuck to the floor. His grandfather chuckled. For a split second, Wyatt felt relief. Maybe it was funny. Maybe he would let Wyatt go. But he didn’t. You wanna eat my food, boy. Eat it, then!

Wyatt pulled himself back from the brink, blinking rapidly. The baggie fluttered in Sorenson’s hands. Sorenson swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing in his throat, and inched his forehead back from the gun. “I’m not putting this on my food,” he protested again.

Wyatt snatched the baggie from Sorenson’s hands and used his teeth to unseal it. He dumped the contents onto the pie and thrust the plate into Sorenson’s lap. “Eat it,” Wyatt said, lowering his voice. “It won’t kill you.”

Sorenson picked up the fork. He stared at the pie as though Wyatt had just served him in a restaurant. As if he had just found a hair in his food and was about to send it back. “What is it?” he asked, wrinkling his nose.

“Something to make you more . . . pliable,” Wyatt said.

In a few hours, the drug would wear off, and even a medical examiner would not be able to find evidence of it in Sorenson’s system.

Sorenson made one last effort. “Pliable for what? This is silly. Let’s

dispense with this nonsense. I don't have to eat this. You don't have to threaten me with that gun. I have money," he said. "I have a safe upstairs."

"I'm not interested in your safe," Wyatt said. He sat down beside Sorenson, moving the gun barrel, digging it into the soft hollow behind the man's ear. "Eat. Or *I* will kill you."

With a sigh that made Wyatt want to pistol whip the man, Sorenson ate slowly. Wyatt was certain the man was trying to figure a way out of the situation. He doubted Sorenson would try to use physical force. He was a college professor, an academic, and by the look of him, he was wildly out of shape.

"Can I have some water?" Sorenson asked.

"No."

Wyatt looked around the room. It was far too big for what he had planned. Messy too, although the mess would actually work in his favor. Discarded clothes lay draped over the furniture. Stacks of books and what looked like student papers spilled from the end tables onto the floor. Several empty takeout containers—pizza and Chinese—had been pushed to the far end of the coffee table. Another pizza box lay on the seat of the recliner.

"I love what you've done with the place," Wyatt snickered. "Your wife left you what—six weeks ago? Took your kid with her. Didn't take you long to shit this place up."

Sorenson's jowly, pock-marked face, although well hidden beneath an unruly mass of facial hair, paled considerably. "How do you know about my family?" he croaked.

Wyatt waved his hand in the air. "Research. Due diligence. It's all about the planning, Martin."

"Planning of what?" Sorenson asked. His voice was getting raspy. It wouldn't be long.

Wyatt ignored him. "Eat."

The last bite of pie went down with some difficulty. The drug worked quickly. A moment later, Sorenson slid onto the parlor floor, incapacitated and twitching. Wyatt pushed the coffee table back with his foot to give

Sorenson room. The man's mouth formed a puckered O as he labored to make a "Wha" sound. Wyatt crouched down beside him.

"I won't tell you why, if that is what you want to know."

"Wha . . . wha . . ." Sorenson kept trying to form the word. His eyes stayed on Wyatt, wide and dark with panic. He blinked slowly several times, as if testing to ensure that he still could.

"You pride yourself on being 'superbly intelligent.' Isn't that how you described yourself once in some archaic academic journal?" Sorenson stopped blinking. His eyes bugged out ever so slightly, and Wyatt smiled. "Well then, you should not have any difficulty figuring out why I am doing this. Not to worry. You'll have adequate time to ponder, though the answer to the question, why, is not the one that will save your life."

Sorenson's mouth went still and Wyatt saw a flicker of fear in the fat man's eyes.

Laughing softly, Wyatt stood up. He left Sorenson on the floor and quickly searched the house. There was a small laundry room off the kitchen that was perfect for Wyatt's purposes. As he had alluded to with Sorenson, his work was never about the killing, which when not in the grip of the monster, he detested. It was all about what came before the kill, and that required planning. In Sorenson's case, it had required weeks of secretly absconding with the man's trash, which Wyatt now used to quickly transform the laundry room into a dumpster after backing the van up to Sorenson's back door.

It was dirty work to be sure, and at times, had hardly seemed worth it, but then Wyatt remembered the face of the woman he loved all those years ago. She'd passed him in the hallway after meeting with the philosophy professor privately, her face red with fury and frustration. Back then, he'd taken pains to find out as much about Martin Sorenson as he could. Then, as now, Wyatt could not find a single redeeming quality about the man.

The most arduous task on this particular leg of Wyatt's mission was dragging Sorenson from the parlor to the laundry room.

First Wyatt tried pulling Sorenson by his arms, stretching them over the man's head. Sorenson easily weighed 300 pounds, and that weight seemed to

have doubled since Wyatt had rendered the man paralyzed. Once the drug wore off, Sorenson would regain full use of his limbs, but it was imperative that he be firmly ensconced in his death bed of garbage when that occurred.

Pulling Sorenson by the legs proved no easier. In fact, it was more exhausting. The man's legs were thick, round posts, their weight unwieldy. At last, Wyatt devised a crude method of transfer wherein he curled Sorenson's floppy limbs around his body and logrolled the man from one room to the next. Wyatt closed and locked the door to the laundry room and took up position on the floor just outside.

Then he waited.

Wyatt waited until he was certain that Sorenson was good and hungry. Until the man was fatigued from trying unsuccessfully to break down the laundry room door and escape. Until the stink of his fear and sweat commingled with the pungent smell of the garbage that filled the tiny room.

When the man's cries and pleas for help died off, Wyatt opened the door. He pulled a chair to the doorway and pointed the gun at Sorenson, flattening his affect against the stench. Sorenson was perched atop the dryer like a slovenly Buddha. His eyes were wild, and the hairs which had escaped his comb-over floated around his head, giving him a demented appearance.

Wyatt smiled.

"What do you want?" Sorenson asked. The man's voice was hoarse from having cried out continuously for almost thirty hours.

"You don't get to ask questions," Wyatt said.

"You can't do this. I—"

"I can do anything I please," Wyatt interrupted.

Sorenson puffed up like a fat bird readying itself for an intense preening session. He opened his trap to speak, but Wyatt stopped him with a shake of his head. Wyatt smiled inside, realizing the power he wielded with a look or a small gesture.

"Not that you particularly deserve it," Wyatt said. "But I'm going to give you a chance to save your life."

Wyatt pulled a photo from the inside pocket of his jacket and tossed it to Sorenson. It landed in the trash on the floor, and Sorenson heaved his bulk off the dryer to retrieve it. The machine made a loud *dwuong* sound, its surface relieved of Sorenson's weight. The man must have been sitting atop the dryer for several hours because when his feet found the floor, his flabby knees buckled. Sorenson did not bother appearing victimized. Instead he reached for the photo. Holding it in both hands, he studied the woman's image.

"Do you remember her?" Wyatt asked.

Without looking up, Sorenson shook his head. "No. No. I don't know her."

"Yes. You do."

Sorenson looked at Wyatt. Fear gave him an unnatural pallor. The blue veins in his face and neck stood out in stark relief. He shook the photo in Wyatt's direction. "I don't know this woman. You've mistaken me for someone else."

Wyatt motioned for Sorenson to return the photo, and the man tossed it at his feet. Carefully, he picked it up and wiped its surface against his pant leg. "I'm disappointed in you Martin but not surprised. You don't see anyone. You go around maiming people and you forget them the instant they are out of your sight. You don't care who you hurt. So," he said, then paused to hold up the photo, "I'll ask you a final time. Do you remember her?"

Sorenson stared at Wyatt, his pomposity returning—as if at any moment Wyatt would come to his senses, realize the absurdity of the situation and release him. Silently, Wyatt counted to twenty. When Sorenson did not answer, Wyatt backed his chair away and shut the door.

As he pulled Sorenson's front door closed behind him, Wyatt thought he heard the man cry out again.

CHAPTER

3

Kassidy

July 6th

I stood at the head of the conference room table, a photo of a dead woman in my hand. I held it up for my BAU colleagues to see. In the photo, her body was carefully laid out on her living room floor, her head turned to her right side. There was no hint of the woman she might have been. All that was left was a bloated, black and purple carcass. The back of her skull was caved in. Her right eyeball hung from a broken socket, lolling in macabre fashion. Her nose lay flattened in a pulpy mess. I'd looked at the photo a dozen times since receiving the file, but it still made my stomach acids roil.

“This is Georgette Paul,” I began. “She was forty-five years old. Found dead in her Denver home three weeks ago. She lived alone. She was a manager at an independent bookstore. There was an employment application crumpled up and stuffed in her mouth with the words ‘for you’ written on it. This, obviously, is the UNSUB’s signature.”

I picked up another photo, a close-up of the application once it had been extricated from her mouth, and passed it around. The agents at the back of the table leaned forward in unison to get a better view of it.

“Marker?” asked Agent TK Bennett, his dark chocolate eyes scrutinizing the photo.

“Yes,” I said. “It looks like the killer used a Sharpie. There was one found at the scene but it had no prints on it.”

TK handed the photo off to Agent Arnold Innes, who sat across from him. The junior agents and interns in the room craned their necks in Innes' direction. For a moment, they reminded me of baby birds, eager, stretching their necks in the direction of nourishment.

"Go on," TK said.

"The medical examiner said there was nothing in her stomach, which suggests she'd been deprived of sustenance for up to twenty-four hours prior to her death."

"Or the UNSUB just didn't have time to feed her while he was torturing her to death," Innes piped in. He sighed heavily, as if bored. Thick reading glasses slid down his nose as he peered at me over the rims.

TK glanced at him and then turned back to me. I swallowed. I picked up another photo of Paul's blackened face. It trembled just slightly in my hand. "She wasn't tortured," I said.

Innes arched a severe eyebrow in my direction. "I think her family would disagree if they saw that photo."

"She didn't have any family," TK said pointedly. "Are you going to wait for Agent Bishop to finish her presentation?"

Innes folded his arms across his chest, staring back at TK. "Bishop said she lived alone. That doesn't mean she didn't have family."

Sighing, TK tapped his index finger along the side of the half-empty foam cup of coffee in front of him. "Well, this was my file which I assigned to Agent Bishop as part of her training. My cursory review of the file indicated that Paul had no family. Now, can we move on?"

I watched the two of them face-off. Innes was short, white, old and rumpled. In contrast, TK was tall, black, considerably younger and sharp as a pin in his neatly pressed suit. TK pulled his shoulders up straight. His reflection lengthened, creeping across the shiny conference room table, closer to Innes on the other side. TK didn't blink, didn't move. Innes shifted slightly forward in his chair and cleared his throat. Although arctic air hissed from the overhead vents, I felt a bead of sweat trickle down between my shoulder blades.

I glanced around at the other agents whose eyes were riveted to the two men. Where bodies had rustled earlier, shifting in an effort to get comfortable in the conference room chairs or to get a better look at the photographs circulating, now there was complete stillness. One junior agent, who sat directly opposite me, looked like his eyes might pop out of his head. I thought I could actually hear him swallow.

“Agent Bennett is correct,” I interjected, drawing the gazes of my colleagues back to me, although Innes and TK continued to stare at each other, the enmity between them almost palpable. “She didn’t have any family. No next of kin. A coworker called the police when she didn’t show up three days in a row. According to the police reports, coworkers say she loved her job and took a lot of pride in it.”

Slowly, with great effort, TK and Innes swiveled in their chairs to look at me once more. “I know it looks bad,” I continued. “But the cause of death was not blunt force trauma. Paul was asphyxiated. They found her saliva on one of her sofa pillows which suggests the UNSUB smothered her. All the blows were inflicted postmortem. Based on the shape of the wounds and the fact that there were no wood splinters in Paul’s head, the medical examiner thinks the UNSUB used a small aluminum baseball bat to beat her. Most likely, he took it with him since it was not found at the scene.”

TK leaned back in his chair, causing it to creak slightly. He met my eyes, a small smile playing on his face. He rested his elbows on the armrests of his chair and made a steeple with his long fingers. “So there was no bruising on the victim’s body. Is that right, Agent Bishop?”

“No. No bruising on her body. Obviously, she would have needed blood flow for that. But he smashed her head in pretty good to make it look like he had beaten her to death. It was all staged,” I responded, glancing at my notes. “No prints at the scene, no trace evidence. No fibers, skin under fingernails, semen—nothing. There was no sign of forced entry.”

“Any reports in there about a disgruntled employee or job applicant that she had trouble with?” TK asked.

“No, nothing,” I replied. “But Denver PD is still rounding up witnesses and people who knew her. They could still turn up something. They asked for

our help with this. I think we should send them a profile and see if it helps them narrow their suspect list.”

“You’re looking for someone she turned down for a job,” Innes said, his tone flat. He pushed the photo of the employment application back toward me. “This is personal. You don’t torture someone like this . . .” He stood and came closer, flicking one finger against a photo of Paul’s battered face. “. . . unless you have something personal against them.”

“I agree that this has a personal element to it, but the beating was staged. He is not a truly sadistic murderer. He didn’t actually torture her,” I argued.

Again, Innes looked down at me over the rim of his glasses. “The UNSUB was angry with this woman. He came into her home and he tortured her, and then he killed her.”

My stomach burned again—from frustration this time. “You think inflicting a beating postmortem is torture? I could tell you a thing or two about real torture.” I tried to keep my voice from rising, but still it went up a full octave.

Innes chuckled, covering his mouth as the chuckle turned into a cough. “That is your golden ticket, isn’t it?” he said when the cough subsided.

“Agent Innes,” TK said, rising from his seat quickly. The chair’s padded top bumped against the wall, a muted thump. I raised an open palm to stop TK from intervening. I knew where this was going. Like most of the agents in the BAU, since my arrival, Innes had shown nothing but disdain for me—when he deigned to acknowledge me at all. This was the closest I had come to any of them openly acknowledging their issues with my appointment to the BAU.

I got as close to him as I could, crowding him, and thrust my chin up defiantly. “Is there a problem, Agent Innes?”

He folded his arms across his chest and snickered, but I caught a brief flicker of surprise in his eyes. “Is there a problem?” I asked again.

“No. No problem,” he said. “Except that you don’t belong in this unit.”

I raised an eyebrow, put my hands on my hips and looked him up and down, nice and slow until he began shifting his weight from one leg to the

other. “Well,” I said evenly. “I guess it’s a good thing you don’t sign my paycheck. If you think I don’t belong here, why don’t you go to our superiors and tell them that you think their judgment is shit? I’m sure they’d be happy to have your input.”

He sneered. “You only got into this unit because of Nico Sala.”

I grinned and stepped even closer. I could smell his aftershave and the mouthwash on his breath. “That’s right,” I said. “I did get in here because of Nico Sala. Because the profile I did on him was dead on. Read the file, you pompous prick. My work stands for itself.”

He was unfazed. He wagged his index finger at me. “Did you or did you not sustain brain damage in the attack?”

“Agent Innes!” TK, who was as unflappable as they came, slapped his palm on the table. “That is enough.”

I didn’t take my eyes off Innes. I focused on my breathing. In and out. In and out. I tried not to give into the dizziness that swept over me. Innes was right. The attack had damaged my brain. There were things I had to relearn in the weeks afterward, and my long-term memory was compromised. There were things from before the attack that I could no longer remember. But just because I couldn’t remember the names of my college professors or the plots of books I had read in the tenth grade, didn’t mean I couldn’t do my job.

“I’m not even going to dignify that with an answer,” I said.

Innes opened his mouth, but before he could speak, I reached out and fingered the lapel of his suit. It was at least five years old, as were his shoes. Beneath his jacket, on his white collared shirt was an old coffee stain. He tried to keep it hidden with his tie, but I could see the edges of it. “When’s the last time you bought a new suit?” I asked, changing the subject abruptly.

He swatted my hand away and stepped back. “What?” he said, his forehead creasing in confusion.

“You’ve been here for fifteen years, right? When’s the last time you bought a new suit or a new pair of shoes?”

A vein in his forehead pulsed, angry and blue. His eyes darted around the room. Everyone but TK looked away quickly. “What are you talking

about?”

“I’m not here to emasculate you. I’m not your wife.”

His eyes flashed. “You watch it,” he said.

“She left you about five years ago, I’d say. Took the house and most of your money in the divorce. She’s got a new man now who is probably living in your home with your kids. You can’t even afford new shoes, she’s raked you over the coals so badly. And apparently when she left, she took the secret of stain removing with her. You now live in a shitty, one-bedroom apartment with musty-smelling furniture and an old, nineteen-inch television. Your kids avoid you, and you’ve had exactly two dates since the divorce, neither of which got past dinner.” I leaned closer to him, lowering my voice. “Am I close or should we talk about your drinking?”

“Fuck you,” he said, brushing past me in a huff.

My hands shook as I gathered up the Georgette Paul file. I had all but forgotten that there were other people in the room. My colleagues gaped at me, some of their faces pale with horror and one or two hiding loose smiles in their coffee cups. Now they busied themselves again, passing around photos, jotting down notes, checking their cell phones. TK’s laughter drew my attention. When I looked over at him, he began a slow clap.

“It’s about time you confronted him,” he said.

The other agents in the room did not join in. Bulgy Eyes in the back cleared his throat and shot TK a look of contempt, his brow drawing low over his eyes. If I remembered correctly, he was Innes’ protégé. Agent Flick, that was his name.

I ignored his pinched face and smiled weakly at TK. I was at the tail end of my five-year mentoring period with the BAU, and I had just dressed down a senior agent. My job was all I had, and I loved it. I didn’t want to make waves, but enough was enough. It felt good to stand up for myself. “I guess he isn’t staying to hear my profile,” I said.

A short burst of laughter, like the sharp report of a gun, erupted from beside Agent Flick.

It was a female intern. It was quickly suppressed beneath the wilting

glare of the others in the room.

“Oh, I think you gave him the profile,” TK said, not bothering to contain his own laughter.

Face flushed, Flick stood abruptly, gathering up his notebook and phone noisily and stormed out of the room.

Still laughing, TK shook his head. “Okay, everyone. This meeting is over. Let’s reconvene tomorrow, and we’ll finish discussing the Paul file.”

Bodies loosened with relief and the rest of the agents slinked away, leaving the conference room door ajar. I plopped into a chair, letting out a heavy breath. Georgette Paul’s dangling, bloody eye stared at me from the surface of the table. “That went well,” I said.

“Actually, it did,” TK replied.

I raised an eyebrow. “I was being sarcastic.”

“And I was being serious. That guy is a jerk, and he’s treated you badly since you got here. I wouldn’t have had the restraint you’ve shown.”

“Let’s hope I don’t regret it later.”

“Agent Bishop?” It was the female intern who had laughed earlier. She stood in the doorway, one hand worrying the gold chain around her neck. The pale skin of her forehead bunched up. “Agent Crossen wants to you see you in her office. Now.”

I glanced at TK, who shrugged. My stomach suddenly felt like a block of ice. “I’ll be right there,” I said.

The woman nodded and walked away slowly. I stood and straightened my clothes. Pain throbbed dully in both my temples. As I gathered the Paul file together, TK reached over and placed a warm palm on my forearm. His dark eyes steadied me. “Don’t back down, Bishop,” he said with a reassuring smile. “There’s only so much shit a person can take.”

CHAPTER



4

Kassidy

July 6th

I don't know what I expected—an inquisition maybe—but when I got to Talia Crossen's office, it was just her. She sat at her desk, her long legs propped up on the corner of it as she lounged in her chair, rifling through a file in her lap. She wore heels and a taupe skirt suit. Her shoulder-length blonde hair was sharply cut and angled toward her face, giving her a chic, sophisticated look.

Without looking up from the file, she said, “Close the door.”

I complied and took a few steps into her office. As intimidating as Talia could be, the warmth of her office was always unexpected. She'd decorated in soothing pastels and impressionist art. Neat stacks of files sat on her desk and floor. A one-cup coffeemaker sat atop the windowsill next to three potted African violets. A large Dieffenbachia plant took up one corner of the room. Trinkets from families she'd met and helped on assignment dotted the bookshelves that lined the wall to my right, and a pair of black flats peeked out at me from under her desk.

“Sit,” she said, motioning to the chairs in front of her desk. One of them had a week's worth of dry-cleaning draped over it, so I chose the empty one.

“If this is about Agent Innes—” I began.

Talia put the file she'd been looking through onto her desk and leaned forward. Her blue eyes sparkled, her gaze that of a hawk's. “Agent Innes did come to see me,” she interjected.

She paused. I waited, resisting the urge to squirm in my seat like a snake under someone's boot. I pulled my body up straight and set my jaw.

"You still have that law degree, right?" she said, her tone unreadable. "I mean, you could fall back on that, right?"

My bowels loosened. My feet went cold and numb. I fought to keep my face from falling but failed. Lucky for me, the torture didn't last long. Talia tilted her head back and laughed, her shoulders quaking. When she looked at me again, her eyes were unguarded and warm. Relief coursed through me.

"I'm kidding, Bishop!" she said. "Innes did come to see me—"

"He was inappropriate, especially in front of our colleagues."

Talia held up a palm to silence me. "I'm not taking disciplinary action," she said. "That's not why you're here. I am familiar with Agent Innes' . . . opinion of you, and I'm aware that there are other agents in this unit who share his opinion."

Unlike me, Talia had been welcomed into the BAU like a war hero returning home, thanks to her uncanny ability to get confessions from even the most tight-lipped criminals. She was legendary.

Talia rose and rounded the desk, perching on the edge directly in front of me. "Kassidy," she went on. "I handpicked you for this unit based on your work on the Sala case. Unfortunately, you came into this position with a stigma attached to you, with questions raised about the reason for your promotion. I want to be clear that the other agents are the ones with those questions—not your SAC, not the director, and not me."

I met her eyes and smiled. "Thank you."

"I had hoped that those doubts would have been dispelled by now, but some people in this unit are simply too rigid to let go of their preconceived notions." She cocked her head to the side and studied me. "What was that you said to me once about bullies?"

I raised an eyebrow quizzically. "Bullies?"

"You know," she said. "You were telling me about an incident in your adolescence where you intervened when another student was being bullied by three larger boys. The one that landed you in a detention center? You were

suspended from school.”

I groaned and covered my eyes with a palm that was quickly becoming sweaty. No wonder other agents and law enforcement officers called her the Confessor. It was amazing what she could get you to reveal in just a few hours. We had gone out for drinks a few months earlier and were discussing pack behavior and team serial killers—great happy hour conversation—and somehow that incident had come up.

“I was in the eighth grade,” I mumbled.

“You said that you only need to take out the leader. Make an example of him.”

“And the rest of them crumble,” I finished.

Talia smiled. “Yes,” she said. “That’s what you said. Anyway, I certainly wouldn’t recommend making Innes swallow a lit cigarette or breaking his kneecap, as appealing as that may seem, but if you need to make an example out of anyone else, as you did with Agent Innes, I won’t be upset.”

I cleared my throat and wiped my palms on my skirt. “I—uh, I appreciate that,” I said. “So if you’re not taking disciplinary action, why am I here?”

She lifted her chin, her smile disappearing and lines of concern bracketing her mouth. “I wanted to see how you were holding up.”

“Holding up?” I said, but I knew where this was going. If Talia remembered the story about the bullies, she would definitely remember the stories I’d told her about my sister.

“Today is the day, right? The anniversary of your twin sister’s death? Her name was Lexie, right?” Talia asked softly.

I nodded, unable to speak. The details of the night Lexie died rushed back at me, as if I’d just come from the scene of her death, not from a conference room down the hall. Saliva pooled in my mouth, and I swallowed.

“How many years now?” Talia asked.

My voice was raspy. “Sixteen,” I said.

“Did the flowers come this time? Like before?”

Another fact I had shared during our girls’ night out that I almost wished I could take back. I’d never told anyone else but my mother about the flowers. But Talia had a way about her. You wanted to tell her every dirty secret and crazy notion that ever crossed your mind.

“No,” I said. “But the day is not over yet.”

For fifteen years, without fail, the same arrangement of purple hyacinths appeared on my doorstep on the anniversary of Lexie’s death. When I was still in college and later in law school, I’d had a number of shoddy dorm rooms and apartments. I’d moved frequently, yet the hyacinths followed me each year, reminding me of the worst day of my life—even worse than the day Nico Sala tried to kill me. A couple of times I’d found the same kind of arrangement at Lexie’s grave.

“You know,” Talia began, her voice low and soft, “if you could find out who is sending them, maybe you could find Lexie’s killer.”

“I tried. I’ve tried for fifteen years. They’re always delivered by a different florist or delivery service. They always come from a different state and there is never a card. Believe me, I’ve tried. But even if I did, I have no proof. No one believed me back then. No one would believe me now—even if I had a suspect. There wouldn’t be enough evidence to support my theory. I just knew my sister. She didn’t jump out of that window. Someone pushed her.”

“What about the diary? Didn’t you say her diary was missing?”

I felt a little stabbing pain in my chest. “Yeah,” I said, closing my eyes as tears gathered behind them. “Lexie was seeing someone before she died.”

“The professor?”

I shook my head. “No. That was over by then. This was someone new. She never told me who, but I think whoever it was took her diary from the scene. When I tried to convince Philly PD and the DA’s office of this, they said there were about a hundred different scenarios in which the diary could have been misplaced, and none of them featured the commission of a homicide.”

I opened my eyes again to see my pain reflected in Talia's drawn face. "I'm sorry," she said. "Do you need anything?"

I smiled wanly. "Thank you, but no. Nothing makes this better."

"I know that, but I could help you pass the time. Drinks?"

I shook my head. "Thank you but no. I've got the Paul file to work on ___"

Talia's eyebrows shot up. She clapped her hands together. "Yes, the Paul file. That's the other reason I called you in. Have you checked with VICAP for similar signatures? Any other crimes with the words 'for you' at the scene?"

VICAP, or the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program, was one of our sister units at NCAVC. They kept track of patterns and other aspects of violent crimes all over the country, solved and unsolved, through a huge database utilized by law enforcement agencies nationwide. If there was a killing, a modus operandi, a signature or any aspect of a previous murder that was similar to the one in the Paul file, VICAP would find it.

"No," I said. "Nothing."

"That's what I thought," Talia said. "I guess that's a good thing. It means our UNSUB hasn't been doing this for years and flying under the radar. Personally, I think this guy is just starting. The signature, the planning involved, the staging. We're going to hear from this guy again."

I nodded. "I'll put out an advisory to all major metro areas to be on the lookout for homicides with this signature. We'll see if it gets any hits."

"How about if you and TK work on this alone?" Talia said. "One of Innes' protégés can do the case presentation tomorrow while you guys get your profile out to Denver PD."

"Sounds good to me," I said, relieved not to have to worry about a repeat of the morning's ugliness. I stood to leave. Talia walked me to the door. She laid a hand on my shoulder before sending me off. "If you need anything," she said.

Although things with Talia had gone well, I left work exhausted, my limbs feeling weighted and slow. I stopped at the grocery store to get dog

food for my three canine companions, and by the time I pulled into my driveway, I had almost forgotten about the flowers. As I got out of my SUV, their scent wafted over to me. Potted purple hyacinths blocked my front door. The memory spiraled up from that low place where I had managed to keep it at bay the other three hundred sixty-four days of the year. That day my sister, my identical twin, plunged eleven stories to her death.

CHAPTER

5

Kassidy

Sixteen Years Ago

KASS!

The shout startled me the way a sudden noise startles you as you're just drifting off to sleep. I sat up and looked around my American History survey class but no one else's attention was diverted by my sister calling my name. I scanned the back of the lecture hall for her face, but she wasn't there.

Had I fallen asleep?

Disoriented, I looked at the girl next to me. She stared straight ahead, listening with what appeared to be keen interest as the professor droned on about the Civil War. Occasionally, her gaze snapped to the notebook on her lap in which she scribbled madly. On the other side of me, a male student slouched, head tipped back, snoring lightly.

I must have fallen asleep. It would not have been the first time.

Pain exploded across the back of my head. My vision went black. It was interrupted by the slow-moving sight of a dusky purple sky, and then it snapped back.

The lecture hall. The professor who looked like a toy figure from where I sat. Slides blurred across a white screen. Cool air. A constant undercurrent of sound—bodies rustling, pages turning, pens scribbling, and the occasional snore.

Had I fallen asleep again or had I just woken up?

I slipped my pager out of my backpack, but Lexie had not beeped me. I stood up. My feet were firm and steady. I made my way to the end of the aisle amidst the annoyed shuffle of feet, bags, and papers.

Outside the air was thick and humid. Summers in Philadelphia were brutally hot, but Lexie and I had decided to stay at school after our sophomore year and take summer classes. It was better than spending a whole summer in our central Pennsylvania hometown, where the only hub of activity was the local Dunkin' Donuts. A light breeze lifted the hair from my neck. I slung the backpack over my shoulder and pressed my fingers against the back of my skull. It was still there. I walked back to the dorm, not stopping when I saw the red, white, and blue flash of police and ambulance lights. I slipped through the mass of people that had gathered, their bodies obscuring the yellow tape which stretched across the south entrance to Temple University's Hardwick Hall.

The people at the very front gasped and stared as I approached. I slid under the tape and looked at the body on the pavement. It was Lexie.

Male voices drifted toward me. EMTs and a police officer. "You think she fell?"

"Out of a window? Nah, she must have jumped."

"What is that? Eleven stories?"

Then one of them saw me. "Miss, I'm going to have to ask you to step behind the—oh shit."

I stood over her. She didn't look right. Her head looked like a flowering onion marinated in blood—yawning open to the cement. Her eyes were glassy, the whites now bright red. The left pant leg of her jeans was also bloody.

My knees hit the pavement hard. *It's not real*, said a voice in my head. *This cannot be real.*

"Who is it?"

"Who do you think it is? Look at her for God's sake."

"Twins."

“Get ‘er back, Joe. This is a crime scene until we know otherwise.”

I touched her cheek. It was warm. One of my tears landed on her chin. *She’s still alive. Maybe she’s still alive*, the voice said, but I knew it was wrong. It was just the part of me that could not accept what I was seeing. I felt a crushing weight on my chest. A sob erupted from somewhere deep inside me.

”Miss, you have to come with me.”

“Lex?” My voice cracked. She would answer me. She had to.

“Miss, please.”

Hands lifted me gently from the ground as if I weighed nothing. I flailed, screaming this time. Screaming for everything I was worth.

“Lexie?” She was going to wake up. She had to. “Lexie!”

Rough hands pinned my arms against my body. Lexie’s form receded.

“Get her *back*,” one of the men yelled.

“Miss, you have to come with us.”

I struggled with all my might, trying to return to her. I fought, punching and kicking at anyone and anything that came close. Tears streamed down my cheeks. Screams exploded from my frenzied body, causing a ripple in the crowds that had gathered. As three large police officers wrestled me to the ground, I looked up at the sky. It was a dusky purple.

CHAPTER

6

Wyatt

July 7th

“Why, in God’s name, is this considered the Garden State?” Wyatt asked a terrified Boyd Henderson as the man walked back and forth across his Trenton living room, replete in women’s clothing. Wyatt stood by one of the windows at the front of the room where an ancient air conditioning unit droned, struggling to cool the room against the sweltering heat outside. The semi-cool air snaked up and caressed the back of Wyatt’s neck. He kept his Smith & Wesson trained on Henderson as he paced awkwardly in four-inch heels. Henderson’s bony, hairy knees knocked together.

“What?” Henderson asked. His voice was tremulous, softened by the first blow he’d taken to the head and his first ten minutes in drag. His eyes were moist and pleading. Wyatt was very pleased with Henderson’s feminization. Henderson was far more compliant than Sorenson had been. Leaving Sorenson behind had lightened Wyatt’s mood somewhat. He’d spent the short hour’s drive mentally shaking off the sleepless night spent guarding Sorenson’s laundry room door, the stink of weeks-old garbage, and the unwanted memories of his grandfather. He had hoped dealing with Henderson would be easier. So far, so good.

Wyatt swung the barrel of the gun sharply, causing Henderson to stumble and gasp. He suppressed a laugh. Silly, so silly. “What I’ve seen of this state is nothing short of disgusting. I won’t even go into the nonsensical roadway system. So tell me, why is this the Garden State?”

Henderson's face turned a grayish hue. "Wh-what?" He stopped walking momentarily and met Wyatt's eyes. "I don't know."

Wyatt clucked his tongue and jerked the barrel of the gun once more just to see Henderson flinch and nearly lose his footing in the flashy red heels Wyatt had chosen especially for this occasion. Wyatt laughed this time. He almost told Henderson to relax, the gun wasn't even loaded. The man was entirely too tense. But the threat of a loaded gun was really his only advantage. Henderson—though graceless in heels and a miniskirt, older and all atremble with fright—was bigger than Wyatt. Wyatt didn't want Henderson getting any ideas of trying to overpower him.

"You live here and you don't know?" Wyatt said.

"N-no."

"Why not?"

"I d-don't know. I n-never thought about it."

Wyatt's stomach rumbled. Rage came up with projectile force, and he fought to control it. Wyatt reminded himself that he had a higher purpose. He wasn't a common murderer.

"That's the problem with people, you know," Wyatt said icily. "They never think about anything. Like you, Mr. Henderson, you never think about your actions or how they affect other people. You never think about how the things you say can set off a string of events that actually extends beyond yourself and your infinitesimal world. Sit down."

Henderson stopped walking and stared at Wyatt. With the gun, Wyatt motioned to the couch. Henderson staggered over and fell onto its cushions. "Why are you doing this?" he asked.

Wyatt shook his head and sighed. Why? Why, why, why? They always asked why. Georgette Paul had asked that question tirelessly before he killed her. Did they really want to know why they were going to die? Is that what people really wanted to discuss in their last moments? Did they honestly expect a detailed explanation? Did it matter?

"If you can't figure it out on your own, I'm not telling you," Wyatt answered.

Henderson said, “Are you going to kill me?”

“What do you think?”

Tears rolled down Henderson’s cheeks. “Y-yes.”

Wyatt smiled and pulled a photo from his shirt pocket. “I’ll tell you what, Mr. Henderson. You have one chance to save your own life.” He walked over to the couch and waved the photo at Henderson. “If you can tell me who this woman is, I’ll let you live.”

He thrust the photo under Henderson’s nose. Henderson stared for several moments. Wyatt sensed his growing alarm. Finally, he said, “I’ve never seen that woman in my life. I swear to you. I don’t know who she is. You must have the wrong person.”

“No, no. You are the person I’m looking for. You have seen this woman before. Several times in fact. Look again.”

Although Henderson’s head shook back and forth, he stared once more at the photo. No flicker of recognition lit up his eyes. “I don’t—I don’t know who she is. I’m telling you—”

“You do.”

“No. I swear it. I’ve never seen her—”

“Look again.”

“You have to give me some clue. I don’t remember her. You have to tell me something.”

Wyatt snatched the photo back and slid it into his pocket. “That’s the problem with you, isn’t it, Mr. Henderson? People *have to* do things for you. You see nothing wrong with treating people like dirt, but then you expect them to cater to your every whim and to do so without you even telling them what those whims are.”

“Wh-what are you talking about?” Henderson whined.

Wyatt stood up. He had not expected Henderson to recognize her. Like all the people on Wyatt’s list, Henderson was careless in the way he treated people. He had treated the woman Wyatt loved badly and had not even cared about the outcome. It had affected her, but not him. Even if Wyatt reminded

Henderson of the confrontation with her years ago, he doubted Henderson would have any true remorse—if he remembered it at all.

He looked down at the man whose rheumy eyes and quivering lips reminded him of a dog who has done something wrong but hopes for a reprieve. There would be none.

“Live in ignorance, die in ignorance.”



Three hours later, Wyatt sat in an airplane waiting to take off from Newark. He would have preferred to fly out of Philadelphia, but the stormy weather made that impossible. The fastest way out of New Jersey was the flight he was on, which he'd booked using one of his many false identities.

He clipped his seat belt and waited while the other passengers rummaged and bustled about, stowing carry-on items, pushing past one another, and dragging their oversized luggage down the narrow center aisle. A flight attendant appeared at the front of the cabin. Wyatt's breath caught when he saw her long, chestnut hair swish gloriously over her shoulders. From his pocket, he pulled the photo of the woman he'd shown both Sorenson and Henderson and compared.

Wyatt already knew that the flight attendant's shiny locks were no match for those of the woman in the photo. But he enjoyed watching her nonetheless. She worked her way toward him, speaking softly and arranging the passengers' carry-on bags in the overhead compartments.

A nasal male voice rose over the din in the cabin. “Miss? Miss? Can't you do something about the heat in here? It's just terrible. I'm getting light-headed. I can't be in this kind of heat. My body won't take it.”

The flight attendant turned toward the man, whose profile Wyatt could see through the divide between the seats in front of him. Wyatt was surprised by the sweet, southern twang in her voice when she spoke, “Sir, I do apologize for the temperature in here. Rest assured, once we take off, the ventilation system will kick in, and it will cool down.”

“What's the matter with you?” Nasal Male said. “I don't want your apology. What am I going to do with an apology when I get heat stroke? I

told you I can't take this heat."

Her smile still in place, the flight attendant said, "You're welcome to exit the plane and choose another flight if this one is not to your liking."

"I don't want another flight, I want the air turned on in here right now."

Wyatt sighed. He was not surprised by the man's behavior. In his experience whenever adults boarded planes, they stepped through some dimensional vortex wherein they regressed to a mental and social age of five. Something about airplanes brought out the absolute worst in human beings.

"I'm sorry, sir," the chestnut-haired flight attendant said sweetly. "There isn't anything I can do about the heat right now. It will be just a few minutes until we take off."

The flight attendant walked away. She froze when the Nasal Male muttered, "Bitch," under his breath. Wyatt watched her. Her shoulders drew up, knotting with tension, but she continued down the aisle. Quickly, Wyatt unfastened his seatbelt and pushed through the remaining passengers in the aisle. He slipped into the seat beside the Nasal Male.

"Hey, I'm holding that seat for someone," Nasal Male protested.

Wyatt smiled. He took hold of the man's left index and middle fingers and pulled them backward. The man gasped. Wyatt leaned over and whispered in the man's ear.

Just a moment later, Wyatt was back in his own seat, comfortably fastened and ready for take-off. He observed the commotion in the front of the cabin with amusement. Nasal Male's arms flailed as though he were being swarmed by killer bees as he pushed past other passengers and the rest of the crew to exit the plane.

Wyatt turned from the spectacle to find the chestnut-haired flight attendant standing right beside him. She leaned over him to push the empty seat beside him into its upright position. He lifted his chin so he could smell her sweat mixed with her perfume. He admired the curve of her breast just an inch or so from his face. She retracted slightly so she could look at his face.

"What did you say to that man?" she asked.

Wyatt smiled, the boyish smile he saved for women he needed to charm.

“Trade secrets,” he said. “I didn’t mean to cause trouble, but there’s just no kindness in the world anymore.”

A newly animated emotion sprang up in her brown eyes. “I agree.” She straightened up and squeezed his shoulder. “Thank you,” she whispered.

Her eyes wandered down to the photo he had taken out once more to study. The flight attendant’s face fell, though she quickly covered it up with a smile. “Is that your wife?” she asked.

Wyatt studied the woman in the photo for a moment before he answered. The woman he’d loved since he was thirteen years old. The woman who infused his life with meaning and purpose. He caught the flight attendant’s eyes once more. “Yes,” he lied. “Yes, she is.”

CHAPTER

7

Wyatt

July 7th

The late afternoon sun was still high in the sky. The July heat was no kinder in Virginia than it had been in Trenton or Ardmore, but Wyatt braved it anyway, hoping for a glimpse of the woman he loved. With two black garbage bags by his side, he secreted himself outside her home, grateful for the shady grove of trees bordering the east side of her house. He'd been using the thicket as cover for years. No one had ever noticed him.

He waited for her to come home, cradling a cup of coffee between his palms. He sipped it slowly, savoring the bitter taste and waiting anxiously for the caffeine to energize his heavy limbs. He'd been trying all day to clear the fog in his mind. He hadn't slept well on his trip. What little sleep he had managed to steal was riddled with nightmares of his grandfather. He had long tried to forget those early childhood memories, or at least to convince himself that they no longer held any power, but still, at times they reduced him to a sweaty, trembling heap.

Wyatt swayed where he stood, like one of the trees beside him moving in the wind. Random images of Sorenson and Henderson flitted through his mind. They were like a bad aftertaste in his mouth. He steered his thoughts toward the love of his life. Soon, she would be home. He'd watch her go inside. Then he'd watch the slow play of light from her windows. Her mini-blinds and gauzy, sage-colored curtains gave nothing away, not even the outline of her form as she passed to and fro, but the long hours studying the squares of light were a comfort to Wyatt. He felt like he was with her, like he

had entered a state of being inhabited by her. Sometimes, from his place in the trees, he swore he could smell her skin. The very thought of it—of watching her—broke open a warmth inside him. It filled his body, leaving him breathless and tingling.

He looked down the street in the direction she usually drove in from, but no cars came. A breeze found its way through the trees, stirring the hair, slick with sweat, at the base of his neck. He should have bought iced coffee. His knees and lower back began to ache. He considered sprawling out at the base of a nearby tree but decided against it. He couldn't risk falling asleep there.

The sound of a car approaching drew his attention, but it passed by without turning into her driveway. She was likely late coming home from work. She frequently worked long hours. When she hadn't come home a half hour later, Wyatt decided to pack up. He threw his empty coffee cup into one of the garbage bags he'd brought and cinched it closed. He looked around at the neighboring houses and listened for cars or joggers. When he was certain that he would go unnoticed, he crept into her driveway, to the side of her house where she kept her trash cans and replaced her trash with his own. Tomorrow was trash day. In the morning, she would put her cans out for pickup and be none the wiser. He had never seen her look inside the cans before putting them out. He made sure his trash bags were the same color as hers so that even if she took a glance into the can, nothing would seem amiss.

At home, Wyatt quickly unpacked the small bag he had carried with him on his latest trip. He was relieved to be home, returned to his own private space, his sanctuary. Even though he had not had many houseguests in the four years he'd lived there, he was very strict about keeping all evidence of his less savory activities hidden. Wyatt had things to hide, and he never knew what occasion might arise that would require him to let someone in on short notice. Wyatt kept his home as normal looking as anyone else. He'd stolen a couple of rolls of film from the drop-off box at a drug store in a different city and had gone as far as sprinkling photos of strangers throughout his home. He could easily pass off the people in the photos as his family.

After unpacking, he took a damp cloth and dusted the surfaces in his living and dining rooms. He was frequently away from home, and the dust accumulated quickly. His job as a freelance software designer allowed him

the freedom to travel all over the country. He had made a small fortune selling programs to the government in addition to what he made designing for corporations. The government stuff Wyatt, himself, used to spy on the woman he loved, as well as his list of targets. Of course, there was only so much one could find out from hacking into people's computers. The rest was good, old-fashioned stake-out work.

After he finished dusting, he spread a large, plastic drop cloth over his kitchen table and began his inventory of her garbage. The woman he loved was fairly predictable. As he did every week, Wyatt separated the empty food containers from the rest of the trash first. She had made things a lot easier on him three years ago when she'd had a garbage disposal installed. Now the messiest thing he had to deal with was coffee grounds and yogurt cups. Sometimes, when she was very busy with work, he found half-eaten fast food.

There were several pieces of unopened junk mail. Wyatt smiled when he found her shredded bank statement. She always shredded them, but it was easy enough for him to piece them back together.

He set the strips of paper aside for later and combed through the rest of the trash. She had broken a glass that week. Its sharp edges were packed in newspaper. It was as if, on some level, she knew he would be sifting through this bag and she wanted to protect him from getting cut. There were three pairs of nude-colored nylons crumpled together, ruined by her tendency to catch them on things and cause runners.

Wyatt found little else of interest. When he was finished, he used new bags to house her garbage, stuffing the original bags in along with the garbage. He kept only the bank statement and the nylons. He placed the tied bags next to his back door. Then he pieced back together her bank statement using Scotch Tape. He sat in his office, leaning back in his leather chair as he studied it. No unusual purchases in the last month. Sighing, Wyatt filed the statement with the rest of her bank statements which he'd been collecting for years.

He checked his list and crossed off Martin Sorenson and Boyd Henderson. It was time to choose another victim. He studied the remaining names on the list. Although the people on the list had been carefully chosen,

they were in no particular order. The order was not important. What was important was that she saw how much he loved her—what he was willing to do for her.

The idea for the list was borne of a chance encounter in an airport bathroom. Back then, Wyatt had been traveling under the alias, Allen West. Allen had a layover at Chicago's Midway Airport. His connecting flight was delayed over four hours. In a rare lapse of self-control, Allen had downed three pints of Guinness at the only crappy bar still open in his terminal. It didn't take long for his bladder to protest.

Allen was standing at the urinal—third one from the door—when he dipped his chin for a quick scan over his shoulder.

That was when he saw the shoes.

Black and white saddle shoes dangling—just visible beneath the stall door. The kind Catholic schoolchildren wore. Pristine white socks peeked from the tops of the shoes. The legs were tiny pale stalks, calves round with baby fat. Between them were large black men's loafers, their tops obscured by pressed gray slacks.

Allen looked in the other direction, down the row of urinals. Spaced evenly apart two other men were lined up with their pelvises pressed toward the porcelain. One had a leathery face which looked as worn as his faded blue jeans and denim vest. He had on a red T-shirt beneath the vest and a matching bandana swathed around his skull. The other man was young, slick and smartly dressed in pressed khakis and a polo shirt. The older man was blond, the younger dark-haired.

One of them cleared his throat. Allen stared at them until they lifted their gazes, one by one, and met his eyes. The men didn't like what they saw.

A muffled grunt issued from the stall.

Allen felt the bloodthirsty monster rise from beneath its cover and fight its way from the dark, hidden recesses of his mind. He said, "Don't you see the shoes?"

At first, perhaps because Allen's voice had been a low growl, the two men seemed not to hear him. Louder this time, Allen turned toward them.

“Don’t you see the shoes?”

The younger man quickly zipped his fly and started toward the door. Allen’s arm shot out, barring the young man’s chest. “The shoes,” Allen said. “Don’t you see them?”

The young man fidgeted as the older man zipped up and came toward them. The kid glanced at the floor of the stall. He turned back toward Allen but didn’t meet his eyes. The older man kept his voice controlled. “Hey buddy, we don’t want any trouble.”

“No,” Allen said. “Nobody ever wants trouble. Trouble is for other people to deal with.”

Perhaps the men sensed the ascending fury because they pushed past Allen and scurried out of the bathroom.

The monster was fully birthed now.

The stall door bent easily and out flew the man in the gray slacks and shiny black loafers.

How long had it lasted? Even now Wyatt could not say. Seconds? Minutes? The man lay battered and dead at Allen’s feet. Allen’s knuckles were bloodied and raw. Had he beaten the man to death? Snapped his neck? Between the ragged gasps of his labored breath, Allen heard whimpering behind him.

The girl had not moved from her perch on the commode except to draw her knees to her chest. Her saddle shoes now rested precariously on the lip of the toilet seat. The oppressive gray of the stall’s metal walls made her seem doll-sized. She watched Allen with large doe eyes.

Her hair was blonde. Long bangs brushed her forehead. Her small lips were swollen, the color of rubies. Allen wanted to touch her, to soothe her, but he knew he could not. He shook his head once quickly, a clipped motion. The girl seemed to understand. She would not tell.

Later that night, Allen lay in a dark hotel room on a bed that felt like cardboard, a nearly empty bottle of vodka between his legs. The flicker of glowing images from the television captivated him.

Then came the breaking news.

“Tonight one of Chicago’s most prominent pastors was found beaten to death in a restroom in Midway Airport after allegedly assaulting an eight-year-old girl. Just after eight p.m. a janitor went into this bathroom to perform his regular duties and found forty-two-year-old Todd Martin lying dead on the bathroom floor. An eight-year-old girl, apparently in shock, sat in a nearby stall where the alleged sexual assault took place. The pastor and the girl had been traveling as a large group with other members of Todd Martin’s congregation. Martin was able to separate the girl from the group during a layover by allegedly telling the girl’s mother he was taking her to get something to eat. He then lured her into the men’s room where the sexual assault took place. As you can see, police have cordoned off the scene and the investigation continues. Police say there were no witnesses to this brutal murder besides the eight-year-old girl who is receiving medical treatment at this time. We’ll have more on this story as it develops. Renee, back to you.”

No witnesses. Allen flexed the fingers of his right hand. The knuckles were bruised. He thought about the men who had fled the men’s room. They had gotten a good look at him, but they would never come forward. What would they say? They had seen the shoes. The shiny black and white shoes pornographically out of place in a men’s bathroom. Surely they had realized what was going on in the stall just as Allen had. But they would protect their cowardice even if it meant a killer walked free.

Allen’s slow smile turned to a scowl of disgust. Who was worse? The pastor with his ugly perversion or the cowards who allowed him to molest an innocent child with impunity? Allen could never decide.

He drank down the last of the vodka in a long, burning gulp. He had killed cowards before in a fit of rage just as blind as that which had overtaken him in the airport bathroom. Then, as now, he felt empty instead of elated. A hollow man.

But in thinking of the two fleeing men who would never turn him in, the germ of an idea took root in Allen’s mind.

Like all three men Allen had seen in the bathroom that night, there were people whose evil deeds were lacquered over in a veneer of wholesome goodness. People whose ordinary cruelties were brushed off with puzzlement, a dash of hurt, and the standard: “He didn’t mean anything by it” or “that’s

just the way he is.”

Allen hated those people.

They deserved to suffer. For the things they did and the things they did not do.

The act of killing had left him empty, but the realization that Allen had punished the man in the stall left him exhilarated. The idea came slowly over the next few weeks, whispering, hissing, and finally shouting inside his head. The woman he loved had suffered even though he'd tried again and again to protect her. At times, she had suffered because of him. Allen could change all that, and he would. He would punish those who had transgressed against her and redeem himself in the process.

Wyatt selected his next victim from the list and went outside to place her trash in his garbage bins.

CHAPTER

8

Kassidy

July 7th

When I reached the front stoop, I set down my briefcase and the bag of dog food. I sat down on the step and stared at the flowers as if they might start speaking at any moment. Some muted part of my mind was trying to decide whether to keep them or to throw them directly into the trash.

I could hear my three dogs on the other side of the door, jostling for position to be the first one for me to pet. They were my home security system. Rocky, a Siberian Husky, Smalls, a hulking German Shepherd, and Pugsley, a Pug, as his name implied. My best friend, Linnea, thought that after the Sala attack, I might feel safer with a dog around. She had bought Smalls for me when I moved from Baltimore to Woodbridge, Virginia. I felt guilty leaving him alone during my long work hours so I adopted companions for him.

Rocky's shrill bark interrupted my thoughts. I closed my eyes briefly and took a deep breath. With a single finger, I pushed the pot of hyacinths to the edge of the stoop, clearing the door. I hesitated, tempted to push them off the edge and topple them onto their delicate purple faces. Pugsley yipped. I stood and gathered my briefcase. They would remain on my stoop.

My three pals waited eagerly on the other side of my front door. I hardly had a chance to set down my things before they rushed at me, sidling along my legs and nudging my hands with cold noses. I bent to pet each of them. The unexpected chime of the doorbell drew them away from me. Rocky

growled, prodding the doorknob with her nose. I pulled her back by the collar and opened the door.

Jory Ralston stood on my doorstep, a half-smile playing at his mouth.

“Kass,” he said.

I didn’t speak. I hadn’t seen him in six months.

He slid past me and knelt to scratch Smalls—who had met him before—behind the ears. Rocky stood beside me, ears pricked, on full alert. She snarled, but Jory was impervious. He rubbed Smalls’ sides, talking nonsense into his ear. Smalls pressed his body against Jory, trying to get as close as he could to Jory’s roving hands.

Jory turned his face up at me, a full smile this time. “You look good,” he said.

“You always say that,” I responded flatly.

He stood up, came closer. Rocky growled louder. I put my hand on her head and she quieted, although her eyes remained locked on Jory. He towered over me, six foot two and all lean muscle. I’d spent as many nights trying to forget those arms as I’d spent in them.

He leaned down until our foreheads were almost touching. “You always look good to me,” he said in a low voice.

I turned my head so he wouldn’t see me smile. “You always say *that*,” I said.

He waited for me to turn back to him. I looked into his eyes. Hazel eyes that seemed to change colors like he changed moods. When he worked they looked dark and intense. When we made love they turned lighter.

“What are you doing here?” I asked.

He backed away. I let out the breath I was holding.

“I’m in town for a seminar. Honing up on my profiling skills. The department sent me,” he said. He looked down at Rocky, who still eyed him distrustfully. “Is this Rocky?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you gonna let her know I’m one of the good guys?”

“You can’t keep doing this,” I said.

Jory rolled his eyes, and I knew if it wasn’t for Rocky he would scoop me up, cover my face with kisses, and let the heat between us incinerate my objections. It had always been that way. The heat between us had always been intense. We met on one of my first cases as an analyst for the BAU. I was working a serial case in Portland, Oregon, with Jory as the lead homicide detective.

We’d spent many nights in my hotel room going over the evidence again and again. The case was tough. The stakes were high. We were catching flack everywhere we turned—the Portland PD, the Bureau, the media, the victims’ families. I was there for a month when I thought I would break. It was my first hot case after the Nico Sala incident. I was still having nightmares and panic attacks.

I felt pressured by my colleagues in the BAU, most of who believed I only got the position because of the attack. I was on loan to the Baltimore PD when Nico Sala was arrested. Later, when he was released and came after me, it didn’t look so good for the Bureau. It was easier for them to turn me into some kind of hero and promote me to the BAU than to examine any potential fuck-ups on their part that led to Sala’s release in the first place. Culpability for the technicality that had allowed Sala to go free was never quite established.

Proximity, stress, and heat were the factors that led to Jory and me sleeping together. The first time we touched there was raw electricity. You could almost see it in the air. We couldn’t stop after that. It was never enough. At the time, we needed it. We needed the release. I thought once the case was over it would just go away. But heat like that doesn’t dissipate easily.

Jory extended a hand for Rocky to sniff. After a thorough scenting, she allowed him to stroke her head.

“Did you hear me?” I said. “You can’t keep doing this.”

“You always say *that*,” Jory replied.

“Because it’s true. You can’t keep doing this. You can’t keep coming around. You’re married for God’s sake.”

His eyes darkened. “What if I wasn’t?” he asked.

I threw my arms in the air. “Don’t start with this again,” I said.

The last time I had seen him was at a conference in Denver. During a particularly breathless postcoital moment, Jory had proposed to me. I had taken it for what it was—a joke. He was already married, and after nearly three years of infrequent, clandestine meetings, he’d never even talked about filing for divorce. Jory was an escape for me, a release. Although I had feelings for him, I sometimes wondered if the reason I gave in to him whenever I saw him was because I knew it would never go anywhere. As it was, it took me months to assuage the guilt I felt for sleeping with him each time it happened. Thankfully, it wasn’t very often.

He peered down at me, eyes somber. “What if I wasn’t married, Kass? Seriously.”

I folded my arms across my middle. “I’m not having this conversation with you. What we did was wrong.”

“Wrong? You think what’s between us is so wrong because I’m married, but did it ever occur to you why you keep coming back?”

“Shut up,” I snapped. “I don’t come back. You followed me to five conferences—”

He grasped my arm. I hated it when he touched me. I hated it because I wanted to melt into him as I had so many times before. I wanted to forget everything but the feel of him. Everything. The cases, the dead bodies, Lexie, his wife, the scornful looks that still followed me through the BAU, Nico Sala. All of it.

“I was always perfect for you, Kass, because you thought I’d never ask you for more than this. You thought you could stay in that place you’ve been in since Lexie died and Nico Sala hurt you. I was just a warm body to you. Is that really all you want?”

“That is not true,” I said, but my voice shook. “I don’t—I’m not even sure what I want, but there is no way around this, Jory. What we did was

wrong. This is wrong.”

“What if I wasn’t married?” he asked again. He bore down on me, his eyes relentless. I swallowed three possible replies, and then luckily, my doorbell rang.

Jory stared at the door. “Who’s that?” he asked.

I sighed. “I don’t know.”

With Rocky growling by my side, I pulled my front door open for the second time in ten minutes.

My neighbor, Dale Hunter, stood before me, a squirming Pugsley in his arms. “I found him in my yard again,” Dale explained. “Thought you might want him back.”

I smiled and took Pugsley from him. I was rewarded with several wet doggie kisses. “He must have slipped out the front door. Come on in,” I said.

Dale closed the door behind him, patting Rocky’s head and glancing warily at Jory. I set Pugsley down. “Oh yeah. Sorry. Dale, this is Detective Ralston of the Portland PD. Jory, this is my neighbor, Dale Hunter.”

As they shook hands Dale said, “Portland, Oregon?” He adjusted his wireframe glasses on the bridge of his nose, as if to get a better look at Jory.

“Yeah,” Jory replied.

“Jory and I worked on a serial case there a few years ago,” I explained. “He’s visiting from Portland.”

Still, Dale eyed Jory with suspicion. Dale was significantly shorter and thinner than Jory. Where Jory was all solid muscle, Dale was wiry with a runners’ frame. The difference in size did not stop Dale from staring Jory down, his brown eyes penetrating. “The escort girls,” Dale said. “I read about it.”

“Yeah,” Jory said. “That was a tough one.” His eyes flickered in my direction.

I smiled in spite of myself, realizing there was some jealousy there.

“You live next door?” Jory asked.

“Yep,” Dale said, motioning in the direction of his house. “Sometimes little Pugsley gets into my yard.”

“Dale watches the dogs when I’m out of town,” I interjected. “So Dale, we were just going to have a drink. Want to join us?”

Jory looked like his head might explode.

“No thanks,” Dale said. He ran a hand through his unruly brown hair, a curl falling across his forehead. “I’ve got a lot of work to do. Just wanted to return the little guy and make sure everything was okay.”

“Well, thanks,” I said as I walked him onto the front stoop. “I appreciate it.”

Out of Jory’s earshot, Dale lowered his voice to ask, “You sure you’re okay with him, Kass?”

I reached out and squeezed Dale’s arm. “Yeah,” I said. “He’s fine but thanks. I really do appreciate you looking out for me.”

Dale smiled and gave me a mock salute before leaving. “No problem,” he said.

“What the hell was that?” Jory asked the moment I closed the door.

“I told you, he’s my neighbor.” I strode past him into the kitchen, heading directly for a bottle of wine.

“What? He thinks I’m gonna murder you or something?” Jory continued as he took off his jacket.

I set the wine on the table and retrieved the corkscrew from a kitchen drawer. “Dale is a good friend,” I said. “He knows about Nico Sala, and yes, he looks out for me. That is all.”

“I don’t think that’s all,” Jory replied. He leaned against the doorjamb and folded his arms, watching me struggle with the corkscrew.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I said.

Jory came up behind me and slid his hands down my arms. His breath tickled my earlobe. “That may be all there is for you, but this guy—what’s his name? Dean?”

He put his hands over mine and together we twisted the cork. It slid out with a hiss. My mouth turned to the sound of his voice. “Dale,” I said. “His name is Dale.”

Jory’s lips were nearly touching mine. “Dale wants something more from you.”

He kissed me lightly.

“He’s just a friend,” I whispered.

Jory smiled. “Well, he wants to be more.”

In my head, a resounding crack charged the air around us as his mouth closed over mine, hard and insistent. There was no sound except our breathing, which came in hard, rapid gasps.

We exhausted ourselves. On the table, in the shower, and finally, on my couch. That was the snap-drive rhythm of our relationship. It was always that way. The enormity of our physical response to each other was unstoppable. A single touch set us off. In Portland, we’d done it everywhere. In squad cars, department bathrooms, the task force conference room, even the morgue. There was something about Jory’s body that I needed—the way it heated mine, the way his skin burned and soothed mine at the same time. I couldn’t say no to him. Which was why I objected to him coming around.

Three hours and three rounds later, we lay on my couch, sharing a blanket, facing each other. Our legs tangled together. Jory pulled one of my feet out and ran his fingers from my Achilles tendon up the length of my calf and back. I moaned and smiled—a wide, lazy grin.

“I needed that,” I said.

He kissed the arch of my foot. “Me too,” he said.

“What? Your wife doesn’t put out?”

He looked at me, his eyes serious. “I left her.”

It took a moment for the words to register. “What?” I said.

Jory took my foot in his hands and smoothed the sole of my foot with both thumbs. “I left her,” he said, matter-of-factly. “Six weeks ago.”

I tried to pull my foot away from him but he held it tightly. “Are you

crazy?” I said, the words thick in my throat. “Jory. This is serious. You can’t just leave your wife.”

“I was being serious in Denver.”

“Jory, we slept together in Portland for six weeks. We saw each other at a few conferences. You can’t just leave your wife.”

“Remember the conference in Atlanta?” he asked abruptly, ignoring me. “Denver was the sexiest. Snowed in. Conference canceled. The all-naked weekend,” he continued, a warm, dreamlike smile in his voice. “L.A. That was a good time too.”

“It was sex,” I said. “This is sex.”

He looked at me then. His eyes were muddy brown. “It’s more than that, and you know it,” he said. “Now come here.”

“Are you listening to me?”

“Come here,” he repeated, his voice low. He held his arms out.

I climbed on top of him, and he swathed me in the blanket. I rested my hands on his chest, wanting him again in spite of myself.

He cupped my face with both hands. The sudden stark blue in his eyes made me want to squirm. When he spoke his voice was husky. “I’m in love with you, Kass.”

“No,” I said. I tried to shake my head, but his large hands held it in place.

“I’ve been in love with you almost from the moment we met.”

“Jory, this is not going to work.”

“I’m serious, Kass. I left her and I’ll leave Portland. She can have everything. She’s not contesting the divorce. We’ve been miserable for years.”

“No,” I said. My lungs weren’t functioning properly.

“I came here to tell you this,” he said. “That was the real reason I came. Not the conference. I love you.”

“Stop.” Fear spread itself over every inch of my skin like heat rash.

“Listen to what you’re saying.”

He traced my cheekbones with his thumbs. “You don’t think I haven’t been over this a thousand times in my head? I want to be with you. I know you’re scared. I know it won’t be easy. But I want to be with you. I want you.”

“Don’t do this. You don’t even know that this will work, and you’re going to throw away your marriage? This is not a good idea.”

“My wife was seeing someone too. For a while.” Before I could protest his line of reasoning, he held up a hand and continued, “I’m not telling you that to try to justify my own actions. Both of us were wrong to cheat on each other. I’m not denying that. I’m telling you because there were problems in my marriage long before I met you.”

“That doesn’t make this right,” I said, my voice trembling. “Nothing will make this right.”

“You’re wrong,” Jory replied, voice husky.

He pulled me closer and kissed my face. He slid the blanket off my shoulders, exposing me. He sat up, holding my body against his as if I weighed nothing. He kissed my collarbone, my throat, and the tiny scar under my chin left by Nico Sala.

His breath was soft and comforting against the intimate hollows of skin he probed and consecrated with his mouth. The smell of him—musky, male, a hint of sweat commingling with cologne—made me light-headed. He lay back again and pushed the blanket down away from my hips. He rested his hands on my thighs and looked at me, eyes meandering along my body in a measured study. We’d been naked together a hundred times, but now I felt more exposed than ever, as if he’d removed something else, some invisible article of clothing I didn’t even know I wore.

I tried to pull the blanket back up around me, but he gently slid it out of my hands and tossed it on the floor. The room was shrinking. Where our skin met, I felt a slow quiver that increased in tempo as he stared intently at my body. As I tried to wrap my mind around the gravity of what he’d just told me, a tear slid down my face, leaving a wet scar.

“Don’t, Kass,” Jory whispered.

“It won’t work,” I croaked. “I’ll lose you eventually.”

“I’m not going to hurt you, Kass. I know you’re afraid if you let me in, I’ll hurt you somehow, but I promise I won’t.”

He sat up again, shifting me in his lap and pulling me down onto him. I bit my lower lip as another tear followed the last.

He moved my hips easily with his hands, using slow and deliberate movements. I put my arms around his neck and buried my face in his shoulder so he couldn’t see me crying.

CHAPTER

9

Kassidy

July 8th

Jory and I drove into Quantico together the next morning. He showered at my house and left his rental car in my driveway. I drove him to his hotel and waited in my car while he changed clothes. He climbed back into the Trailblazer dressed in neatly pressed black trousers and a blue dress shirt. A loose tie dangled around his neck. He smiled at me, and I was glad for my sunglasses, afraid that if he saw my eyes he'd see the longing in them. He looked like something shiny and new, like the single gift under the Christmas tree you wanted more than anything else, like something you gaped at in a store window when you passed it each day. He looked like something I wanted.

We pulled up in front of the Base Education Center Building.

"I'll see you tonight?" he asked.

I stared straight ahead, both hands gripping the steering wheel.

"Kass?"

"It's not going to work, you and me."

Jory checked his watch. His breath was an exasperated huff. "The only way it won't work is because you won't let it. What's going on in that head of yours?"

I stared hard into his darkening hazel eyes. "Is it completely lost on you that our relationship started out as an affair? Why should I think that you're

going to be faithful to me when you were not faithful to your wife? This is not a good idea.”

He pursed his lips briefly. His brow was a hard line. “I’m telling you that it’s different with you. Kass, I love you. I want you. My wife and I were never truly happy together. We should have ended it years ago—”

“Do you know who John Douglas is?” I asked, cutting him off.

He blinked. His voice was tinged with impatience. “What?”

“Do you know who John Douglas is?” I said again, more slowly.

Jory arched an eyebrow but answered anyway. “The guy who basically founded your unit? That John Douglas?”

“Yeah, that one. He practically started the field of criminal profiling. Do you know what he said? He said, ‘The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.’”

Jory groaned and rubbed his face with both hands. “For God’s sake, Kass. I’m not a serial killer. I’m not some UNSUB for you to profile. I want to marry you.”

“Don’t,” I said sharply. Tears gathered quickly behind my eyes. I turned away from him and looked out the window, trying to keep my composure.

He waited a long moment. He leaned toward me, but I didn’t turn my head. “Kass,” he said, his breath against my cheek.

“Don’t do this to me,” I said.

“Do what?”

I swallowed over the lump that had formed in my throat. My voice came out as a croak. “Give me hope.”

I turned back to him, and his lips were so close I felt as if they were pulling my mouth toward his like a gigantic magnet. “I’ll lose you,” I whispered, unable to conceal the tremble in my voice. “One way or another, I’ll lose you. I can’t handle that.” *I can’t take any more*, I added silently. Images of Lexie’s lifeless body splayed on the pavement followed by images of Nico Sala’s angry fists raining down on me rose unbidden. I tried to push them down.

“You won’t,” he whispered back, and the tenderness in his voice caused a sob to escape my mouth.

“Yes, I will,” I said with a shuddering breath. “It’s not going to work, Jory.”

“It will work, if you let it. I’ll show you how easy this can be. Kiss me,” Jory said.

“Not now,” I said.

I glanced around the periphery of the car. Agents and other personnel walked or trotted past my Trailblazer. They came and went from the building and crossed the street in front of us. No one appeared to be watching. I turned back to the windshield.

He sighed. “Okay, look, I know you have doubts and we can talk about them later, after you’ve had time to think about things. Right now, just kiss me.”

I couldn’t bring myself to do it. Kiss him in public, in the open like that. I couldn’t bring myself to kiss him at all knowing what that would mean. He was wearing me down.

“I cannot deal with this right now,” I said.

“All I’m asking for is a kiss.”

“Jory.”

“Kass, please.”

I looked back at him. His eyes were pleading. I planted a chaste kiss on his lips and turned away. Still, a tingle started in my feet and rose with dizzying speed to my temples.

He smiled at me and cupped my cheeks gently with both hands, kissing me again. In spite of my mind’s protests, my mouth kissed back. One of my hands rose and felt the hard line of his jaw, tracing it to the place where our mouths met. Abruptly, he released me, and I felt like the wind had been knocked out of me. He smiled that boyish smile that had stripped me of every ounce of professionalism I had in a Portland hotel three years earlier.

“See you tonight,” he said.

Then he was gone.



TK met me outside my office. He pulled a chair from the lobby to rest his long legs on as he sat in the chair I kept in front of my desk, opening his copy of the Georgette Paul file on his lap. I brushed past him and dropped my purse and briefcase on my desk.

I sat down and quickly glanced at my clothes, straightening my blouse and skirt where Jory had pressed against me. I tucked a strand of hair behind my ear. When I looked up, TK was staring at me, his eyes probing over the rim of his reading glasses.

“What?” I said irritably.

“Nice try,” he said.

“What’s that mean?”

“You’re trying to act normal albeit rushed. Something’s off today. What’s going on?”

I shook my head and booted up my computer. “Nothing.”

“You got laid,” TK said, grinning. He pulled his legs from the seat of the chair and dropped his feet onto the floor, turning his whole body toward me.

“What makes you say that?”

“Oh please, Bishop. I’ve worked with you for five years. I have a PhD in psychology, and you’re uncharacteristically flushed today,” he explained.

“I was in a hurry,” I said lamely.

“Detective Portland again? Is he here?”

I pursed my lips and gave TK a long stare. “I really don’t want to discuss it,” I said.

TK shrugged. “Okay,” he said in a tone that implied he didn’t believe me for a second.

From my briefcase, I pulled the Georgette Paul file. “Let’s just talk about work.”

“Fine,” he said. “What did Crossen say?”

I recapped the meeting with Talia, but my mind kept drifting back to Jory. His skin, his smile, the warmth of his body, the slick, smooth feel of him inside me, and his professions of love—his sudden capitulation, the prospect of that body available to me whenever I asked. My stomach clenched and released. I tried to put him out of my mind, but his scent lingered on my clothes, intoxicating.

Focus, a voice in my head commanded.

“I put out the advisory before I left yesterday. I think we should finish up the profile and get someone from Denver on the phone,” I said.

“So we’re off the hook with the case presentation?” TK asked.

I smiled grimly. “Given the friction between Agent Innes and I, Talia thought it was best that you and I work on this by ourselves.”

TK raised his large palms. “You won’t get an argument from me.”

My office phone rang. I snatched up the receiver and listened, a sinking feeling in my stomach. I hung up and looked at TK.

“What?” he said.

“There’s another one. Same signature. Body was just found. We’re going to Philadelphia.”

CHAPTER

10

Wyatt

July 8th

She had a man with her. Wyatt had seen the man go into her house the night before after returning to try and get a glimpse of her. He had watched the two of them leave her house together in the morning and now followed the woman he loved to work, using his civilian pass to get on base. He had secured the pass years ago, when he began subcontracting for one of the software development companies there. He stayed as far back from her vehicle as he could and pulled over when she did. He watched the man kiss her—at least that’s what it looked like from where he sat, several parking spots back. They were just shadows, vague human shapes through the back windshield of her SUV. But Wyatt saw the man lean in and stay that way for a long time. Then he emerged, smiling, all swagger and lean confidence. It was difficult for Wyatt not to run him over with his car. She lingered there, and Wyatt wondered if she was watching the man walk away, admiring his tall, muscular form. Wyatt’s stomach twisted. A painful burn rose up in the back of his throat.

“No,” he whispered.

This wasn’t right. Wyatt knew from spying on her and hacking into her email that she had seen the man before, but it had been months since they’d had any contact. Wyatt thought it was over. He thought she was his now. She was meant for him.

He waited for her to pull out and resumed following her. She went into

the parking garage beneath the building she worked in, as she always did. Wyatt drove on, headed toward home. His palms had grown sweaty, and the steering wheel slid in his hands. He quickly wiped his palms on his pants one at a time.

“No,” he said again, his voice low and strangled.

He got home before the grayness encroaching on his vision took over altogether. He felt something rising from his bowels, almost like he had swallowed a balloon, and it was now inflating inside him. He lay on his couch with a cool, wet cloth over his eyes. He could not let it take over. He hated the beast. He had no control over what it did.

He focused on his breathing, but his mind kept returning to her. It always returned to her. Thoughts of her with the man only made his heart rattle his ribcage so he went back further. His frantic mind alighted on the day she had changed everything. The day he had fallen for her. The day he knew she was meant to be his. They were so young, only thirteen. But he had known, even then, that she was special.

Some parts of the memory were painful, but he suffered through them. To get to her.

The boys had started with his arms. The first cigarette they burned him with went out immediately, its glowing tip extinguished in the crook of his right arm. There were three of them. They were freshman at the high school. They had taunted him before, as he cut through old man Vickers’ junkyard on his way home from school. The older boys hung out there next to Vickers’ abandoned barn where they could smoke and, rumor had it, look at nudie magazines. Usually, they just threw rocks at Wyatt. He scurried behind the burned out pick-up truck on the other side of the lot to avoid them, and they moved on. It was the fastest and most direct way home. His sister would be there already. He had to get to her before his grandfather came over for one of his “visits.” Lots of kids passed through that way, so there was plenty of taunting to be done; Wyatt figured they wouldn’t bother with him all that much as long as he kept moving.

On that day, he was wrong.

They ran after him. At first he didn’t realize what was happening, and by

the time he did, it was too late. He was like one of those helpless women in slasher movies—running as fast and as far as he could while his attackers walked at a slow, measured pace and caught up with him as if they'd been sprinting all along.

They dragged him over behind the barn and pinned him down. He could feel small rocks in the grass piercing his legs. One of the boys held his legs down while another sat on his chest. The third boy pinned his arms to the ground above his head, forming a steeple. That must have been when the panic really set in because everything became a bit blurry after that. Wyatt remembered fighting for air. His whole body seized when the first cigarette seared his skin. What little breath he had left in his body escaped. He tried to scream, but all that came out was a tiny huff.

I'm going to die. I'm going to die. Inside his head, he screamed the words. He was aware that the boys were laughing, but the sound seemed to recede, until it was just a vague undertone to the rushing in his ears.

“Light another one,” one of them said.

“Yeah, and don't waste it this time. You gotta be gentle, don't crush it like you're putting it out.”

Again came the burning. Wyatt tried to squirm away from the pain, but he couldn't move. All three boys were easily twice his size. More laughter. Then, with perfect clarity, he heard a new voice. It was a boy's voice, smaller and less certain. It came from far away. “What are you guys doing?”

“None of your goddamn business,” one of the boys said.

“But you're hur—”

“Shut the hell up, you little asshole. Unless you wanna be next.”

Then the sound of feet shuffling away.

No! Nonononononono. Again, the screams were in his head. He tried to call out, but the boy was a boulder on his chest.

His vision was graying in and out.

Finally, the boy on his chest jumped up. He whooped and pointed down at Wyatt. His face lit up with glee. “Look! He's crying! He's crying!”

The others laughed. “Pussy!” one of them called.

“Burn his other arm. Come on.”

Wyatt tried to catch his breath, to squirm away from them, but he couldn't get enough air. His body felt sluggish. He told his limbs to move, but nothing happened. A gasping sound came from him, part sob, part plea for oxygen. They were on him again, tearing at his shirt. He heard the *fwwwt* of the lighter. The smell of cigarette smoke burned his nostrils. He knew they were burning him again, but he could no longer tell the pain in his arm from the pain in his chest, where one of the boys now sat again. His vision went black at the edges.

His grandfather's face loomed above him, floating disembodied. For a split second, some part of Wyatt was awash with relief. His grandfather would stop them. But no, that wasn't right. His grandfather was every bit as sadistic as these boys, if not more so. He would never intervene. Wyatt blinked, and his grandfather's face morphed into one of the boys.

“Fucking crybaby,” the boy said. He spit on Wyatt's face. The glob of saliva landed on his cheek and slid down to his neck. Wyatt shook his head back and forth, trying to get it off, but he could feel the hot stickiness where it had been.

A sudden stillness overtook the boys. It took everything he had to turn his head and see what had frozen them in place. His eyes were out of focus. He couldn't see anything from where he lay, pinned to the ground. But out of the silence, he heard the padding of feet moving away from him.

Why wasn't anyone stopping? Why wasn't anyone helping him?

“Hey, look at this,” Cigarette boy said.

“What are you gonna do with a pipe?”

Laughter. Wicked laughter. Wyatt's whole body went completely cold. He started to shiver. He closed his eyes.

“Take down his pants and you'll see,” Cigarette boy said.

Boulder stood up, allowing Wyatt precious air. He stepped hard on Wyatt's limp arm, keeping Wyatt on the ground. Not that he had any energy left to fight them off. He just needed to get air. “That's gross, man,” Boulder

said.

“Yeah,” said the boy holding Wyatt’s legs. “What are you, gay?”

“No, but he is,” Cigarette said. “Come on, I’ll show you.”

Boulder laughed, but it had a tremulous quality to it. “I heard his sister likes to do it that way.”

Sarah.

“His sister? She’s only, like ten.”

“I heard she’s a slut,” Boulder said with authority.

Sarah. Wyatt hoped she wasn’t waiting for him. He hoped she had already hidden.

“They probably do it together. That family is all kinds of fucked up.”

“Let’s see if he likes it.”

Again, Wyatt willed his body to move and this time, it did. He started to flail and thrash, but they held tight to his limbs as they yanked his khaki shorts and underwear down. They flipped him over, and the air was cool on his bare bottom. He thought he might vomit. A swift strike in the ribs with the pipe that Cigarette had found took all the fight out of him. Then Boulder was on his back.

No. Nononononono.

He knew what they were going to do. He had walked in on his grandfather doing it to Sarah. Not with a pipe, of course. Their grandfather had never touched Wyatt in that way—only his little sister. For Wyatt, he saved the pinching and choking, the slamming of fingers in doors, the threat of scalding hot water or a flaming stove burner. But never this.

The boys were laughing again. Maybe that’s why they didn’t hear her coming. Or maybe she didn’t give them any warning. Wyatt felt more than saw Boulder fall sideways. He heard a *thunk*, then a heavy school bag landed beside him. Boulder groaned. The boy pinning Wyatt’s legs stood up, but he did not move. Instead, he watched, his face pale and slack in disbelief. Or maybe awe.

Wyatt turned on his side. He saw a flash of long, brown hair. He heard a

shriek like a war cry. As his vision cleared, he saw that Cigarette had dropped the pipe. He held his crotch with both hands. The girl, no bigger than Wyatt, picked up the pipe and swung at Cigarette's knee like she was in the homerun derby. A sickening crack sliced the air. Cigarette went down on his side, one hand on his crotch and the other on his knee, mewling like an injured animal. The girl zeroed in on a discarded cigarette that still smoldered in the sparse brush next to the barn.

She spoke as she stepped toward Cigarette again. She paused for a moment to look at the boy who had been holding Wyatt's legs. Whatever he saw in her eyes sent him running. He didn't look back.

Wyatt still couldn't hear what she was saying, but he could see her perfectly as she straddled Cigarette boy, and forced the smoking cigarette butt into his mouth. She held her hand over his mouth and did not release until he swallowed it. Wyatt closed his eyes, listening to the boy's tortured cries. Relief coursed through every inch of his body. It was over.

She had saved him.

When he opened his eyes, there were two of her. One standing over him triumphant, with her hands on her hips, and the other looking stricken, tears streaming down her face. Disorientation slowed his mind.

"Twins," he said aloud. He remembered them. They were in his class at the middle school.

A few feet away, Boulder rubbed his temple. Hatred flashed in his eyes as he looked at the two girls. He scrambled over toward his friend. Wyatt could barely hear him over Cigarette's screams. "You're in big trouble," he told them. "I'm calling the police."

"Go ahead," the triumphant twin shouted back. "My dad *is* the police."

Her twin knelt beside Wyatt as he hurriedly covered himself up with weak, rubbery hands. She guided him into a sitting position and rubbed his back tentatively.

The girl who had saved him crouched in front of him. She leaned in, her face inches from his. Gone was the fury that had sent her raging into battle against three bigger and meaner boys. She was just a girl. She smiled, her

face flushed from exertion. “You okay?”

He wasn’t okay, of course. He hadn’t been for a very long time. But looking into her blue eyes, he couldn’t tell her no. For a split second, she started to fade away. He blinked several times and she came back into focus. She squinted at him and waved a hand in front of his eyes. “Hey,” she said. “You okay?”

Wyatt nodded.

The other girl looked over her shoulder where Cigarette and Boulder huddled together, one of them curled up, crying and the other eyeing them warily, as if they might get up and attack again. She looked back to her twin and wiped her tear-stained cheeks. “Kassidy,” she said. “Dad is going to kill you.”

“Shut up, Lex. I did the right thing. They were hurting him.”

A lone siren sounded in the distance.

“But you really hurt that guy. I’m telling you, you’re in for it now.”

The girl named Kassidy smiled at Wyatt again. “I don’t care,” she said. “It was worth it.”

CHAPTER

11

Kassidy

July 8th

The smell had caused Martin Sorenson's neighbors to vacate their homes while Ardmore's local police department, assisted by a crime scene unit on loan from nearby Philadelphia, worked the scene.

"Good God," TK said as we pulled up to the large Tudor house. TK had driven us in his car, his lead foot shaving nearly an hour off what would normally be a three and a half hour drive.

The car windows were closed, but the foul smell seeped in through the ventilation system and filled the car.

"Mother of God," TK said as he pulled his credentials from his pocket and clipped his ID badge to the front of his jacket.

Awkwardly, I followed suit, using only one hand. I used the other one to cover my mouth and nose. We stepped out of the rental car. It was a humid, sunny morning in the most affluent suburb of Philadelphia. The uniformed men and women bustling about Martin Sorenson's house seemed just as out of place as the yellow crime scene tape sealing the area.

Like Sorenson's, the homes in his neighborhood were large, elegant, and meticulously kept. Lawns sparkled green, cut as fastidiously and precisely as the greens of a golf course. Almost every yard boasted an expensively landscaped garden, all of which likely went unappreciated by their busy owners.

We slipped under the tape and walked to the front door. The intensity of the smell was like a kick to the shin. A blast of frigid air hit us as we entered. It felt as though someone had turned the central air in the house to full blast, but it didn't dispel the stench.

"Good Lord," TK muttered. We glanced at one another. Both our eyes watered.

"Hey guys."

We were so overwhelmed by the smell that we hadn't noticed Tony Aiello. Tony was a crime scene tech for the city of Philadelphia—on loan to Ardmore PD to help process the Sorenson scene. Both TK and I had worked with him on a number of cases in the past. He was a nice guy—astute and helpful. Guys like him were the reason I never minded working in Philadelphia. It had become one of my favorite places to work, which was ironic since it was the city where Lexie had died sixteen years earlier. Ardmore was just outside the city.

Tony smiled and pulled a jar of Vicks VapoRub out of his pocket. "I've been to a lot of crime scenes, but this is the worst smelling, hands down."

He handed me the VapoRub, and I immediately smeared a generous glob on my upper lip. TK did the same.

"One of the guys went to the drug store and got us some jars," Tony explained.

The menthol didn't cover the smell entirely, but it helped. Tony slipped the jar back into his pocket. "You're only supposed to need this stuff in the morgue," he added.

We followed Tony toward the back of the house. "It smells like a landfill," TK observed.

"Really?" I said dryly. "All I can smell is rotting flesh."

Tony shook his head. "Wait till you see this one," he said.

We stopped outside the door to a small room. A uniformed officer from the local police department stood guard, monitoring who went in and out of the room. His face was pale green. Tony waved him off, and the man looked grateful for the break.

“Looks like this was originally used as a laundry room,” Tony said.

The room was windowless and not much bigger than a walk-in closet. A washer and dryer stood against one wall. TK stopped abruptly as he entered the room. Poking my head around his large frame, I took in the scene.

The garbage was easily two foot deep. The washer and dryer backed against one wall like defeated sentries, their white sheen now smudge gray. A large form lay amid the trash. Martin Sorenson’s skin was waxy and translucent, thickened by death like the sole of a well-used shoe.

“Are those maggots?” TK asked, gesturing toward a clump of waste at our feet.

Tony nodded.

I pulled my gaze from the floor. On the wall to our right, large chunks of bland beige drywall had been gouged out, spelling the words FOR YOU.

In spite of the heavy July heat, the movement of air through the house felt like an icy squall at my back.

“Here’s the county detective,” Tony called.

The man was in his fifties, tall and thin with gray whiskers protruding from the edges of his moustache. Tony introduced him as Umstead. TK and I stepped away from the door as Umstead smudged a fresh glob of menthol beneath his nose. He nodded at us and pulled a notebook from his inside jacket pocket.

“Martin Sorenson, age fifty-eight. Married with a thirteen-year-old daughter, but his wife took the kid and left six weeks ago. One of the neighbors called it in. They thought the smell was from a sewage backup. Coroner estimates the time of death between seventy-two to ninety-six hours ago.”

I swiped futilely at my nose which burned. “Wow . . . That’s four days.”

Umstead nodded. “This guy was a philosophy professor at Temple University. He’d been pretty depressed since the wife and kid left. Apparently, he’s very eccentric, so the other professors in his department didn’t really notice that he hadn’t been in the office. Then the Fourth of July holiday—no one noticed him missing.”

“Temple University?” I said.

“Was he teaching summer courses?” TK asked.

Umstead checked his notes. “One class.”

“Let me guess,” TK interjected. “None of his students bothered to alert anyone to his absence.”

A light shrug was as close as Umstead came to a smile. “From what I gathered, he wasn’t real well-liked.”

The memory returned to me in pieces, like shattered glass. Seventeen years ago. Sorenson’s office. Him screaming at me, spittle flying from his mouth. It had to be the same guy. How many Martin Sorensons taught Philosophy at Temple?

“He wasn’t,” I said flatly.

I looked back toward the death scene where only the vague hill of Martin Sorenson’s stomach could be seen. Garbage trickled out of the doorway like autumn leaves tracked into the house.

“That’s right,” TK said. “You went to Temple for your undergrad.”

I nodded and turned back toward the two men. Umstead’s face was a grimace, but I couldn’t tell if he always looked that way or if it was a reaction to the foul odor. “My daughter just started there last fall,” he said.

“I had to take Philosophy 101 as part of my General Education credits. Sorenson was terrible.”

After nearly two decades and the beating from Sala, there were few college professors whose names or classes I remembered, but Martin Sorenson had been particularly brutal.

“I remember him. He was just mean. He always implied that teaching was beneath him—like he was too smart for it, but he had to do it to make a living. There was a guy in my class who had cerebral palsy. He was in a wheelchair with all these adaptive devices for note taking and speaking.

“He was smart, but Sorenson didn’t have the patience to listen to the guy. Kept telling the kid that if he needed a wheelchair, he had no business being in a college class.”

Umstead made a sound deep in his throat and hung his head. “They say you shouldn’t speak ill of the dead, but what an asshole.”

I nodded. “Do you have a preliminary cause of death?”

Umstead shook his head. “Nope, we won’t know much till after the autopsy. No signs of blunt force trauma, no signs of strangulation or asphyxiation. He’s just dead. But we got a lot of white powder mixed in with the garbage so we’ll run some labs and toxicology on Sorenson to see what we come up with.”

“Could be arsenic,” I said. “Poison is certainly a passive way of killing someone.”

“Yeah,” TK agreed. “Just like asphyxiating them. Where’d the trash come from?”

“It’s his,” Umstead said, glancing at the room where crime scene techs now carefully bagged and logged each item of refuse. “Sanitation department said he’s been putting his garbage cans out empty, but one of the neighbors said Sorenson always put them out the night before—full.”

“So our UNSUB was picking it up,” I said. “Saving it for this occasion. How long? How long was this guy collecting Sorenson’s trash?”

Umstead checked his notes and this time his grimace was directly related to the crime scene at hand. “Six weeks,” he said.

“That’s a long time,” I commented. “A lot of planning. No sign of forced entry. No obvious signs of trauma to his body, but Sorenson is a big guy and the UNSUB somehow got him into the laundry room.”

“Yeah, but how did the UNSUB get in here in the first place—there were no signs of a struggle,” TK said.

“The same way he got into Georgette Paul’s house. Either he is a real smooth talker or he’s controlling the scene with a gun.” I said.

TK nodded and turned to Umstead. “Did your guys canvass the neighborhood to see if anyone saw anything suspicious?”

“Sure did. The neighbors on the west side have been away on a cruise for the last two weeks. The neighbor on the east side said she thought she saw

a green van parked in Sorenson's driveway a few nights ago, but she didn't get a good look at it—can't give us a make or model. She said she was just driving past and that the van was pretty far up Sorenson's driveway, closer to the house than the street. Neighbors directly across the street didn't notice anything unusual. My guys will keep working it though."

I sighed. "Well, the driveways are long and secluded. There's a lot of foliage between houses. It's possible the UNSUB drove right up to the house with no one the wiser."

"That's pretty bold," Umstead said.

I shrugged. "Yeah, but Sorenson wasn't well liked. People probably didn't care enough about him to notice who, if anyone, was coming and going. So let's assume the UNSUB drove into the driveway without being noticed. He knocks on the door, Sorenson answers and the UNSUB smooth talks his way in. Then he pulls out a gun. Sorenson does what he's told."

Umstead sighed and motioned toward the laundry room. "Seems like an awful lot of trouble to go to just to kill someone."

"It is but this wasn't really about the killing, it was about humiliating Sorenson," I replied. "BTK—the Wichita Strangler—he used a gun to control his first crime scene, but he never shot anyone. He made the victims believe that he was just there to rob them. The gun scared them into compliance so that he could carry out his bondage fantasies. He killed a family of four his first time out without firing a shot. Of course, I think that's where the similarities between these two killers end."

"I agree," TK said.

Both mine and TK's cell phones rang simultaneously. I jumped at the sound. Again we met each other's eyes. Then I fished my phone out of my jacket pocket and flipped it open.

"Bishop," I said.

Talia Crossen's voice came through as clearly as if she were standing beside me. "You're going to Trenton," she said without preamble.

"Trenton, New Jersey?" I asked.

TK's broad shoulders slumped.

“There’s been another one,” Crossen said.

CHAPTER

12

Kassidy

July 8th

“This guy works fast,” I said.

“I hate New Jersey.”

“Serials usually have a cooling down period,” I went on. “This guy did two in four days.”

Boyd Henderson’s body was splayed in the middle of his living room, his pale skin and bra and miniskirt like a splash of color on a dull palette. The locals had already worked the scene over, taking photos, collecting what trace evidence they could find, and dusting for prints, but we always liked to study a fresh crime scene on our own given the opportunity. BAU agents rarely saw a fresh scene. Our work was largely academic and our profiles were written after reading police reports and photos of crime scenes.

We stood in the doorway of Henderson’s Trenton home, waiting for their homicide detective to get off the phone. Emmett Lane was a short, bald black man with a stocky frame and fastidiously cropped facial hair. His crisp black suit made him seem out of place in Henderson’s dated house, with its nubby shag carpets and dark-paneled walls. There was something defeated about the place.

Lane stood in the corner of the living room, just a few feet from Henderson’s body, talking rapidly in a low voice into his cell phone. As he spoke, he lifted his chin in acknowledgement. He pulled a small black

notebook out of his jacket pocket and waved us over. He ended his call and dropped the phone into his other pocket as we approached.

“Emmett Lane,” he said, shaking both our hands and taking a quick glance at our credentials. “I’m with Trenton Homicide. Glad you guys could come. This is a weird one. I saw the advisory and thought it might be the same guy.”

“Glad you’re close enough that we could get here in time to see the scene,” TK said.

“Who found him?” I asked.

Lane looked at his notepad and back at me. “A customer. Henderson was an antiques dealer. He had a guy stopping by this morning to pick something up—something he had purchased online. Henderson didn’t answer the door, the guy took a peek through the front windows, thought he saw Henderson lying on the floor and called us.”

“No one else lives here?”

Lane shook his head. “I talked to one neighbor and one colleague. They both said he lives alone. No girlfriend—or boyfriend. He’s been divorced ten years. No kids. We did a door-to-door canvass of the street, but it didn’t turn up anything. But this is a busy street. An unusual vehicle wouldn’t stand out around here. Based on the coroner’s initial exam, he thinks Henderson’s been dead for twenty-four hours. We won’t know the cause of death till the ME gets him on the autopsy table, but his head is pretty banged up.”

I took a look around. The place was sparsely furnished—a couch, one end table, and a television on a small entertainment center. None of the furniture was overturned. The lamp on the end table hadn’t been knocked over. “He didn’t put up a fight,” I said.

Lane nodded. “He must have believed that the killer might let him go if he just did as he was told.”

“Mind if we look around?” TK said.

Lane’s phone vibrated, the buzzing sound audible. “Go ahead,” he said. “Just about everything’s been processed, we’re just waiting for the bus to come get him. I have to take this call.”

TK and I each donned a pair of latex gloves which he took from the pocket of his suit jacket. I knelt beside Boyd Henderson's body, gently probing the thin strap of Henderson's ill-fitting, red bra. It looked brand new.

TK knelt beside me and lifted Henderson's other arm, first checking for defensive wounds on the forearms. He sighed. "Nothing."

I studied Henderson's other forearm. "Nothing over here either."

TK pulled his latex gloves off with a snap and stuffed them into his pocket. He surveyed the room once more, his gaze landing on the words FOR YOU scrawled in bright red lipstick across Henderson's living room wall.

Gingerly, I moved around Henderson's body. His eyes were fixed on the ceiling, his last expression frozen on his face. It looked like he had begged for mercy. One side of his skull was cracked open, brain matter seeping into the carpet beneath him.

I had already seen the pinpoint petechiae in his eyes, which meant he had been suffocated, and like Georgette Paul, the blunt trauma to his skull had been inflicted postmortem.

"These wounds look the same as Paul's," I noted.

"Baseball bat again?" TK asked.

I nodded. I pointed toward a couch cushion lying above Henderson's head. "Looks like he used that to suffocate him."

I moved down toward Henderson's feet. Even though I wore nylons beneath my skirt, my knees felt naked against Henderson's carpet. Carefully, I slipped the red, four-inch-heeled pump from Henderson's right foot.

"Blisters," I said.

TK crouched beside me as I pointed out the red marks where the pump had dug into Henderson's skin. "They're fresh," he said. "Looks like the UNSUB made him walk the runway."

I walked over to the wall, which bore the killer's signature words. I used the tip of one latex covered finger to smudge the lipstick. It was just beginning to harden. Like the rest of the scene, it was still fresh.

I turned away from the killer's mural and took in the sterility of the

crime scene. One of the responding officers led a crime scene technician into the room. The tech began carving out the piece of drywall with the killer's message on it.

"Do you know if Henderson was a neat freak?" I asked Lane after he ended his second call.

He shrugged. "Well, the neighbor and the colleague described him as anal, so probably."

"What about women's clothing? You guys find any in the house?"

"Nope. We didn't find anything to indicate that Henderson was into cross-dressing."

Which meant that the UNSUB had brought the women's clothing to the scene. Lane motioned toward Henderson's body. "They'll send the clothes for processing when they get him down to the ME's office."

I nodded and thanked him. TK and I toured the rest of Boyd Henderson's home, which was neatly kept and unremarkable. There were no adornments in any of the rooms. Nothing to suggest a man lived and slept in the house. Even Henderson's bedroom had the temporary air of a hotel room. The only oddity was a stack of newspapers next to the bed, probably fifty of them. They were three days old. There was a newspaper from every major city within a hundred miles.

I thumbed through the newspapers, listening to TK's footsteps echoing in the hallway. He poked his head into the bedroom. "You ready?" he said.

Without turning, I said, "Yes."

CHAPTER

13

Kassidy

August 22nd

“I thought this guy would be on a rampage by now, but he’s gone completely silent,” TK said. He stood at the head of the conference room table, facing me and Talia. Behind him, crime scene photos of the For You Killer’s three victims lined the wall.

“He’s stalking his next victim,” I said.

Talia tapped her pen against the table. “We can’t know that for sure.”

“No, we can’t, but serial killers don’t just stop,” I replied.

“Not unless they’re in prison for something else or they die,” TK added.

I stood and rounded the table. TK made way for me as I moved toward a photo of Sorenson’s body laying atop a thick bed of garbage. I pointed to it. “He’s not dead. I’m telling you. He collected Sorenson’s trash for six weeks. This guy is a meticulous planner. He is still out there, and he’s going to kill again.”

Talia sighed. “Well, none of the police departments have any viable suspects. Now that more of the evidence has been processed, both Denver and Ardmore have asked us to revisit our profile, so let’s go through it again. What’ve you got?”

My left hip vibrated. Discreetly, I checked the number on the display of my cell phone—Jory for the third time that day. My chest tightened. I had tried to distance myself from him, to give him some time to rethink ending

his marriage, but he was not going away.

I cleared my throat, focusing on my present task. “Caucasian male between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five. He’s either self-employed or he has a job with a comfortable income that allows him to travel.”

“A sales job?”

“Could be,” TK said. “If he’s a good salesman and smooth talker, it might explain how he is able to spend so much time at each scene without there being any kind of struggle. Although Agent Bishop thinks that he uses a gun to control the scenes, and I agree.”

“He’s organized, methodical, controlled,” I continued. “Either that or he’s the luckiest murderer in the country. He leaves no prints. No neighbors hear or see anything. The bodies are posed, and there is minimal evidence of a struggle. Also, he brings what he needs to the scene—besides the pillow and couch cushion—and takes it with him when he is finished. Looks like his weapon of choice is a small aluminum baseball bat—even though the damage is inflicted postmortem. Both the ME in Denver and the ME in Trenton concur on that.”

“He’s single,” TK said. “A loner but one who can get along easily in social situations. To people who know him, he’s probably a nice guy who’s very quiet, keeps to himself, and can be a little obsessive about things.”

“He drives a newer car, probably a sedan. Nothing flashy,” I added. “He won’t want to draw attention to himself. Also, I don’t think we’re going to find a criminal record on this one. He may have committed crimes before, but he hasn’t been caught.”

Talia stopped taking notes and rubbed the cap of her pen over her bottom lip. “Why do you say that?” she asked.

“He’s obviously successful enough professionally to move around the country with ease and flexibility. A criminal record would have impeded that success,” I explained. “Plus these crimes show a level of sophistication that indicates someone who has probably committed crimes before. He’s clearly honed his art—you don’t get this good without practice committing crimes.”

“Good, good,” Talia said.

“He may have a history of mental illness, probably clinical depression. He has some college education,” TK said.

“Let’s talk about the sexual element of these crimes,” Talia said, motioning to the pictures of Boyd Henderson.

“I don’t think there is a sexual element,” I said.

Talia’s eyebrows rose. “Even with the women’s clothing?”

“None of the bodies showed evidence of sexual assault or abuse,” I pointed out. “No semen at any of the scenes. If we operate on the theory that these killings are about humiliation, we may be looking at revenge murders. Georgette Paul may have denied him a job. Henderson’s friends and colleagues described him as a misogynist. The women’s clothing emasculates him, puts him in his place, so to speak. Sorenson had a reputation for treating people like garbage, and the killer made him spend his last hours in a heap of garbage.”

“You don’t think these crimes were committed by a woman?” Talia asked.

“Hairs were found at the Sorenson and Henderson scenes. We just got the labs back on those today, and both hairs belonged to a Caucasian male—to the same male—so our UNSUB is definitely male. He may want it to look like a female killed the victims,” I replied.

Talia stood and walked slowly around the table. She tapped her pen against the photos of Paul and Henderson, the ones showing their pulpy skulls up close. “There was a case in Texas where a husband caught his wife in bed with another man. He killed them both. He stabbed his wife seventy-six times and the medical examiner counted fifty-five separate blows to the other man’s body, made with an aluminum baseball bat. The husband was angry.”

“You don’t say,” TK said.

Talia grimaced and tapped the photos once more. “If these are revenge killings, why don’t we see a greater degree of violence?”

“Maybe the murders aren’t revenge for something the victims did to him, maybe they’re revenge for something these victims did to someone else.

Maybe someone he loves. The ‘for you’ makes more sense in that context.”

TK nodded, his fingers rattling against his thighs, as they did when he was onto something. “I don’t think the UNSUB takes pleasure in killing. I mean he smothered both Paul and Henderson. Sorenson’s cause of death came back as arsenic poisoning. It was in the trash, and Sorenson ate it. These killings seem less about pleasure and more about retribution.”

Talia moved down the wall of photos. Her blonde hair swayed as she tipped her head to one side. “So the UNSUB writes ‘for you’ at each scene but why? His loved one will never see it—unless he photographs the scene before he leaves.”

“That’s why I think we should consider the possibility that there are two UNSUBS—in that case, the loved one might be there,” TK said. “The words are symbolic. The killer writes them as a show of his love for the other UNSUB.”

“Serials do a lot of things that only make sense to them or only have meaning to them. That’s why signatures are unique. If the words are symbolic to him, the loved one could be dead. He’s sending the message along with the dead into the afterlife,” I said.

Talia turned back to us. She planted her palms on the table, leaning into it. “Either way, I think if you find the person all three vics have in common, that will lead you to the killer.”

“So far we haven’t found any commonalities,” I said. “But I’ll call the locals and ask them for lists of every person the victims knew. We can cross-reference.”

She checked her cell phone display. Her brow furrowed. “Okay,” she said. “Get on it. I’ve got to get to another meeting.”

She breezed out of the room, leaving us alone with the For You Killer file, which had grown exponentially over the last six weeks, as more and more evidence poured in. I plopped into a chair with a heavy sigh. I used my foot to swivel the chair back and forth lightly, rocking myself. My mind drifted back to Jory, and the way he had kissed me goodbye before returning to Portland. It had been weeks, but I could still feel his mouth soft against mine.

“You look pale,” TK said as he began gathering up paperwork.

I smiled, trying to look sunnier than I felt. “This case is full of dead ends,” I said. “I don’t like it.”

“Yeah, well, I didn’t like the armed robberies in Seattle or the serial rapist in Boise. Maybe we should put out a memo to these assholes and tell them to do their dirty work on someone else’s turf.”

I laughed. “That’s funny,” I said. “If only it were that easy.”

CHAPTER

14

Wyatt

September 15th

Fat, gray clouds hung low in the Portland sky. Wyatt thought he'd had his fill of blistering sun on the East Coast, but the Oregon weather was making him glum. He stood at the window of his second-floor room at the Paramount Hotel, using his binoculars to spot Jory Ralston going into the Starbucks across the street. Ralston was fifteen minutes later than he had been the day before. He managed to find a parking spot right out front this time. He strode into the coffee shop with a confidence that gave Wyatt heartburn.

He'd known about Cassidy's affair with Jory Ralston since its inception, but Wyatt had never taken it seriously. Wyatt had made a point to find out everything there was to know about the man three years earlier when Cassidy had taken a prurient interest in him. There wasn't much to know. The guy worked ninety percent of the time. He was unhappily married to his high school sweetheart who was sleeping with their next-door neighbor.

As far as Wyatt could tell, Ralston and Cassidy rarely saw one another. He hoped Ralston's most recent visit would be another isolated tryst. Wyatt was thinking of ways he could slip some kind of poison into Ralston's morning coffee when the man emerged from Starbucks with a cup, in conversation with another patron—a man. They lingered near Ralston's car, laughing and exchanging what Wyatt imagined was witty banter. Finally, the other man patted Ralston on the back and walked off. Ralston got into his vehicle and pulled away.

Wyatt sighed. As much as he wanted to harm Ralston, he had vowed not to do anything that would hurt Cassidy. He would have to let the man go—until or unless he became a threat to her happiness. Besides that, Wyatt wasn't in Portland for Ralston. Not this trip. He checked the clock at his bedside. *Time to get to work.*

It took a half hour to get from the Paramount to Megan Wilkins' home. He parked a half block away, across the street. From where he was parked, he could see that Wilkins had pulled her mini-blinds up. He could see her moving around inside. His thoughts kept floating back to Cassidy with Jory Ralston.

Wyatt sighed and tried to focus on the task at hand. He shifted in the seat of his rental car so he could pull his prepaid Tracfone from his back pocket. He slouched down so that anyone passing by would not be able to see him immediately, then dialed Wilkins' home phone number. She picked up on the fourth ring.

“Hello?”

He waited.

“Hello?” she said again. He could see her standing in her living room, the cordless phone pressed to her ear. He exhaled as loudly as he could, his breath almost a moan.

“Who is this?” she asked, her tone brusque and dismissive, like an old schoolmarm chiding a prankster.

He spoke in a sing-song voice. “Meg-an,” he said, drawing out each syllable in her name.

Her breath caught. “Megan's not here,” she said, without conviction.

“I know it's you, bitch,” Wyatt snapped, switching to an angry tone.

“Leave me alone,” she said, her voice rising.

He saw her move to her front windows and glance up and down the street. He slid farther down in his seat, so his bent knees were jammed against the underside of the steering wheel. Next he whispered, “I'm watching you, Megan. I'm always watching you.”

He heard a gasp and then, “Leave me alone!” He peeked out the car window to see her mini-blinds falling. She had difficulty with one, yanking the slats until they bowed in the middle. He heard her labored breath and the sound of her struggling to close them. Finally, a *thwack* as the last set fell down onto her windowsill.

He started breathing heavily, feigning sounds of exertion, then pleasure. “Megan,” he groaned.

She made a sound like a dog makes when you step on its paw. But she didn’t hang up. She never did. No matter what he said to her or how many times he called, she stayed on the line. *Fucking idiot.*

He gave one final, drawn-out moan then hung up on her. He waited five minutes and called again. This time he hung up as soon as she said hello.

She emerged from her home twenty minutes later, looking pale and drawn, and shooting glances all around her. A jogger ran past her porch, and Megan jumped, one hand flying to her chest. She turned back toward her door to lock it. Her hands shook. From where he sat, he could hear the clatter of her keys. She dropped them twice before completing the task.

Wyatt noticed the tremor in her shoulders as she reached the sidewalk, headed toward the diner where she waited tables. It was only a few blocks away. Her blonde hair was pulled back in a sloppy bun. She wore all black. Her clothes were tight and her thick middle strained against her shirt. She carried her waitress apron in one hand. A heavy coating of make-up caked in the premature wrinkles on her face. She was his age—Kassidy’s age—but she looked much older.

She had once lived in his hometown, and as a freshman in high school, she had made the Bishop girls’ lives absolute hell. As a teenager, Wilkins’ loneliness and desperate need for attention had made her an insufferable bully. The behaviors she’d exhibited as a fourteen-year-old, which drove her friends away, had succeeded no better in her marriage, chasing her husband away after only a few years. Divorced for twelve years now, Wilkins had no meaningful contact with other human beings other than at her job.

He watched her slip out of sight. Twenty minutes later, her teenage daughter came home. *Like clockwork.* The two Wilkins women deviated little

from their routine, which worked out well for Wyatt. As he waited for her to let out their cat, a fat, gray tabby, he reached into a bag on the passenger seat and pulled out a can of wet cat food. *Gourmet*, the can read.

“It will be gourmet, all right,” he muttered as he peeled the lid back, wrinkling his nose at the rancid smell. He spread some arsenic atop the brown mush. The cat never seemed to go very far. In fact, like its owners, it kept mostly to a routine. It would be sauntering past Wyatt’s vehicle in a matter of moments. Wyatt opened his car door and dropped the open can onto the sidewalk. He waited until the cat had scarfed down half its contents before driving over to the diner.

He parked in the back corner of the parking lot, where he was less likely to be noticed, and changed his clothes in the car, donning the persona he had created just for Megan Wilkins in the last several weeks. A dirty T-shirt covered in sheetrock dust and a pair of painter’s pants. A Portland Trailblazers hat topped off the ensemble.

She greeted him with a wide smile. “You’re back,” she exclaimed.

He smiled at her, the kind of smile women loved. The kind of smile that made a woman feel like she was the only person in the room. It had taken him a long time to perfect it. The trick was to show some teeth and let the smile reach your eyes. Let your eyes linger on them, and act like you’re looking at something you’ve been craving. The flush crawling from Wilkins’ collar to the roots of her hair told him that it worked.

“Hi, Megan,” he said softly, with a faint Southern accent. “How’ve you been?”

He sat on a swivel stool at the counter. Almost instantaneously, she pushed a steaming cup of coffee toward him, leaning over the counter, her ample breasts resting on it. “I’m so glad to see you,” she said conspiratorially. She looked around to see if any of the other patrons were listening. “I’m not doing so good, truth be told. It sure is good to see a friendly face, though.”

Wyatt let his smile transform into a look of intense concern. “You getting more of those calls?”

She pressed a palm over her heart. For a split second, she looked as

though she might cry. “I got one today. Just before work. It was just awful. He said he was watching me.”

“You really should call the police,” Wyatt said.

She looked away, fingering the tops of the sugar packets that sat between them. “And say what? He didn’t exactly threaten me. He just said he was watching me.”

Wyatt poured some creamer into his coffee and stirred it. “Have you gotten anymore . . . gifts?”

Wilkins laughed drily. “You mean dead flowers on my front door step? Yeah, twice last week. In a paper bag, no less.”

“Did you call the police for that?”

She shook her head. “What for? There’s nothing they can do.” She caught a glare from one of the other waitresses and straightened up quickly. When she smiled, it looked forced. “You want the usual? Cheeseburger, medium well, with a cup of soup instead of fries?”

Wyatt smiled back at her. “You got it. Thanks, Megan.”

She bustled about, waiting on other customers, occasionally returning to him to chat him up. She asked a lot of questions about his fake job as a painting contractor, his fake divorce, and his fake teenaged daughter. To her, his name was Dylan, and he had moved to Portland from Alabama two months earlier. He tried to keep it simple so that he wouldn’t slip up in subsequent conversations. Then again, he wouldn’t be keeping up this ruse much longer.

Megan Wilkins’ day of reckoning was fast approaching.

CHAPTER

15

Kassidy

September 28th-29th

The nausea came on quickly. I knew in an instant that I would never make it to the bathroom in time. In that moment, the distance from my office to the ladies' room at the end of the hall seemed impossibly long. I bent over the small trash can beside my desk and vomited. When my cell phone rang I answered it without thinking.

“Bishop,” I croaked.

“Kass?”

The sound of Jory's voice sent my stomach into a tailspin. I bent over the trash can again in case there was anything left of my lunch waiting to come up.

“Kass?” he said again.

I squeezed my eyes shut. Sweat, cool and slick, gathered along my spine. In the last month, we'd had a handful of conversations which basically consisted of me telling him that I was scared of having a real relationship with him, and him assuring me that he would never hurt me. We were going in circles. Today I just didn't have the energy to talk to him.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“Fine,” I lied. But I'd been sick on and off for almost a month. It was just like this—the nausea was abrupt and violent. One minute I was fine, and the next I was vomiting in the nearest toilet or trash can. If it continued much

longer, I'd be forced to take the pregnancy test I was desperately avoiding.

I was so worried I would vomit while I was in front of people. It would be like the eighth grade all over again. I'd gotten sick and thrown up in my classroom—right in front of everyone. My teacher, who was mean to begin with and seemed to hate female students, was less than sympathetic. It took months to live that down.

“You don't sound fine,” Jory said.

“Jory,” I said, wiping my mouth with the sleeve of my shirt. “I can't talk right now. I have a lot of work to do.”

“We need to talk,” he said.

“I asked you to reconsider moving here, being with me. I told you that I have reservations about us jumping into a relationship together. Look, I can't discuss this right now—”

“Kass, I've filed for divorce. We've both had time to think. I haven't changed my mind. I want to start looking for a job out there. I need to know where we stand.”

TK appeared in my doorway, and my whole body went loose with relief. I smiled at him. “I really have to go now,” I said into the phone. “My colleague is here.”

I heard a frustrated sigh. Then, “I'm not going away, Kass. Call me.”

He hung up. I put my phone on vibrate and tucked it into the case that was clipped to my waist. TK raised an eyebrow. “Throwing up again, huh?”

I stood and gathered the trash bag filled with my vomit. I tied it in a knot, sealing it up. “I'm fine,” I said. I fished in my purse for a handful of mints and sipped from the bottled water on my desk.

TK crossed his arms across his chest. “You still haven't taken a pregnancy test, have you?”

I glared at him. He laughed. “I'll take that as a no. Bishop, it's almost seven o'clock at night. Go home, take a pregnancy test.”

“But I—” I opened my mouth to speak, but TK held up a palm to silence me.

“Go home,” he said. “Now.”



I picked up six pregnancy tests. At home, all three dogs stood in the bathroom doorway, their furry little brows knit with concern. I stood in front of the sink, looking at the pale-faced woman in the mirror. She had dark circles under her eyes. She looked terrified.

Was this how Lexie had felt?

My sister had gotten pregnant in our sophomore year of college. I had been with her when she took the home pregnancy test.

I breathed deeply, pushing the air down into my abdomen. Somewhere, deep in my belly might be a little life. A living, breathing product of mine and Jory’s poor moral choices, created with love. No matter how many times I denied Jory, no matter how many times I pushed him away or how many doubts I had, I did love him.

“Oh my God,” I moaned.

Pugsley yipped. I looked at my dogs who remained baffled by my obvious turmoil.

“It’s okay,” I assured them, even though every single cell in my being screamed that it wasn’t.

I tried not to let my mind venture any further than the task at hand. I’d have to make some choices, though none as difficult as Lexie had had to make.

I had a memory of her collapsing onto her bed, burying her face into the pillow and sobbing. I felt cold. I closed the door to our dorm room. I sat on the side of the bed and waited.

After fifteen minutes or so, the sobs lessened into hiccups and an occasional gasp in lieu of a breath. She turned over and looked at me. Her long brown hair formed a silky fan over the tear-stained pillow. The rims of her eyelids were red.

“What do I do?” she whispered hoarsely.

“What do you want to do, Lex?”

Her body shook with a deep pang of grief. “I can’t,” she said. “I can’t have this baby.”

“You know mom and dad won’t say anything. I mean they might be a little pissed at first, but you’d have their support,” I said.

She shook her head, swishing her brown hair across the pillow case. One renegade lock came loose and drifted downward toward her shoulder. “It’s not that,” she said.

I felt a little creak inside, like a door opening. Maybe it was the door that opened up between us, allowing us every so often to see and know the things the other did. “Oh no, Lexie,” I said.

She sat up and gripped my arm, fingers digging into my tricep. “I know it was wrong. I know it was. I won’t ever do anything like that again. He never talked about his wife, and I just never thought of asking. He doesn’t wear a wedding ring. I don’t know why I didn’t think of it—he’s so much older than me. I was just so crazy about him. Kass, I promise I won’t do anything like this again, but please don’t let me go through this alone.”

“It’s okay,” I mumbled. “I’m not going anywhere. But who? Who is he?”

She loosened her grip on my arm and drew her upper body back. She dipped her head and looked up at me through a curtain of hair that matched mine exactly. “Professor Garrity,” she said softly.

“Wow,” was all I could say.

I’d known she was seeing someone since the spring semester of our freshman year, but I hadn’t known who and I didn’t ask. I figured if Lexie wanted to talk about it, she would come to me. In a small sense, I could not blame her. Almost every girl on campus who’d been in one of Garrity’s classes had a crush on him. He was probably fifteen years older than we were, but he had a smile that reduced young women to giggles and a swagger that brought on hot flashes.

“Did you tell him?” I asked. “I mean before you took the test just now—did you tell him you thought you were pregnant?”

She nodded.

“What did he say?” I asked softly.

She didn’t look at me. “He said he’d pay for it if I had an abortion. He said really that was the only option for us.” She laughed harshly. “Us. Please. He means himself. It would ruin his career he said. He’d get fired, and his marriage would be destroyed. His whole life. He said maybe I couldn’t understand because I was only nineteen, but that it makes no sense to let this one thing ruin everything he worked for when we could stop it.”

Her face was stiff, her voice a lattice work of bitterness and grief.

“What a prick,” I said.

She laughed a little. I squeezed her hand. “You should ruin his career just for saying that,” I added.

“I know. Boy, would I love to.”

Here I was, seventeen years later, going through the same thing, only I faced it alone. I ached for Lexie in that moment. I thought of calling Linnea. I had already told her about Jory’s visit when we last spoke on the phone. I had left out the part about possibly being pregnant. I decided not to call her.

In the quiet solitude of my bathroom, with three canines looking on, I took all six of the pregnancy tests. I lined them up on the sink and waited. Three of them had already shown results when my doorbell chimed. The dogs erupted into a chorus of barks. I followed the mad flurry of dog paws down to the foyer—at once hoping and terrified that Jory would once again be on the other side of the door. But it wasn’t him.

Linnea Deeds stood outside my front door. As she moved inside, Rocky and Smalls stood on their hind legs, pawing at her chest and shoulders, almost reaching the length of her five-foot-ten frame. She scratched between their ears, talking softly and smiling.

She moved past them and embraced me. As I clasped my arms around her, I felt the hard sinew of muscle beneath her tattered jacket. “You look like a hoodlum,” I said when she released me.

She laughed. She flicked one of her many long braids and put a hand on her hip. She looked me up and down, pretending to appraise me haughtily. “Yeah? You look like a Fed.”

I laughed. Linnea strode past me in her torn jeans. I followed her into the kitchen. “You undercover?” I asked. Linnea worked for the DEA.

Her reply floated out from behind my refrigerator door. “Mmm-hmm.”

I heard her shuffling the contents of the fridge around as she gathered the desired items. “Are you a pothead or a coke whore?”

With a pile of food in her arms, she joined me at the table. She grinned. “Honey, nobody cares about weed and coke no more. Don’t you Feds know anything? It’s meth, baby. Meth.”

I smiled watching her slap together a hefty and largely unappetizing sandwich as only Linnea could. When she took her first bite, a third of its contents fell onto the table, scattering amongst the open packages of meat, cheese, vegetables, and open containers of condiments.

Finally, she plopped into a chair across from me. She pushed a glob of food into one cheek and talked around it, “I saw Dale outside. How’s his dad?”

“The Alzheimer’s is getting worse, but the nursing home takes good care of him. Dale finally got him into a place with a specialized Alzheimer’s unit,” I said. “It’s not too far from here.”

Linnea nodded. “I brought him a print of New York City to add to his collection of cityscapes. He was very pleased. I see he’s just as watchful as ever.”

“Yeah, I know. He actually came over when Jory was here.”

Linnea rolled her big brown eyes. “I bet that went over well.”

I sighed. “Yeah. About five seconds later we were doing it right here on this table.”

“All three of you?”

Linnea ducked as I threw a piece of lettuce at her. “Very funny,” I said.

She winked at me. “Ahh, Detective Ralston. Nothing like a little old-fashioned jealousy to light a fire under his ass.”

“Yeah. It was a fire all right,” I said wryly, but my voice came out weaker than I intended. I glanced briefly at my lap, avoiding Linnea’s gaze.

She put her half-eaten sandwich on the table and leaned across it, peering into my face. She wrinkled her brow. “What’s going on? You’re freaked out about something. I can tell. Don’t say nothing because I know there’s something.”

I looked away from her. The dogs lay in various poses on the kitchen floor. All I saw was Jory, his smile like a newly minted coin, sending a thrill up my back and making my stomach plummet at the same time. I remembered the way his breath felt stirring the hair at the back of my neck. His hands warm and dry on my hips. Then the baby growing inside me.

“I’m pregnant,” I said.

She went rigid, her brown eyes wide as saucers. Her voice was as high-pitched as I’d ever heard it. “What?”

I led her upstairs to the bathroom where all six pregnancy tests announced what I knew but didn’t want to face.

Linnea picked them up one by one, studying the plus signs and double lines that marked each one positive. She whistled under her breath. “Whoa, Momma,” she said.

“Don’t,” I said.

“You’ll be a momma soon,” she pointed out. “You have to tell Jory.”

I wanted to tell her to shut up but instead I said, “I know.”

“You could have a life with him, you know.” She waited for a response, but I gave none. I turned away from her and sat on the edge of the tub. “Kassidy, think about what Lexie would have wanted for you.”

I groaned again. Linnea came over and stood in front of me. She looked at me intently. “You have to tell him now.”

“I haven’t even adjusted to the fact that I’m going to be a mother,” I said.

Linnea smiled and sat beside me, wrapping an arm around my shoulders. She pulled me in, jostling me against her side. “You’ll make a great mom,” she murmured.

Tears burned the backs of my eyes. “No,” I said. “Lexie would have

made an excellent mother. Not me.”

I had never really developed the nurturing quality that had come naturally to Lexie. It always felt like that part of me had stunted in its growth, remaining half-formed and indistinct. Lexie had always had it.

“She was a sucker for wounded creatures, you know. One time we found our outside cat eating a baby rabbit and she tried to save the rabbit. She was devastated when it died. Another time, this baby sparrow fell from its nest in the tree behind our house. It couldn’t fly yet and neither of us could catch it to put it back in the nest. Lexie insisted on holding vigil over it all night long to make sure no other animals killed it. She stayed up all night with her flashlight while I slept in a sleeping bag. I even snored.”

Linnea laughed. She gave me another squeeze. “Just because you don’t save baby animals doesn’t mean you won’t be a good mother.”

I shook my head. “But she would have been amazing,” I mumbled.

“You’re thinking about the abortion, aren’t you?” Linnea said.

I nodded. It seemed like the world had somehow sprained its axis, throwing everything into reverse. Lexie had not chosen to have her baby, even though she would have been a natural mother. I was the one having a baby now even though I hadn’t chosen to become pregnant. The idea of motherhood was loose and slippery, refusing to solidify in my head.

I was always the ornery one—less sensitive and quicker to anger than Lexie—rougher than my twin.

The day Lexie had her abortion, I accompanied her in and out of the clinic. On the way out, I held her arm. She was pale, unsteady, and slightly groggy from the anesthetic.

Neither of us saw it coming.

A rock flew through the air and thumped against Lexie’s skull, just over her right eye. It knocked her down.

As the impact jarred her from my grip, I spotted the protester responsible. His arm froze in an arc over his head. He quickly hid his glee when our eyes locked. I was on top of him in seconds, kicking and punching.

“You son of a bitch,” I hollered as Lexie sat on the sidewalk dazed, blood trickling out of the gash over her eye.

When the police arrived they asked if Lexie wanted to press charges. She had received five stitches over her eye. She looked at me. The silent flood of communication between us lasted only seconds.

“Yes,” she told the officer. When he asked her name, she said, “Kassidy. Kassidy Bishop.”

CHAPTER

16

Wyatt

September 30th

Wyatt waited in his rental car across the street from Megan Wilkins' home. He knew she'd finished her shift at the diner at five because he'd had an early dinner there after flying into Portland that afternoon, but she hadn't come home yet. He tried to concentrate on the task ahead, but his mind kept coming back to the positive pregnancy tests he had found in Cassidy's trash that morning. He had had no immediate reaction to Cassidy's pregnancy other than puzzlement. One of her college friends was visiting—perhaps they belonged to her. Wyatt had tried to convince himself of that, but he knew that Cassidy had missed her period the last two months because he hadn't found the usual array of feminine hygiene products in her trash at the appointed time. It made perfect sense in light of all the vomit he'd been finding in her garbage. He knew that Jory Ralston was the father. Ralston was the only man Wyatt had seen her with in years.

Kassidy Bishop had had lovers, but she hadn't had any serious relationships with men. The closest she had ever come was the boyfriend she'd had during her freshman year of college. That relationship had lasted nearly a year and ended shortly after a man attacked Cassidy as she left a women's clinic.

Wyatt had been wrong about Ralston's most recent visit being an isolated event. Terribly wrong.

Nausea assailed him. He was about to open the car door and vomit on

the sidewalk when he noticed Wilkins in his side mirror, walking toward his vehicle. He threw himself across the seats, facedown, hoping she wouldn't look into the car as she passed. His heart pounded so loudly in his ears, he had to concentrate very hard to hear her footsteps as she went by. She didn't slow down, and when he peeked over his dash, he saw her unlocking her front door and slipping inside.

He closed his eyes and sighed with relief. He had to pull himself together. He had important work to do, and he couldn't afford to fuck it up. He would simply have to put the pregnancy tests out of his mind for the time being.

By 5:30, Wyatt had calmed down. He mentally reviewed his plan again and called Wilkins from his Tracfone. As usual, she listened instead of hanging up. "I'm watching you, Megan," he whispered.

"Who is this? Why are you doing this to me?" she cried.

"Because you're a bitch. A mean, nasty, heartless bitch. I'm coming for you, Megan."

Her voice cracked. "I'm calling the police."

He laughed, long and loud. "No, you're not. You never call them. Now it's too late. I'm coming for you, and I'm going to kill you. But first, I'm going to take my time. I'm going to make you beg for mercy."

The words flowed easily from his mouth as if they had been pre-recorded. He was barely cognizant of what he said; he was more intent on listening to Wilkins' breath quicken with each word. He could just imagine her pallor and the hand on her chest.

He knew she'd been having chest pains since he'd begun his harassment campaign. He finished that call and waited twenty minutes before calling again and hanging up on her. Then he went immediately to her door. As he expected, Wilkins offered no challenge. For a woman who complained of being terrified, she took no precautions. She opened her front door immediately without looking out the window or calling out first to find out who was there. It almost took all the fun out of the previous months during which Wyatt had carefully and methodically terrorized her.

She looked surprised to see him, but she recognized him immediately. Her hand still lay over her heart. “Dylan, hi,” she said with a nervous smile.

Wyatt smiled the smile of the innocuous guy whose coffee she’d been pouring for the last two months. He didn’t even have to say anything.

“Come on in,” she said, moving out of the doorway to admit him. He moved past her into the darkened living room. “What are you doing here?” she asked, closing the door behind her.

Wyatt could not contain his annoyance. Although she made his job easy, he was astounded by her stupidity. He wondered fleetingly if she was really that dumb, or if she secretly enjoyed the anonymous harassment. What had his mother said to him and his sister when they had tried to tell their parents about the horrible things that his grandfather had done to them? She had accused them of lying to get attention. *Even bad attention is better than no attention at all.* Did Wilkins really welcome the threats? Was being the object of a stalker better than nothing at all?

He turned to her and the change in his demeanor registered on her face instantly. She backed up two steps. “Now why did you let me in?” he asked.

She stumbled a little, backing up and reaching for the door knob. Wyatt pulled his Smith & Wesson from the rear of his waistband and sighed heavily. He waved the barrel of the gun in the direction of her couch. “Forget it, forget it. It’s too late. You fucked up. You let me in, and now I’m afraid I will have to kill you just for being stupid.”

Wilkins started to tremble. Her eyes were very wide.

“Sit on the couch,” Wyatt said.

She moved to the couch, her body staying as far from his as she could manage, pressed and sliding along the furniture and walls.

“What is the matter with you?” Wyatt asked once she was seated on the couch.

She didn’t answer. She just stared at him, her eyes glued to him, moving back and forth across the room. There was a slight tremor in her chin.

“I have been harassing you for weeks. Weeks. I killed your fucking cat. I told you I was going to kill you. You had no idea who I was, and yet after

all that, I knock on the door and you let me in without even asking a question. You don't know me—”

She stuttered. “But I—I—the diner—”

He waved the gun at her in dismissal and shook his head again. “So you saw me at the diner a few times. So you chatted with me. You still have no idea who I am or what I am capable of. Why would you just let me into your home? Do you like it, Megan? Do you like being threatened?”

She swallowed. She looked at him as if she expected him to answer his own questions. He stopped pacing and stared at her. Her brown eyes were blank—even her fear had a vacuous quality to it. He waited for some response from her—a question, the ubiquitous *why* that punctuated his work, some pleading, anything—but there was nothing. She kept looking at him almost as if she were watching a film and she was watching only to see what came next. As if she had no influence on the events, no part in them. She was just an audience who went willingly wherever the film asked her to venture. Irritation rose like heartburn and settled in Wyatt's diaphragm.

“Just forget it. Never mind. Let's just get this over with.” He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out the photo of Cassidy. He handed it to Wilkins. The photo shook in her hands. She studied it for a long time.

Wyatt began, “I'm going to give you a chance to save—”

Before he could finish, Wilkins lurched up from the couch and sprinted toward the kitchen, nearly knocking Wyatt off balance. He caught her just as she reached the doorway. He wrapped her in a bear hug from behind. In spite of her violent struggles, he wrestled her to the floor easily. Her frame felt insubstantial and frail. He straddled her, holding both her wrists in one of his hands. He pointed the gun at her head.

She kept trying to wrench her hands free. Her legs bucked uselessly. “Stop,” Wyatt commanded. He repeated the command three times, but she seemed not to hear him. He glanced behind them and saw the photo had fallen face down on her living room carpet. He looked back at Wilkins. Her face was ash gray. Her body struggled, but her eyes stared at the barrel of the gun until they crossed. She spoke to it as if had attacked her independent of its owner. “Please don't hurt me,” she said again and again. Her voice started

out a whimper but rose with each intonation until her words were a screech, like nails on a chalkboard. He could not risk her neighbors hearing Wilkins' cries. Wyatt wanted to hit her to make it stop. Instead, he tossed the gun aside and put his palm over her mouth and nose.

Then suddenly he was sitting on her couch, the gun dangling from his hand. Wilkins' body lay a few feet away on the floor. The rank smell of feces singed his nostrils. He stood up abruptly. Had he suffocated her? Strangled her? He knelt down beside her. Her face was badly bruised. Had he beaten her to death or after her death like the others? On her shirt, the words were smeared in shit. FOR YOU. He looked at his hands but they were clean. In his jacket pocket he found a couple of balled-up latex gloves which had been turned inside out. It only took a sniff to know that he had used them to smear the shit onto Wilkins' shirt. He always carried latex gloves with him, but where had he gotten the shit from?

Wyatt's hands shook. Fumbling, he put the Smith & Wesson in the back of his waistband and sat beside Wilkins' body. He glanced around the room until his gaze landed on the clock hanging on the dining room wall. It said 7:45 p.m. He shook his head. That couldn't be right. He'd arrived at her house at 5:45 p.m. It couldn't have been longer than five minutes before she'd bolted for the kitchen. But he'd been there for two hours. Wilkins was dead, and Wyatt's message had already been written at the scene.

He ran out to the backyard and checked behind her shed where he had hidden a small aluminum baseball bat. It was his blunt object of choice. He usually bought one at a sporting goods store when he arrived in town—it had to be small enough to fit into a duffel bag or large backpack. After each murder, he cleaned the bat thoroughly and then dropped it off at the nearest good will. The bat he had bought for Wilkins was still there. He had put it in Wilkins' backyard that day while she was finishing her shift at the diner. He hadn't even used it. He went back inside.

“Oh shit,” he mumbled.

His heart pounded faster and faster until the sound of it thundering filled his ears. The smell of feces made him nauseous. He searched the downstairs for any evidence he may have left behind. He couldn't think straight.

“No,” he said aloud. “Not again.”

But there was no denying it. He was losing time.

CHAPTER

17

Kassidy

October 1st-2nd

I worked late into the afternoon the next day, trying to catch up on my caseload and not think about how drastically my life was about to change or about how I would tell Jory that I was carrying his baby.

When my office phone rang, I snatched up the receiver. “Bishop.”

“What time do you get done?” Linnea answered.

I glanced at the clock. It was almost six o’clock. “Very soon,” I said.

“I’m lonely,” Linnea said.

“What about Dale?”

“Dale’s not around. He flew to Boston yesterday after you left for work. Business trip, he said.” A heavy sigh. “I already took your dogs for a walk, and I lay on your couch all day watching talk shows, which I think actually made me dumber. Let’s have dinner.”

“Okay. You leaving tomorrow?”

“Nine a.m. flight. Wish I could stay for the weekend, but I can come back later, Momma.”

“I don’t need a babysitter.”

“No, but you will need an ultrasound, and I am volunteering to be your baby’s daddy for that particular event,” she said. “You know, since you probably won’t have worked up the nerve to tell Jory by then.”

“Volunteering?”

“Okay, I’m forcing myself on you. When did your OB/GYN say you could get one?”

“Two months from now,” I said. “I made the appointment this morning before I left their office. November 30th, I think.”

“Okay,” Linnea concurred. “I’ve marked it on my calendar.”

I laughed. I was about to tell her she didn’t need to make the trip when TK appeared in my doorway. His face was a grimace. “Hold on,” I said. I covered the receiver with one hand.

“The For You Killer is back. If we leave now, we can be there by late tonight,” he said.

“The For You Killer?” I asked. “Where?”

“Portland,” TK said. “We’re due at the airport in an hour.”

He disappeared. I uncovered the receiver and spoke into it. “Linnea? Bad news.”



We had a long layover in Chicago. Our connecting flight was canceled, and we ended up spending the night at the airport waiting for an a.m. flight. With Dale away and Linnea leaving, TK’s wife, Diane, had graciously agreed to look after my dogs. TK snoozed in a chair beside me while I fielded phone calls from Linnea and Jory. Linnea called to make sure I planned on telling Jory my big news once I arrived in Portland. Jory called to discuss the latest For You murder since he was the primary investigator. The next morning TK and I checked into our hotel and went immediately to the scene.

Remy Caldwell met us there. Remy had twenty years on Jory and had been Jory’s partner in homicide for as long as I’d known them. He had also known about our affair and made it clear to both of us that he didn’t approve. Remy and I had endured our fair share of uncomfortable silences together, and today looked like it would be no different. Although he gave me a curt nod, he shook TK’s hand, but not mine. When he spoke, it was to TK, not me. As he led us through the front door, a technician vacuumed the carpet—where Wilkins’ body had lain—with a handheld unit designed to pick up any

extraneous fibers or hairs.

Megan Wilkins' body had been removed from her two-story Portland home the day before. The crime scene remained largely intact except for items that had been bagged and removed by the crime scene technicians for analysis. In spite of the sunlight streaming down on Portland, Megan Wilkins' house was dark inside. The mini-blinds were up, the living room curtains pulled back to let in the day, but little light filtered through.

I stopped in the living room, wrinkling my nose. "I smell shit," I said.

Remy stood by the front door nodding. "Yeah, that's what he used to spell out his little signature. It was on the vic's shirt, but we can't seem to get the smell out of the place."

TK shook his head and walked past me into the kitchen, then back to the living room. "Take us through it again, Detective," he said.

Remy sighed and clasped his hands in front of him. He kept checking his cell phone and looking toward the door, making it clear that there were about a million places he would rather be than revisiting this crime scene. "Megan Wilkins, thirty-seven years old, divorced with two kids. One is seventeen, he lives with his father in Astoria. Her fourteen-year-old daughter lives here with her. Wilkins was a waitress at a diner about five blocks from here. Her daughter was at a friend's house working on a school project. She says she saw her mother Thursday morning before she went to school. Came home about 10:30 Thursday night and found her here in the living room, bludgeoned with the words 'for you' written in feces across her shirt. We're not sure where the feces came from. We've sent samples to the lab, but it will take a while to get any results."

"The daughter also says her mother was being harassed recently," Remy added.

"By whom?" I asked.

Remy shrugged. "Don't know. Apparently even Wilkins didn't know who it was, but the daughter says that someone has been fucking with her—the daughter's description—for at least the last six weeks or so."

"Fucking with her how?" TK asked.

“Prank phone calls, sending dead flowers to the house, slashing her tires, that kind of thing. The daughter also claims that whoever it was poisoned their cat.”

“Any proof of that?” I asked.

“The vet confirmed that the cat was definitely poisoned, but there’s no way to prove who did it. “

“You might get somewhere with the cat,” TK pointed out. “If you can determine what kind of poison it was, where someone could have gotten it, how it was dispensed—”

“It was arsenic,” I said flatly.

Remy’s head shot up, and for the first time that day, he looked directly at me. “How did you know that?”

I looked from him to TK. “Sorenson,” I said. “He poisoned him using arsenic. You won’t get anywhere with that. It’s too common, and clearly our UNSUB is bi-coastal. Was the cat an inside cat or outside cat?”

“Daughter says mostly inside but that she let it out once a day for a few hours,” Remy answered.

“There you go. He’s stalking the vic beforehand, getting an idea of her routine. It was probably pretty damn easy to poison her cat.”

“The harassment, the stalking—that’s new,” TK said.

“Yeah, but it’s unique to Megan Wilkins,” I pointed out. “This UNSUB had a reason for harassing her. He deprived Georgette Paul, emasculated Boyd Henderson, got Sorenson to eat trash, and with this one, he harassed her beforehand. The things he does to his vics before he kills them is more important than the actual killing. Obviously, he has a reason for it. Those are the activities we need to be focusing on.”

TK nodded, and I followed him past Remy out onto the sidewalk. Remy watched us from the Wilkins’ doorway. TK and I stood at the end of her walkway, looking up and down the street.

I motioned to the other side. “Residential but with enough activity for someone to go unnoticed if he wanted to spy or leave something at the

house.”

TK nodded. Two-story, brick twin homes lined Megan Wilkins’ block on either side. They all had porches and walkways, short flights of steps leading to the front doors. Alleys on either side. The street was two way so there was parking on both sides. It was busy even in the middle of the day. People walked up and down the block, some with their dogs. Cars passed continuously in either direction. While we stood there, a UPS truck stopped about five houses down and the driver jumped out to deliver a package. Large trees lined the edges of the sidewalk. Anyone inconspicuous enough could linger here without raising any alarms, particularly if they acted like they were supposed to be here.

“See if the locals canvassed the street—someone might have seen this guy and just not know it,” I suggested.

“That was one of the first things we did, Agent Bishop.” It was Jory’s voice. I heard it seconds before I saw him crossing the street. Sunglasses obscured his eyes, but his sexy, megawatt smile was firmly in place. My breath suddenly left my body.

He shook TK’s hand and addressed both of us with his back toward me. “We have a couple of people who think they saw a man lurking around in an older, light blue Honda Civic the day Wilkins was killed. One neighbor said she saw a man at Wilkins’ door around quarter to six, but she didn’t get a good look at his face, and she didn’t see him go inside. We’ve already arranged for composite sketches, but without more information, I’m not sure it will get us anywhere. We can’t prove this guy had anything to do with it.”

I opened my mouth to speak but staring at Jory’s back the words wouldn’t come out. TK spoke for me. “You can always run it on the news as a person of interest.”

Remy had come slowly down the walk when he saw Jory approach. “Yeah, but if this guy is the same guy and he’s all over the country, that’s not going to do any good,” he said. “I mean if he doesn’t live here . . .”

Jory nodded but said, “Yeah, but what else have we got to work with? We’ll run it as soon as we have a decent sketch. Tell the media we think he’s a witness, and we just need to ask him some questions.”

“I’d like to talk to the daughter,” TK said.

“Sure thing,” Remy said. “Her dad is bringing her into town today to meet with us.”

Jory slapped Remy lightly on the back. “Why don’t you take Agent Bennett over to the division now to meet them.” He motioned toward me. “We’ll meet you there later.”

Unblinking, Remy stared at Jory until the moment grew slightly awkward. Then he sighed and uttered a gruff, “Come on,” to TK under his breath. He stalked off with TK in tow.

I waited until they had driven off in Remy’s unmarked car before saying, “We need to talk.”

Jory grasped the back of my elbow and steered me across the street to his car. I let him usher me into the passenger seat. I watched him move around the front of the car, my heart teetering a little at the sight of him, at being able to look at him without censoring myself or worrying who would see me do it. He was clean shaven, his hair trimmed perfectly, his suit crisply pressed. He smiled at me again as he got into the car, that old boyish smile, the one that made my heart flutter at thirty-six. The one that brought to mind adolescent doodles with our names joined together in a heart.

We got three blocks from Megan Wilkins’ house and I said, “There’s something I need to tell you, but I think you should pull over.”

“Just a minute,” he said.

We rode in silence. I resisted the urge to wring my hands. He pulled up in front of the hotel where TK and I were staying. He took his sunglasses off and placed them on the dash. He reached for the door handle, but I put my hand on his forearm. Before I knew what was happening, I blurted out the news. “I’m pregnant.”

I expected shock or tension—some indication from him that this news was indeed a complication in his already convoluted situation. Instead, he looked like he had just won the lottery. I expelled a long breath that I felt like I’d been holding for three months. Grinning, Jory gripped my face and kissed me hard on the mouth. He pulled me toward him, trying to hold me, but in the

confines of the front seat of the car, it was awkward. He released me but kept one of my hands in his. “When are you due?” he asked.

“April 11th,” I said.

“So I have until April to get my affairs in order and move East. I’ll start making phone calls on Monday.”

“Jory—”

“I can’t believe it,” he said. He shook his head slowly. He couldn’t stop smiling. “I’m going to be a father!”

“Yes, you are.”

“I don’t want you to do this alone. I mean I don’t want you to do it without me.”

“I know.”

“I want to be a part of this, a part of your life.”

“I know that too. It’s just that this doesn’t change the fact that I have reservations about us jumping into this.”

He reached up and stroked my cheek. “Kass, we’re having a baby. This changes everything.”

I looked out the window, watching hotel guests come and go, wheeling suitcases of various sizes alongside or behind them. “In some ways, yes,” I conceded. “Jory, you have a life here—”

Gently, Jory turned my face toward his. “Kass, my life is with you and my child. Nothing else matters now. Listen, you have to give this a chance. You have to give us a chance. If not for me, then do it for our baby.”

To emphasize his point, he slid one hand over my abdomen. I groaned lightly and shook my head. “You cannot use this baby to smother all of my objections. I am still afraid.”

Jory laughed. “I’m not using the baby, although it does give me an advantage. I know you’re scared, but we love each other. I am not going to hurt you. I want to be with you. Now there is just one more reason for us to go for it, and it’s a pretty damn important one.”

I couldn't really argue with him. Although I had my doubts about whether or not our relationship would survive the long term, I would never deny Jory access to his own child. I wanted us to be a family.

Jory squeezed my hand. "Just let go. Take this risk. We'll figure the rest out as we go along."

I nodded, the motion jerky. I looked back out the window. We sat that way for a few minutes, me looking out the window, him looking at me, holding my hand.

Then he said, softly, "Come on. Let's go inside. We'll order room service."

CHAPTER

18

Wyatt

October 2nd

Wyatt was dreaming about blood when the sound of a car door slamming jolted him awake. He glanced at the hotel entrance. How long had he been out? He shifted in his seat and wiped a thin line of drool from his chin. It was hot inside the Honda. He turned the key to the start position and rolled the window down, sucking in the cool, moist air. He blinked, trying to rid his mind of the bloody images his dreams had dredged up.

He tapped his fingers on the steering wheel. He'd been there over an hour, but he had no way of telling how long he had been asleep. He was about to take a cruise around the parking lot to see if the black Ford Taurus was still there when Jory Ralston emerged from the hotel's entrance. The man walked at a brisk pace, his stride purposeful and confident. The sight of him made Wyatt's chest constrict. He felt as if a steel band were wrapped around his torso, slowly crushing his sternum.

Wyatt slipped on a pair of sunglasses and started the Honda. He was about to pull out when Ralston stopped abruptly and turned back toward the double-glass doors. The man smiled, his entire face lighting up. Gone was the severity in his demeanor. The hard line of his brow softened, and a dimple appeared in his right cheek.

Then Cassidy appeared, smiling, her face uncharacteristically flushed and unguarded. Wyatt clenched the steering wheel until his knuckles were white. They kissed—a long, deep, unapologetic kiss which drew stares from

passersby. Ralston cupped her cheeks and spoke to her. He was turned away from Wyatt so Wyatt could not read the man's lips. But he could clearly read her lips, and her words tightened the vise around Wyatt's chest.

"I love you," she said.

Wyatt leaned forward and opened his mouth, gulping air. There wasn't enough of it. He wanted to reach in front of him and grab big handfuls of air and stuff his face with it, but he could not even move.

When he looked up again, she was gone and so was the hotel. Wyatt was no longer in a parking lot. He was parallel parked curbside, watching Jory Ralston fill his tank at a gas station across the street.

"Shit," Wyatt muttered.

He looked for street signs. Disorientation made his head hurt. He had no memory of following Ralston—no memory of driving away from the hotel at all. He'd forgotten how disconcerting losing time could be. It had been years since he'd lost time that way. It was similar to when the beast woke and took over. In fact, the many psychologists who had examined, evaluated, and tested him so extensively when he was younger had had conflicting diagnoses. Some claimed he had multiple personality disorder and others said he merely suffered from dissociative fugues. Whichever it was, during the blackouts Wyatt forgot himself completely. He had no idea what transpired during the lost time, no memory of anything he may have said or done. The hours and sometimes days lost were black spots in his mind, dark and empty.

Wyatt blamed Jory Ralston for these latest instances, even though it was Wyatt who had grossly underestimated the seriousness of Cassidy's relationship with the man. Wyatt had not anticipated her falling in love with him, much less the two of them having a child together.

She had always been alone, and she was supposed to stay that way. She was alone the way he was—as if on some subconscious level she knew that she was his. That they were meant for one another. As if, subconsciously, she knew that no man could or would ever love her the way Wyatt did. His life's work was an homage to her. Maybe she didn't realize it, but it was as though, in the same way she wrapped broken glass in newspaper before placing it in her trash, she had foregone relationships with men because she already had

Wyatt.

It had been that way for nearly twenty years—the two of them living on opposing sides of a single reality. But always, she remained alone and by default, his.

But now there was Jory Ralston. Now there would be a child with wide-set, hazel eyes and a strong jaw—a child half Ralston’s and half Cassidy’s. The thought made Wyatt’s stomach burn.

Wyatt’s thoughts were focused so intently on the offspring that, in spite of the fact that he had been watching Jory Ralston pump gas into his Taurus, he did not realize that Ralston was striding directly toward him. He was already tugging at the door handle by the time Wyatt got his bearings. Luckily, Wyatt had locked the door. Ralston knocked on the window with his knuckles. “Hey, hey,” he said. He leaned down and peered into the car. “You,” he called. “Open up.”

Slowly, Wyatt rolled the window down and met Ralston’s eyes. Hatred rose like bile in his throat. He thought of Ralston touching her. They’d been alone in her hotel room for over an hour. He knew they’d been intimate. He tried to quell images of him touching her, kissing her naked body, pushing himself inside her. Wyatt felt sick again.

“Why are you following me?” Ralston asked. He didn’t wait for an answer. Something in his face changed. Ralston recognized him. “Hey, what are you doing here?”

“That’s not your concern,” Wyatt answered.

Ralston’s head was nearly in the car. “Are you spying on me? Are you spying on Cassidy?”

“Don’t say her name.” The words seemed to come from someone else. Wyatt almost looked in the backseat to see if there was someone there—someone else who had said the words. He looked away from Ralston, his face burning.

Ralston laughed. “You’re spying on her, you sick bastard.”

Wyatt looked back at the other man. “I’m looking out for her. I’m watching over her, which is more than I can say for you. You’re just going to

hurt her. She's been through enough.”

“Does she know you're here? Does she know you're ‘watching over’ her?”

“She doesn't need to know. That's not important.”

Ralston laughed again. “Yeah, sure. Whatever helps you sleep at night, you gutless fucking stalker. I'm telling her.”

Ralston turned and walked back to the other side of the street. Wyatt watched him get into the Taurus. Momentarily, Wyatt was transported back in time to a dorm room in Philadelphia. A face identical to Cassidy's looked at him with the same disgust Wyatt had just seen on Ralston's face. “You're pathetic,” she had said. “You're a pathetic stalker. You're afraid to talk to her—to really talk to her because you're afraid she'll reject you, and it will be over. As long as you avoid her, you'll never be rejected by her.”

Ralston pulled out of the gas station and turned North on Route 26. “Wait,” Wyatt muttered.

Then he was sitting on the edge of the bed in his hotel room, a glass of scotch in his right hand. He stood up and walked to the table where his laptop rested. He booted it up and checked the date and time. Four hours had passed since the confrontation with Jory Ralston across from the gas station. Wyatt looked around the room, looking for some clue as to what he'd done during that time.

Two wallets rested on the nightstand. One of them belonged to Wyatt Anderton. The other belonged to Jory Ralston.

CHAPTER

19

Kassidy

October 2nd

“We got a partial print.” I heard TK’s voice seconds before he entered my room through the door which connected mine to his. I froze when he walked in, the bed sheets bunched up in my arms. My face flushed.

He smiled. “Oh,” he said. “Detective Portland was here.”

I raised an eyebrow at him and started remaking the bed. “What did you say?”

He looked excited, like a kid who’d just gotten his first bike. His eyes were wide. He paced the room.

“A partial print,” TK said. “There was a partial print left at Megan Wilkins’ house. It doesn’t belong to her or her daughter. They’re running it through AFIS now.”

AFIS was actually IAFIS—Integrated Automatic Fingerprint Identification System—a national database of fingerprints maintained by the Bureau.

I shook my head. “I think the UNSUB is too slick. I don’t think he’ll be in AFIS.”

TK plopped into the chair across from the bed. “For a woman in love, you sure are pessimistic.”

I smiled in spite of myself. I thought of Jory and the afternoon we’d

spent together, which had ended in me chasing after him and confessing my love for him once and for all. Even now, hours later, the moment seemed surreal like it hadn't happened to me but to another woman. A woman who had given in, let go of her fear for one terrifying, reckless moment. The whole thing made me breathless just thinking about it.

"I'm realistic," I said. "A criminal record is not in this guy's profile. Whatever he did, he did without getting caught. That won't show up in AFIS."

TK tapped his long fingers on his knee. "Well then, here is something else unusual—the medical examiner's preliminary findings indicate that our UNSUB beat Wilkins before her death."

"Really?"

"Well, she wasn't beaten as badly as the other vics, but most of the trauma she sustained was inflicted before she died," TK said. "And it looks like he used his hands this time—not the baseball bat."

"This guy is all over the place," I said. "Did the ME say what the cause of death was?"

TK shook his head. "They were still working over the body when I left. Never could stomach the autopsies."

I plopped onto the bed and pulled out the room service menu. Jory and I had actually ordered room service, most of which I had devoured with little help from him, but I was hungry again. "Let's order some food, and you can tell me about the interview with Wilkins' daughter."

TK clapped his hands together. "Only if I get to hear about your *interview* with Detective Portland."

"Not a chance," I said.

"So it was X-rated. You're right. I don't want to hear the steamy stuff. Did you tell him about the baby?"

I couldn't stop the grin from spreading across my face. "I did."

TK's grin matched my own. "By the look on your face, I'm guessing it went pretty well. I'm happy for you, Bishop. Don't forget me when you're

picking out godparents.”

I laughed and tossed the menu at him. “Pick something. I have to pee.”

We spent the evening discussing the Wilkins file and arguing about what it meant to our profile, specifically about TK’s assertion that there were two killers. Thoughts of Jory floated to the surface of my mind again and again, making it hard to concentrate. He had said he would be back, although he didn’t say what time. It was after ten o’clock at night when the knock came. Remy Caldwell stood on the other side of the door, and I knew at once that something had gone horribly wrong. My chest felt impossibly tight. I couldn’t breathe.

He wasted no time. He stepped inside my hotel room where TK and I stood. His face was pale. He didn’t look at me. He said, “Agent Bishop, there’s been an accident. A car accident.” He met my eyes. “Jory’s car went off the road and hit a tree on Route 26. He died at the scene. We’re still not sure what happened. There weren’t any witnesses. He was going to my house to get something. He had called the division a few minutes before the accident to find out if there was any news on the For You case. I’m sorry. He’s gone.”

Then grief. I knew this feeling. First, the smoky cloud of denial because the reality was so foreign, so alien, so contrary to everything you knew as a human being, that it simply could not be true. For a split second, you hoped your denial would make it so. Then there was the sensation of falling. Reality snuck up on you. It took a convoluted path, but when it hit you, it hit like a door slamming closed for the last time.

The worst part was when it set in—the person was gone. They just weren’t there anymore. A whole life made up of sighs and breaths, laughter, skin, and effort just vanished. Your image of the world broke. Suddenly, you were looking through a kaleidoscope, and no matter how you approached it, what angle you took, the pieces of the picture refused to tumble back into place. Every time you opened your eyes or blinked, the image shifted without making sense. The picture was no longer complete. And you were alone on that side of the kaleidoscope, staring out at the remaining population of your world through distorted glass and misshapen colors.

It was just like the night Lexie plummeted to her death. I had little memory of those first moments after her death. My mind went somewhere, quickly ducking out before the destructive explosion of grief aimed and fired its first blast. Again, I was vaguely aware of my mind's absence as I watched Remy's face float up and away like an errant balloon lost in the sky. His whole face creased, dry lines, like cracked leather.

When TK's large hands grasped my shoulders and pulled me up, I realized I had sunk to the floor. I covered my stomach with both hands as he guided me to the edge of the bed. If the world could snatch Lexie and Jory away, it could surely snatch my child away. My hands were meager protection but warm and reassuring against the place where the baby rested. Remy followed, and he and TK stood over me, looking down with pinched expressions. They looked like they were watching someone get a limb amputated, their faces clenching as they imagined themselves in that position, imagining how much it must hurt.

"Agent Bishop," Remy said. He held out his hand. In his calloused palm was a small velvet box, stained a deep blue. "Detective Ralst—Jory would want you to have this. He was saving that for the right time, for after his divorce was final."

I nodded and took the box with a trembling hand.

"Oh man," TK said, rubbing a hand over his cropped hair. He couldn't stand still.

Remy finally had to open the box for me. He set it back in my hand and there it was—a simple ring with inlaid jewels, aquamarine sapphires winking next to diamonds. It was exactly something I would have chosen myself. Nothing big or gaudy, just a sparkling band. My vision blurred with tears, and I felt the box lift from my hand. Then TK's voice, quiet and grim, "He had it engraved."

I couldn't bring myself to look at the inside of the band. When TK held it out to me, I clasped it tightly in my fist and said a hoarse, "Thank you," to Remy.

He nodded solemnly. "I'll let you know when the funeral will be," he said.

TK thanked him and walked him out to the hotel parking lot. By the time he came back, I could no longer stop the tears.

TK sat next to me on the bed and held my hand while I cried. “I’m calling Linnea,” he said.



I don’t know how long I sat there. Time was suddenly irrelevant. It seemed like moments, but it also seemed like hours. There was a kind of comfort in the paralysis that had found me. I no longer felt the burning hunger pangs, the nausea, or the stinging in my eyes. I couldn’t feel the tension in my hand, which clutched the small velvet box Remy had brought me with white knuckles. My body didn’t exist anymore. I was floating free in warm grief. It cushioned me and soaked me through. The ambient noise of the room and the world outside it receded into silence. It was almost a relief.

Then Linnea stood before me in torn jeans and a wrinkled purple blouse. She stunk of cigarette smoke. Her long fingers stroked my hair, tucking strands behind my left ear. She spoke, but I did not hear her. TK appeared next to her. They conferred, talking about me in hushed voices as if I were asleep and they didn’t want to wake me up—exactly like my parents and Linnea had spoken when they’d held vigil by my hospital bed after Nico Sala had nearly killed me. Linnea and TK discussed me, and TK left.

The world returned to me in increments, and Linnea waited with me. The sounds of the television, of cars driving past outside, muffled noises from TK’s room became clear again, as if someone had merely turned up the volume. My body parts switched on one by one, reactivating and announcing themselves by sensations. I felt my feet first. They were cold. Then the aching in my fingers and the soreness of my red-rimmed eyes. Gently, nausea rocked me back and forth.

“Come here,” Linnea said. She pulled me into her arms, pressing my head against her bony shoulder.

“He’s gone,” I mumbled.

Linnea stroked my hair. “I know, baby,” she whispered. “I know.”

CHAPTER

20

Kassidy

October 6th

Fat, white clouds rolled across the Portland sky, shrouding everything in gray as the last mournful notes of TAPS faded into the distance. The entire service was held graveside. There hadn't been a viewing, although I wouldn't have gone to it if there had been. I was too ashamed to stand in the receiving line and look Jory's wife in the face.

There were almost two hundred people. The only sounds were the rustling of bodies as people leaned on each other for support and pressed tissues to their eyes, trying futilely to stem the flow of tears. An occasional sob erupted from the throng of people gathered around the gravesite. The civilians—friends and family members—wept openly. Half of Jory's colleagues were in uniforms—a sea of blue. The other half wore suits. All of them stood ramrod straight, steely-eyed and stoic, daring the grief to come closer, to take them in. Only their eyes, dark and full with unspoken pain and unshed tears, hinted at the true depth of their sadness.

Linnea and I blended in easily with them, although I could not stop the tears from streaming silently down my cheeks. Linnea supplied me with tissues from her pockets as we hung back on the fringe of the crowd. Remy Caldwell passed by me, but we didn't acknowledge each other. Later, after the service was over and Jory's casket had been lowered into the ground, I spotted Remy talking to Jory's wife.

I didn't even know her name. I had never wanted to know. I hadn't

known anything about his real life—the names or faces of his loved ones and friends or even what he was really like. I had known a different, private man. It seemed alien that I was carrying his child.

Watching Remy Caldwell comfort Jory’s grieving widow, I realized I hadn’t known Jory at all. What would I tell his child about him? Fresh tears blurred my vision. I gripped Linnea’s arm and slipped on a pair of sunglasses.

“Be cool,” Linnea said under her breath.

Jory’s widow spoke quietly to Remy, her arms clutching the folded American flag that had topped Jory’s casket. The widow was thin and not at all what I had expected, although I hadn’t spent much time envisioning her. She had auburn hair and freckles. Her face was pale, in stark contrast to her red-rimmed glassy eyes. Mostly she looked stunned, like she didn’t understand what was happening. It was as if even after watching her husband’s body lowered into the ground, she still did not really know what was going on. She searched the faces around her, as if looking for someone to make sense of things, to explain. How could this happen? What did it mean?

A short, stocky man crept up behind her and slipped an arm around her waist. She leaned into him, and his hand slid down to just above the curve of her buttocks. It had the familiarity of a lovers’ embrace.

“Well she didn’t waste any time,” Linnea muttered under her breath.

The widow’s words caught in the air—fragments of what she was saying—like stray leaves tumbling through the cemetery. “—hadn’t seen him in weeks.”

Remy nodded. “I’ll bring the rest of his stuff to your place,” he said.

My knees felt rubbery. My stomach growled loudly. Linnea glanced at my belly. “Are you kidding me? You ate a pound of bacon before we left the hotel—at least.”

I shook my head and gave her arm a squeeze. “Just get me out of here,” I mumbled.



Fifteen minutes later, I stood on Route 26, looking at tire tracks while Linnea paced along the shoulder of the road. The accident had happened just

over the crest of a hill. The road was heavily wooded on either side. The nearest house was at least a quarter mile down the hill. I knew that Portland's Accident Investigation Division had already questioned the homeowner, but he hadn't seen anything. Occasionally, a cluster of cars passed by, but mostly the stretch of road was deserted.

"What are you looking for?" Linnea asked.

"I don't know. I just know that something isn't right. You don't just crash into a tree for no reason."

"You do if you're about to hit an elk. Remy told me they think that's what happened—he may have come up on a group of them crossing the road and had nowhere to go."

We had, in fact, seen a handful of elk on the side of the road on our way out there but still, I wasn't buying the elk theory. I shook my head vehemently. "No. He would have had time to stop."

Linnea glanced back behind us. "Not if he was coming over the crest of the hill going over forty miles an hour, Kass. Look at the tracks. He tried to stop."

Tears stung my eyes. "Stop trying to make sense of this. It doesn't make sense. Something is not right."

Linnea sighed. "You're right. It doesn't make sense. It never does when we lose someone—"

"Don't give me the grief talk!"

As I moved onto the shoulder with her, she touched my forearm. "Hey, I'm just saying don't turn this into more than it is—sometimes accidents just happen."

I pushed her away. She followed me as I descended from the shoulder of the road to the mangled tree that had caused Jory's death. My heels sunk into the soft earth, and the unruly grass tickled my ankles. Remnants of the Ford Taurus Jory had been driving lay on the ground around the tree. Its large trunk was splintered and streaked with black paint. I knew from the accident report that there was no rear-end damage to his car—nothing to suggest someone hit him from behind to cause the accident. I also knew that he

hadn't hit the tree head on—the point of impact was the driver-side door.

I glanced back toward the road and tried to picture it. Jory traveling over the crest of the hill, a herd of elk crossing, him slamming on the brakes, losing control of the car. I imagined him jerking the wheel as he approached the tree. Why would he turn the car so that the driver side was exposed to the tree?

Again I shook my head. “No. This isn't right. I don't see how he could have lost control of the car. Look how far we are from the road. He should have had plenty of time to stop or at least to slow down. He should have tried to avoid hitting a tree, but instead he turned into it.”

Linnea folded her arms across her middle. “Okay,” she said. “Then what happened?”

I spent a few more minutes studying the area around the tree, trying to put it together in my mind. What had caused him to lose control of the car, to turn the wrong way?

Before I could answer Linnea, my cell phone rang. I fished it out of my pocket and answered.

“I'm at the gas station,” TK said without preamble.

My heart thumped. TK had offered to look into Jory's death. He must have known that I wouldn't be able to let it go so easily. I had hardly seen him the last three days as he worked the Megan Wilkins case and Jory's death simultaneously. He was a good friend, a good investigator.

Since Jory had been driving a department car, his travels were documented by GPS. Remy had told us that he had stopped at a gas station on Route 26 after leaving my hotel. “And?” I prompted.

“The surveillance shows him pumping gas, talking on his phone. Then he walks out of the frame. He leaves his car there at the pump and walks toward the road. He's gone for about a minute, and then he comes back.”

“You can't see what he's doing?”

“No. The camera only overlooks the pumps,” TK explained. “He walked toward the street, but there's nothing there and on the other side of the road is just houses. I canvassed those, but no one remembers seeing anything.”

“Are you there with the manager? Find out which cashier was working that day,” I said. “If it was a woman, she’ll remember Jory.” Women always do, I almost added. “Maybe she’ll remember what he was doing when he walked out of the parking lot.”

“I’m on it,” TK said and hung up.

I dropped the phone back into my pocket and stared at the tree again. I stared until my body felt cold and stiff and my feet were freezing. There were no answers there. Finally, Linnea gripped my arm and led me slowly back to our vehicle.

CHAPTER

21

Wyatt

October 6th

Wyatt woke to the sound of dogs barking. He staggered from his couch and parted the curtains at the front window of his house. It was just a neighbor's dogs barking at a passing jogger. He plopped back onto the couch and rubbed his temples. He had been dreaming of blood again. Lately, that was all he dreamed about—the blood. He saw their faces now. It had been twenty years, and he still had few memories of that night. He knew what it had looked like when the beast was finished—his parents' bodies laid open side by side in the bed. Their faces were streaked with blood. Their mouths hung open, and his mother's head was turned just slightly toward his father, as if she'd looked to him for saving before the knife found her.

Wyatt remembered the dark wood paneling in their bedroom made darker by splatters of blood. The sheets tangled among their legs, tie-dyed and shredded. They had been so still—all stiff and quiet, asleep with their eyes open in their bed of carnage. He remembered the sensation of waking up as if he'd simply been asleep on his feet at the foot of their bed, bloody knife in hand.

He was asleep, then he wasn't. He wasn't there and then he was.

He remembered everything that came after—telling his sister to hide in the basement, calling the police, jail cells, judges, lawyers, the trial, juvie. But he had never been able to remember the act—how he'd done it, the looks on their faces, the sounds they'd made. Lately though, his dreams allowed

him glimpses. At least he assumed that's what they were. He had no way of knowing whether the images were real or just his tortured imagination extrapolating on details he'd found out after the killings.

He tried to blink away the image of his mother's bloody face, her mouth an O shape, blood bubbling out of it. He blinked again and he was standing in the dark outside Cassidy Bishop's house. He was well concealed in his usual spot.

"What the hell?" he muttered. He looked down at himself. He was still in the sweatpants and black T-shirt he'd been wearing when he had dozed on his couch. He patted himself down to see if he had brought his cell phone at least. He hadn't.

"Shit." How long had he been there? He clenched his fists open and closed. Her house looked dark. She likely wasn't home from Portland yet. He turned his head toward her driveway to see if it was still empty. White-hot pain shot from his shoulder blades into his neck, exploding across the base of his skull. He gasped and clutched the back of his neck. Ever since he'd woken to find Jory Ralston's wallet in his hotel room, his neck and back were killing him. It had taken him less than a day to find out Jory Ralston had perished in a car accident. Based on the agony he was in, Wyatt could only surmise that he'd been involved in the accident, although his rental car was unscathed, and there were no witnesses or any indication in the police report that a man had fled the scene of the accident.

Wyatt had no idea what had happened.

He hadn't fully digested it yet—her having Ralston's child. It seemed so improbable. She wasn't showing. Other than the pregnancy tests and the vomit in her trash the last several weeks, one wouldn't even know that she was pregnant. He wished he could talk to her about it. Why a child? Why now? Obviously, she'd been in love with Ralston. Wyatt grimaced. He flashed to the two of them outside her hotel in Portland. The look of adoration on her face. The words that Wyatt was certain she'd never said to a man before. *I love you*. Wyatt blinked again to put it out of his mind. He sighed. That was behind him now. Ralston was dead. There was no sense upsetting himself over it.

At the moment, other things were more pressing—like his plan which was going straight to hell.

He needed help.

He returned home and booked a flight to New York City. He hated to do it. He hated going there almost as much as he hated going to New Jersey. Even though the person he needed to see lived near Central Park—the only part of New York City he could tolerate—Wyatt still did not want to go. It was filthy and closed in, filled with throngs of dirty, rushing people everywhere you turned. He always felt like he couldn't breathe when he was there.

He used a prepaid cell phone. Dustin DeMeo answered on the third ring. “There are three things I cannot resist.”

“Women, wine, and winged creatures,” Wyatt answered.

Dustin laughed. “Ah, my good friend—what are they calling you these days?”

“George,” Wyatt said. “George Harbison.”

“What can I do for you, George?”

Wyatt hadn't spoken to Dustin DeMeo in four years, yet Dustin got right to the point. That was what Wyatt loved about him. “I need some medication,” Wyatt said.

“What kind?”

“Painkillers, anti-inflams, and, uh, I need some Klonopin.”

“What?” Dustin's tone changed abruptly. Now would come the questions.

“Klonopin. I need Klonopin. I've been losing time again,” Wyatt muttered.

“How much time?”

“Enough. Look, I need those meds. Can you get them or not?”

There was a long silence punctuated by a heavy sigh. “Yeah, but you know where you have to come to get them, right?”

“I’ll be there in twenty-four hours.”

“Fine. George?”

“Yeah?”

“Is this like the Chicago incident?”

Wyatt closed his eyes. “No,” he said. “It’s worse.”

“Holy shit, George.”

“I’ll be there in twenty-four hours,” Wyatt repeated.

Wyatt had met Dustin DeMeo when they were both sixteen. They’d been incarcerated together in a juvenile detention center. Their birthdays were a week apart. When they were eighteen, they were turned back into the world with nothing but their wits and the clothes on their backs.

Dusty had taken Wyatt under his wing once they were released from juvie. Dustin was the only guy Wyatt had met in juvie who wasn’t there for a violent crime. Dustin had hacked not just his local school’s computers, but the computer systems of the surrounding five districts. He was a master forger and a pathological liar. At fifteen, he’d wreaked havoc with an entire county of teachers and administrators. Every student in the county had straight As. Those stunts had gotten him in trouble. Embezzling \$40,000.00 from the retirement funds of three local teachers had landed him in juvenile detention.

After juvie, the two of them had lived in New York City and Philadelphia. Dusty had given Wyatt some basic lessons in forgery, lying, stealing, and embezzling. He’d mentored Wyatt in creating new identities. He’d gotten Wyatt into Drexel University using forged paperwork. Wyatt could have lived in the lap of luxury using what Dusty had taught him—stealing and defrauding people—but he preferred to make an honest living. He’d taken the degree he’d earned under an assumed name and started his own business developing software programs and selling them to the government. While few things Wyatt did were technically legal, he did earn his living instead of stealing it from other people.

Dustin DeMeo was the closest thing Wyatt had to a friend, and he was the only living person who knew Wyatt’s true identity. They’d kept each

other's secrets for almost twenty years. Dustin's voice interrupted thoughts of their shared history. "I assume you're still obsessed with that FBI agent."

"That's inconsequential," Wyatt said.

The receiver of the phone erupted with Dusty's raucous laughter. "You really do need that Klonopin, my friend, because you are delusional."

Wyatt resisted the urge to tell Dusty where to go. He needed those meds. His sanity and his work depended on them. He gritted his teeth. "Just get me what I need," he said. "I'll see you tomorrow."

CHAPTER

22

Kassidy

October 6th

The mood at the Portland Homicide Unit was somber, to say the least. In addition to being a stellar detective, Jory had been well liked by his colleagues. Many of them had congregated at the bar after his funeral to drown their grief in alcohol and celebrate his life by telling stories about him. TK and I had been invited, but we had declined. I smelled beer on Remy Caldwell's breath, but I didn't say anything. If I could, I'd drink myself stupid for a week. I thought suddenly of the last hours I had spent with Jory and felt dizzy. I sat in a chair in front of Remy's desk, across from him. TK stood beside me, one of his feet tapping against the floor. He had definitely had too much coffee that morning.

Remy stared at us, the deep circles under his eyes intensifying as he grimaced. "Jory died of injuries sustained in the accident. There was no foul play in that sense. But we are treating his death as suspicious. It is under investigation," he said.

"Then why didn't you pull the surveillance tape at the gas station?" I asked. I almost said, "That's the first thing Jory would have done," but held my tongue.

Remy shook his head and slumped in his chair. "We did that. I was waiting for a call back from the manager about the cashier who was working that day." Remy gestured toward TK. "Until you jumped in."

"Well, I talked to her today," TK said. "She says that Jory walked across

the street and talked to a person parked there in a light blue car. She couldn't tell if the person was a man or a woman, the car was too far away, but it was a small car—maybe a Hyundai or a Honda—an older model. Any idea who it might have been?"

Remy's bushy eyebrows drew together, the skin at the corners of his eyes crinkling. "He talked to someone?"

"Yes," I said.

"They talked for about a minute, the cashier said. Jory went back to his car and drove off. The blue car drove off in the same direction as Jory," TK added. "I canvassed the street. No one remembers seeing the car, but you work with him every day. Any idea who it might have been?"

Remy sighed. He looked like he was in pain. Grief and exhaustion paled his face. Slumped in his chair he looked flattened somehow, one-dimensional. "You think it's important that Jory talked to someone in a blue car before he died?"

"You don't?" I challenged, heat rising from my collar to the roots of my hair.

Remy held up a hand. For a split second I thought I saw tears in his ancient eyes, but he blinked and they were gone. "Now just a minute. I'm only asking you questions here. You think I don't want to know what happened? He turned the wrong goddamn way into the tree. The wrong goddamned way." He pointed a finger at me. "I got a bad feeling too."

I nodded and put my hands up in concession. "I don't know why Jory approached the car, if the person drove after him or just happened to be going in the same direction. I don't know what happened on that road," I said. "What I do know is that whoever was in that car was the last person to talk to Jory before he died. Maybe it was nothing, but I want to know what they talked about. I think you should find out if anyone he knew owns a small blue foreign-model car. If no one does, I think you should get a list of all owners of blue Hyundais and Hondas in the city and surrounding area and see if there are any names you recognize."

Remy rubbed a hand over his face. "It could have been someone asking for directions for all we know."

“Yes, it could have been but maybe not. If you just get a list of owners, a name might jog your memory. It could have been anyone. A neighbor, a witness from a case he worked on. I just want to know what they talked about. Please.” I couldn’t keep the pleading note out of my voice.

“Okay,” Remy said softly. “Okay.”

He had stopped looking at us. He picked up a pen and put it down, fidgeted with some paperwork on his desk, straightening papers and moving files from one pile to another.

TK and I exchanged a look. “What is it?” I asked.

Remy looked up slowly and scratched his chin. “Jory’s wallet is missing,” he said.

TK’s brow furrowed. “He had it with him on the surveillance tape. He took it out of his pocket when he went to pay.”

“Could it have flown out of the car?” I asked. “He had a habit of putting it in the center console when he drove.”

“We checked pretty thoroughly around the perimeter of the accident scene. I checked the evidence logs three times, but I don’t see it on there. I’ve got calls out to the first officer on scene and the crime scene unit to see if anyone remembers seeing it. Maybe it’s sitting down there in evidence and no one logged it in.”

“Could someone have come along after the accident, stolen his wallet and taken off without reporting anything?” TK suggested.

I shivered. A fresh wave of tears assailed me, burning the backs of my eyes. I had an image of some heartless person ransacking the crushed car for valuables while Jory lay dying in the driver seat. Had someone left him there—alone and injured—stealing the few dollars he had in his wallet and letting him die because of their petty greed?

“The ME said he died instantly,” Remy said, as if sensing my thoughts. He looked up at TK. “I suppose that’s a possibility, but it’s pretty bizarre. There was about an hour between the time stamp on the gas station tape and the time the couple driving past saw the car on the side of the road and called it in, so I guess it could have happened. We didn’t see any evidence nearby

that anyone had stopped, but I'll track down the couple who called in the accident and the EMTs—see if they know anything. It's just odd."

TK looked at his watch. "You'll let us know," he said. It wasn't a question.

Silence descended among us, heavy and awkward. Jory's absence was an oppressive force. I expected to look over my shoulder and see him saunter into the division at any moment. Judging by Remy's meandering gaze, he felt the same way. After a moment, Remy caught my eye. He swallowed once, the words caught in his throat. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm sorry for your loss."

I sat up straight. When I spoke, my voice sounded much stronger than I felt. "And I'm sorry for yours."



Linnea, TK, and I caught a flight back to Washington, DC, that evening. Linnea managed to get on the same flight but was seated nowhere near us. Once we were airborne, TK went to the restroom. He was almost as tall as the cabin, and as he went, he retrieved items from the overhead bins for the other, more vertically challenged passengers.

I closed my eyes and immediately thought of Jory. Then questions about his death crowded in, causing tightness in my chest. I tried to push the thoughts out of my mind and focus instead on Megan Wilkins. Her autopsy showed signs of asphyxiation, but surprisingly, the official cause of death was myocardial infarction.

Megan Wilkins had died of a heart attack.

"The killer probably scared her to death," the ME had said.

The going theory was that the killer had probably beaten her to subdue her and then been in the act of suffocating her when Megan Wilkins' heart gave out. I wondered if the killer even realized that she hadn't died of suffocation. He'd terrorized her for weeks before her death. It was no wonder that her final confrontation with him culminated in a heart attack.

This is good, I thought. I wasn't thinking of Jory as much. I unfastened my seat belt and reached under TK's seat for his briefcase. The combination was TK's oldest daughter's birthday. We'd worked enough cases together

that we had no trouble rifling through each other's things. I extracted the Wilkins file and slipped the briefcase back in place. I skipped over the crime scene photos and scanned the interviews with Wilkins' daughter and ex-husband. Then I turned to the notes taken by various members of the Portland PD during their initial investigation. It was a small piece of information that caught my eye. A notation in the margin. Something I would normally overlook—something that wouldn't even be in the file except that we were trying so desperately to connect the For You Killer's victims that we were gathering all the information we could compile.

It said: PLACE OF BIRTH: SUNDERLIN, PA.

I stared at the words, uncomprehending. Sunderlin was a small town in Central Pennsylvania, its population no more than 6,000 people. I knew that because Lexie and I had been born there. My parents still lived there.

“Saw Linnea at the front of the plane. She's out.” TK's voice startled me. I clapped the file closed and looked up at him. He smiled. “She's actually snoring.”

“She does that,” I said as TK squeezed past my knees and folded his long frame into his seat. I had taken the aisle seat for quicker access to the restroom.

TK fastened his seat belt and looked at me. “They're starting a task force.”

My face burned. I looked at him. He pulled a magazine out of the pocket in the back of the seat in front of him. “What?” I said.

“The Bureau—they're putting together a task force to catch this guy. Lucky us, we'll get to be in charge of it I'd imagine since this is our case. We'll be under Crossen's supervision, but other than that, we'll be in charge.”

“A task force?” I said.

TK shrugged with his eyebrows—a little habit of his I'd grown used to over the years. He flipped a page in his magazine.

“Bishop, this guy has killed four people in four months and he shows no signs of slowing down.”

The flight attendant set a plastic cup of ginger ale in front of me which I gulped down. Some of it dribbled down my chin, and I wiped it hastily away. “Yeah,” I agreed. “It’s just that needle in a haystack comes to mind. We may never find this guy. This could go on for years.”

“Indeed,” TK said as if he were merely concurring that the weather sucked.

We fell into an easy silence. I stared straight ahead. I didn’t realize I was gripping the armrests until TK slipped a hand over mine. I met his eyes. “You can come stay with us,” he said. “If it helps. You and the dogs. Sometimes it helps to have company. Diane and the kids would love to have you—she’s already quite concerned.”

Tears welled up in my eyes, but I held them back. In my pregnant state, once I started crying, I couldn’t stop.

“Thank you,” I said. “And thank you for everything you did in Portland.”

CHAPTER

23

Wyatt

October 7th

Dusty DeMeo's Manhattan penthouse offered an expansive view of Central Park. Dusty's living room was bigger than any house Wyatt had ever lived in. It boasted twelve-foot ceilings with columns throughout the room. A glass enclosure took up one corner of the room, and inside it was an aviary complete with exotic birds whose twitters and shrieks made Wyatt jumpy. Along the opposite wall was a flat-screen television nearly the size of a movie screen. A massive circular bed lay before it, illuminated by round lights which were recessed into the floor and encased in glass. It had the effect of a stage. Amid pillows and rumpled bed sheets lay a naked blonde woman. She was spread eagle and snoring. Her head turned to one side, a thick line of drool creeping from the corner of her mouth. Wyatt stared at her body, disgust warring with arousal. Dusty's slap on his shoulder startled him. Wyatt's face reddened.

Dusty laughed and motioned toward the woman. "Fuck her if you want. She won't mind."

Wyatt turned away from the woman and followed Dusty into a smaller room which Dusty used as an office. Dusty was naked except for a silk robe and matching bedroom slippers. He lit a cigarette and plopped into the leather chair behind his desk, looking Wyatt up and down. "Or if you prefer, there's a brunette in the master bedroom. You look like you could use a good fuck."

When Wyatt did not respond, Dusty asked, "How long has it been,

George?” Dusty said the name George with a sarcastic edge.

“I’m not discussing that with you,” Wyatt said quietly.

Dusty smiled like a fat cat who’d just eaten a canary. “I’ll take that as an ‘it’s-been-over-a-year.’ Living in your stalker fantasy world doesn’t allow for much hedonism, does it? Seriously, George. Fuck the blonde. Your FBI agent is blonde, isn’t she?” Dusty pointed to the doorway. From where he sat, Wyatt could see one of the blonde’s legs. Dusty went on, “Oh wait, my mistake—she’s a brunette. Well, my blonde will let you call her Kassidy.”

The blood drained from Wyatt’s face. Just hearing Dusty say her name made him feel nauseous. He felt sick, the way he’d felt when he realized that Nico Sala had assaulted Kassidy right under his nose. That was a failure for which he’d never forgive himself. Wyatt wanted to punch Dusty in the face, but he knew that was exactly what Dusty wanted. Dusty loved getting a rise out of people, even at his own expense. He was interested. He would push people just to see what would happen.

When they were in juvie together, Dusty had manipulated the other boys, pitting them against one another just to watch the conflict unfold. Usually violence erupted, which was when Dusty was happiest and most exhilarated. Wyatt had met some violent sociopaths in juvie. Boys with no consciences—their eyes empty, their impulses primitive. They were like animals. They’d kill a human being with no more thought or compunction than they’d employ in taking a piss. They were unpredictable, and they did not discriminate. They were scary. They belonged in an adult penitentiary for life. In spite of that, Dustin DeMeo was more terrifying than any ten of them put together. Dustin’s mind was lightning quick. He lied as easily as he breathed, and there seemed no limit to his capabilities or to what he would do—stealing, cheating, embezzlement, fraud, identity theft. He’d made an enterprise of peddling drugs which he obtained using mostly forged doctor’s prescriptions through identities he’d either stolen or made up. His entire lavish lifestyle was financed with money he’d embezzled or obtained by various and sundry methods of deceit.

Wyatt knew from the group-therapy sessions at juvie that Dustin, too, was a sociopath. He was the non-violent kind. He lied, stole, and cheated for the thrill. He didn’t experience feelings the way normal people did. He had to

push the boundaries of acceptable behavior, live on the edge, so to speak, in order to feel anything at all. Some sociopaths could only experience a feeling of fulfillment or euphoria by killing or other abhorrent acts—like Jeffrey Dahmer or Ted Bundy. Then there were non-violents like Dusty. Other people existed solely for his entertainment. He preferred manipulation to killing.

Even though Wyatt knew this, and knew that Dusty was goading him, it was difficult to keep his cool.

“Maybe if you had a good lay, you wouldn’t be losing your head.” Dusty stood up and breezed past Wyatt, flicking Wyatt’s temple as he passed. In the floor behind Wyatt’s chair was a safe which Dusty kept covered with a throw rug. Dusty unlocked the safe and rummaged through it, coming up with two baggies. One was filled with large white pills and the other with small yellow pills. He didn’t give them to Wyatt right away. Wyatt knew this drill. Dusty returned to his chair and held them in one hand, tossing one and then the other into the air and catching them again. “Why the painkillers?” he asked.

Wyatt suppressed a sigh. “I was in a car accident—I think. Look, I’m in pain. I can’t go through normal channels. I’m kind of in the middle of something.”

“Something being a criminal enterprise?”

“What do you think?”

Dusty regarded Wyatt for a long moment, his Cheshire grin lingering—subtle and intrigued. He waited to see if Wyatt would divulge more, but Wyatt wasn’t giving him any details. His work was too important. He couldn’t risk it by sharing details with a person like Dusty, who was liable to insert himself into Wyatt’s plan just for something to do.

“Very well,” Dusty conceded. He tossed Wyatt the bag of white pills. “OxyContin. Enjoy them my friend, and don’t operate heavy machinery.”

Wyatt opened the bag immediately. Dusty got him a bottled water from a small refrigerator behind the desk, and Wyatt took one of the large pills. He plopped into a chair. Dusty watched him, fingering the bag of yellow pills. “I’ve got your Klonopin,” he said. “Although I don’t think you need it.”

“I’m losing time,” Wyatt said. “Big chunks of time. I have no idea what happened or what I’ve done.”

“You’re losing time because you’re a pussy. You can’t stand the stress of life so your brain checks out and allows you to become someone else. Has it ever occurred to you that the other person, the someone else you become while you’re blacked out is your true self? You don’t need drugs, my friend. You need to embrace who you really are.” Dusty grinned and tipped his head back, concluding loudly with the word, “INTEGRATE!”

Wyatt leaned across the desk and snatched the pills from Dusty. Quickly, he swallowed one. “I was never officially diagnosed with a split personality.”

“But it was on the table. You don’t know that you don’t have one. You don’t have a conscience though,” Dusty mused.

“That’s not true.”

“Sure it is. You don’t have a conscience—just an extremely aggravated sense of fairness—tit for tat, eye for an eye—that does not equal a conscience.”

Wyatt straightened his back and squared his shoulders. “I’m not a sociopath.”

Dusty eyed him for a long moment. Perhaps he sensed that Wyatt would next bring up their shared history, and perhaps he didn’t want to revisit it, because he conceded with a sigh. “Well, I suppose the fact that you actually feel guilty about the people you’ve killed brings you into the vicinity of having a conscience.”

“Some of them. Not all,” Wyatt said.

Dusty laughed. Then he leaned toward Wyatt, his eyes aglow. “But don’t you want to see what happens? Where it all leads? What your true self is capable of? Come on, lose the drugs and let things unfold as God intended.”

It was Wyatt’s turn to laugh. “Please. You don’t believe in God, and the problem is that I won’t see how things unfold because I black out.”

He was starting to relax. The OxyContin worked its way through his

veins at a slow crawl, heating his body, giving him the feeling of an incredibly slow orgasm, working outward from his center. Even the shrieking birds ceased to bother him. He started to close his eyes, but the sound of a phone ringing startled him. Dusty pulled a cell phone from a pocket in his robe and answered it. The entire conversation took less than ten seconds and required only three words from Dusty. He hung up and smiled at Wyatt.

“I have to go. Stay as long as you like.”

Wyatt shook his head. “I’m leaving in an hour. I have work to do.”

Dusty slapped Wyatt’s knee. “Do yourself a favor, George. Fuck the blonde before you leave.”

CHAPTER

24

Kassidy

October 6th-13th

The dogs greeted me as if I had been gone for weeks instead of days. They almost knocked me to the floor. It was a frenzy of fur and wet doggie kisses, their bodies wriggling against mine with excitement. I bent to them, scratching, petting and talking to them in a low, sugary voice, assuring them I'd missed them.

Although my superiors were not happy about it, I took a leave of absence from work. Linnea stayed one night with me but then had to return to work in New York. My first few days at home I busied myself with housework I'd been neglecting for months. I took the dogs for long walks twice a day. By the end of the first week, the creeping, rushing silence that had started as fleeting background noise filled the house until I felt its pressure bearing down on me with almost physical force.

The house felt strangely and inexplicably empty even with three happy canines in residence. Jory had only been in my home once, but he seemed to haunt every corner of it. I expected to find him whenever I entered a room, his smile bright, fresh and unlined. Grief nudged and poked at me. I tried to keep it at bay, but it was ever present and growing more raucous each day. I called Remy daily, and he assured me he was working on the list of names we had discussed. Jory's wallet remained missing. No one who had been at the scene that day remembered seeing it. Remy planned to go back out there himself and widen the search.

At night I had nightmares. I woke weeping uncontrollably, sweaty, and shaking.

Finally I called TK. "I'm not doing well," I said, startled by the openness in my voice.

Without further discussion, he said the words I had hoped he would. "Come stay with us for the weekend. You can bring the dogs. We'd love to have you."

TK lived just under twenty miles away in Manassas, a small city on the outskirts of DC. His wife, Diane, was a history professor at Georgetown University. The Bennetts' home in Manassas was a compromise since Diane's commute to DC was roughly ten miles longer than TK's commute to Quantico. They shared it with their two teenage daughters, Quinn, thirteen, and Zoey, fifteen. During the day, surrounded by the Bennetts, I was able to distract myself from thoughts of Jory and his death, but alone at night, I lay awake in their spare bedroom, staring into the darkness and listening to the muffled sound of a television somewhere in the house. Jory's image floated to the surface of my mind. My brain kept revisiting snatches of our time together, cataloguing his smiles. There was a burning sensation in my chest. I knew it was heartburn from the pregnancy, but it felt like my heart disintegrating.

Round and round my thoughts went with questions about Jory's death. Questions for which there were no easy answers. With a frustrated sigh, I turned my thoughts to the baby growing inside me, wondering what he or she would look like and how it would feel to hold him or her in my arms for the first time.

Then inevitably my thoughts drifted back to Jory. How was I going to explain to a child what had happened between Jory and I? Why I only had one photo of Jory and none of the two of us together? For a while it would suffice just to say, "Your father died before you were born, but we loved each other very much." But I knew the more years that passed, the more explaining I'd have to do. How would I explain that I was an adulterous whore, for example? And what of the rest? The fact that my child would have an extended family out there somewhere? Grandparents? All kinds of relatives I knew nothing about? To them my child would be a pariah, and that

was my fault.

I spent three sleepless nights at the Bennetts' before returning home. I had a week to go before returning to work. The days stretched out before me. They seemed never ending. I spent most of my time surfing the Internet, learning everything there was to know about pregnancy and giving birth. Both Linnea and TK called each day to check on me. Dale stopped in.

"You're having a really hard time, huh?" he said. I had spoken to him right after I got home from Portland and told him what had happened.

I nodded.

The dogs surrounded him, and he knelt to pet each one absently, his eyes on me, concern furrowing his brow.

"I don't want to talk about it," I said. "But you can have dinner with me. I'm making steak."

"Sounds great," he replied.

We talked about things that didn't matter, and for a couple of hours, I didn't have to be someone who looked at horrific crime scenes each day. I didn't have to be someone whose married lover had just died. I didn't have to be someone who was bringing an innocent, fatherless child into the world. I was just a friend having dinner with a friend.

It only took moments for the sadness to creep back in once Dale left. I thought about asking him to come back but decided against it.

I stood at my kitchen sink, washing dishes. I looked down to my feet where Pugsley slept. He'd been quite clingy lately, as if he sensed my grief. "Well, Pugs," I said. "Looks like the leave of absence wasn't such a good idea."

He lifted one eyelid to glance up at me. I reached down and scratched his head. "I have to go back to work."

CHAPTER

25

Wyatt

October 14th

For the first time in two weeks, Wyatt felt good. The searing pain in his neck and back faded into warm relief. He felt so good that he decided to get right back to work. He had to put the Jory Ralston debacle behind him—behind them. He parked his car two blocks down from Deborah and Michael Bittler’s Manassas, Virginia, home and waited. The last rays of the late-afternoon sunlight lingered on the horizon. It was dinnertime; most of the Bittlers’ neighbors were safely inside their homes. An occasional car rolled past, but no one seemed to notice Wyatt slouched in his vehicle. He reclined in the driver seat and popped another OxyContin.

After leaving Dusty’s apartment, things had seemed clearer. His mind was less cluttered. Cassidy Bishop was in shock. Grief stalled her, but it was only temporary. Eventually, she would return to her position with the Bureau. Wyatt could not take a hiatus from his work just because she had taken one from hers. Now, more than ever, he had to make clear the depth of his devotion to her. Now was the time to show her that he was a constant in her life, that he had always been a constant in her life. He had to forge ahead.

Wyatt had chosen Michael Bittler because he lived only a short drive from Wyatt’s home. Wyatt had surveilled Bittler for several months before he had killed Georgette Paul. Originally, Wyatt had intended to start his work with Bittler but decided starting so close to home was a bad idea. Wyatt knew that most serial killers usually started killing close to home in their “comfort zone” or with a victim they knew personally. Bittler was too close to home

for Wyatt to start with, but now he was an easy target. He'd already been researched, and he was nearby. Perhaps killing Bittler would draw Cassidy back into the field.

Wyatt fought to keep his eyes open. Finally, as expected, Deborah Bittler drove past him in her minivan, heading away from her home.

"Right on time," he murmured.

He knew from his previous surveillance that on Sunday nights Deborah attended bible study from six to nine p.m. It didn't leave Wyatt much time, but it was the best he could hope for. Deborah Bittler never left her home for more than a few hours. Wyatt could have easily killed Michael outside of his home, but there were too many variables. Too many things he couldn't control.

Wyatt waited ten minutes before snatching up his backpack and walking to Michael Bittler's home. The homes on this street were spaced well apart and separated by groves of large trees. Wyatt walked up Bittler's driveway at a slow, measured pace. If anyone saw him, he didn't want to draw attention to himself by rushing. He went right up to the front door, as if he was there on perfectly legitimate business, and rang the doorbell. No answer. He rang it twice more then knocked. Nothing.

"What the hell?" he muttered.

Bittler had to be home. His wife had their vehicle. Wyatt glanced behind him, looking for nosy neighbors. He heard dogs barking in the distance, children laughing, but he didn't see anyone. He crept around the side of the house to the backyard. A small shed took up most of the yard. It was fashioned like a miniature barn, painted in earthy brown tones. One of its double doors stood open. Wyatt heard a rustling coming from inside the shed. He pulled his Smith & Wesson from his waistband and pointed it toward the shed door as he approached.

Bittler emerged wearing a short-sleeved, button-down, plaid shirt and black slacks. He looked like he was going out to dinner except his clothes were smudged with dirt. He was thin and wiry, like Wyatt, but at least twenty-five years older, with skin that looked like tissue paper—like it would wrinkle or tear easily.

In one hand, Bittler held a wet cloth which he used to wipe the sweat from his face and the back of his neck. In the other hand, he held a small shovel. The grass padded Wyatt's steps, giving him an element of stealth. He was almost on top of Bittler when he spoke.

"What's in the shed?" he asked.

If Bittler was startled, he didn't show it. The only indication of surprise was a slight stiffening of his shoulders. Wyatt might have missed it if he hadn't been so intently focused on the man. Bittler turned his head toward Wyatt, his dark, beady eyes zeroing in on the gun.

In the split second it took for Bittler to swing the shovel at Wyatt's hand, Wyatt realized that he had grossly underestimated the man. The rounded back of the shovel clanged sharply against the barrel of the gun. It twisted out of Wyatt's grip and flew to the ground.

Wyatt braced for attack, but Bittler didn't rush him. Instead, he turned and scurried back toward the shed, practically leaping through the open door. Wyatt dropped his backpack and sprinted after the man. He tripped over the lip of the threshold. Bittler was less than a foot in front of him. Wyatt reached out and snatched a handful of Bittler's shirt, pulling it from the back of the man's pants.

They went down together, Wyatt landing on Bittler's back. The fall seemed to take too long. They had fallen into some kind of pit. As Bittler struggled beneath him, Wyatt turned onto his side and slipped an arm around Bittler's throat, scissoring the man's carotids between his forearm and bicep. Bittler pulled down hard on Wyatt's arm, trying to relieve the pressure.

"Stop," Wyatt commanded, his mouth nearly touching Bittler's ear. "Stop moving."

Bittler went limp, but Wyatt didn't let up. The skin on his arms and face burned. The air in the shed was thick and close. Sweat poured down Wyatt's face in rivulets. Bittler's thin frame felt solid in Wyatt's grip. The man looked like a stiff breeze might knock him over, but he was deceptively strong. As Wyatt's adrenaline waned, the myriad of smells inside the shed seared his nostrils. Dirt, compost, and something else. Something old and sour but sharp as well. Acrid.

Decay, he realized. It was the smell of decay.

It reminded him of the pit at the back of his grandfather's house—where he dumped the bodies of animals before he burned them, but after he made them squeal.

“What the hell is this?” Wyatt asked. “What were you doing in here?”

Bittler yanked on Wyatt's arm again. Wyatt loosened his vise slightly, but Bittler didn't answer the question. Instead he sucked in a few noisy breaths. Wyatt pulled the man up into a sitting position between his legs, holding Bittler in a headlock, lest the man try to fight back. Wyatt looked around, noticing for the first time a band of fluorescent lights overhead. They blinked on and off, one side dimmer than the other, as if dying. It was enough to illuminate a work bench directly across from them with large glass jars atop it. There were things floating in the jars, but Wyatt couldn't make them out. The light barely reached the depths of the pit, but it was enough for Wyatt to see the white sheen of bone poking out from the dirt floor where he'd just been laying.

“What the hell is that?” Wyatt asked, his voice unnaturally high.

His bowels loosened. His stomach felt as if it were floating somewhere around his throat. He shifted, jerking Bittler's neck. The man grunted but moved with Wyatt. Wyatt squinted at the object beside him until a gaping eye socket formed out of the darkness. Half the skeleton's face was enveloped in dirt. Whoever it was had had crooked teeth. A tuft of brown hair clung to its scalp.

Wyatt's feet kicked, crunching what he imagined must be more bones beneath him. Dirt and debris flew as he scrambled out of the pit, lurching toward the twilight pouring through the shed door. He pulled Bittler by the neck, across a large, hinged wooden door that had been opened and lay flat on the shed floor. Wyatt assumed it was Bittler's access point to the death pit. The man put up little resistance as Wyatt half-dragged, half-carried him out of the shed.

Wyatt deposited Bittler onto the grass and dove for the gun, a few feet away. From his back, he aimed at Bittler, but the man was still on his knees, gasping for air and massaging his throat. Wyatt stood and moved closer,

keeping the Smith & Wesson trained on him. “Who was that?” Wyatt croaked.

“They’re just whores,” Bittler answered, his voice raspy. “Whores and murderers. I’m ridding the world of their unholy filth.”

“Murderers?” Wyatt asked. The skin on his bare forearms and neck seared even hotter. His hands tingled. Keeping the gun on Bittler, he used a free hand to brush himself off. It didn’t help.

Bittler stayed on his knees. He coughed heartily and brought up a large glob of saliva which he spit on the ground. “It’s lime, son,” he said to Wyatt. “It will burn your skin for a while.”

“Shut up,” Wyatt snapped. “Who were those people in there—in the pit?”

The man shook his head, still not meeting Wyatt’s eyes. “I told you, filthy, murdering whores. I saved their babies’ souls, but I couldn’t save theirs.”

The jars. Wyatt remembered the dim outline of the jars across from the pit. The warm, almost orgasmic feeling of the OxyContin turned to raging nausea in seconds. “Dear God,” he mumbled. He thought about the confrontation Cassidy had had with Bittler nearly twenty years ago. He hadn’t been there. He had only read the police report—that was public record. But the circumstances were clear enough. “You got them from clinics, didn’t you?”

Bittler scoffed. “Clinics. Please. Those aren’t clinics. They’re execution chambers. Those women were murderers the same as the Nazis.”

Wyatt swallowed. His throat burned, and he wondered if he had somehow ingested the lime that Bittler had obviously used in the pit. “Those women? How many are in there?”

Bittler glanced up at Wyatt, finally meeting his eyes. He smiled, showing a set of small teeth that looked chiseled into blunt points. “Not enough,” the man answered.

When the gun met the back of Bittler’s head with enough force to knock him unconscious, it seemed to come from nowhere. It took Wyatt a second to

realize that he had done it. He stood over Bittler, trying not to vomit. He reached up and felt the outline of Cassidy's photo in his shirt pocket. He pressed it closer to his chest and closed his eyes. Somehow, just having her photo in close proximity to Bittler made Wyatt feel as if she had been violated. He couldn't confront the man. Bittler should not be given the opportunity to save his own life. It was best to just get on with it.

Lucky for Wyatt, although Bittler was deceptively strong when awake and alert, unconscious he was pretty easy to move. With much maneuvering, punctuated by grunts and expletives, Wyatt managed to sling Bittler over his shoulder and carry him into the house. It didn't take long to find the bathroom, although carrying Bittler up the steps was quite exhausting. Wyatt deposited him face down into the tub and turned the faucet on. He plugged up the drain and then washed his own arms and face in the bathroom sink. Although he got most of the dirt off, the burn in his skin only deepened.

He tried to ignore it as he climbed into the tub with Bittler and held the man's head beneath the water. It was only a few inches deep, but it was enough to keep the man's mouth and nose submerged. Wyatt's arms ached and trembled as he held Bittler's face pressed against the bottom. Although he was unconscious, the man's body still twitched and quaked before finally going still. The whole thing took about five minutes. When he was finished, the tub was nearly full. He turned off the water and flipped Bittler's body over but couldn't bring himself to look at the man's face.

He checked his watch. He had almost two hours before Deborah Bittler got home. He went downstairs for staging materials, taking care to avoid the shed. He had dropped his backpack, with the bat in it, in the yard. He finished up with Bittler and was arranging rocks on the bathroom floor when he heard the sound of a car door slamming.

It was close. Very close.

Wyatt froze and listened intently. He strained to hear over his thundering heartbeat. The house was completely silent.

Except for the sound of the front door opening.

"Fuck," Wyatt mumbled.

Then Deborah's voice, the sound causing the hair on the back of his

neck to stand up. “Michael, I’m home,” she called.

In all the time Wyatt had spied on the couple, aside from a traffic jam a single time on her way home from grocery shopping, Deborah’s routine had not altered by more than two minutes. But the night Wyatt had chosen to kill her husband, Deborah came home early.

That’s what he got for being so impulsive. The OxyContin made him feel so good—like he could do anything—that he had grown careless. He hadn’t taken the proper precautions. Even though he’d spied on the Bittlers for months, it had also been months since he’d surveilled them. He should have taken more time to make sure their routine remained the same.

Again, Wyatt’s heart *tha-thudded* hard in his chest—unusual for these occasions since his meticulous planning precluded any heart-pounding excitement. He went to the bathroom doorway and listened. He waited until he heard Deborah’s feet on the tile in the kitchen before creeping silently down the steps.

His mind raced. He paused at the bottom of the staircase to steady his breath. It would be okay. He’d sneak up from behind and tie her up. Blindfold her so she couldn’t see his face. It would be fine.

And it almost was.

Deborah never heard him. One moment she was studying the contents of her fridge and the next she was firmly in Wyatt’s grip. Her body went rigid. He looped one arm around her middle, pinning her arms against her sides.

He used his other hand to cover her mouth as he spoke into her ear. “Do not move.”

She squirmed initially. When she heard his voice, her body relaxed slightly, and she nodded. Wyatt released her mouth and reached into the back of his waistband for the Smith & Wesson. He pressed it into the small of her back. “Close your eyes.”

Together, they turned from the fridge. Wyatt looked around the room. The kitchen was large with faded green tile and yellow curtains that were probably meant to be cheery but clashed with the tile. “Do you have rope?” he asked.

Deborah's voice was calm, as if she'd been through this very same experience a hundred times. "Michael has some in his shed."

Wyatt sighed, shaking his head. "No shit," he said.

Deborah's coat rested on the back of one of the kitchen chairs. Wyatt reached inside the collar and found what he was looking for. He used her scarf to blindfold her. Then he sat her in the chair. He watched her, trying to decide how to handle the logistics of this new development. Several minutes passed. She must have thought he had left the room. Her knees were pressed together, ankles crossed. Her hands were clasped together primly in her lap. She sat up straight, craned her neck first to the right and then the left. Listening.

"Michael?" she called. "Michael?"

Wyatt shook his head, announced himself with another sigh.

Deborah's shoulders slumped. "Your husband is dead," Wyatt said.

Her mouth made a perfect circle. "Oh," she breathed. Wyatt thought he sensed a bit of relief in the word. He started looking in cabinets and drawers for anything he could use to bind her. He didn't feel like traipsing her all over the house, and he was definitely not going out to that shed again. The hour-old memory of the pit still made his stomach turn.

Deborah's voice started as a low murmur. At first, Wyatt didn't even realize what she was doing. "Are you praying?" he said loudly.

His voice startled her momentarily out of prayer. She continued, the words smooth and automatic, picking up tempo with each murmured supplication. "Dear holy Jesus, I pray to you now that Michael has come home to you. Please commit his soul to rest and give him a glorious place in your kingdom, I pray to you most holy Lord . . ."

A tiny coil of anger sprang loose in Wyatt. He swept the toaster off the counter. The sound of it clanging onto the floor made Deborah jump. Her body went rigid again. The praying stopped.

"You're praying for him?"

She turned her head toward Wyatt's voice.

He paced before her. “Your husband murdered innocent women,” Wyatt said.

“They weren’t innocent,” Deborah said calmly.

Wyatt didn’t know what was more frightening—Michael’s collection of dead bodies or his wife’s absolute conviction that he hadn’t done anything wrong.

“Some of those women were pregnant,” Wyatt pointed out. “What kind of monster murders pregnant women?”

“Michael was doing God’s work.”

Wyatt couldn’t keep his voice from rising an octave. “God’s work? He killed a bunch of women because he saw them leaving reproductive health clinics.”

“Abortion is an abomination.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Wyatt said. “How did he know that those women were there to have abortions? Maybe they were getting checkups.”

“They were sinners.”

Wyatt felt the flush descend from the roots of his hair to his collar. The beast stirred. Fear made the fine hairs on the back of his neck spring upward. He had only been taking the Klonopin for a few days. It wasn’t long enough to keep the beast at bay. He couldn’t help but think of Cassidy and the baby she carried. What if it had been her?

“*They* were sinners? Your husband murdered those women. And when he did, he murdered their unborn children. So it’s okay for him to kill those fetuses, but abortion is an abomination? Are you fucking stupid?”

“Michael’s sins are already forgiven.”

“What?” Wyatt could not keep the incredulity from his voice.

“Once we have faith, once we accept Jesus Christ as our personal savior, all our sins are forgiven,” Deborah replied. “We’re born again in Christ.”

Wyatt stopped pacing and stared at the woman. “You’re using your religion to justify murder,” he told her.

“Not murder,” Deborah insisted. “God’s work. What you’re doing—that’s murder.”

“Yeah, no shit,” Wyatt said. “I’m not trying to hide it.”

“Michael has already been admitted into God’s kingdom. He was saved. Christ paid for all our sins with his own blood. If you accept Christ, your sins can be forgiven too.”

Wyatt stepped forward. The decision had already been made. The beast prowled and panted within. He knew he could not stop it, and for the first time in his life he did not want to. He pulled Deborah Bittler’s blindfold down and looked into her eyes. They were dull and brown.

“Then I’ve already been forgiven for killing you,” he said.

CHAPTER

26

Kassidy

October 18th

TK called me a little after eleven p.m. I was still awake, lying in the darkness of my bedroom fighting off tears and a fresh wave of grief. For the third straight night I was unable to sleep. Instead of obsessing over the unknown details of Jory’s death, I was indulging in a fantasy in which Jory was alive—living in my house, sleeping next to me in my bed with our baby in the other room. A family.

The fantasy stopped there. I couldn’t let my mind go any further. My chest felt heavy. I could hardly breathe. My mind had not even scratched the surface of the full magnitude of what I had lost—of all the things I would never experience with Jory. As always, I was alone. When my cell phone rang, it was a relief. I tore it off the charger.

“TK? Is everything all right?”

He cleared his throat. “Yeah, yeah. Listen, we’ve got another For You murder.”

I flicked on my lamp. “What?”

“Yeah, we just got the call. It’s here, here in Manassas.”

I tensed, a flutter in my chest. “My God.”

“Yeah. Apparently, Prince William County called DC for some extra crime scene techs and someone in DC recognized the signature—that it was something we were looking for, so they called us. The scene isn’t far from

my house. I know you're not due in till the morning, but do you think you'd be up for it?"

I was already pulling clothes out of my dresser. "Absolutely," I said.

TK rattled off the address. "Bittler is the victim's last name," he added. "I'll meet you there."

"I'll be there in twenty," I said.



The Bittlers lived in a quiet residential part of Manassas, much like the Bennetts' neighborhood. Single homes with sizable yards and one-car garages. Outside their home, a single streetlamp cast a dim yellow circle in the center of the street. An ambulance rested beneath it, silent and unmoving. Its two attendants leaned against the outside of it, sharing a cigarette and speaking to one another in inaudible tones. I counted three police cruisers, one coroner's van, a crime scene van, and at least three unmarked police vehicles. They were all crammed around the Bittler residence. In spite of all the cars, there was almost no movement. No activity. It was eerily quiet. A uniformed Prince William County officer stood stationed at the Bittler's front door. As I rounded the porch, he nodded at me and hooked a thumb toward the back of the house, indicating that everyone had congregated there.

In contrast to the calm silence at the front of the Bittler residence, the backyard was a sea of activity. I waded in, passing several uniforms, a half dozen crime scene technicians and at least two detectives. The Bittlers' back door yawned open, admitting an elongated rectangle of light. Another uniformed officer stood outside the door checking IDs and badges as various people went in and out. TK's height made him hard to miss. I saw his outline pass through the open doorway. He nodded to the uniformed officer as he joined me.

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"About five minutes. I came through the front of the house. There's one body in the kitchen, but I don't see a signature. The uniforms said the local liaison was out here."

Most of the activity seemed concentrated in front of a large shed that

took up almost half the yard. Its double doors had been propped open. The exterior light by the back door did not quite reach the shed's entrance, where three men stood, heads bent toward one another. They were grouped into a tight knot, obscuring the entrance to the shed. On either side of them, crime scene technicians were setting up flood lights. Someone had already begun snapping photos.

"Need more lights over here," someone else shouted.

As we approached the shed, I saw that one of the men was the coroner, as evidenced by the bold yellow print across his back. I felt a little fumble in my step as the man in the center broke away and came toward us. "Agent Bishop, is it?"

TK looked at me with one eyebrow raised. I shrugged.

Just under six feet and muscular, the man was in his early forties with unruly brown hair and striking blue eyes. He wore jeans and a forest green jacket. He smiled in a way I was sure charmed the hell out of most women and turned their resolve all to mush. He was the kind of man who turned heads—the laugh lines and hard angles of his face made him look distinguished but rugged at the same time. He was the kind of man I would remember under other circumstances. Yet there was something understated about him.

He extended a hand and I shook it. "I'm sorry," I said. "Have we met?"

"Lieutenant Isaac McCaffrey. I'm with the Prince William County's Criminal Investigative Division. We met before—in Baltimore—I was a detective there—"

"On the Nico Sala case," I filled in.

He nodded. "You look good," he said.

Considering Sala disfigured me, I thought. "I don't remember you," I said. "I'm sorry."

His smile remained in place, blue eyes sparkling as he took me in. Heat rose to my cheeks. I was glad for the relative darkness in the backyard. "That's okay. I was one of many detectives who worked that case," he said. "I left Baltimore a few years ago and took a job here in Prince William

County. Is this your colleague?”

I introduced TK, who shook hands with McCaffrey as well. “What’ve you got out here?” TK asked.

We walked over to where the coroner stood with another man. The other man looked from TK to me and shook his head. “We’ve got a goddamn mess. I don’t know where to start.”

McCaffrey turned to him and said, “Well, let’s have a team out here and a team in the house. We’re dealing with two separate issues here.”

TK and I nodded at the coroner in greeting. McCaffrey introduced the other man as the head of Prince William County’s crime scene unit. Both he and the coroner looked pale and overwhelmed.

The coroner shifted his weight from foot to foot and blotted his forehead with a vinyl glove, which he pulled from his jacket pocket.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

McCaffrey motioned toward the house. “Your vics are in there.”

“Our vics?” TK said. “I only saw one victim in the kitchen. No signature.”

The other two men stared at us like children who’d broken a prized possession. No one wanted to tell us. No one wanted to talk about what they had seen.

“Your guy killed the homeowner and his wife,” McCaffrey said. “The signature is in the bathroom.”

“His wife?” I said. “He killed them both?”

“Looks that way,” McCaffrey said.

I stepped toward the shed. “So what’s in there?”

The coroner’s eyes widened. He stumbled forward and grasped my forearm. “Don’t,” he said.

I turned and stared at him. He released my arm and shook his head. “It’s just—” he didn’t finish.

McCaffrey laughed. The sound was small and soft, rising up from

somewhere unseen and tittering over the jagged edges of the crime scene, inappropriate and startling. The other two men looked at him, the horror on their faces barely concealed. TK remained stone faced, the only indication of his curiosity a small furrow in his brow.

“Gentlemen, this lady has seen more gruesome crime scenes than all three of us put together,” Isaac explained. “I’m sure they both have.”

The head of the crime scene unit looked at me. He remained ashen-faced and mute, as if he’d lost his ability to speak. The coroner looked angry. He shook the glove in his hand in the direction of the shed. “I’ve seen a lot of gruesome things too, Lieutenant. You can believe that. But what’s in there is pretty bad. Pretty damn bad.”

I met his eyes. “I’m fine,” I said coolly, but I wondered what was in the shed. A cold sweat broke out along the back of my neck.

He shook his head, turned and walked off into the house. The other man stood stuck in place, paralyzed, watching. I glanced at McCaffrey who smiled at me again. I considered asking about the contents of the shed before walking into it, but I wanted to draw my own conclusions. I looked at TK. He nodded. “Let’s have a look.”

Later I would wonder if photos of the scene in the shed would have bothered me less, but I could never be certain. The floor of the shed was wooden, with a trap door that had been left ajar, revealing a large patch of dirt—large enough for a mass grave, which was essentially what it had become.

It wasn’t the bodies being dug out of the dirt subfloor that got to me. All but one of them was so old that they were visible to me only as browned skeletons in tattered clothing, all their sinew and viscera having seeped away into the earth with time and decomposition. The last one was probably six to nine months old, and while it was a horrific and distorted facsimile of the woman it must have been in life, it was not what caused me to flee the shed, vomit rocketing up into my throat.

What made me sick were the small, embryonic creatures of varying sizes and development that Michael Bittler had cut from their mothers’ bodies and preserved in clear gallon jars which sat along a shelf above his

“work” area.

Unfinished and unformed the small, pale creatures floated, suspended in clear, yellow-tinged fluid, sealed in gallon jars. There were six in all, lined up on a shelf which overlooked a work table. A long, fluorescent light was affixed to the wall above the shelf, and its light gave the specimens a translucent glow. The largest ones were no bigger than a golf ball but there was no mistaking what they were.

Babies.

I knew instantly that it was not the For You Killer who had done this. I knew without being told that either Bittler or his wife or both of them had killed the women in the shed floor and cut their fetuses from their bodies to save and display, and that the For You Killer had killed the Bittlers, possibly in retribution for one of the women they’d murdered.

I pushed TK, uniformed officers and crime scene technicians out of my way as I sprinted out of the yard. I rounded the front of the residence at breakneck speed, barreling past the ambulance and stumbling with blind desperation toward my SUV with one hand over my mouth. Still, some part of my mind was already at work, processing the scene and making adjustments to the profile TK and I had already come up with, weighing the investigative possibilities and considering what was to be done next. This part of my mind seemed to exist independent of my body, and it was eager to get into the house and examine the rest of the scene even as I reached my Trailblazer.

I faced away from the house, body bent toward the ground, one hand on the window of my vehicle as the contents of my dinner splattered on the asphalt. The hot smell wafted upward, causing a dry heave. I coughed and my body spasmed in protest.

TK was behind me within seconds, his hand on my back. “You okay?” he asked.

“Yeah,” I choked. “Just give me a minute.”

I heard Isaac’s feet crunch along the street. The first thing I thought was: they crunch, they don’t clack. I hadn’t noticed his footwear earlier. When his feet came into view, I saw he wore heavy black boots. I didn’t straighten up.

Instead, I focused on those black boots, turning my head slightly so I could take them in. The toes were scuffed, the sides worn. The boots surprised me because most detectives wore shiny dress shoes, usually black, that clacked on pavement and floors when they walked. Jory had three pairs. All of them polished to a gleeful shine. The only evidence they ever showed of being worn were the heels, which bore scuff marks. Jory had small feet, I remembered suddenly.

Another dry heave. I spit gracelessly on the ground.

Isaac had large feet, and he said, “And here I told those guys it wasn’t your first time at a crime scene.”

“It’s not,” TK said defensively. “She’s fine.”

“That was a joke, Agent Bennett,” Isaac said.

I flashed a palm at them and spit again. “I have the flu,” I lied, for McCaffrey’s benefit.

I stayed bent over, tore my eyes from his boots and waited for him to walk away. He didn’t. The boots shifted but didn’t leave. TK placed himself between us, but a moment later, Isaac moved around him and a crumpled napkin appeared under my nose. “It’s clean,” Isaac said.

I snatched it out of his hand, straightened up, and turned away from both men. I wiped my mouth, checked my dark reflection in the driver-side mirror. My reflection was smooth and unruffled, angry but poised. The exact opposite of how I felt. I balled the napkin up and stuffed it in my pocket. When I turned back to McCaffrey, he said, “You don’t look so hot.”

His face was unreadable. I pulled myself up and concentrated on looking imposing. I was a federal agent. “I’m fine,” I said.

TK studied my face. He seemed to want to reach out and touch me but didn’t. I shot him a hard stare. “Really,” I said. “I’m fine. Why don’t you have a look in the shed, and I’ll start in the house.”

“Sure,” TK agreed. “I’ll meet you in the house in a minute.”

Once TK had made his way to the back of the house again, I walked off, leaving Isaac beside my vomit. A few seconds later, I heard his steps crunching along the asphalt at a leisurely pace. I chanced a look back at him.

His hands were jammed into his pockets, his head tipped downward, a tight-lipped grin on his face.

I snapped my head forward. A crimson flush blanketed my face. My fingers trembled as I opened the gate and slipped back into the crime scene.

CHAPTER

27

Kassidy

October 19th

I entered the house through the front door. Lights blazed in the living and dining room, but they were empty so I moved past them to the kitchen where a technician was snapping photographs. The first thing I noticed were the cheery yellow curtains over the kitchen sink. They seemed out of place hanging so benignly above the scene at my feet.

Deborah Bittler's body was face down, arms at her sides. One of her legs was bent slightly. The back of her head had been smashed in—a tangle of hair and blood. The blood streaked the floor, mingling with broken glass and scattered remnants of a toaster. The kitchen chairs had been overturned. They lay on their backs in the mire of what violence had left behind. Deborah's hands were bruised. I knelt beside her, fighting a wave of dizziness, hoping no one saw me sway.

Only the left side of her face was visible. Her eye had swollen, taking on the appearance of a bruised plum. "She was beaten to death," I muttered to myself.

"Looks that way." McCaffrey's voice startled me. I fell back a little. I placed my hand on the floor to catch myself from going ass over head. McCaffrey was beside me instantly. He pulled me up with one hand under my elbow and the other on my shoulder. I steadied myself and brushed his hands away.

He cleared his throat and stepped away from me, glancing back at

Deborah's body. "Is that significant?" he asked. "That she was beaten to death?"

I circled the body, putting some distance between myself and McCaffrey. "It doesn't look like these blows were inflicted postmortem."

"No, ma'am."

TK came in from the yard and stepped gingerly around the edges of the scene. "Look at this," I said to him. "Nothing about this scene looks like the work of the For You Killer. It's messy, disorganized, angry."

TK nodded and hooked a thumb toward the backyard. "Yeah, and the shed is definitely not his work either."

"He doesn't normally beat people to death?" Isaac asked.

"Our guy asphyxiates them and then beats them or poisons them. This is new," I told him. "Where's the signature?"

"It's upstairs. Follow me."

As we made our way up the steps to the second floor, Isaac briefed us on what he knew. "Husband and wife. Both born-again Christians—real hard core. They belong to the New Life Church over on Chestnut. Wife left her prayer group early last night. Said she didn't feel well. We think your guy was in the middle of his business when she came home. Husband was supposed to lead some pro-life rally in the morning—apparently he does a lot of that. There are a number of criminal complaints against him—harassment, terroristic threats, assault, that sort of thing. Anyway, one of his church buddies stopped by to drop off pamphlets for the rally tomorrow. The guy knocked, rang the doorbell—nothing. It was late, almost ten, but the guy thought they were still awake since most of the lights were on. He went around the back, peeked in and saw the wife lying on the floor. That's when we got the call."

Isaac paused outside the Bittlers' bathroom.

Over my head, TK met Isaac's eyes. "What made you look in the shed?"

Isaac grimaced. "The doors were wide open when our officers responded. They had a look inside—the floor had been pulled up and the bodies partially unearthed. Those bodies have obviously been there for a long

time. We think that was Bittler's dirty work. So either your guy showed up and caught him out there, or he left it that way so we'd find it."

I arched an eyebrow. "It doesn't look like Bittler went to great pains to conceal his activities."

I pictured the embryos again, nausea roiling in my stomach.

Isaac sighed. "No. No, he did not."

We entered the bathroom. I followed Isaac, and TK walked in behind me. It was small and stifling. As we entered, the sink was to our right. The room was shaped like a rectangle, and just past the sink was the bathtub, which was across from the toilet. Between the two was no more than three feet of green marble tile. The throw rug had been tossed aside and in its place were small rocks, each one roughly the size of a hockey puck. They'd been arranged to spell out the words FOR YOU.

I stepped in front of Isaac to get a better look. I felt his breath on my ear. "He always use rocks?"

I shook my head and glanced at the tub where Michael Bittler's naked body rested, submerged from the neck down in fluid that looked sickeningly similar to that in the gallon jugs we'd seen in the shed. His face was pale but bruised. His skin looked waxy. He had curled into a fetal position on his side. His tongue lolled, moist and thick.

"We think he mixed eggs in with the water to make it slimy like that," McCaffrey said. "I already had someone take a sample for analysis. I also had someone photograph the rocks."

"The rocks are new," I said. "They must have some significance that is specific to Bittler." I shook my head. "This guy, he's just so—"

I didn't finish my sentence. Michael Bittler's body unfurled and rose up, arching its back, thrashing and twitching. The unexpected seizure sent the pale yellow liquid splashing over the side of the tub and onto my shoes. My startled yelp was eclipsed by Isaac's cry. I staggered backward into him, away from the dead body dancing wildly in the bathtub. One of Bittler's arms flopped over the side of the tub.

I heard Isaac say, "Holy shit," before I toppled him over. Our bodies

tangled in our frantic effort to get out of the bathroom. I felt Isaac's large hands on my shoulders. My throat felt tight. Sweat broke out along my brow. He held onto me as I pushed against him, trying to get away from the flailing corpse. We fell like dominos, knocking TK back into the hallway.

"What the—" TK said but didn't finish. He fell to the floor as Isaac and I tumbled past him, bodies fused together. We tripped over TK's legs and landed on the floor.

Isaac's large frame cushioned my fall. I fell atop him as if he were a mattress. With my shoulder blades pressed against his sternum, I felt his heart pounding.

"What the hell?" TK said. He looked from the bathroom door to us, his eyes unnaturally wide.

Unceremoniously, Isaac lifted me off him, one hand scooping my bottom and the other between my shoulder blades. He placed me gently on the floor next to him and climbed to his feet.

"He's alive," Isaac said. "He's still goddamn alive."

Isaac grabbed TK's outstretched hand and pulled him to his feet. "Help me in here," Isaac instructed. "Let's get him out."

They disappeared into the bathroom. I sat on the floor, frozen. Everything had become loud and sharp like the night Nico Sala tied me to a chair and shot me up with meth. The splashing sounds of Michael Bittler being delivered from his would-be grave were painfully loud. Isaac's shout from the bathroom hurt my ears.

"Bishop, is that ambulance still out front?"

I staggered to my feet and raced down the steps. The front door banged into the uniformed officer on the porch as I dashed past him. I would have vomited, but there was nothing left in my stomach. The EMTs still stood outside the ambulance. One of them leaned against the passenger-side door, arms folded, one foot tucked up behind him on the runner. Their conversation stopped abruptly when they saw me. One of the men opened his arms as if to catch me. The other said, "You alright, lady?"

I stopped a few feet from them, bending at the waist as a dry heave took

me. I slipped a hand over my belly and with the other I pointed back at the house. “Up the steps, a left and another left. The bathroom. He’s still alive in there. He’s still alive.”

CHAPTER

28

Kassidy

October 19th

Back at Quantico the excitement was palpable. A victim left alive. A mistake. An uncharacteristic blemish in our killer’s nearly perfect body of work. This was a rare treat for us since our jobs were largely academic. I sat in a chair in the corner of the large conference room the task force had commandeered. Agents and visiting detectives moved in and out, some huddling together, talking in rushed, breathless tones. Isaac stood at the far end of the room talking to Talia Crossen. He moved his hands in various motions as he spoke. At one point, Crossen tipped her head back and laughed heartily, her blonde hair swishing across her back.

I felt a small stab of something which I chose not to examine. I wished I could remember him. TK’s voice was a balm, soothing my frayed nerves. “Well, well, well. That sure was exciting.”

He handed me an ice pack and plopped into the chair next to mine. He surveyed the room. I put the ice pack over the large bruise on my right knee. I hadn’t even noticed the bruise or the intense throbbing until we got back to the BAU—which wasn’t until almost 8 a.m.

“You went home and changed?” I asked.

TK wrinkled his nose and smoothed the lapels of his new, clean suit. “Had to. That stuff in the tub got all over me. I had to throw my suit away.”

I laughed. “Good call. Even if you could clean it, why would you want

to keep it?”

“Exactly.”

“How can that guy still be alive?” I said. “Our killer drowned him and then beat him. I don’t get it.”

TK sighed and folded his hands in his lap. He watched Talia and Isaac. “He’s not really alive. I mean he’s breathing on his own, but the docs said he sustained massive brain damage. They’re saying TBI.”

I studied TK’s profile. “Traumatic brain injury?”

He nodded. “The guy was deprived of oxygen too long. He’s a vegetable. Even if he makes it and wakes up, he won’t be able to tell us anything.”

“Son of a bitch,” I mumbled, shaking my head. I closed my eyes momentarily. Of course, it could not be as easy as having a living witness to identify the killer. I opened my eyes and turned back to TK. “The UNSUB killed the wife,” I said. “She came home early, and he beat her to death. This guy is losing control. He didn’t even beat his first few victims to death. I mean he definitely hit Megan Wilkins a few times, but it was nothing like this. He seemed to have real problems with killing, but what he did to Deborah Bittler is the result of some serious visceral rage. Her hands were bruised. But she wasn’t the intended victim since we didn’t find the signature with her body.”

“So what are you thinking?”

“Two things. One is that something happened to throw this guy off his game in the first place. Two is either something about Deborah or something Deborah did or said triggered this guy’s truly violent side. This is why he is normally so rigid and meticulous. We know he doesn’t like to lose control—he lost it this time, and now he’s made a mistake. This guy has been nearly flawless until now.”

“Except for the partial print at the Wilkins scene in Portland,” TK reminded me.

“The partial print that we can’t match to anyone? It doesn’t do us much good if it doesn’t lead us to a suspect,” I pointed out.

TK nodded. “Well, we’ve known all along that he doesn’t like to kill. I mean most serials do it because they enjoy it. It gets them off. Some of them do it because they literally cannot stop themselves. It becomes a compulsion. But this guy—he’s trying to make a statement. Even for revenge murders, these killings are clinical, detached, passionless. Well, except for Deborah Bittler.”

“Right. I think once his statement is made, he’ll stop.”

“Which means we have to find him before he reaches the end of his list,” TK added.

“Unless he loses control. He may have killed before and not gotten caught. And if he did, I bet he did it in a fit of rage. I bet it was messy. That’s why he is so methodical and obsessive with these killings. It’s not OCD, he just doesn’t want to lose control. He could kill someone twenty years from now in a fit of rage, but you wouldn’t be able to link it to these murders because the For You killings are about his statement—whatever it is. “

“Which is why I still maintain there are two killers,” TK said. “One organized and the other disorganized.”

I frowned. “I see why you’re saying that, but I still disagree. First of all, double serial killers are rare. The ones we know about—Buono and Bianchi, Bittaker and Norris—they targeted women. They raped and tortured women, and then one of the partners would kill them. But those were savage murders with a sexual component. Even Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka in Canada—he brought home young girls, and she helped rape and torture them before they were murdered. Again, a sexual component. This case doesn’t fit that mold. I think we’re looking at one guy with huge control issues and some seriously repressed rage.”

We fell into an easy silence, each of us mulling over our private thoughts about the killer and the new developments in the case.

Then TK nodded toward Isaac. “Do you remember him?”

My memories of the Sala investigation consisted of a blur of faces and photos, broken apartments, and damaged victims. “No,” I said. “But if he worked with me on the original investigation, that was almost six years ago.”

TK nudged me with his elbow. “Six years? He certainly remembers you. You must have made an impression.”

“Looks that way,” I said.

Across the room, Talia patted Isaac’s arm and left. He jammed his hands into his pants pockets and looked around until his gaze landed on me. He smiled and waved, his brilliant blue eyes lighting up the room. I kept my expression carefully blank. In my head, I pictured Jory’s face and the jealous comment he’d have if he was there. A lump formed in my throat. I tried to think of something else.

“McCaffrey likes you,” TK said.

I sighed and rubbed my tired eyes with both hands. “I know,” I mumbled.

“He’ll be joining the task force,” TK added.

I raised my head from my cupped hands and glared at him. “Do you have a point?” I snapped.

TK chuckled. “No,” he said. “No, I do not.”

CHAPTER

29

Kassidy

October 19th

The conference room table was shiny enough to see your reflection and it was bigger than my living room. There were a couple of agents from VICAP and five detectives—the lead investigators from each police department involved. They would work with us in Quantico for a few days before returning to their departments. Remy Caldwell had taken Jory’s place on the task force, albeit reluctantly. I’d spoken to him earlier in the day. He still didn’t have the list of car owners nor had he located Jory’s wallet.

As I waited for the For You task force meeting to begin, I wanted to talk it over with Remy, but he wouldn’t look at me. He chatted up Isaac and kept his back toward me. It was almost two in the afternoon, and I still hadn’t slept. Judging from the circles beneath Isaac’s eyes, he hadn’t either.

TK came in and sat beside me. He placed a steaming cup of black coffee in front of me. “Thanks,” I said. I pretended to take a sip. I had stopped drinking coffee when I found out I was pregnant.

“It’s decaf, Bishop,” TK whispered. “But don’t tell your body. Placebo effect and all that. Worked for Diane when she was pregnant with the girls.” He gave me a wink and opened the small notebook he always carried with him. He tapped the cap of his pen against the blank page in front of him.

Talia sailed into the room, immediately drawing the attention of everyone present. The air of seriousness ratcheted up a notch. She had a grim, fixed expression, her brow a hard line. She took a seat on the other side of

TK. She swiveled her chair in his direction and gave him the nod. He cleared his throat. He stood and moved to the large dry-erase board that covered nearly one whole wall of the conference room. We had posted the main points of our profile on one half of the board in list fashion, and TK had written the victims' names in columns across the top of the board: Paul, Henderson, Sorenson, Wilkins, Bittler. The names were evenly spaced apart, leaving room to draw connections between the victims, should any arise.

All eyes were on TK. He pointed to the profile. "This is what we know. We're looking for a Caucasian male. Based on the high level of sophistication we see in these crimes—the stalking, the lack of forced entry, the lack of physical evidence—we believe our UNSUB is over thirty-five."

"Between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five," I said, moving to stand beside TK.

TK continued, "He'll be college educated. He is not someone who draws a great deal of attention to himself, but he is high-functioning in social situations. He has a job that requires a lot of traveling. He may be self-employed. He probably has a little bit of money socked away, but you won't know it from his house or the car he drives. Again, this is not someone who is going to go out of his way to draw attention to himself."

I continued where TK left off, "He is no stranger to crime. He has a juvenile record. As an adult, his crimes are mostly white collar like identity theft or embezzlement. He has no criminal record as an adult. He may have killed before, but he has not been caught. He came from a dysfunctional home. It's likely that he or someone close to him was abused as a child. He has a history of clinical depression. He was probably bullied as a child. As an adult, he is a bit of a control freak. He is meticulous and obsessive. His house, car, and person will always be neat, clean, and well kept. But he has a wild side. He is walking around with a lot of pent-up rage. He tries to keep it under control because it is messy and unpredictable."

"What about his relationships?" Edward Umstead, the detective from Ardmore, Pennsylvania asked.

"Excellent question," I said. "Although he blends well in social situations, he is a loner. He keeps to himself. He has a lot of acquaintances

but no close associates, no good friends—no one he lets into his world. He doesn't trust people.

“Our UNSUB is someone who prides himself on his keen sense of fairness. In his mind, injustice is everywhere. Small things bother him. Things you and I would normally dismiss will stick in the UNSUB's head and eat away at him. He sees what he is doing as curing injustices. This also gives him an unreasonably high standard of conduct to which he holds himself and others.”

“That standard will make it difficult for him to maintain relationships with women,” TK added. “Like everyone else, women inevitably disappoint him. Also, based on his mobility and the amount of time he travels, it is unlikely that he is married, has children, or is involved in any kind of committed relationship.”

“Also, based on his mobility and his need to blend in, we believe he lives in a major city or a suburb of a major city,” I said.

Emmett Lane, the detective from Trenton, New Jersey asked, “So you think these are revenge killings?”

“Absolutely,” TK replied.

I nodded. “But our killer is seeking revenge for things that maybe only he recognizes. It's entirely possible that a victim just spoke to him the wrong way or did something that, to normal people, would not warrant harassing them or poisoning them or killing them.”

For the first time since I had met her, Ellen Noll, the detective from Denver, Colorado who was there for the Georgette Paul murder, spoke. “Aren't these crimes a little sophisticated for revenge killings?”

“Yes,” I answered. “Most revenge killings are impulsive. Even the ones that are planned are not very well thought out. Usually the killer hasn't planned past the actual killing. Obviously, our UNSUB has planned everything very meticulously. He is extremely cautious. He stalks these victims for weeks—maybe even months—before he strikes. Also, with at least three of the victims, we can confirm that they were probably beaten postmortem with a small aluminum baseball bat which the UNSUB brought to the scene and took with him when he left. Again, this level of

sophistication and planning points to someone who has committed crimes before.”

This time Remy spoke. “So basically this guy made a list of everyone who ever pissed him off and now he’s going around killing them?”

TK scratched his head. “Something like that.”

“We realize that the staging is unusual for revenge killings,” I said. “Not only does our UNSUB leave the words ‘for you’ at each crime scene, but he stages the killings themselves to look far more savage than they are.”

TK went on, “Our UNSUB does not enjoy killing.”

“Except when he loses control,” Isaac piped up.

TK nodded. “I’ll get to that. He doesn’t enjoy killing, but he wants it to look like he does, which is why with the early victims most of the trauma was inflicted postmortem. He started out asphyxiating the victims. With Martin Sorenson, he used poison. These are less violent ways to kill—almost merciful compared to stabbing or beating someone to death,” I said. “Even the fact that he takes the ‘weapon’ with him when he leaves is unusual for revenge killings. With most revenge killings the UNSUB leaves the weapon at the scene. In many ways, this UNSUB is an aberration. Even for a serial killer he is a bit of an aberration. Most serials are sexual sadists, but in these crimes there are no sexual components that we can see.”

“These crimes are primarily about humiliating his victims,” I went on. “The killing is almost an afterthought. The real satisfaction for our killer is derived from what happens before the killing—depriving Georgette Paul, making Martin Sorenson eat garbage, emasculating Boyd Henderson, harassing Megan Wilkins for weeks before he killed her. Whatever wrongs the UNSUB thinks the victims committed against him are closely related to the methods of humiliation he chooses for them before killing them.”

“Recently something in his life has changed. Something in his life has gone wrong,” TK said. “A recent stressor—maybe losing his job—has caused him to start coming apart. He is rapidly losing control as we see from the Wilkins and Bittler scenes.”

“He’s making mistakes,” I said. “As you guys know, we have a partial

print from Megan Wilkins' home.”

Remy sighed. “A partial print that we can't match to anyone.”

“Not to anyone in AFIS,” Isaac interjected. “But it does match a print we found in the Bittlers' kitchen this morning.”

There was a small collective gasp. “Yeah,” I said, echoing my earlier statement to TK, “but that doesn't do us any good if we can't match the prints to a suspect.”

“But if this guy has a juvenile record, wouldn't his prints be on file?” Remy asked.

“Not necessarily,” I replied. “Most juvenile records are sealed and expunged.”

“What about Michael Bittler? He's still alive, right?” Lane asked.

Isaac shrugged. “It doesn't look good.”

TK filled the room in on what he had told me earlier—that for all intents and purposes, Michael Bittler was a vegetable.

“What about the signature?” Remy asked.

TK and I exchanged glances. We still could not agree on the meaning of the UNSUB's bizarre calling card. We reiterated the theories we had shared with Talia early on in the case—that it was possible the UNSUB was murdering people because of wrongs they'd committed against someone he loved who may or may not be involved in the crimes; that perhaps this person was dead and the message was intended to follow the loved one into the afterlife.

“What if he's leaving the words for the families—the ‘for you’ is for the families who find them?” Umstead suggested.

TK shook his head. “It's a great theory except that Paul and Henderson lived alone and Sorenson's family had left him months before the murder.”

“The ‘for you’ could be meant for law enforcement,” I said. “If he is so concerned with righting wrongs, curing injustice, then he may be saying to law enforcement, ‘here, look, I did what you couldn't do—I gave this person what they deserved.’”

“Look,” Talia said as two agents brought in boxes containing evidence from the Bittler investigation. Isaac sprung up from his seat to help them. There were only three boxes, and the men set them near the head of the table where I stood. “Certainly the signature is significant, and all the suggestions I’ve heard are feasible. I also think the profile is good, but this time I don’t think those things are going to help us very much. We need to focus on the victims. If we can find the thing that connects them all, we can find the killer.”

There were nods all around the room, followed by heads dipping to check notes and files. At this point in the case, no piece of information was too trivial, too small, or too mundane. If the victim preferred mustard over catsup or slept on the right side of the bed instead of the left, we wanted to know. If they’d ever cheated on a test, rolled through a stop sign, or forgotten to wash their hands after using the restroom, we wanted to know.

A charley horse caused me to pace back and forth as Isaac opened the boxes the agents had just brought in. I busied myself beside him, pulling documents out.

“So what do we have in terms of connections?” TK asked. He turned to the board and picked up a dry erase marker. He uncapped it and looked at the eager faces in the room.

“Georgette Paul used to live in Philadelphia, and Martin Sorenson taught there,” Umstead said.

TK drew a line from Georgette Paul’s name to Martin Sorenson’s and wrote Philadelphia over it.

“Michael Bittler has protested at clinics in Philadelphia and in Trenton,” Umstead said.

TK drew one line from Bittler to Paul and another from Bittler to Henderson. “He has criminal complaints against him in both cities,” Lane added.

Isaac slid a stack of papers toward me. “This guy has criminal complaints against him in four states,” he said. “I don’t know if that’s going to help us connect him to the killer.”

I picked up a stack of papers from one of the Bittler boxes and started thumbing through them.

“The killer may be one of the people who had a complaint against Bittler,” I mused.

I was looking at citations and criminal complaints that had been lodged against Michael Bittler in New Jersey and Pennsylvania over the last thirty years. There were dozens of them. I felt a tingle at the nape of my neck. My fingertips burned.

“The Bittler investigation is complicated and there is a lot of work to be done on it yet,” TK said. “Let’s just focus on connecting the victims for now.”

“Georgette Paul was a manager at LJ’s Books in Philadelphia twelve years ago. Boyd Henderson has been a regular customer there since they opened in 1981,” Lane said.

A split second before I found it, I realized I had been looking for it. An involuntary gasp escaped my lips, drawing stares from around the room. TK’s marker froze poised over Georgette Paul’s name—ready to make a line from her name to Boyd Henderson’s.

I met his eyes. I managed what I hoped was a wan but apologetic smile and hopped a little on my left foot. “Charley horse,” I said, my voice shaky. “Sorry.”

I made a show of rubbing my left calf and excused myself, hobbling awkwardly out of the room with the pages from Bittler’s file clutched to my chest.

I felt light-headed. When I heard myself breathing, I realized I must be hyperventilating. I slipped into my office and pulled the door closed behind me. The pages scattered onto the floor as the tremble in my hands grew worse. I dropped to my knees and sifted madly through them, trying to locate the complaint, hoping I’d been seeing things earlier in the conference room when I’d come across it.

I wasn’t hallucinating. It wasn’t my imagination.

The criminal complaint was seventeen years old and it had been issued

in the City of Philadelphia. The complainant was Kassidy Bishop.

CHAPTER

30

Wyatt

October 19th

Evette Gerst's one-story, Cape Cod-style home sat on the beach of an inlet, the dunes threatening to swallow up her porch a little more each day. As he walked along the beach, Wyatt could not fathom how the house continued to stand built so close to the water. The water itself gave off a stagnant smell that reminded him of raw fish and sewage. It was, however, perfectly in keeping with the ill-named Garden State.

When Wyatt was in eighth grade, Evette Gerst was in her forties. Now she was sixty three. She had stopped teaching at Sunderlin's middle school three years earlier and retired to Cape May, New Jersey. Several months before, Wyatt had tracked her down and spent some time watching her, trying to learn as much about her life as he could. Her husband continued to work in Sunderlin, driving six hours to spend the weekends with his wife. Their son lived between the two in Philadelphia. He, too, only visited on the weekends.

Wyatt had only to catch the woman on a weekday to ensure total access and absolute privacy. The next closest residence to Evette Gerst was a half-mile down the road. First thing Monday morning, he drove to Cape May. He was still shaken from the scene at the Bittlers' home. He had lost time again, although this time it was mere minutes instead of hours. One second he was looking into Deborah Bittler's flat brown eyes, and the next he was standing over her battered body, a piece of one of the kitchen chairs in his hand. He'd done his best to wipe down the kitchen and gotten the hell out of there.

He hadn't been able to sleep in spite of the two OxyContin pills he'd taken when he got home. At five a.m. he left for Cape May. It was near noon when he arrived. He parked his car two blocks away and walked to Evette Gerst's house. He wore a wide-brimmed hat and fishing vest. He carried a fishing pole which he had purchased solely for disguising himself on this particular trip, and his tackle box held nothing but his Smith & Wesson. Inside his vest, against his heart, was the photo of Cassidy Bishop.

Gerst sat in a rocking chair on her front porch which, luckily for Wyatt, faced the deserted beach. Her hair had turned white. She kept it cut short, almost like a buzz cut. Unlike most women her age, it was not lacquered over in hairspray after having been rolled in curlers and teased. She had never been particularly feminine, and even in her forties when Wyatt had known her, he could not understand what her husband found attractive about her.

Gerst saw Wyatt walking across the beach and waggled a long, arthritic finger. "You can't fish here," she said.

He turned toward her as if he hadn't known she was there. He smiled and waved. Walked closer. "I'm sorry," he said. "Did you say something?"

Her stony expression showed a faint flicker of annoyance. "I said you can't fish here."

Wyatt looked toward the south end of the beach and shook his head. "Actually I'm not looking to fish. I'm done for the day. Didn't catch anything all morning. I was looking for my son and nephew. They were with me and we got separated. Maybe you saw them on the beach?"

Her brow wrinkled. She looked down the beach in the direction Wyatt had just looked, as if she might see the two imaginary figures. "No," she said. "I haven't seen anyone. Been here all morning."

Wyatt scratched his head beneath his cap and looked worried. "You sure? They're 14 and 15. About this tall—" he motioned to his shoulder. "They're both skinny. Brown hair. My son was wearing jeans—those black flies bite something awful."

Gerst nodded, and in that moment, Wyatt knew he had her. It was the mention of the flies that authenticated his story. He'd been making it up as he went along, waiting for the second where she went from skeptical to

compliant. "I honestly haven't seen them or anyone on this beach all morning," she repeated.

Wyatt looked around again as if the two fictional boys might suddenly come walking along. He made a show of crinkling his face, scratching his head again. Then he sighed. "My car is about a mile that way," he motioned to the north side of the beach. "I gave the boys my cell phone. Could I use your phone to call them? Maybe they can meet me at the car. I'd really appreciate it."

The hint of a smile played on the corner of Gerst's mouth. She stood slowly, her joints popping. "Come on in," she said as she went into the house. Wyatt followed her. She didn't bother to look back, so she didn't notice him close and lock her front door. He followed her through the living room and dining room into her kitchen, surveying the house for anything unusual or any signs that someone else was either there or en route. There was nothing.

Nothing but this lonely old woman, her shoulders beginning to round, betraying the first hint of a dowager's hump. As they entered the kitchen she said, "Where are you from?"

She was focused on the phone, so she didn't notice him check the lock on her back door. Wyatt set his tackle box on her kitchen table. "Sunderlin," he said. "Pennsylvania."

He saw a little rise in her shoulders, a straightening of her spine. "Really?" she said. "That's where I'm from."

She turned and handed him the phone. He took it. "Small world," he said. He opened the tackle box. He placed Gerst's phone inside and picked up his gun.

He pointed it at her. She looked more puzzled than surprised or even scared. She stared at him as if waiting for instructions so he said, "Sit down."

He pulled out a chair and she sat in it, never taking her eyes off him. She studied him without the slightest hint of fear. Her scrutiny made his hands sweat. He wanted to put the gun down and wipe his hands on his pants, but he didn't. Finally she said, "You're one of my students."

"I was one of your students," he corrected.

He was surprised, but he wondered if she truly recognized him. If she did, she was not letting on. Then she said, “I don’t remember you. It may take a minute.”

Surely it would come back to her. His face had been plastered all over the local and national news for many months when he was in high school. She would remember that.

“I’m not here because of me,” he said.

She arched an eyebrow. Her palms rested flat on the surface of the table. “You’re not?”

“You were not a very nice person,” he said. “Not a nice teacher.”

She scoffed. “Now that’s not true.”

“You hated girls.”

She considered this. Her gaze dropped for a moment, and when it returned to his face there was concession in it. “The girls were never as easy to manage or as pleasant as the boys. Girls come with a lot of problems.”

“That doesn’t justify demeaning them and undermining their confidence. You were dealing with eighth grade girls—they’re already dealing with a lot of self-esteem crises.”

Gerst laughed. The sound made Wyatt wince as if she’d pinched him. “What are you? Some kind of psychologist?”

“Shut up,” he said.

She didn’t even have the good grace or the good sense to look afraid. She stopped laughing, but a smirk lingered on her lined face.

“I’m going to kill you.”

As if he’d just told her he was simply going to cook her dinner, Gerst shrugged. “I gathered that.”

Her nonchalance bordered on irreverence. It reminded him of every single time she’d insulted, harassed, or denigrated one of the students in his class—in the face of their obvious distress, even in the face of their tears, she remained smug and unaffected. Even when parents complained about her, she was unapologetic.

As if coming from a great distance, he heard thunder. At first he thought it was actual thunder, but a quick glance out the window betrayed no storm clouds—no clouds at all. The sun was high in the sky. Then he thought it was the ocean, but the waves weren't powerful enough on the beach outside to make the kind of noise he heard. Maybe a motorboat.

“Stay,” he commanded, although the look she gave him indicated she had no intention of trying to escape.

He pointed the gun at the back of her head as he crept into the doorway of the dining room. He craned his neck to see the large bay window in the living room and the water beyond. There were no boats.

“What is it?” Gerst asked.

“Shut *up*.”

He moved back into the kitchen. The thunder receded just a little. Small beads of sweat popped out along his upper lip as he realized what it was. The beast.

“You cracking up or what?” Gerst snapped.

The next instant Wyatt was staring at the woman from across the table, and she was holding the right side of her skull. Blood trickled from between her fingers. He stared at the butt of his gun and back at her. She looked up at him. Her face was crinkled in pain, but her eyes showed annoyance.

Had he hit her?

He waited for her to say something else, but she didn't speak. Finally, he pulled the photo from the inside pocket of his vest. He was troubled to see that his hand trembled just a little as he held the photo up for her to inspect it. He swallowed.

“I'm going to give you a chance to save your life,” he recited.

Gerst studied the photo as if she were looking at a mug shot. She brought her hand down from her forehead and poked the photo with it. Wyatt stared at the inch long gash on her head, oozing bright red blood. “I remember her,” Gerst said. “There were two of 'em. Had to be almost 25 years ago. Her dad was a police officer. One of 'em got sick in my classroom. Threw up all over.”

Wyatt snatched the photo from her. “I know,” he said. “You made me clean it up.” She’d smeared a tiny drop of blood on the photo. He rubbed it with his shirttail, trying to return the photo to its original pristine shine.

Gerst began to laugh but quickly stopped, using the sleeve of her sweater to staunch the blood sliding down the side of her face. She looked at him as if waiting for him to hit her again. When he didn’t, she continued, “So you’re here for her? You telling me that twenty-five years ago your girlfriend didn’t like my class and she’s still upset about it?”

“You put her down every chance you got,” Wyatt said. “That day she threw up—that’s a perfect example. Do you remember what you said to her?”

Gerst shook her head.

“You told her she stunk. You said she was disgusting and to get out of your classroom because you couldn’t stand her stench. Who says that to a child?”

Gerst pressed her mouth into a thin line. “You mean to tell me you’re going to kill me because your girlfriend threw up in my class over two decades ago and—” She froze.

For a second, Wyatt thought she might be having a heart attack. Her eyes widened. Her mouth went slack, hanging open in the shape of an O. But then he realized what was happening.

She remembered him.

And she was afraid.

Wyatt smiled.

“You went to prison,” Gerst said. Her voice squeaked.

Wyatt crossed his arms. He could not contain the gleeful grin that spread across his face. “No,” he said. “I went to a juvenile detention center. I was tried as a juvenile, or don’t you remember that? Did you pay attention? I was released at eighteen. My records were sealed.”

“That’s impossible,” Gerst said.

Wyatt laughed. “It happens every day in this country.”

“They couldn’t just let you go.”

“But they did, and by that time everyone had forgotten all about me and my little crime. I got to start over.”

A long moment of silence passed between them. Then Gerst smiled. “You said you would give me a chance to save my life. What do I have to do?”

“You have to be sorry.”

“Sorry for what?”

He shook his head and clucked his tongue. “And that is where you have failed to save your life. You recognize the woman in the photo, but you don’t recognize that you hurt her. You’re not truly sorry.”

Indignation got the best of the woman, blotting out her fear, making her bold as she thrust her chin forward. “I didn’t hurt her. I never hurt anyone. You, on the other hand—”

He was standing over her. She lay on the floor. The chair had tipped with her in it. She was curled up on her side, holding the other side of her face. The beast circled. He couldn’t control it much longer.

A voice was speaking. It took him a moment to realize it was his own. “So stubborn,” it said. “You believe so profoundly that you are right; you don’t even care what happens to you. You don’t even have it in you to pretend to be sorry to save your own pathetic life. You hurt people. That is a fact. What’s worse is that you don’t care that you did. You don’t care because you don’t for one second believe that that is true. You’re not even living in the same reality as the rest of us.”

One of her palsied eyes glanced up at him, wet with part fear and part disgust. “You’re deranged,” she said.

The beast smiled. “You’re dead,” Wyatt whispered.

CHAPTER

31

Kassidy

October 19th

I locked my office door and plopped into the chair behind my desk. I held onto the armrests because it felt like the chair was spinning wildly. The room seemed to be moving, the air pulsing around me. Everything was fluid, and the sound of my breathing was a high-pitched whine. I closed my eyes and planted my feet on the floor.

Slow, I commanded. Slow breathing. In and out.

I don't know how much time passed—it may have been a few minutes or a half-hour. I still felt a low thrum coursing through my body, but my breathing had returned to normal. I opened my eyes and swiveled my chair to face the desk.

The knock on the door made me jump. I stood and straightened my clothes, as if my inner turmoil might be apparent on my person. I expected to find TK on the doorstep, but it was Isaac. My breath caught in my throat momentarily. For the first time I noticed the little bit of gray threaded through his tousled brown hair. Matching stubble covered his face. His eyes were penetrating but warm, like he knew everything there was to know about me and was happy to see me anyway. How could I not remember him?

“What are you—can I help you with something?”

“I wanted to see if you were okay.”

My cheeks burned. “I'm fine.”

“You rushed out of that meeting. It seemed like something was wrong.”

“I—” I froze and glanced back toward my desk where the seventeen-year-old complaint against Michael Bittler lay. I wished Jory were there. He would know what to do, what to say, where to start.

What if the For You Killer was killing for me?

I felt cold suddenly, as if I’d just walked into a meat locker. I didn’t know what to say, so I didn’t say anything. I stood staring awkwardly at a point over Isaac’s shoulder until I felt like I was floating outside my body. I had a flash of watching myself from the same vantage point while Nico Sala tried to kill me five years earlier.

Isaac held up a large hand as he turned to leave. “Forget it. I’m sorry if I’m being intrusive. I know you don’t remember me. You just looked spooked when you ran out of there. I’ll go now.”

Before I could think about it, I reached out and grasped his forearm. It was thick, and I could feel the cords of muscle beneath his jacket sleeve. “Wait,” I said. “I found something. Come look.” Surprise registered on his face, then he nodded.

I led him to my desk and handed him the complaint. It only took him a moment to find my name. His wide lips pressed into a thin line. “Bishop,” he said. “This is over fifteen years old. You were at a clinic?”

I opened my mouth to explain, but the words got stuck. I cleared my throat and tried again. “My sister,” I said. “She was coming out of the clinic. Bittler threw a rock and hit her on the head.”

“Your sister—” Isaac began.

I cut him off. “We were twins. She pretended she was me. She didn’t want my parents to know that she—” I trailed off. I didn’t want to go into it with him. The only living people who knew about any of that were Linnea and my mother.

Well, Linnea, my mother, and possibly the For You Killer.

“So it was okay if they found out that you were involved in,” he groped for words, finally settling on, “these activities, but not your sister?”

I laughed dryly, staring at the floor. “Yeah,” I said.

I hadn’t given much thought to the dynamic between Lexie and I, but it was true that in a sense I was the “older” sibling. I was the protector. I took the brunt of punishment and disapproval in our household. I had often fought her battles. I’d comforted her through disappointments. I’d shielded her. I had done the hard things, and I’d been left behind.

“Where’s your sister now?”

“Dead,” I said flatly.

I had a dozen memories of Lexie imploring me with a look to please, please do this for her, please just this one time. They were interrupted by Isaac.

“Wait a minute,” he said.

I turned my attention toward him. His eyebrows drew together. “A rock—you said Bittler threw a rock and hit your sister in the head.”

“Yeah,” I said.

“The killer used rocks in Bittler’s bathroom to spell out the words—”

“I know. I am connected to him and a couple of the other victims as well. I’ve been sitting here thinking about it. Martin Sorenson was one of my professors in college. Megan Wilkins is from my hometown.”

“What about the others?”

I sighed and moved back to the chair behind my desk. My legs felt heavy and achy. I hadn’t slept in over twenty-four hours. “I don’t know,” I said. “If I’m connected to them somehow, I don’t remember them. After Sala, I have trouble—”

Isaac waved a hand in dismissal and plopped into the chair across from my desk. “It’s okay,” he said. “You don’t have to explain. Is there anyone else in your life who might remember them?”

“My mother,” I said.

Isaac took off his jacket. Beneath it he wore a white button-down shirt with no tie. The outline of his V-necked T-shirt was visible under his formal shirt. The top button of his shirt was undone, revealing a few golden brown

chest hairs. My eyes were drawn to the hollow of his throat.

I closed my eyes for a moment, and immediately Jory's face floated before me. What was I thinking? How could I possibly be looking at Isaac McCaffrey? At anyone? When I opened my eyes, my gaze was drawn to Lexie's photo, and I was hit with the sudden realization that although Jory had wanted to marry me and we were going to have a child together, he hadn't yet been a real presence in my life. There should have been a photo of the man I loved on my desk next to Lexie's picture. But there wasn't. Maybe there would have been, but all of those possibilities had been cut short.

I sucked down the sob that rose instantly in my throat. Sleep deprivation and pregnancy hormones were not a good combination. Again Isaac looked at me, concern darkening his azure blue eyes. "You okay?"

I nodded but didn't trust myself to speak.

He leaned forward in his chair, studying me. "You're freaking out a little."

I laughed abruptly, the sound surprising me as much as it did him. It reminded me of his own inappropriate laughter at the Bittler crime scene, which for some reason, made me laugh harder. "A little bit," I said. "I'm freaking out a little bit."

He leaned back in his chair again, smiling calmly. It was then that I realized why his presence put me at ease. He was the calmest person I'd ever met. He exuded it. It rolled off him like waves of gentle warmth. Like Talia Crossen, I couldn't imagine anything ruffling him. I wondered if he had been that way before—during the Sala investigation.

He motioned to the phone on my desk. "Call your mother," he said. "See if she remembers the other victims. Then we'll talk to the rest of the task force and figure out where to go from there. In the meantime, I'm going to try to score some food."

The thought of food made my mouth water. I hadn't eaten in six hours. The last thing my nerves were interested in was food, but the baby had other ideas. "A cheeseburger. Two cheeseburgers. See if you can get some cheeseburgers," I instructed.

Isaac stood and gave me a mock salute as he made his way out of my office. He left his jacket and the Bittler complaint in the chair by my desk.

With another glance at Lexie's picture, I picked up the phone.

Although I checked in with my mother by phone about once a month, I hadn't even told her about my pregnancy yet. But there were questions I needed to ask her. My mother remembered everything—especially when it came to her children. She knew the name of every bully who'd ever picked on us, every teacher we'd either loved or hated, every boy we'd ever had a crush on or been rejected by, every girl who'd ever made our lives miserable, every job we'd ever had, however long it lasted—an hour or a year—and every supervisor who'd ever ruined our day.

She answered on the third ring. "Mom? I have to ask you a few questions. They are going to seem very strange, but it is very important that you answer them as best you can."

I jotted things down on a notepad as we talked. I didn't go into the details of the investigation, and she didn't ask. When I hung up I looked at Isaac's jacket, wishing he and the cheeseburgers had come back already. Then I thought again of Jory. He would have been here. He would have been a part of the task force. I felt a sharp pang, a pain under my diaphragm. My thoughts were quickly interrupted by Isaac's voice and the delicious smell of hot food.

I tried not to look like a maniac as I tore the wrapping off the first cheeseburger and devoured it. "Thank you," I managed around a wad of food.

"Got you fries too," he said. He pulled the chair closer to my desk and spread the rest of the food and two bottles of water out between us. For a few blissful moments, my anxiety over the For You Killer was smothered with the greasy goodness of fast food. I ate like I hadn't eaten in years. Isaac watched with an amused smile, his own burger frozen halfway to his mouth.

"What?" I said.

He chuckled. "I love a woman who eats like a lumberjack."

I shot him a caustic look as I finished off my second cheeseburger. "Shut up," I said.

He shrugged. “Did you get in touch with your mother?”

I took a long drink of water and picked up my notepad. My stomach full, a deep warmth suffused my body, and I found it easier to reveal the things I’d figured out by talking to my mother.

“Georgette Paul was my boss in college. I worked at a bookstore in Philadelphia. One of our regular customers was Boyd Henderson. He came in every Sunday and bought about 10 newspapers. One Sunday not all his papers were there, and he called me a cunt. I called him a misogynist pig and told him where to go. Paul fired me over it. Megan Wilkins bullied me and Lexie mercilessly when we were in middle school.”

I took a deep breath. “All the victims are connected to me,” I concluded.

Isaac was silent for a full minute. He put his uneaten hamburger on my desk and stared into my eyes. “The UNSUB must be someone you know. Who is the killer?”

I shook my head. “I don’t know.”

He studied my face, his gaze intense and unflinching. The scar beneath my chin burned—Nico Sala’s brand. “No ideas?”

“No. I mean I’d have to think about it. I don’t even remember the victims.”

TK gave a cursory knock as he entered my office. He pulled up short when he saw Isaac but recovered quickly. “Lieutenant,” he said.

“Agent Bennett,” Isaac responded.

TK strode over to the desk and looked down on me with a severely wrinkled forehead.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“Are you up for a trip?”

I had the sensation of falling in my stomach. “There’s been another murder?”

TK grimaced. “Cape May, New Jersey. Normally we wouldn’t get a call, but Detective Lane from Trenton put out notices to all New Jersey county police departments so we got the hit. They just found the body. They

think she was killed this morning. The scene is fresh.”

I exchanged glances with Isaac. “I’ll wait for you here,” he said. “You can bring Agent Bennett up to speed on your way there.”

I looked back at TK. “Let’s go,” I said.

I briefed TK during the ride. It kept my mind from turning in on itself. My mother’s words echoed in my ears—answers to questions which seemed so innocuous and delivered to me in the same soothing voice that had chased away thirty-five years of nightmares but held the key to a serial killer’s identity. It was difficult to grasp.

Part of my mind refused to accept it. The other part, the agent, the analyst who was cool and clinical at all times had already begun sifting through the facts, putting the pieces together around me, until the puzzle was complete. Evette Gerst was another piece of that puzzle. The scene at her beachfront home was almost identical to the one we’d found in the Bittlers’ kitchen. TK and I stood in the kitchen doorway, taking in the scene. It was the only room in the house in disarray. Pieces of kitchen appliances were scattered across the floor. A bowl of fruit had been knocked to the floor. It lay overturned, apples, pears, and a single banana making a trail along the point of trajectory. Jagged wooden pieces lay amid the wreckage, having splintered from the chair the killer used to beat Gerst to death.

Gerst’s body lay face down like Deborah Bittler’s had. A small circle of blood had pooled under her open mouth. Her upper dentures lay three feet from her body, broken evenly in half. Her short, gray hair was dark with blood, one half of her skull caved in like a rotten cantaloupe. Her face was swollen, stretching the gashes on her cheek and forehead into obscene red mouths, gaping open, revealing bone and yellow tissue. Her hands had turned deep purple. One of her fingers was kinked backward. Another was strangely flat as if someone had taken a roller to it. Clearly all these blows had been inflicted while she was still alive. I was certain in this case the cause of death would be blunt force trauma.

Although TK pressed me on the drive, the name Evette Gerst meant nothing to me. I hoped something at the scene would jog my memory. Gerst’s son had called her earlier in the day but had been unable to get in touch with

her. He then phoned a neighbor and asked him to check on her. The neighbor had found her front door unlocked, her body in the kitchen.

Two crime scene technicians were working the room, moving slowly and carefully. They looked around like men who had dropped a contact. They didn't acknowledge us. TK snapped on a pair of gloves and slipped past me. He moved around the perimeter, working his way toward the body at the center of the scene in concentric circles.

"This is personal," I said.

"They're all personal," TK said.

"No," I said. "The others—they did something to the person this guy is killing for—to me. Evette Gerst—he knew her."

"What about Deborah Bittler?"

"He didn't know her. Deborah interrupted him. Michael Bittler was the target. His body—he was where we found the signature, and we know now that Michael was connected to me. Deborah was not. Like I said before, I think Deborah Bittler said or did something to send our killer over the edge."

TK glanced around. "Speaking of the signature, where is it?"

"Table," one of the techs said without looking up from his work.

We nearly had to step over Gerst to get to the table. Standing before it, I realized it was the cleanest part of the entire room. The oak shone in the afternoon sunlight. Only one item lay on it, placed in the center.

"A plaque?" TK said.

Before I could read it in its entirety, I knew who Evette Gerst was. "Oh my God," I gasped.

"Do you remember her now?" TK asked. He leaned over and read the plaque aloud: "Luzerne County school board in recognition of 30 years of excellence in teaching. Evette Gerst."

"She was a teacher," I mumbled. "My eighth grade teacher."

"Well, someone besides you didn't like her class," TK muttered.

He leaned even closer to it, his face inches from its surface. "Looks like

he carved it right into the metal. Probably with a knife.”

The words FOR YOU had been crudely etched over Evette Gerst’s accolades. “Sunderlin,” TK said. He almost touched the plaque. He stopped himself at the last second, his gloved finger hovering over the words. The gloves kept him from contaminating the scene, but it wouldn’t stop him from smearing any useable prints the killer might have left on the plaque—although we still didn’t have a suspect to match up with the prints. “I’d be willing to bet that our UNSUB is from your hometown.”

CHAPTER

32

Kassidy

October 20th

Isaac McCaffrey was an excellent interrogator. I might have known this from the Nico Sala investigation, but I couldn't remember him. True to his word, he had waited until after midnight for me to return from the Gerst crime scene. He had joined me for moral support at a meeting with TK and Talia during which it was decided that I would be pulled from the For You case and work from home indefinitely. They wanted it to look like I wasn't working at all. For the life of me, I couldn't figure out how I'd gone from just meeting Isaac to using him as moral support in just twenty-four hours.

He promised to have some patrols from his own division drive past my house a few times during the night and to return himself the next day.

I tried to get a good night's sleep, but I couldn't get comfortable. I couldn't stay in one position long enough to sleep. The pregnancy wreaked havoc on my body. As my uterus expanded, all the muscles and ligaments around it stretched. Shooting and stabbing pains assailed me when I least expected it. I'd just be drifting off to sleep when a sharp pain somewhere in my body would startle me awake. Then there were the crippling charley horses and a pounding headache I couldn't shake. By morning, heartburn had been added to my litany of complaints.

I also had racing thoughts—the whirlwind of anxieties. A serial killer out there killing for me. My ache for Jory. The questions about his death. The poor, fatherless child growing inside me. Sleep came in fits and starts and

always with nightmares.

When Isaac showed up at 10:00 a.m. I felt as though I'd been awake for a week. The dogs took to him instantly, and as we sat in my kitchen, he grilled me on every detail of the case until I got hungry and had to order a pizza. I picked up the phone to dial the pizza place and arched an eyebrow at him. "I guess you're staying for lunch."

He laughed and took off his jacket. "I like pepperoni," he said.

"We're having bacon."

I got him a bottled water from the fridge and sat across from him again. "Pizza," Isaac said. "It was a pizza boy who saved you from Nico Sala, wasn't it?"

"In a manner of speaking. Can we get back to the issue at hand?"

"Your stalker," Isaac said.

"Yeah. My Superstalker 3000 as my friend Linnea would put it."

"Still have no idea who it is?"

I shook my head.

"Well, it has to be someone who knows you pretty well, knows your life—or at least has known you for a long time," Isaac said.

"It's not either of my parents, my friend Linnea, TK, or my friend Dale so I doubt that."

He rubbed his chin. "Well, at least four of his victims are straight out of your college years from what you've told me—Paul, Henderson, Sorenson, and Bittler. Any serious boyfriends in college?"

My brow wrinkled. "There was a guy," I said. "I dated him for about a year, but it wasn't serious."

I had met him my first month at Temple University. He was a sophomore from a suburb of Philadelphia. He was kind and funny. The sex had been so-so. We'd liked each other, but we hadn't been head over heels. Lexie was so depressed after the abortion that all my time was devoted to her. Our relationship had fizzled out. I only heard from him once after that. He'd sent me a card after Lexie's death.

“What was his name?” Isaac asked.

I shrugged. “I honestly don’t remember—although my mother might. I don’t think it’s him. He came from a very nice, well-adjusted family. Plus our relationship was pretty passionless.”

Isaac didn’t look convinced, but he went along with my assessment. “All right. Let’s look at the other vics—your eighth grade teacher and your middle school bully. Bishop—this guy is going pretty far back.”

I shook my head, fighting off an involuntary shiver. “I know,” I said. “TK thinks he’s from my hometown. I guess he is, I mean I don’t even know how he—or anyone—could know these things otherwise. I mean I don’t even remember these people.”

“Well, he can’t know you that intimately or he would have known that it was Lexie, and not you, who had the abortion,” Isaac pointed out.

“True.”

The dogs broke into frenzied barking as they raced to the front door. “Pizza guy,” Isaac said.

I pushed the dogs out of the way and stepped onto the porch to pay the delivery man. When I returned to the kitchen, Isaac said, “This guy killed two people from your middle school years and four people from your college years. What happened to high school?”

The smell of the pizza was overpowering. I had eaten half a slice before Isaac stopped talking. He leaned back in his chair, eyeing me warily as if I might lunge across the table and devour him next. He looked like he was going to make a snide comment but thought better of it. Instead he said, “Didn’t anyone piss you off in high school?”

“Sure,” I said over a mouthful of pizza.

Tentatively, Isaac reached across the table and took a slice.

“It is odd though,” I said. “The gap.”

“Let’s go back to eighth grade,” Isaac said.

I reached for my third slice of pizza, but my hand froze over the box. It felt like all the blood in my body had drained away.

“My God,” I muttered. “If TK is right, that would mean he’s been infatuated with me for almost twenty-five years,” I said. “Who stalks someone for a quarter century?”

Isaac shrugged. “You tell me. You’re the behavioral analyst.”

“Yeah, but most stalkers try to insert themselves into your life. Predatory stalkers will typically not make themselves known, but their stalking period is usually short because they have a higher potential for violence. A predatory stalker would not watch from the sidelines for decades without making his presence known. That is a really long time to stalk someone, and I don’t think he’s ever tried to approach me. That is what is really unusual. If he’s been watching me all this time then why hasn’t he approached me? I mean, most people who are being stalked know they are being stalked. He’s never even sent—”

I had thrown the hyacinths away months earlier, but I looked at the trash can anyway as if they might still be there.

“What is it?” Isaac asked.

My voice was a croak. “The flowers. Someone sends me flowers on the anniversary of my sister’s death every year. No matter where I’m living, they find me and send the flowers. I’ve never been able to trace them. I bet it’s him.”

I stood up and paced the kitchen, suddenly feeling jumpy and cold. I hugged myself. The dogs watched me warily, their eyes following me back and forth. Pugsley whined. I looked at Isaac. “Is it really possible that this guy has been watching me for twenty years?”

Isaac shrugged again. “Anything is possible, Bishop. We’re not dealing with a stable or logical individual here. Maybe he hasn’t been watching you constantly all this time. It’s possible he’s just kept tabs on you. Either way, twenty years is a damn long time. Most marriages don’t last that long.”

“So basically, I’ve had this kind of benign wallflower of a stalker for most of my life who has just now decided to start killing people who have pissed me off,” I said incredulously.

“Speaking of that, it might help if you made a list of people who’ve

pissed you off in your professional life, because once this guy is finished with people from your childhood and college years, he'll probably move on to them."

"I could," I said. "But I don't know what good it would do. I didn't remember any of the people he's already killed except for Evette Gerst. My long-term memory is useless. Ever since Sala attacked me, there are a lot of things I just can't remember."

Isaac smiled. "Like me."

I returned a tight smile. "Yeah. Sorry."

"I'll get over it."

Another thought came to me. "If this guy's been watching me all this time, why didn't he stop Nico Sala?" I said.

"Maybe he called the pizza guy," Isaac suggested.

Those last hazy moments came back to me. I'd tried so hard to forget everything about that night, but there were parts that I just could not expel from my mind. I had been so delirious. I thought death was speaking to me. I felt the color drain from my face as I stared at my kitchen table. "Oh God," I whispered. My stomach felt strange and airy, like I was on a roller coaster, permanently suspended on the downward track.

"What is it?" Isaac asked.

That night my legs had been so weak, every muscle in my body taut and trembling with the effort of moving after so many hours of being restrained, beaten, and stabbed. His voice: "He's coming. You have to do this. Listen for him." Hands lifting me.

"He was there," I said. "He was there that night."

Isaac was calm and cool across the table, watching me.

Cold sweat broke out across my forehead. "He was in my house. He untied me and handed me my gun." And in that moment, I had felt such relief and such absolute, unconditioned love for that voice—for death—because it was releasing me.

"He didn't shoot Sala?"

Again I felt the reassuring weight of my Glock as if it were still in my battered hands. “No,” I murmured. “I shot him.”

“That’s still pretty amazing considering what he’d done to you,” Isaac said. “Why didn’t he shoot Sala though?”

“I don’t know. Maybe he wasn’t ready to reveal himself.”

“It would have been perfect though. What better way to reveal himself than by saving your life?”

I wiped the sweat from my brow and shook my head. “No, no. People like this guy live in a fantasy world and the reality is never as good as the fantasy. He wouldn’t want to ruin things by revealing himself before he was ready. Who knows how many years he was stalking me before Sala attacked me. All those years of watching me, his fantasy would have been building to the point where no possible reality could stand up to it. In his mind, it would have been too risky to reveal himself even under those circumstances.”

“That’s messed up.”

“I know,” I said.

I plopped into a chair. Smalls walked over and nudged my hand. I pet her absently on the head. “God, all those years. My whole life . . .” I said, unable to finish. It was too much to take in. One person watching me for over twenty years. How had he done it? Why hadn’t I noticed? Where was he now? Outside? Had I spoken with him over the years and not known it? Run into him innocently not realizing that he was stalking me?

The room spun. I looked at Isaac and focused on his eyes to keep myself from getting dizzy. Fear and exhaustion threatened to overcome me.

Isaac leaned one elbow on the table, resting his chin in his hand. With his other hand, he flipped the cap from my water bottle. He turned it on its side and used his thumb and index finger to spin it like a top. I watched his fingers as he spoke. It gave my mind something to focus on besides the panic threatening to overtake me.

“You said in your profile that this guy probably committed crimes before and didn’t get caught, or that he was a juvenile offender. What about the kids you went to school with in Sunderlin? Any violent offenders?”

The realization was like an anvil landing on the table between us. Both my hands flew to my forehead. Pugsley scurried over and sat on top of my feet, whining softly.

“Oh my God,” I gasped. “I know who it is!” I tried to recall the boy’s name, but it wouldn’t come back right away. “There was a boy in our class,” I continued. “His name was . . . it will come to me. I can’t remember it now, but he killed his parents when we were in high school. He went away. That could explain the gap in the victims—people from middle school but no one from high school.”

It came to me. I punched a fist in the air. “Blake! Blake Foster was his name.”

“So you think this kid Blake grew up to be your stalker and a serial killer?”

“It makes perfect sense,” I said, “Blake Foster was the kid whose own parents forgot to pick him up after school or after extracurricular activities. I mean this kid got picked on every day of his life as far as I can remember. I ‘saved’ him from one of the worst instances.” Briefly, I recapped the incident that I had told Talia about a few months earlier. “I was probably the only person who ever stood up for him. I think he was fixated on me.”

The cap flew out of Isaac’s fingers and shot across the table at me. I caught it and flipped it back to him. “When we were fourteen he tried to kill himself, and even though we never ever spoke to each other, he asked for me to visit him in the loony bin.”

“Nice,” Isaac said, referring to my choice of words.

I waved him off. “Lexie went and pretended to be me, but he didn’t know the difference. I always thought it was odd that he never tried to talk to me once he got out.”

“Did it go badly with Lexie?” Isaac asked.

I shook my head. “No. She said it was awkward, but that mostly she felt really bad for him. I mean she fully expected him to approach me when he came back to school. But he acted like we didn’t exist. A year later, he stabbed his parents to death. While he was in jail awaiting trial, he asked to

see me again.”

“You didn’t go?”

“No. My father blew a gasket when he found out that Foster wanted to see me. Lexie tried to convince him to let one of us visit Blake, but my father didn’t want us anywhere near him.”

I reached over and fished another slice of pizza out of the box. I hesitated before closing the box again and took two slices.

“You know that pizza isn’t going anywhere, right?” Isaac chuckled.

I rolled my eyes. For a few moments, there was only the sound of me eating with the speed and vigor of a starved dog. Then Isaac said, “But this guy was convicted. Isn’t he in prison?”

“He was tried as a juvenile. I’m pretty sure he was released when he was eighteen.”

Isaac munched on a pizza crust, his brow crinkling. “I always hated that rule.”

I nodded. “My dad was so upset about it. He’d been to the crime scene. I don’t think he ever really got over it.”

“Your dad?”

“Yeah, he was Chief of Police. Retired last year.”

I came up for air. I took a long gulp of water and eyed the pizza box again. Pizza never tasted this good. I should have ordered two. He watched me with a wry smile, one eyebrow raised. “Tapeworm?” he asked.

“Something like that.”

“Finish it. I had plenty.”

I took the last slice of pizza from the box and took a sizeable bite.

“You have to go to the task force with this,” Isaac said. “Today.”

“I know.”

I polished off the slice of pizza and retrieved my phone from my purse. Holding it in my hand, I thought of Jory, a deep ache throbbing at my center. The phone no longer rang every two hours. I missed his relentless courtship.

Isaac stared at me. "I'll go with you," he said.
"Okay." I said and dialed TK.

CHAPTER

33

Kassidy

November 22nd

“Linnea, can’t you come just for the weekend?” I pleaded into the phone. “Thanksgiving is less than a week away.”

I heard her laugh softly. “I can’t. I’m in the middle of something up here. I told you, I’m taking a leave of absence after the baby comes.”

I pouted, though she couldn’t see me.

“Don’t pout,” Linnea said. “I know you’re pouting.”

“It’s been a month. A whole month at home. I’m bored out of my skull. All I do is eat. My body hurts. I have heartburn twenty-four hours a day, not to mention a heavy discharge which is apparently normal—oh, and occasional crippling crotch pain. I’m rapidly expanding.”

This time Linnea laughed loudly. “Are you visibly pregnant now?”

I slipped a hand over my bulge. “It sure feels like it, although I’ve managed to hide it well with baggy clothes. Not that I’ve been able to leave the house.”

“What about Dale? Hasn’t he been over to check on you?”

“He’s busy with work. He comes over when he can, but he’s not home much lately. I haven’t discussed the ‘Superstalker’ with him. I don’t want to freak him out.”

“What about your new boyfriend?” Linnea asked. “I thought he was

there all the time. What's his name again?"

I rolled my eyes, pacing the kitchen. The burning in my chest worsened. "Isaac McCaffrey is not my boyfriend, but yeah, he's been here every day for a month, and come to think of it, I don't even think he's noticed my bump."

"Does he stay long?"

"Oh, shut up."

More laughter. "I'm serious. What do the two of you talk about?"

I shrugged. "Well, we've been going to the range almost every day even though the baby doesn't seem to like the noise. I don't think I've shot my gun this much since the academy. I don't know. We talk about the case. My childhood. The UNSUB. Past events that I have no memory of. I think he's only here to deter the stalker. Or he is the stalker."

"He must like you," Linnea said, echoing TK.

"I don't want to talk about this," I replied irritably.

The truth was I looked forward to Isaac's daily visits. I still grieved for Jory, and my nights were spent weeping into the furry necks of one of my dogs and pacing the house, unable to sleep. Remy Caldwell had come up with the list of car owners I had asked for. No one Jory knew owned a blue foreign-model car. The list of blue Hyundai and Honda owners in the city of Portland had turned up nothing. Jory's wallet was still missing. When I wasn't thinking about the For You Killer, I was making myself crazy trying to piece together the events leading to Jory's death, trying to figure out what could have possibly happened out there on that road.

Even though my discussions with Isaac centered around the For You case, they were a welcome relief.

Linnea changed the subject. "Have you looked at baby stuff yet? Maybe if you started the nursery, it would occupy your time."

"Well, I cleared out the guestroom and put a coat of primer up. I'm waiting for the next ultrasound to pick out the paint," I said. I bit my lip. The entire time I was priming, all I could think about was how I was going to protect my child from the For You Killer.

“I will be there for that,” Linnea said. “They’ll tell you the sex of the baby then?”

“Yeah,” I said. “I guess I could go shopping though.”

One of the advantages of being nearly thirty-seven, single, and a workaholic was that I had quite a few thousand dollars saved up for a rainy day. Or a baby.

“Have you told your mother?” Linnea asked.

I sighed. “No. No, I have not.”

I was rewarded with a loud tongue cluck. “Girl, you better call her before you do anything else. She’s missing everything. You know she’ll be upset if you don’t tell her soon. You should go home for Thanksgiving. You know your folks would love that.”

Before I could answer, my dogs sprung up and raced to the front door sniffing and whining excitedly. I went into my living room and looked out the window.

“Linnea, I gotta go. McCaffrey’s here. He’s picking me up for a meeting with TK and Talia.”

As he got out of the car, I opened my front door. The dogs rushed out to greet him. I left the door ajar and returned to my kitchen. I put the phone back on its base and fluffed my oversized sweatshirt to hide my growing bump. I don’t know why I was trying to hide it from him except that I didn’t feel like having the whole who’s-the-father discussion, which would lead to the I-slept-with-a-married-man discussion, and then I would have to talk about how Jory was dead. I could hardly stand the reality of it, let alone having to rehash it again.

Isaac appeared in the kitchen doorway, a box of doughnuts in his hand. My three dogs pawed his legs, looking for attention and probably hoping for doughnuts too. An image of Jory standing in the same doorway almost five months earlier sprung into my mind, and just as suddenly, tears burned my eyes. My throat felt thick. I turned away from Isaac and wiped my eyes. “Thanks,” I said.

Isaac set the doughnuts on the table. He took off his jacket and sat down.

“It’s been a month already and none of my officers have seen anything suspicious around your house. I even stepped up patrols to four times a day, and nothing,” he said.

“The Bureau has a couple of agents stationed outside most of the time,” I said. “They’re hoping they’ll catch the UNSUB spying on me.”

Isaac laughed and pulled a glazed doughnut from the box. He ate it in two bites. I was already on my second. “You Feds aren’t exactly subtle. The UNSUB would spot those guys a mile away. That’s why I’ve had my guys coming by, but they haven’t seen anything. Whoever this guy is—he’s invisible.”

I felt a little shiver and glanced out the kitchen window, half-expecting to find the grown-up Blake Foster staring back at me with a grotesque smile. “No shit,” I said. “He’s been stalking me for years and I never caught on.” I rubbed my arms, suddenly cold. “The whole thing gives me the creeps.”

I had had an entire month to think about my stalker. I found it ironic that, in spite of my heightened wariness after the Nico Sala attack, I hadn’t noticed anyone spying on me. While I paced the house at night, I searched my memory for any detail I might have missed—someone walking their dog past my house, someone following me, a stranger doing a kind deed, anything unusual that should have been a red flag. I went over my entire life—the parts I could remember—with a fine-toothed comb, seeing it in a new light, watching it play out before a one-person audience I’d never known was there.

I felt violated. I felt so violated that what Nico Sala had done to me began to seem small. Sala had destroyed my life in a single, terrifying night. What the For You Killer was doing had been going on for two decades, and it was far more underhanded and insidious.

“Stop thinking about it,” Isaac said. “You’ll make yourself crazy. Are you ready?”

I frowned at him and stuffed another doughnut in my mouth, eating the entire thing in one bite.

“Classy,” Isaac said.

“Let me change,” I said. I could still squeeze into one of my skirt suits.

Damned if I was going to meet with my colleagues wearing a sweat suit that was three sizes too big. The suit jacket was big and covered my bump quite well. On my way back to the kitchen, I got my coat from the hall closet.

“Should I bring the rest of these doughnuts?” Isaac asked as he came to the front door.

“We’re meeting at a diner, right?” I said. I slipped my Glock into the holster I kept clipped to the back waistband of my skirt. It felt unusually heavy, pulling the material of the skirt tight against my burgeoning belly.

Isaac nodded.

“They’ll have food there,” I said.

CHAPTER

34

Wyatt

November 22nd

Wyatt sat in a corner booth at a diner in Manassas. He wore a Washington Nationals baseball cap with the brim pulled down low over his brow and a thick, baggy sweatshirt with old jeans. So as not to draw attention to himself sitting alone, he had brought a backpack full of textbooks, two of which he spread before him on the table. He was just a grad student trying to study. He put his iPod on the table next to one of the books and plugged his headphones into it. He wore them in his ears, although no music played. This way no one would be tempted to talk to him while he eavesdropped on Cassidy's meeting with her FBI colleagues. He had been monitoring her for the last month. She hadn't done shit but spend damn near every day with her new best friend, a local police officer named McCaffrey. He had hacked into her email several times before finally finding an email from TK Bennett scheduling this meeting with her and their supervisor, Talia Crossen.

His back was turned to the door, but he need only look to his left at the strip of mirrors running the length of the wall behind the counter to see who was coming and going. Bennett and Crossen were already there, seated side by side two booths behind him. The place was only about half-full, but Wyatt could still hear them from where he sat. He heard the *swoosh* of the door open and glanced furtively at the mirror. Cassidy was there—and McCaffrey was with her.

Dammit.

They slid into the booth across from Bennett and Crossen. Then Bennett's voice, an edge of excitement to it. "We've confirmed that Blake Foster is the For You Killer."

Wyatt suppressed his gasp. They knew. He wasn't even halfway through his list, and they knew. He wondered if he had left something at the Gerst scene that gave him away. Then he realized it didn't matter. They'd never know that *he* was Blake Foster.

"How?" Cassidy and McCaffrey said, almost in unison.

Crossen replied, "His prints match up with the prints we found at Megan Wilkins' home in Portland and in the Bittlers' home here in Manassas."

"You got his prints?" Cassidy said. She sounded just as surprised as Wyatt felt.

"You were right about his records," TK said. "They've been expunged. Everything should have been destroyed, but someone in your hometown kept all the evidence from the original investigation, and they kept it damn well preserved."

Wyatt leaned over the table, squeezing the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger. Pain pulsed over his eyes. He was pretty sure he knew exactly who had kept his case file preserved. Damn that stupid Chief of Police. Still, he had used so many aliases since then, he was certain he could never be traced. He watched the four investigators in the mirror. McCaffrey kept glancing out the window, eyes searching the parking lot. The waitress brought them all coffee. Cassidy curled both hands around her mug as Crossen slid a folder across the table.

"Our problem now is that Blake Foster is a ghost," she said.

Cassidy flipped open the folder and stared at its contents. Wyatt wished he could see what she was looking at, but the mirror did not afford a good angle.

"I can't believe you found this," Cassidy said.

Bennett took a sip of coffee and smoothed his tie over. "He was released from a juvenile detention center in Erie, Pennsylvania, one week after his eighteenth birthday. He showed up in a halfway house in Philadelphia a

month later, and that's it. He stopped existing after that. He's clearly changed identities—otherwise there's been no activity on his name or social security number for almost twenty years.”

Wyatt smiled to himself and turned a page in one of the textbooks, pretending to read. The waitress came over and refilled his coffee cup. She smiled but, thankfully, did not try to engage him in conversation. He nodded his thanks and glanced back at the mirror. Cassidy picked up the folder and held it aloft, as if testing its weight. “This is awfully thin,” she said. “He certainly is off the radar.”

McCaffrey was still occupied with looking out the window. He took a sip of coffee, his arm brushing Cassidy's. Wyatt felt his gut tighten. “He's off the radar, but he's probably out there right now, watching us,” McCaffrey said.

Both Cassidy and Crossen looked out the window. Bennett sighed. “We've done an age progression.” He pulled what looked like a large photograph out of the file. “This is what he might look like now, although you know these things are just approximations.”

“Are you going to release the age progression?” McCaffrey asked.

Wyatt stretched in his seat, craning his neck, trying to see what they were looking at, but he was too far away.

“In the cities where he's killed for now. Maybe someone saw something,” Crossen said.

TK looked at Cassidy. “Does it look like anyone you've seen?”

She studied the photo, but no spark of recognition lit up her face. After a moment, she passed it back to TK and shook her head. The corners of her mouth drew down—halfway between a frown and a grimace. “I don't recognize him.”

“He has a sister,” Bennett said.

Wyatt's hand trembled as he turned another page in his textbook. *Sarah*. They would track her down and talk to her. But even she could not tell them where to find him.

“A sister? I forgot all about her,” Cassidy said.

“Sarah Foster. She still lives in Sunderlin,” Talia said.

“I’m driving there tomorrow to interview her,” TK said.

“She might be in contact with him,” Talia pointed out.

“I was thinking of going home for Thanksgiving,” Kassidy said.

“Well, let me know,” TK said. “I’ll stop in if you’re there.”

Talia looked at her watch. “We’ve got to go. Let’s keep in touch.”

They stood and put their coats on. TK left money on the table. He squeezed Kassidy’s shoulder before he left. “Be safe,” he said.

Wyatt watched them go. He turned his gaze back to Kassidy and McCaffrey, sitting side by side, looking quite at ease with one another. He half-expected her to rest her head on McCaffrey’s shoulder. Just seeing her so close to the man, so familiar with him, made Wyatt’s stomach roil.

Kassidy sighed. “Well that was anti-climactic.”

“So we have confirmation—we know for sure who it is,” Isaac said, looking out the window. “But he could be anyone.”

Wyatt took a last sip of his coffee, his hand finally steady. He smiled into the cup. *That’s right, I could be anyone.* He started gathering his things. Neither of them even glanced his way.

A shudder ran through Kassidy’s body as she stood. “I have to pee,” she said. “If I’m not back in five minutes you better come in after me.”

Isaac smiled at her, blue eyes twinkling. “You got it,” he told her. The tension in Kassidy’s shoulders seemed to lessen. Wyatt knew what he had to do. He turned away from her quickly as she strode past him, headed toward the restrooms. He left a few bills on the table and walked out, past McCaffrey, whose gaze remained on the parking lot. In his car, Wyatt took a prepaid cell phone from his glove compartment and dialed the number for the Prince William County Police Department.

CHAPTER

35

Kassidy

November 22nd

Isaac was on his cell phone when I returned to the table. As he listened, he jotted something down on a napkin. “Got it,” he said. “No. No, I’ll go myself. Yeah. Thanks.” He flipped the phone closed.

“Are you ready?” I asked.

He motioned to the seat TK and Talia had just vacated. “Sit,” he said. “I ordered us breakfast.”

I stared at him. My stomach growled loudly, and I covered it with one hand. “Breakfast?”

Isaac smiled. He pointed over my shoulder to the booth directly behind us. “That lady back there—I know you’ve been eyeing up her French toast and bacon since we walked in here. Now sit.”

Silently, I slid into the booth. My mouth had started watering the moment he said breakfast. Once the food arrived, we ate in silence. In less than five minutes, I was mopping the leftover maple syrup on my plate with the last piece of French toast. I felt so satisfied, it was akin to being high. Who knew food could be so enjoyable? I felt a little pang that I’d never get to share this with Jory. He’d wanted to be a part of this.

“I want to know everything,” he’d whispered in our last private hours together, ensconced in the hotel bed. His breath had tickled my skin as he kissed my stomach and the top of my pubis softly. “I want to know about

every sensation, every craving, every pain, every ache. I don't care if it's really bad gas—" at that we had both laughed—"I want to know about it. I want you to call me."

He had cupped my bottom and buried his face in me. The memory made my face feel hot.

"Bishop?" Isaac said.

I shook my head abruptly, willing Jory's face and touch out of my head. I met Isaac's eyes. My face burned hotter. I knew it was impossible, but I felt like my thoughts were prominently displayed across my forehead.

"You okay?" Isaac asked.

"Fine," I said, clearing my throat. "What's on the napkin?"

In response, he handed it to me. He had scrawled a name and phone number on it. "Who's Jacob Bentley?" I asked.

"He called in. Says he thinks he saw something the night Deborah Bittler was killed."

"He called into the task force?"

Isaac shook his head. "No, he called my guys. The local department. Apparently, he lives down the street from the Bittlers."

I handed the napkin back to him. "So when are we talking to him?"

Isaac's brows drew together, making a crease of consternation over the bridge of his nose. "We?"

I rolled my eyes. "Yes. We. Don't even try talking me out of it. I'm going stir crazy sitting at home doing nothing."

Isaac studied me for a moment. Then he gave me a half-smile. "Think you can go without eating long enough to talk to this guy?"

"Screw you," I snapped, tossing my fork at him.

Snickering, he turned his body slightly so the fork bounced off his upper arm.

I stood and walked off. "I'll meet you at the car," I said.

"I'm not done," he called after me.

“I don’t give a rat’s ass,” I responded irritably, pushing through the double doors and stepping out of the diner.

It had started raining while we were inside, the sky growing ever blacker with each moment. I stopped and waited beneath the overhang, scanning the parking lot. Goosebumps rose along my arms. I hugged myself and glanced back into the diner. Isaac was at the register, talking on his cell, the phone tucked between his ear and shoulder as he counted bills out of his wallet.

I had the sensation of being watched. I had no idea if Blake Foster was nearby watching me or not, but I was spooked. I wondered how many times over the last, God knew, how many years he’d been watching me and I’d sensed nothing. Had I just grown used to it? Ever since Nico Sala broke in to my house I operated as if someone *was* watching me. I was constantly on edge. Before that night, I couldn’t remember if I had ever felt as though I was being watched.

I thought about the mug shot of a fifteen-year-old Blake Foster that TK and Talia had just shown me. He had been thin and lanky. In the photo, his hair was long and jet black. A shock of it fell across his forehead. It looked greasy and it nearly obscured his brown eyes. He stared at the camera unapologetically, his eyes communicating part deer in the headlights and part resignation. There was a smear of dried blood on his neck. He didn’t look frightened. He looked spent.

Seeing it did not spark anything for me. The age progression hadn’t helped either. The eyes and the bone structure were the same, but the face had filled out, stretched and hardened into more manly features. They had Photoshopped his hair, giving him a short cut instead of the shoulder-length hair he’d had at fifteen. Still, it just looked like a guy my age with black hair and brown eyes. I could have run into him a hundred times in my adult life and not known it.

A cold gust of wind blew a sheet of rain onto my legs. Shivering, I stopped myself from running back into the diner. I waited for Isaac to emerge. He paused, taking in the downpour. Then he said, “You wait here. I’ll bring the car around.”

I didn’t want to get soaked. I was already cold, but I didn’t want to be

left alone a second longer. It was getting dark. “Don’t bother,” I said curtly, stepping past him and into the rain. Isaac said nothing, but he jogged ahead of me to unlock his sedan.

He turned the heat on full blast as we drove. In spite of the hot air blowing mercifully onto my legs, I was freezing.

“I talked to this Jacob Bentley guy. He said he’s on his way home from work. He’ll meet us at his place,” Isaac said as he turned toward Michael Bittler’s neighborhood.

“I thought the neighbors were canvassed,” I said.

“Oh, they were,” Isaac said. “And they all got business cards in case they remembered something later.”

“Your card?” I pressed.

“No, but I told my detectives I’d do this interview myself.”

Isaac squinted, peering out the windshield. The wipers slashed back and forth furiously, but visibility was still bad. The rain thundered down too fast. Coupled with the dark of evening, it was almost impossible to see where we were going. At least that’s what it looked like to me.

“Pull over,” I said. “Wait for the rain to let up.”

“We’re almost there,” Isaac said. He hunched over the wheel, slowing to a crawl as he turned down the Bittlers’ street. We passed the Bittler house, the yellow crime scene tape standing out in the darkness. I shuddered as we rolled past, trying to block the images that immediately came to mind—the lifeless specimens in jars and Michael Bittler’s naked body dancing its way out of the tub.

“That place will go down as the worst crime scene ever,” Isaac muttered.

I snorted. “I don’t know about the worst, but it was definitely the creepiest.”

“I think it’s right up there,” Isaac said.

“How can you see anything?” I asked. I gripped the edge of my seat. Even though the car was barely crawling, I wished Isaac would pull over until the rain slowed.

Isaac's cell phone rang. He fished it out of his pocket and flipped it open. He listened intently. Then he said, "Are you sure? We never interviewed a Jacob Bentley?" He met my eyes briefly. "Did you check all the lists? What about the address? He doesn't live there? Who does? The Weidermans. I just talked to this guy. Do you have the phone number he gave us? Run it. Yeah, yeah. Call me back."

"I don't like this," I said, feeling suddenly edgy.

"My detective says there's no Jacob Bentley on the interview rolls and the address this guy gave us belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Weiderman who've lived there for forty years." Isaac didn't sound concerned, only inconvenienced, but I felt a full-blown panic attack coming on.

"Turn around," I said. "Now. We're getting out of here right now."

Before Isaac could respond, I leaned forward and slapped the dash. "Stop! Look out."

Isaac braked hard, and I was snapped back into my seat by the strap of the seat belt. A figure, clothed in black lay crumpled on the ground in the middle of the street. Isaac frowned. He looked at the houses on either side of us, but no one was around. The rain kept people inside. He put the car in park. I gripped his forearm. My whole body felt tense and abuzz, panic making me dizzy. "Don't go," I said. "Just back the car up, and let's get out of here."

He looked at my fingers digging into his sleeve and then at my face. "Bishop, I can't leave this guy in the street. He was probably hit by a car. He could be dying. Just wait here."

Without waiting for a response, he opened his door and stepped into the downpour. I watched Isaac round the front of the car and approach the prone figure. Then my body sprang into motion, almost of its own volition—instinct keening in my ears.

Everything happened at once. I came at the two of them from the other side of the car, pulling my Glock out of its holster, racking a round into the chamber and aiming it as I walked. Rain fell in sheets, big, fat drops of it rolling down my face. My hair was soaked in seconds, heavy strands plastering themselves to my face and neck. My clothes were heavy and cold.

Beads of water dripped from the barrel of my gun. I took a shooter's stance. As I leveled the gun at the figure lying in the street, Isaac saw me.

"Are you out of your fucking mind?" he said.

The use of profanity, which was unusual for him, distracted me, drawing my gaze to his rain-soaked face. As he spoke, the figure rose up to a crouch and pulled Isaac to the ground. For a split second, the figure was atop Isaac, punching at Isaac's head. His face was obscured by a ski mask. Then Isaac bucked him. He reached for his own gun as the man rolled away and climbed to his feet.

"Freeze!" I yelled.

"Stop!" Isaac shouted simultaneously.

But the man was already running from us. He cut through a driveway on his right, and we lost sight of him. Isaac scrambled to his feet and took off in a dead run, both hands on his pistol, the barrel pointed at the ground.

I ran to the driver side of the car, my shoes squishing loudly. I got in and threw the car into reverse. I could barely hear the rain against the roof over the pounding of my heart. I backed all the way up the street, laying rubber. The car careened wildly from side to side, fishtailing from the shitty visibility and my unsteady hand at the steering wheel. I prayed that I wouldn't hit any of the parked cars lining both sides of the street and thanked God that there were no cars behind me.

I screeched to a halt at the cross street and screamed at the top of my lungs when a figure thudded against the driver-side door. The scream was still going as the figure tried the door handle.

Then Isaac's face appeared on the other side of the glass. He slapped a palm against the window. "Open up," he shouted.

My fingers shook so badly it took three tries to flip the auto unlock.

"Move over," he commanded, pushing me over to the passenger side as he got in, water flying off him like a dog doing a whole body shake. He sped off into the wet, black night, scanning both sides of the street like a hawk hunting its prey. His phone rang, and he answered with a gruff, "Yeah," and an angry account of what had just transpired.

“No, I didn’t see what he looked like. He was wearing a fucking ski mask. It was dark, and in case you hadn’t noticed, it’s fucking pouring.” Isaac turned to me, his blue eyes aglow with irritation. “Bishop, you see what he looked like?”

“No,” I said. “It happened too fast.”

“No,” Isaac reported back. Then resignation tempered his voice. “Yeah, all right. Get some units out here, but I don’t think we’re gonna find this guy. Did you get anything on the phone? A throwaway? What, a prepaid cell phone? Yeah, yeah. All right.”

He flipped his phone shut and put it back in his pocket. He glanced at me. “You okay?”

“Are *you* okay?” I countered.

He laughed, a short, dry bark. “I’m fine. My pride is a little bruised, but I’m okay.” He kept driving, panning the streets, looking for a man clothed in black from head to toe.

“That was him,” I said. “That was Blake Foster.”

Isaac pursed his lips. “Looks that way,” he said.

“I should have shot him. I had a clear shot before he even got up,” I said. My teeth chattered despite the car’s heater whirring at full blast.

“We both know you couldn’t have taken a shot at an unarmed man lying on the ground. If you had, I’d be arresting you right now and you know it.”

I winced, hugging myself to slow the shivering. “Yeah,” I conceded. “It wasn’t a good shot.”

“That could have been a random pedestrian who’d been hit by a car lying there dying. How were we supposed to know it was a psycho killer waiting for us?” Isaac reassured me.

I slapped my palms on my thighs, making a loud, wet thwack. “I knew it was a trap. I just felt it.”

Isaac snorted. “Hey, I feel like shooting someone every day, but I don’t do it. You can’t go around shooting people because of a feeling. Even though this guy has clearly lost whatever control he had.”

“He’s taking huge risks right now,” I said. “He’s decompensating fast.”

“Well, he is watching you,” Isaac said. “He came after me today. He’s pissed. He must have noticed we’ve been spending a lot of time together.”

A new wave of shivers overtook me, these having nothing to do with the cold. “Holy shit,” I said. Then, “I’m sorry, McCaffrey.”

Isaac shrugged. A moment passed. Without looking at me, he turned the car around abruptly, making a wide U-turn across two lanes of traffic. “You’re freezing,” he said. “I’m taking you home with me.”

“What?” I said.

“I’m not comfortable leaving you at home alone with this guy running around like a loose cannon,” he explained. “Besides, I’m two blocks away.”

I opened my mouth to protest but clamped it shut as a cascade of disturbing images flooded my mind—the six crime scenes and the black figure rising up out of the rain-washed street to attack Isaac. I didn’t want to go home.

I rubbed my cold, wet baby bump. “I’ll call Dale and ask him to let my dogs out,” I said.

I pulled out my cell phone and dialed, getting him on the second ring. After several assurances that I was okay and not under any duress, Dale agreed to take care of my brood until the next day.

When I hung up, Isaac was pulling into the driveway of a small, ranch-style house with dark red shutters. “I think you should get out of town,” he said. “Maybe you could take that trip to Sunderlin with TK. Spend Thanksgiving with your folks.”

I nodded, clutching my purse to my body. Isaac turned the car off. The rain hadn’t let up at all. With no windshield wipers, the view of his front door was smeared and distorted.

“I’ll race you to the door,” he said.

CHAPTER

36

Kassidy

November 22nd

Before we hit his living room, we were peeling our wet clothes off. They dropped to the floor with muted thuds, making a trail from the foyer to the center of the living room. My fingertips were hard and numb with cold. It took three tries to unfasten my skirt. A few feet away Isaac stood bare chested, fumbling with his belt. Without looking at me, he said, “The heat. I’ll turn up the heat.”

He tugged at one of his boots as he hopped from the room, the muscles over his ribs rippling jerkily. I pulled my Glock and holster from the waistband of my skirt and dropped it into my purse. I let my skirt drop to the floor and pulled my nylons off. My skin was pale with a bluish tint. I stood next to his couch in my slip, my only meager cover for my bra and panties. My arms were covered in goose bumps, every fine hair on end. My hair hung in a wet sheaf down the center of my back. I hugged myself, rubbing my arms and marching in place to warm up. My teeth chattered anyway.

I looked around the room. It had the feel of a log cabin, cedar-paneled walls and hardwood floors. An oval-shaped area rug took up the center of the room. The room was sparingly decorated. A nine-foot couch sat across from a large television. The TV was recessed into a small, black entertainment center. I saw a DVD player but no movies. On the wall above the couch was a painting of a lonely snow-covered forest. There was one end table boasting a lamp which had a couple of ceramic grizzly bears fishing as its base. There

were no photographs, nothing personal, only a universal remote.

“McCaffrey?” I called.

His voice came back to me from somewhere in the house. “Just a sec.”

He returned wearing only a clean pair of boxer shorts. He handed me a large men’s sweatshirt with matching sweat pants and a comforter. “I’ll dry your clothes,” he said as I pulled my slip over my head. I tossed it aside and pulled the sweatshirt on, my frame trembling. When I glanced at him he was staring at my belly.

I watched him as I pulled on the sweatpants. “Leering doesn’t become you,” I said.

His Adam’s apple bobbed in his throat. Finally, his gaze meandered upward to meet mine. “Sorry,” he said. “I wondered how far along you were—you never talk about it.”

I wasn’t about to start. I snatched up the comforter, pulling it over my shoulders.

Isaac cleared his throat. “I’ll get you some socks,” he said.

He was gone only seconds this time. He returned with a large pair of men’s socks. “Sit,” he commanded. I sat on his couch and let him slip the socks onto my feet.

When he was finished, he pulled the comforter tighter around me, covering my feet and wrapping me up with the tenderness of a lover.

I felt a pang.

“There,” he said. He looked at me and smiled his rugged, charming smile. It was softer than usual, a little shy.

“You hardly ever smile,” he said.

I didn’t respond. Instead, I curled up onto the couch. I slipped a hand beneath the sweatshirt and touched my little bump. My baby.

Isaac picked up my skirt and stockings, then my slip. “Don’t,” I said. “The suit is dry clean only. It’s probably ruined.”

He stared at the crumpled skirt. “No,” he said. “I’m sure we can salvage

it.”

I laughed unexpectedly. “McCaffrey, forget it. I have ten of those. It’s not a big deal. What I could really use is some sleep.”

I stretched out on the couch and closed my eyes. Moments later, Isaac slipped a pillow under my head. I nestled into it and sighed. It smelled like him.

I felt the weight of his body settle near my feet. After a few minutes, I opened my eyes. He was watching me.

“Stop looking at me,” I mumbled.

“Bishop?”

“Hmmm?”

Silence. A rustling in his throat. Then, “Nothing.”

CHAPTER

37

Wyatt

November 22nd

Rain poured down on Wyatt, matting his hair to his face. Fat drops of it rolled down the bridge of his nose and hung from the tip before falling. He was soaked through. His jeans felt heavy and stiff. They chafed against his frozen skin. His body shivered. When he pulled himself up in chin-up fashion to peer into Isaac McCaffrey's living room, his hands trembled. He felt nothing. Nothing but the cold, prowling rage bubbling up from his gut mingled with the hot flush of betrayal. He held himself aloft, his feet dangling a foot from the ground as he tried to catch a glimpse of Cassidy.

McCaffrey's mini-blinds were closed, but still Wyatt could see slivers of the room through the tiny squares where the string was threaded through each slat. He bobbed his head up and down, back and forth trying to find her in one of the squares. His breath caught as he spied her long, brown hair cascading over the arm of McCaffrey's couch. She was clearly lying down. From the angle of the square he peered through, he couldn't tell if she was naked or not, but there were a pile of clothes on the floor a few feet away. It couldn't be.

He let his body fall back to the wet ground, clenching and unclenching his fists to encourage circulation in his hands. Then he tried again. This time he caught a snatch of McCaffrey's bare chest. He let go of the window sill and sank to his knees. The rain drumming down all around him, coupled with the wind slamming against trees and houses, drowned out the sounds of cars passing by. No one would see him at the side of McCaffrey's house dressed

in black in the dark, especially with the storm raging.

Wyatt emptied the contents of his stomach into the grass. “Whore,” he managed.

He’d been afraid of this. He had a flash of her confessing her love to Jory Ralston outside of the Portland hotel. It was happening again. He couldn’t stop his imagination from torturing him. A thousand images of Cassidy naked with Isaac McCaffrey in the throes of sexual pleasure flashed through his mind. Each one was dirtier and more graphic than the last. He slapped his palm against the side of his head.

“Stop,” he said.

He should have killed McCaffrey. He would have except that Cassidy was there. She had been there with him. Her presence had thrown Wyatt off—ruined his plan. He would have had to hurt her—otherwise risk her arresting or shooting him. Wyatt hadn’t counted on Cassidy being with him. He thought that she would go home, and McCaffrey would go looking for Jacob Bentley alone. He definitely hadn’t counted on the entire incident leading to McCaffrey defiling the woman he loved.

Wyatt slapped the sodden ground. “Whore,” he said again.

His body ached with tension. He needed something to calm him down. He had Xanax, but it was at home. He thumped the side of his head again. “Stupid.” He should be carrying it with him. The only way to keep from blacking out was to stay calm.

A brief flash of lightning lit up McCaffrey’s yard. Thunder peeled from the sky. It wasn’t in Wyatt’s head this time. Still, he waited for another jagged streak of lightning to cut through the sky and breathed a sigh of relief. Two weeks after Evette Gerst’s murder—which Wyatt had no memory of—he’d discovered the placebo pills Dustin DeMeo had mixed in with the Klonopin he’d given Wyatt. The Klonopin wasn’t working because Wyatt wasn’t getting enough of it. Dusty had been fucking with him. Dusty’s words echoed in Wyatt’s ears: “But don’t you want to see what happens? Where it all leads? What your true self is capable of? Come on, lose the drugs and let things unfold as God intended them.”

Wyatt couldn’t depend on Dustin for an adequate supply of the drugs he

needed. Taking revenge on Dusty had to wait until Wyatt's plan was back on track. In the meantime, he'd gotten Xanax from a local drug dealer he sometimes used. He needed something. He had to keep from "cracking up" as Gerst had put it. He just couldn't risk losing more time. And now they knew his true identity.

Another roll of thunder issued from the sky, this time without lightning. Wyatt counted to twenty but no lightning came. He stood up and took a piss on the side of McCaffrey's house.

Then he was sitting on the edge of a queen-sized bed, staring sightlessly at a television which showed mid-morning news. He was warm and dry. His clothes were different. Wyatt looked around. He knew at once that he was in a hotel room. It only took a moment of rifling through the desk drawer to determine his location—he wasn't far from his home. He flipped on CNN and found the date and time within ten minutes.

Just under fifteen hours had passed since he'd pissed on the side of McCaffrey's house. Wyatt winced at the memory of what he'd seen through the miniscule peepholes in the mini-blinds. He felt bile rise in his throat and quickly knelt over the trash can next to the desk. He dry heaved. After a moment, it subsided. The long gash on his forearm took his mind off Cassidy and McCaffrey. It was four inches long. He'd dressed it with butterfly Steri-Strips and a large gauze pad. Blood seeped through the gauze. He didn't know what had caused it—or who—but his breathing increased rapidly as he entertained the horrifying possibility that he'd done something to Cassidy.

CHAPTER

38

Kassidy

November 23rd

I woke to a flutter in my abdomen and warm breath across the taut skin over it. I opened my eyes, trying to remember where I was and how I'd gotten there.

Then it came back to me. The diner. Blake Foster attacking Isaac in the rain. Isaac's house. Isaac's couch.

Now I looked at the top of Isaac's head as he pressed his cheek against my stomach. With one hand, he cupped the swell of skin. He lay next to me, the comforter tangled in our legs. He'd pushed the sweatshirt up under my breasts. His other hand caressed my stomach as he moved his face from one area of my abdomen to another.

He was pressing his ear against it, I realized.

"You know I could have you arrested for this," I said. "Molesting a federal agent."

His head shot up. He smiled sheepishly, his brown hair in wild disarray. The effect was comical, and I laughed a little.

"Sorry," he said. "I'm really sorry. I couldn't help it. I—he was moving in there." Isaac brushed a palm over my distended stomach. Again, I felt a flutter. It was inside.

I bolted up onto my elbows and stilled as the flutter came again. "Oh my God," I said, breathless as the baby tumbled around inside me. I put a hand to

the right lower quadrant of my stomach, and I was rewarded with a tiny thump. I gasped. Isaac watched my face.

Impulsively, I grabbed his palm and pressed it over the place the baby had just moved. Two thumps. Isaac laughed.

I looked at him in wonder. “That’s the first time she’s done that,” I said. “I’ve been waiting and waiting. They say you can feel it as early as four months, but I haven’t felt it till just now.”

He grinned. “It’s pretty amazing.”

I held his hand to my stomach. He shifted upward, sidling his large frame against mine. He was on the inside of the couch, sandwiched between me and the back of the sofa. He had to lie on his side so he didn’t push me off. He propped his head on his other hand and gazed down at me. He was still in his boxer shorts. His broad chest was warm against my side. Stubble covered his face.

“That got you smiling,” he said.

In spite of myself, I smiled again. He leaned down into me like he was going to kiss me. I felt my head tip slightly upward toward his. My lips parted. But he didn’t kiss me. His hand slid loose from mine and off my stomach, down to my side, resting just beneath my armpit. His thumb moved across the outside curve of my breast. I felt a sudden hardness against the outside of my thigh. I wanted to turn into him, into his warmth. One of his feet found mine. He used his instep to caress the bottom of my foot.

I waited for the kiss, realizing with difficulty I wanted it. I wanted to know if it would be as tender as the rest of his handling of my body. It never came. Instead he made a low sound in his throat, something between a sigh and a growl.

“Am I going to get you in trouble?” he asked.

I swallowed. “What do you mean?”

He nodded toward my stomach. “With the little guy’s father?”

“Little girl,” I corrected.

“You know it’s a girl?”

“Well no, but I think of her as a girl. Better than thinking of the baby as an ‘it.’”

“Well, am I going to get you in trouble with *her* father?” Isaac asked.

“He’s dead,” I said.

Isaac pulled back, his eyes struck with shock. “Good God, Bishop.”

I looked away. “We weren’t—we didn’t—weren’t really together.”

“Oh,” he said.

He wiggled out from beside me and perched on the edge of the sofa, putting space between us. “I’m sorry,” he said.

He wouldn’t look at me. A muscle worked in his jaw. A long silent moment passed.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

He shook his head, avoiding my gaze. “Nothing. I just—nothing.”

“Tell me,” I demanded, feeling more than a little uncomfortable. I covered my belly with the sweatshirt.

“This case,” he said, still unable to articulate what he was thinking. Finally, he looked at me. “You’re exposed. You need more protection than the Bureau is giving you. You should be far away from here, in hiding or something. Right now you’re just out there like a sitting duck.”

“I’m fine,” I said.

He laughed, the loudness of it making me jump. “No, you’re not,” he said.

“I can take care of myself,” I insisted, scooting into a sitting position.

Again he shook his head. “No, you can’t,” he said. “You’re vulnerable.”

I stood, nearly tripping over the comforter. “I’m no more vulnerable now than I was five years ago when a rapist broke into my house and tortured me for almost an entire day. I’m sure if you asked him, he’d agree that I can take care of myself.”

He stood, towering over me. “You’re carrying a baby. This is a different situation.”

I put my hands on my hips. “No shit. I just woke up with your head on my belly and your hand practically down my pants. I don’t need that kind of help.”

He shook his head. “Oh, no. No, you don’t.” He pointed to the opposite end of the couch. “I was sitting right there last night. I got up to go to bed, and you asked me to stay. You asked me.”

My bravado weakened. “What?”

“Convenient that you forgot that little detail, isn’t it?”

“But I didn’t—” I protested.

“Yeah, you did.”

I held his unwavering gaze for a long, awkward moment before stomping into the foyer. After retrieving my purse and I held out a hand, “Give me the keys to your car,” I demanded.

He folded his arms across his chest and stared me down.

“Dammit, McCaffrey. Give me the keys. Now.”

He addressed me as if I hadn’t spoken. “Bishop, I’m not insulting you. You think I don’t know how many slugs they pulled out of Sala’s dead body? I believe you can handle yourself, but I’m concerned for your safety. Whether you admit it or not, you need someone to have your back right now. You can let me do that.”

Immediately, I thought of Jory—how hard it had been for me to let him in, and how the moment I had, he’d been stolen from me. I spun on my heel and headed for the front door. As I opened it, Isaac appeared behind me and pushed it closed with one hand. I felt his breath on the nape of my neck. His voice was gentle. “Just let me make you breakfast, and I’ll take you home.”

I sat silently while he cooked, watching as he quickly and expertly whipped up a feast. The smells of bacon and eggs, pancakes, and toast filled the air. My mouth watered. My stomach groaned loudly, drawing a sideways glance from Isaac.

A few minutes later, he slid a heaping plate of food in front of me. Then silverware and orange juice. I stared at it, wishing I wasn’t so damn hungry.

Isaac fixed his own plate. I looked at his profile, his easy hands, his butt.

“I can handle this,” I said, my voice not sounding nearly as strong as it had in my head. “I’ve been through a lot. Losing my sister. Sala. Losing the man I loved.”

He sat down across from me. “I didn’t say you couldn’t handle things, Bishop. It’s just that this guy—the father—he can’t have been dead more than a few months, right?”

“Right,” I murmured.

“Yeah. That’s not very long, and you say you loved him. Now you’re having this baby by yourself. You’re alone. There is a serial killer out there stalking you as we speak. That’s a damn lot of stress. I think you need more protection than you have right now, not to mention a support system. That’s all I’m saying.”

He shoveled food into his mouth, eating uncharacteristically fast. I thought about what he had said—that I had asked *him* to stay with me on the couch. I had been so tired, I couldn’t even remember doing it. It was as if someone else had inhabited my body during a moment of weakness and asked Isaac to sleep next to me on the couch. I didn’t remember asking him to stay, but I remembered him insinuating himself next to me on the inside of the couch. I remembered feeling safe and almost immediately falling asleep as I inhaled his scent.

It made me think of Blake Foster. After he had killed his parents, he claimed he had no memory of doing it. He’d blacked out, he said. I wondered if he was blacking out again, losing control at the crime scenes. Maybe that was why it looked like we were dealing with two different killers—one organized and controlled, the other disorganized and out of control.

I shared my theory with Isaac who sighed. “This guy just gets scarier and scarier, which is why I will be escorting you home.”

CHAPTER

39

Kassidy

November 23rd

After breakfast, I changed back into my clothes, which were stiff and wrinkled. I fished my Glock and holster back out of my purse and affixed it to the waistband of my skirt. We didn't speak on the drive back to Woodbridge. The storm had left downed trees and electrical wires in its wake. Sunlight peeked around corners and sliced between houses, creeping along the streets to illuminate the destruction. The world seemed strangely quiet in the absence of the deluge. Twice Isaac had to take detours.

I called TK and filled him in on what had happened the evening before.

"Come stay with us," he said. "You'll be safer. Bring the dogs."

I smiled, grateful for the offer. "You know I can't," I said. "I appreciate it, but I can't put Diane and the girls at risk like that. I was actually thinking of going with you to Sunderlin."

TK sighed. I could picture his forehead creasing, his fingers tapping against his leg. "That is not a bad idea," he said. "Let me just fill Crossen in, and I'll let you know when I'm leaving."

I put my phone in my purse as Isaac turned down my street. A familiar ball of fur scurried out in front of the car. For the second time in as many days, Isaac braked abruptly. My body was thrown forward slightly. I used both hands to brace myself against the dash.

"Isn't that your dog?" Isaac asked as I watched Pugsley hop the curb on

the other side of the street and urinate at the base of a tree.

I stepped out of the car and called to him. He rushed at me, his little body wiggling vigorously as he scurried toward me. I scooped him up and got back into the car. “What are you doing out?” I cooed, scratching between his ears. “He’s the mischievous one. I can’t figure out how he’s doing it, but he gets out constantly.”

“How about the other two?” Isaac responded as he pulled into my driveway. He motioned toward my porch, the crease above the bridge of his nose reappearing. Smalls and Rocky lay obediently by my front door. They stood when they saw the car. Smalls’ tail wagged, but Rocky remained on guard, her velvet ears making perfect steeples as she eyed the vehicle.

“Something’s wrong,” I said. My stomach went into free fall. I stepped out of the car.

Rocky and Smalls bounded over. I set Pugsley on the ground and pet the other dogs absently, my eyes locked on the front door. Isaac drew his weapon. “You stay here,” he said as he moved to the porch. He crept up to the front door and listened. Softly, he turned the knob and pushed the door open. “Unlocked,” he said.

A knot formed in my throat. It was hard to breathe. “Something is wrong,” I repeated, my voice a croak. I wanted to say be careful, but the words lodged in my throat.

Isaac disappeared into my house. The world seemed to shrink to a tiny point in my field of vision. The sunshine, which had been so welcoming only seconds ago, seemed sterile and harsh. I felt a prickle at my scalp. I turned 360 degrees, searching the cars parked up and down the street and the houses across from and next to mine. My gaze landed on Dale’s house.

His front door stood wide open, admitting only darkness beyond its threshold.

My Glock was in my hand. For the second time in as many days, I racked a round into the chamber.

“McCaffrey!” I shouted.

I turned toward Dale’s house and broke into a dead run.

CHAPTER

40

Kassidy

November 23rd

I burst through the doorway of Dale's home and almost took a face-plant. A broken flowerpot lay immediately at my feet, its dirt and plant contents scattered across the floor. Beyond it, Dale's living room was in wild disarray. His couch was overturned, his coffee table splintered in two. His television lay face down on the floor, bleeding broken glass. Torn books and picture frames littered the floor. His DVD player lay on the floor opposite the entertainment center, as if it had been thrown across the room like a Frisbee. There was a gouge in the wall above it where it had made impact.

Framed prints of the cityscapes which Dale had loved lay broken and crumpled amid the destruction. I swept the barrel of my gun from one side of the room to the other. The Glock trembled in my hands. I expected to see Dale's bludgeoned body on the floor just like we'd found Deborah Bittler and Evette Gerst, but it wasn't there.

I took another cautious step into the house. The words jumped out from my periphery. I looked to my left. Next to the front door, on the wall was a bloody scrawl that said: I HATE YOU.

Isaac almost knocked me over as he stumbled into Dale's house after me. He flew through the doorway, gun at the ready. He, too, almost tripped over the broken flowerpot. Instead, he barreled into me. He caught me expertly with one arm before I fell to the floor. He steadied me, but his fingers remained curled around my upper arm.

“Are you out of your mind, Bishop?” he admonished. “You can’t go running off without backup. God knows what you’re walking into. I came out and you were gone. You scared the crap out of me. Your house is clear.”

He stopped talking when I pointed to the message on the wall. My eyes were transfixed. I couldn’t stop staring at the angry, red words. “Do you think that’s blood?” I asked numbly.

For the first time since he’d stumbled in after me, Isaac took a good look around. He studied the devastation, giving a low whistle before stepping toward the wall to better study the words.

I tore my eyes away from the wall. As I took in the massacred living room again, tears welled up in my eyes. My throat felt thick, my chest heavy. I holstered my weapon and stepped over a pile of debris. I glanced at a mangled print of Washington, DC. “Where’s the body?” I asked.

“I’ll check the rest of the house,” Isaac said. “Stay. Here. Don’t touch anything. We don’t want to contaminate the scene.”

Even if I had wanted to, I couldn’t move. My legs were stone pillars. I knew I was breathing, but my body felt like stone. I had brought this on Dale. Poor hapless Dale, who was just trying to be a good neighbor. He’d helped me with the dogs, with home repairs, and other mundane things. We were both single with no real family nearby. We’d relied on each other for things most people took for granted: a ride when your car broke down, a buddy to sit with you in the ER when you needed stitches, someone to sign for a package when you weren’t home. He knew what I had gone through with Nico Sala, and he looked out for me.

I had always felt safe and secure knowing Dale was only a stone’s throw away. He didn’t deserve this. I had brought a killer into his life, into his home. It was unusual and completely out of character for the For You Killer to kidnap a victim, but I prayed that Dale was still alive.

Blake Foster had obviously lost control. His unbridled rage lay all around me, announcing itself in splintered wood and shattered glass. Again, it was completely in contrast to his earlier, staged crime scenes where he’d carefully planned and placed every detail. Just like the scenes at the Bittlers’ and Evette Gerst’s homes, the departure from his normal rigid habits and his

signature was alarming.

I HATE YOU.

He was angry. I'd betrayed him. First, I had thwarted his plan to harm Isaac. Then, I hadn't come home last night. He must have known or at least assumed that I'd spent the night at Isaac's house, in which case Blake Foster had taken Dale in retribution for the night I'd spent with Isaac. It was out of character for me. I'd had very few lovers. Even my liaisons with Jory had been few and far between. Jory. If the For You Killer had gone off the deep end because of my proximity to Isaac, was it possible that he had somehow caused Jory's car accident? Was it coincidence that the day I gave in to Jory and finally let him into my life he was killed?

The heaviness in my chest intensified to a sternum-crushing pressure. I couldn't catch my breath. My mind worked frantically through the inconsistencies surrounding Jory's death—him turning the wrong way into the tree, his missing wallet, the blue mystery car.

The car.

I worked backward, remembering the day TK and I had visited the Wilkins scene. Jory's words came back to me: *"We have a couple of people who think they saw a man lurking around in an older, light blue Honda Civic the day Wilkins was killed."*

I HATE YOU.

"Oh my God," I said aloud.

I was still staring at the angry, red words when Isaac came back into the room. "Bishop?" He said. "Did you hear me? There's no one here and no body. I checked the whole house and out back. Dale is not here."

CHAPTER

41

Wyatt

November 23rd

Standing in the hotel room, a cold sweat enveloped Wyatt's entire body. He had blacked out standing outside McCaffrey's house after seeing Cassidy with the man—after seeing bare skin. Had Wyatt attacked the two of them? Was the gash a defensive wound? Had he hurt her? What if he'd killed her? He found a set of car keys on the nightstand and snatched them up. In the parking garage he went from level to level, clicking the lock/unlock buttons on the keychain while panning the cars for signs of blinking lights. Finally, on level four a black Lincoln MKX beeped back at him, its hazard lights blinking briefly.

Wyatt got in and started the car. He found the registration in the glove compartment. It was registered to Wyatt Anderton at a small property he kept under that alias in Southern Central Pennsylvania. It was registered in Pennsylvania, but Wyatt kept it in a rented garage only a few miles from his home near Cassidy. He kept the MKX nearby in case of an emergency. Something must have gone wrong if he'd resorted to using it. Wyatt's heart thudded in his chest, the sound echoing in his ears. His entire head pulsed with each beat. He white-knuckled the steering wheel and tore out of the parking garage, tires squealing.

It took him twenty minutes to reach Cassidy's street. Dizziness took over when he spotted emergency and police vehicles outside the house. He rolled by slowly in a line of passing cars. No one even glanced in his direction. He gasped, relief surging through him when he saw her and

McCaffrey standing on her front lawn. TK Bennett stood talking to them. Wyatt almost pulled over, but then he noticed the crime scene techs going in and out of the house next door to hers. His relief was quickly tempered with confusion. Again, his heartbeat roared in his ears, increasing in tempo until he felt breathless.

What the hell had happened?

Wyatt returned to his hotel and tossed the room, looking for any evidence of his activities from the previous evening. He wished he would leave himself notes. In the hotel room closet, he found all the files and mementos he'd ever kept on Cassidy. He'd put them in boxes and stacked them neatly. If he'd brought them with him that meant he'd abandoned his home and the alias that went with it. In the bathroom sink he found a blood-soaked T-shirt which looked as if it had originally been white.

Next to the sink was Dale Hunter's driver's license, a bloody thumbprint obscuring the photo.

"No," Wyatt muttered.

He picked up the license and stared at it. His legs wobbled. He sat on the edge of the tub.

"Fuck."

What had he done now?

CHAPTER

42

Kassidy

November 23rd

TK arrived along with a crime scene unit. He spoke softly as he shepherded me outside and over to my front lawn. My dogs surrounded me. Their usual excitement was held in reserve. They could tell something was not right. I didn't hear anything that TK said. I stood in my sun-drenched driveway feeling awkward and light-headed. I thought it would be just fine if the world stopped right that moment and I could remain safe and warm in my paralysis. The baby brought me back. I felt six tiny thumps as she tumbled around inside me. My senses returned. I was hungry again.

I noticed TK and Isaac conferring a few feet away, Isaac motioning toward my house.

"I need Remy Caldwell's phone number," I said.

They both looked at me as if surprised to hear me speak. TK stepped toward me. He raised an eyebrow. "What?"

"Remy Caldwell's phone number. Do you have it?"

TK looked from me to Dale's house and back, as if trying to make the connection. "Kassidy," he began, but I held up a hand to silence him.

"McCaffrey has been stopping in to check on me for a month. Yesterday, Foster attacked him. After I spent the night at McCaffrey's, he did something to Dale. He thinks that something is going on between the two of us and he's angry," I explained.

TK folded his arms across his chest. “What does that have to do with Remy Caldwell?”

“Foster is watching me. He’s always been watching. So he would have known about Jory. I think he may have had something to do with Jory’s death. The witness from the gas station said Jory talked to a person in a blue Honda or Hyundai. When we were at the Wilkins scene, Jory said they had reports of a man lurking around in a blue Honda Civic the day she was killed.”

“You think Jory approached the person in the blue car for that reason?”

I shook my head. “I don’t know why Jory approached the car. I doubt he suspected that the driver was the For You Killer—if he had, he would have detained the guy. Look, all of these deaths are connected to me. I think we need to explore the possibility that Foster may have been involved in Jory’s death. I think we should ask Remy to track down a list of people who rented blue Hondas in or around the city of Portland the day or two before Megan Wilkins was killed.”

Isaac, who had been silent up to that point, came to stand next to me. He caught TK’s eye. “I think she’s right,” he said. He turned to me. “Jory was your—”

“We had been seeing each other,” I cut in. “It was on and off, but the day he was killed, we had decided to give the relationship a real try.”

Briefly, I recapped the circumstances surrounding Jory’s death. Isaac listened, eyes serious and sympathetic at the same time. The crease in his brow appeared as he took in my words. When I finished, he looked at TK. “This guy is killing people Agent Bishop doesn’t even remember. Now with her neighbor disappearing—I don’t think it’s a stretch that he might have gone after someone she was seeing. It’s a viable lead.”

TK checked his watch. “I don’t have Remy’s number here, but we have it at the office. You and I will drive to Sunderlin today. Lieutenant McCaffrey will stay here on scene until you’ve packed some things. Meet me at the office in one hour. We’ll call Remy before we leave.”

I nodded and started toward the house. I needed a shower. My hair felt lank and stringy from the previous night’s rain and sleeping on Isaac’s couch.

I stopped at the front door, a thick knot forming in my throat. I didn't want to go in. Had he been in there? Touched things? Defiled my home with his presence? I let my mind wander into scenarios I'd been keeping at bay. Blake Foster had stalked me for years. Surely he'd been in my home before without my knowing about it—even with my dogs, who were not easily charmed.

The dogs gathered around my legs, nudging each other aside as they vied to be the first inside the house. I put my hand on the knob. My dogs probably knew Blake Foster. He'd probably been in my home hundreds of times. For all I knew, he'd made himself a spare key.

I was slipping back into my paralysis, my heart beginning to thunder with anxiety when Isaac's hand closed over mine and twisted the knob. He gave me a gentle push inside. He didn't look at me. He said, "I'll wait while you get ready."

He took up position at the foot of my stairs.

"Thanks," I said.

CHAPTER

43

Kassidy

November 23rd

I left Isaac at my house and drove to Quantico, all three of my dogs piled in the back of my Trailblazer. I left them in the parking garage with the windows rolled down while I went to my office to call Remy Caldwell. After lodging my request with him, I returned to the parking garage to find Isaac leaning against the side of my Trailblazer. He had slid a hand through the cracked window to pet the dogs. He removed it when he saw me coming.

“What are you doing here?” I asked as I unlocked the driver-side door.

He brushed through his hair with one hand. “TK called me. He, uh, can’t go to Sunderlin today—too much work to be done here now that Dale is missing—but he thinks you should go, and he’ll meet you there tomorrow or the next day.”

“You didn’t answer my question. Why are *you* here?”

He went completely still, staring at me. I couldn’t read him. I put my hands on my hips and thrust my chin in his direction. He stared back at me, his face perfectly blank. I had no idea why I was doing this—why I was being so difficult. Isaac had been a good friend to me the last month, particularly the last twenty-four hours, yet I couldn’t stop myself from pushing him away. We had even almost kissed.

In the harsh light of day, a romantic involvement with him seemed like a terrible idea, but that morning a part of me had wanted him to kiss me. A

wave of shame enveloped me. I was carrying Jory's baby, and although he was gone, my feelings for him were not. Even though I was sure my attraction to Isaac was born of intense loneliness and grief, I still felt guilty about it.

A long moment passed. Isaac kept his expression neutral, seemingly mulling over possible responses. Finally, he said, "I'm here because I'm going with you to Sunderlin."

He held up a hand to silence the protest about to spill from my lips. "I'm going because whether you like it or not, I don't think you should be alone. Neither does TK. I'm not trying to imply that you can't take care of yourself. I'm just telling you that your colleagues would feel better if you had a little backup. The buddy system and all that."

I felt my resistance give way to emotional exhaustion. I didn't want to drive to Sunderlin alone. I didn't like the fact that Isaac made me feel safe and less afraid, but there it was. I chewed my bottom lip for a moment. "Don't you have a police department to run?"

"No. I have a division to run, and for that I have some good people to step in for a few days. Besides, technically I'm still on the clock. Deborah Bittler's killer is still on the loose."

I sighed and turned back to the car. Wet dog noses smudged the windows as I opened the door. The three of them tried to stick their heads between the seats at the same time. Smalls managed to lick my forearm as I climbed into the vehicle.

"I'll be staying at my parents' for Thanksgiving," I said.

Isaac shrugged. "I didn't have plans for Thanksgiving, anyway."

"Did you pack a bag?" I asked.

Isaac hooked a thumb toward his sedan, which was two spots away. "In my car."

"Get your bag," I said.

CHAPTER



Kassidy

November 23rd

When Lexie and I were children, my parents' home was brand new. It was one of the original three homes built in what was a new development at the time. All around us were dirt lots. Each year more and more homes sprouted up, their yards delivered by a truck, the grass rolled out like a carpet in front and back of each one. After ten years, our house looked old and small compared to the newer, larger ones surrounding it.

I hadn't been to see my parents in years. Usually my mother drove to Virginia to see me. My father had only come once or twice—he had been frequently busy with work until his retirement the year before. It had always been difficult for me to return home without Lexie. There was an achingly lonely silence that crept up on me. It woke me in the night, and I couldn't get back to sleep. I always ended up in the attic going through the few boxes of Lexie's things that my mother had kept.

Being home always reminded me how lost in the world I was without Lexie. I felt adrift, anchorless, a lonesome passenger on a shoddy raft in search of rescue that would never come. The last time I was home that sensation was heightened by the fact that I had just barely survived Nico Sala. I loved my parents, and my memories of growing up in their home were warm and inviting, but I just couldn't stand being there without my twin.

"Looks cozy," Isaac said as I pulled into the driveway.

In the backseat, the dogs stood and wagged their tails, whimpering

excitedly. As always, the lawn and hedges were immaculately clipped. My mother had hung a decorative wreath on the front door. The stone walkway was illuminated by small, solar-powered lights shaped like miniature lanterns.

I felt a little ache in the pit of my stomach. I sighed. “It is cozy,” I said.

We had just stepped out of the car when my mother emerged from the house, wiping her hands on a dishtowel. Isaac paused in his stretching to introduce himself. The dogs were in a full-blown frenzy. My dogs remembered the lady who fed them lots of table scraps.

My mother clapped her hands together in welcome as I opened the back door to the car. “Where are my grand dogs?” she called as they rushed at her.

She scratched the wriggling mass of fur surrounding her, pausing to take a good look at me. It was the standard mother-checking-over-her-offspring look—checking for any signs of illness or hidden distress, anything out of the ordinary. When we were children, Lexie and I had endured this full-scale inspection at least once a day, usually after school. Sometimes we got it before going to school. My mother couldn’t send us out into the world with anything amiss.

It took exactly one second for her to zero in on the major change—my stomach. She straightened her body slowly, eyes glued to my bump as if it might suddenly detach from my body and float over to her. Her eyes were wet.

“Mom?”

She smiled suddenly, looking at Isaac and then back to me. “Oh dear,” she said. “Linnea said you had something to tell me, but I thought maybe you’d just gotten promoted or something.”

My mother embraced me—squeezing tightly at first then cradling me gently. She spoke softly in my ear. “Linnea told me about Jory. I’m sorry. I know you cared for him.”

My stomach clenched. “Yeah,” I choked.

She released me and turned her gaze toward Isaac. “You’re here on a case?”

Isaac nodded. “Afraid so.”

My mother kept one arm around my shoulder. “And here I thought you were coming home for Thanksgiving.” She sighed dramatically and patted my belly. “So I’m going to be a grandmother.”

I covered her hand with one of my own, holding it fast against my distended belly. Inside, the baby kicked and rolled. “Oh,” my mother gasped with delight and pressed harder against my stomach.

“Yeah,” I said.

My mother beamed. “Finally! I never thought I would see the day.”

“Me either,” I admitted.

Isaac got our bags out of the Trailblazer, and we went into the house. My mother gave him a quick tour and instructed him to sleep in my father’s office for the duration of our stay. We ended up in the kitchen. Isaac and I sat at the island countertop while my mother immediately set about cooking a large meal. She loved having people to cook for. Her kitchen was packed with every kind of appliance and gadget imaginable. She had an ice shaver for making snow cones, a breadmaker, popcorn popper, and three different types of coffee makers—one traditional coffee maker, one that deposited coffee directly into two travel mugs simultaneously, and a single cup brewer. She even had a chocolate fountain—the memory of which suddenly made my mouth water.

“Where’s Dad?” I asked.

“He’s over at the Norton’s helping Ned put in a new hot water heater. He’ll be back this evening.” She looked at Isaac. “Do you like steak?”

He smiled—rather charmingly I thought. “Love it,” he said.

My mother set a glass of water in front of him and started assembling her cooking instruments. “So Cassidy, when were you going to tell me about my grandchild? After his birth—oh, do you know the sex yet?”

“No. I find out Monday. I was hoping you’d go with me to the ultrasound.”

I would say her face lit up, but that wouldn’t accurately describe it. She

was ecstatic. It was a look I hadn't seen in almost twenty years—since before Lexie fell from the window of our dorm room. I felt tears behind my eyes and blinked them back.

“Oh honey,” my mother said, vigorously taking a knife to a large onion. “I’m moving in with you next week. I can finally use all those vacation days. You know your father never wanted to go anywhere unless it involved hunting or fishing.”

Isaac glanced at me. I read his thoughts. “About that, Mom. It’s not a good time to have you at the house. In fact it’s not a good time for me to be there either.”

She froze and looked at each of us in turn. I knew she was thinking of Nico Sala. “What’s going on?”

“Remember last month when I called and asked you about all those people—the names?”

My mother’s brows shot up. Worry lines appeared on either side of her mouth, delicate parentheses. “Yes,” she said.

I told her everything, starting with how I’d gotten the case after Georgette Paul’s murder. I told her how local law enforcement had asked for the BAU’s help because of the elaborate staging at the crime scene and the unique signature, not to mention the total lack of suspects. I told her about the Sorenson and Henderson murders, about going to Portland to investigate Megan Wilkins’ murder and finding a reference to Sunderlin in Wilkins’ file. About the attack on Michael Bittler and his wife, about finding the criminal complaint. Finally, I told her about Evette Gerst and how it was at that crime scene that I had realized the killings were all connected to me.

My mother put a hand to her heart. “Oh, I heard about poor Mrs. Gerst.”

I nodded and continued, telling her how we’d figured out that the For You Killer was Blake Foster. I told her how we’d attempted to track him down, but every avenue we tried led to a dead end except that he had a sister who still lived in Sunderlin. Finally, I told her how Isaac had been attacked and that Dale was missing and likely dead.

“That’s why you called me,” she murmured. “Your neighbor is

missing?”

“Yeah,” I said. “You remember Dale—you and Dad met him—it was my second Christmas in that house.”

My mother nodded. “I met him,” she said. “I don’t think your father did. He was working that Christmas.”

“Oh, yeah.”

Her brow creased. “Speaking of your father, he’s going to be very upset when you tell him that you think Blake Foster is involved in this. He’s never gotten over that, you know. He’ll have enough to take in when he finds out you’re pregnant.”

“Oh, yeah,” I said, suddenly feeling hollow in the pit of my stomach. I had been dreading the pregnancy conversation with my father most of all.

“He remembers Blake Foster?” Isaac said.

My mother nodded. “He had nightmares about those murders for years. He still gets them from time to time. He was so upset when they tried that boy as a juvenile. My Cameron always believed that people would pay for that decision. I guess he was right.”

“Your father was one of the original investigators?” Isaac asked.

“Yeah,” I said. “We can ask him for particulars when he gets back. In the meantime, we can interview Sarah Foster.”

CHAPTER

45

Kassidy

November 24th

Sarah Foster lived in a trailer park. I had a vague memory of her. She'd been a pretty child—prettier than the woman who answered my knock. She was obese with dull, stringy brown hair and eyes that looked beady, all swallowed up in the puffiness of her face. I expected her to have a cigarette in one hand, but she didn't.

She didn't open the screen door. Instead, she looked me up and down and turned her hardened gaze on Isaac. Usually the sight of him softened women, but Sarah was unimpressed.

"Who are you?" she asked.

I held my credentials up against the screen for her inspection. "My name is Kassidy Bishop. I'm with the FBI. We're here about your brother."

She tore her gaze from my credentials momentarily. The skin above her nose formed a knot. "Brother? I ain't got no broth—" She stopped abruptly. She looked at both me and Isaac once more, as if considering something. Her lips disappeared into a thin line of consternation. She unlocked the screen door and slipped one pudgy hand out, palm up. "Let's see it," she said. "Your ID."

I glanced at Isaac. He shrugged. My credentials were swallowed up into her hand, which she quickly retracted, locking the screen door as if I might try to force myself past her.

Sarah studied it, making a careful comparison of me to my photo. She took her time. Finally, she unlocked the door again. She didn't open it, but she turned and walked further into her trailer, my credentials in her hands. She called over her shoulder, "Well, come in then. Him too."

I pulled the door open. Isaac followed me inside. Sarah's kitchen was to our immediate right. It was surprisingly large and very neatly kept. In the center of the tile floor sat a round table with four chairs tucked beneath it. My credentials lay atop the table.

Sarah had her back to us, busying herself at the refrigerator. "I got iced tea and water," she said without turning.

Isaac pulled out a chair and motioned for me to sit in it. He sat beside me.

"Iced tea would be great, Miss Foster," he said. "Thank you."

I glanced around as Sarah poured two glasses of iced tea. The trailer boasted a few well-placed adornments—unlit candles, framed generic prints of flowers, and several houseplants. It was spotless. Across from us was a small sitting room. A tan-colored couch faced the television. A coffee table sat between the two with a small silk floral arrangement perfectly centered atop it. There was one end table next to the couch with a lamp on top of it. There wasn't a speck of dust to be found. There were no personal photos, only a few knickknacks, but the effect was still cozy.

Although her home was kept with precision, Sarah herself looked a bit unkempt. Her hair was uncombed and her clothes mismatched. She sat across from us, her own glass filled with water.

"What's he done?" she said.

"I'm sorry?" I said.

"My brother. What's he done?"

Isaac took a long sip of iced tea and smiled at Sarah. "Miss Foster, when is the last time you saw your brother?"

She thought for a moment. "I guess right before he went up for killing our folks."

I glanced at Isaac. “That was over twenty years ago,” I said.

“When is the last time you were in contact with him?” Isaac asked.

Wordlessly, Sarah leaned back in her chair and reached for the nearest kitchen drawer. It was filled with thick, white envelopes. She pulled one from the top and opened the flap. She rifled through its contents and pulled a slip of paper out.

“Last month,” she said.

“May I?” Isaac said.

Sarah handed him the paper. I leaned toward Isaac to get a look. It was a money order for \$1,000.00.

“He sent this to you?” I asked.

Sarah shrugged. “I assume it’s him. Don’t know who else it could be. They been coming for years. No letter or nothin.’ No return addresses—just money orders. At least two a month, sometimes more.”

I looked over her shoulder at the drawer, which was still partially open. “You don’t cash them?” I asked.

“My brother is a shit. That money’s guilt money,” she said matter-of-factly. She looked each of us in the eye and wrapped her hands around her glass.

“Guilt money?” Isaac prompted.

Sarah’s eyes hardened. “He knows what he done.”

Isaac glanced at me as if to say, “Your turn.”

“He killed your parents,” I said.

Sarah nodded. Her fingers crept along the table to where my ID badge still sat. She flipped it open and ran her fingers across my name. “Bishop,” she said. She looked up at me, brow furrowed. “We had a Chief of Police by the same name. Cameron Bishop.”

“He’s my father,” I said.

Her face lit up a little. “You got a twin sister?”

I swallowed hard over the lump in my throat. My voice wouldn’t come.

I nodded yes.

Sarah smiled briefly. “Thought so. My brother was obsessed with one of you—or both, who knows. I was younger than him. I don’t really remember. You seen Blake?”

“No,” I said.

“You think Blake feels guilty for murdering your parents?” Isaac interjected.

Sarah sighed. Her gaze dropped to the table. “That ain’t all,” she said. “He killed the wrong people and he knows it.”

“The wrong people?” I said with a jolt. Isaac shot me a sideways glance. I clamped my mouth shut and let Sarah talk.

“You know why he killed our folks?” she asked.

I shook my head.

“Cause of me,” she said. “Cause our grandfather was hurting me, and when Blake told our parents, they didn’t believe it. They didn’t believe it, and they didn’t stop it. Blake kept telling them, but they said it wasn’t true. Then one night after it happened again, he went crazy. I was down in the living room, and he came downstairs all covered in blood and made me go to the basement. He locked me down there. Next thing I know, the police are waking me up. My folks are dead, and Blake is gone too.”

A tear slid down Sarah’s cheek. She wiped it away quickly. “But killing them didn’t do no good. We both tried to tell on my grandfather, but then he just turned it around and said it was really my dad who done it. They all believed him. Blake should have killed him.”

Isaac and I exchanged a look. “Your grandfather—did he continue to abuse you after your parents were gone?” Isaac asked.

Sarah looked him in the eye. Her expression sent a chill to my core. “When I was fifteen, I gave birth to a little girl. I gave her up for adoption,” she answered.

“What happened to him?” I asked, feeling ill and hoping it didn’t show. “He had a heart attack,” she said. “I was seventeen.”

“Other than the money orders,” Isaac said. “Do you or have you had any contact with your brother?”

Sarah shook her head. “I never saw him again. Never even talked to him on the phone. If I passed him on the street, I wouldn’t even know it.”



Sarah put the money orders into a brown paper bag. We promised to return them once we’d made copies and had them analyzed. I left her my card, which she affixed to her refrigerator with a magnet. I wrote my cell phone number on the back.

Isaac carried the bag under his arm as we returned to my Trailblazer. “We won’t get anywhere with these,” he said. “This guy has made it his life’s work to be untraceable.”

I waved to Sarah before getting in. “I’d like to know how much is there,” I said.

“She doesn’t cash them, but she keeps them,” Isaac said as we pulled out of the trailer park.

“It’s all she has,” I said. “It’s not about the money. Sure, those money orders represent Blake’s guilt, but they’re also tangible proof that someone cares about her. Someone loves her. Possibly the only person who ever stood up for her, tried to protect her. They mean something.”

“Sad,” Isaac said quietly.

“What’s sad is the lengths she’s gone to not to get noticed. Her home is immaculate, but her person is a mess. She’s made herself unattractive so she doesn’t draw attention to herself.”

“She blames herself for what Blake did?”

“Not just that—she blames herself for what happened to her. It all started with her grandfather. He picked her to abuse; Blake found out and tried to help. Their parents didn’t believe them, Blake killed them. Then she lost him too.”

“And after she lost her family, she still had to endure the abuse,” Isaac said.

“And then she brought an innocent child into the world and had to give her up. In Sarah’s mind, all of those things are her fault. Every terrible thing that has happened to or around her is because of her,” I continued.

Isaac shook his head. “That’s no way to live.”

“She lives in fear. She’s lost everything. She’s so afraid to get hurt again that she won’t even put herself out there. Being unattractive makes it easier to keep the world out.”

We pulled into my parents’ driveway. “Sounds like someone I know—except for the unattractive part,” Isaac said.

I looked over. His eyes were piercing, and that maddening smile played on his lips.

“I’m not even going to respond to that,” I said.

He sighed and opened his door. “I know,” he said.

CHAPTER

46

Kassidy

November 24th-25th

My father hadn't come home yet so Isaac and I had dinner with my mother. I ate until I couldn't move and left Isaac in the kitchen with my mother. I had nothing to contribute to their culinary discussion, so I went into the living room and flipped on the television. An hour later, I heard my father come in. His movements through the house were as familiar to me as they had been when I was a child. He spoke with my mother and Isaac for several minutes before finding me. I muted the television and stood to greet him. He stared at me—his face freezing mid-smile as he took in my stomach.

“Daddy,” I said.

He squinted and scratched his head. “You gettin’ fat or am I going to be a grandfather?”

I suddenly felt like I was four again, tiny, looking up at my father, wanting him to smile and hug me. “I’m pregnant,” I said.

My father motioned in the direction of the study. “Isaac the father?”

I shook my head. “No, he’s just a colleague.”

“Where’s the father?”

“He’s dead.”

If my father was surprised, he didn't show it. His bushy brows crinkled. “Was he going to marry you?”

My breath caught as I thought of the ring Jory had bought for the purpose of proposing to me. I thought of the inscription inside the band. *Love always, J.* It had taken me weeks to look inside the band and read those three simple words. “Yes,” I breathed. “He was.”

I reached into my pocket and pulled the ring out to show my father. I couldn’t bring myself to wear it, but I carried it with me. It made me feel like Jory was with me. If Blake Foster had access to my house, I didn’t want him finding the ring.

My father studied it for a long moment. He read the inside of the band and handed it back to me. “Nice,” he said.

I thought he would have more questions, but he said nothing as he stepped toward me and wrapped me in a long, warm hug. “I’m sorry,” my father breathed into my hair. “You could have called us. We would have been there for you.”

Fighting tears, I squeaked, “I know.”

He released me, clearing his throat, and said, “So your mother tells me you’re here about Blake Foster.”

I filled him in as quickly as I could. He scratched his head as I spoke, the lines in his face creasing with each thing I told him. He let out a long sigh. “He was always fixated on you. I had hoped he was dead. Never could fathom why the DA tried that little prick as a juvenile. He should still be in prison. Then again, I arrested the grandfather twice for raping little Sarah Foster, and the DA could never make it stick. Fucking lawyers.”

“We interviewed her today,” I said.

“That’s a sad story,” he said.

“Yeah, it is.”

We fell into an easy silence. My father’s frown slowly turned into a grin, making him look ten years younger. He touched me under my chin. “It’s good to see you,” he said.

I smiled back at him. “You too,” I croaked.



The next day my mother made a Thanksgiving feast large enough to feed our entire neighborhood. Both Isaac and I tried to help, but she would not hear of it.

“Stay out of her way,” my father advised.

Isaac was content to watch college football with my father while I paced the house, my stomach in knots. My thoughts kept drifting back to Dale, who was likely dead. Blake Foster had always left bodies behind before. I thought of Dale’s father. Dale usually spent holidays in the nursing home with his dad even though the senior Mr. Hunter didn’t remember his son. At least the older man wouldn’t be waiting for his son to show up. At least he wouldn’t be disappointed when Dale did not come.

Isaac caught me in the upstairs hallway on his way to the bathroom. He tugged at my elbow. “Would you just sit down?” he whispered.

“I can’t.”

“There’s nothing you can do,” he said.

“That’s the worst part,” I mumbled.

“Look,” he said, keeping his voice low so that my parents would not overhear him. “I know what you’re going through—”

“Do you?” I shot back.

His Adam’s apple danced in his throat. He looked away from me for a long moment. When he met my eyes again, his gaze was hard and closed-off. “Dinner is almost ready,” he said. “Just try to enjoy this time with your folks. That’s all I’m saying.”

He left me standing in the hallway and went into the bathroom. I went downstairs where my mother had set the dining room table as if she were having twenty people over instead of two. The delicious smells made my mouth water, not for the first time that day. The baby thumped and rolled. Isaac came to the table, but neither of us had much to contribute to dinner conversation. Thankfully, my mother talked enough for all of us, covering all things baby, from her own pregnancy to possible names for her grandchild.

I ate until it felt like my belly had expanded two more inches. My mind was still on Dale. I tried to focus on something else—like Isaac. As I watched

him from across the table, I realized I didn't know a damn thing about him. I had been in his home. He'd been at my side daily for a month, and yet I knew absolutely nothing about his life. He wasn't married—you didn't bring a woman home and sleep next to her on the couch if you were married. I wondered what he had meant by his comment in the hallway. He knew what I was going through—had he felt the kind of guilt I was feeling now?

I had tried several times to dredge up memories of him from the Sala investigation, but almost the entire period of time remained a blank spot in my mind. Thanksgiving dinner left me sluggish. I went to bed early but slept fitfully, and when I dreamt of Isaac, I knew it was half-memory—one of the trivial things my mind had pushed aside in favor of remembering snippets of the attack—snippets I wished I could destroy, snapshots I longed to burn.

In the dream, I stood in the crowded sex crimes division of Baltimore's police department. Isaac had caught my eye early on in the investigation because he was cute, and that charming half-smile he sometimes wore made me feel warm and tingly all over even from across a crowded, noisy room.

Then, one day he walked into the division with a full-blown grin so sexy I thought my knees would buckle, and on his hip he carried a little girl with long legs and eyes like his. She kept three fingers in her mouth as she looked around the buzzing room, a small twinge of uncertainty furrowing her delicate brow. She couldn't have been more than two or three years old. After a slow scan of the room, she wrapped her tiny arms around Isaac's neck and held on tight.

I woke with a start, sitting up abruptly. I felt like all the air had been sucked out of my lungs. The baby kicked vigorously. Sunlight streamed through the gauzy curtains. I looked at the clock on the nightstand. 8:30 a.m. I'd slept over twelve hours, but I didn't feel rested at all.

I threw the covers off my body and bypassed the bathroom in spite of the fact that I had to pee very badly. I found Isaac alone in the kitchen, making toast. A steaming cup of coffee sat on the counter to his right.

He smiled when he saw me. "Morning."

I advanced on him. "Why didn't you tell me?" I asked.

He raised an eyebrow. "Tell you what?"

“I remember you,” I said. “Sort of. I mean I remember some things—they’re fuzzy, but now I remember—you were married. You had a kid—a daughter.”

For the first time since I’d met him at the Bittler crime scene almost two months ago, Isaac’s face registered shock. He was suddenly naked before me, and his skin was gray. He swallowed. “You want to know why I didn’t volunteer to you that my family is dead?” His tone was so low I had to strain to make out his words, but the slight tremor in his voice was unmistakable.

“You could have told me,” I said.

“Why? It’s not relevant.”

I stepped closer to him. “Not relevant? You know an awful lot about me. You know I lost my sister and the father of my child. You know about Nico Sala. You’ve been in my home. You’re standing in my parents’ home. You could have told me.”

“You’re upset because we didn’t exchange secrets like a couple of adolescent girls?” he asked.

The ice in his voice made me rear back a little. “You know that’s not it,” I said.

He walked away from me, toward the living room.

“Isaac,” I said as he reached the doorway. Tears stung my eyes.

He turned back to me. His tone was matter-of-fact, like I was a witness he was interviewing. “Why didn’t you tell me about your lover—that you’d been seeing someone, and that he was dead? You didn’t even tell me you were pregnant. I figured that out on my own. Why didn’t you just tell *me*?”

My voice came out small and shaky. “I didn’t want to talk about it,” I said. “It was—it was too painful.”

“Exactly,” he said.

He turned to walk out of the room. I didn’t want him to go, but I didn’t know what to say. I wanted to comfort him, I realized, but I didn’t know how. “Isaac,” I implored.

He stopped and put his hands into his jeans pockets. His shoulders drew

up, tension radiating from his frame. His back was to me. “My wife was driving to the bank. She had just picked up my daughter from daycare. She was going to stop at the bank on the way home. She wasn’t going to be long. They were stopped at a red light. It turned green, and my wife pulled out. Some jackass coming through the light on the cross street thought she could make the left—squeeze by even though the light had already turned red. She T-boned them. My daughter died at the scene. My wife died in surgery six hours later. The other driver had a broken wrist. The DA charged her with vehicular manslaughter, but she pleaded down to reckless endangerment. She served eighteen months.”

He still wasn’t looking at me so he didn’t see the tears flowing freely down my cheeks. I couldn’t stop them.

“Eighteen months,” he repeated.

Then he was gone.

CHAPTER

47

Wyatt

November 26th

His sister had grown fat and ugly. Although Wyatt had kept track of her, he hadn't seen her in over twenty years. He had spied on her for a few days before deciding to confront her. Gone was the lovely girl from their childhood with pixie-like features, shiny, brown hair and a slender but shapely frame. Now her soulful brown eyes were swallowed up in her chubby face. Her once svelte figure was draped in flab. Everywhere she went, she walked in a slow waddle. She did nothing but go to and from work and clean her trailer obsessively.

The last time he had seen her he had been in county jail waiting to find out which juvenile detention center would become his home until his eighteenth birthday. His public defender had arranged the meeting at her request. It was the first time he'd been able to talk to her since the night he'd murdered their parents. His memory of the meeting was hazy save for her broken eyes. Those eyes had given him nightmares. Even after all the times she'd been hurt, her expression was never as tortured as it was the day she visited him in jail.

In his childhood, Wyatt had come to know her expressions well. He always knew when she had been hurt. Her cheeks turned pink, her eyes glassy. She looked like a spooked rabbit, like an animal that knew it was defenseless prey and was just waiting for the inevitable.

Wyatt had no idea how long their grandfather had been abusing Sarah,

but Sarah was ten the first time Wyatt walked in on them. They were in the Fosters' kitchen. Wyatt didn't remember where his parents were when it happened. Wyatt came home late that day. He'd been at baseball practice. His parents had forced him to join the school's team even though he hated it. They had left Sarah in the care of their grandfather.

He didn't even stop when Wyatt walked in. Sarah had puked a little on the counter. The smell wafted over to Wyatt, hot and rank.

When it was over, Sarah sank to the floor, hugging herself and rocking back and forth. Their grandfather zipped his fly and smiled at Wyatt. "Hey," he said, as if everything were perfectly normal. He squeezed Wyatt's shoulder, his thick fingers digging into the soft hollow above Wyatt's collarbone. The pain caused Wyatt to gasp. "Don't tell your folks, okay?" He leaned in, his breath right on Wyatt's neck, and said, "Or I'll kill her and dump her body in the woods."

Then he'd left. Just like that.

Wyatt was too stunned to respond. He stood there like a piece of furniture, vaguely aware of the sound of their grandfather's car pulling out of their driveway. The sound of Sarah's whimpering brought him back. He helped her get cleaned up, gave her some children's Tylenol like his mother did when she was sick, and made her a grilled cheese. They didn't talk about it right away, although Sarah begged him not to tell their parents. She slept in Wyatt's bed after that.

Wyatt had never told their parents about the things his grandfather had done to him as a young child, and they had never noticed his distress or the bruising. They dismissed his nightmares as night terrors. "It's normal," his mother said. "It will pass." His grandfather had never told him *not* to tell, and Wyatt had been too afraid of ending up like one of the animal carcasses in the tire ring to tell. As a very young child, he even began to think it was normal. But what he was doing to Sarah—Wyatt knew that was not normal. Not right. He had to tell. He didn't want to—he was still terrified of his grandfather even though he had turned his sadistic tendencies toward Sarah—but he thought of Cassidy Bishop and how she had saved him. Wyatt didn't want to be like those other kids who had kept walking while three bigger boys tortured him. He decided he could be brave like Cassidy. He could save his

sister.

It had taken a lot to convince Sarah though. She was humiliated and ashamed. She never wanted to talk about it—not even to Wyatt—let alone to their parents. But he had convinced her that the best thing, the right thing to do, was to tell. Their parents would make it stop. They would stop Grandpa and punish him. That was their job. Sarah wouldn't even have to talk. Wyatt would tell. He would finally stand up to the man. He would handle it, and then everything would be okay.

But their parents didn't believe him. They laughed at him. Scoffed. They even talked about punishing him for telling such serious lies.

Wyatt thought that Sarah's face could not look more stricken than when their grandfather hurt her or later when their parents did not believe his claims. But he was wrong.

When he'd been allowed to see her, after his conviction but before he was sent to juvie, there was something so ravaged in her, something so irreparably damaged that it hurt him to look at her. They'd spoken, but he only remembered the last four words she said to him before they hauled him away.

“You made it worse.”

Once he was released from juvie, and later after he finished his studies at Drexel University, he considered going to get her and taking her with him, getting her away from Sunderlin. But he'd never been able to face her.

Now he sat inside her trailer, waiting for her to return home from her job at Wal-Mart and looked around, wondering if she'd spent any of the money he'd sent her over the years. The place was cozy, but none of the décor appeared to be particularly expensive.

He'd followed Cassidy and Isaac to her trailer, and then spent two days skulking around Sunderlin, trying not to draw attention to himself. He'd stayed at a motel near the interstate, staying in his room most of the time except to visit Lexie's grave. He'd left something there for Cassidy. A sign. His way of saying that he knew she was onto him. Wyatt was so caught up in thoughts of Cassidy that he didn't even hear Sarah come in. She stood before him holding her blue Wal-Mart smock in her hands. Her mouth hung open.

She swallowed twice and said, “Blake?”

“I used the key you keep in the hanging flowerpot outside. Very clever.”

“You’ve been watching me?”

“I’ve always kept an eye on you,” he said.

“Why didn’t you come back?”

He dropped his gaze to the surface of her kitchen table. The wood was dull from her repeated buffing. “I always made things worse,” he said.

“You could have come back.”

He couldn’t look at her. His throat constricted. He drummed his fingers on the table. She stepped closer and put her purse and smock on the table. “That woman came here looking for you—the one you were in love with—she’s with the FBI now.”

“I know.”

“What did you do? Did you kill people?”

Wyatt sighed. “That’s not important.”

She stood before him wringing her hands. When he looked at her, he saw worry lines around her eyes. Her lower lip trembled. It took him back to their unfortunate childhood. He had to look away. Her voice was so quiet he almost didn’t hear her. “Why didn’t you kill *him*?” she asked.

A slow burn started in Wyatt’s stomach. His bowels groaned. “I was in jail.”

She stepped forward and slapped the table. He jumped, his startled gaze going back to her face. Tears trickled from her beady eyes. “After that,” she said. “After you got out. You never came back. You could have killed him. You were out for a whole year before that bastard dropped dead. Why didn’t you do anything?”

Paralyzed, Wyatt stared at her. He had no answer. None that would make sense to her. He had never remembered killing their parents. When he was released at eighteen, he didn’t feel like a killer. It was over a decade later that he’d killed the pastor in the airport bathroom. He had no real memory of the act, although that incident had woken something in him. It was only after

that that he'd worked up the nerve to kill. He had tracked down his grandfather only to find out the man was long dead.

"I was too late," Wyatt said. "I was going to, but he died so suddenly."

Sarah slapped him, stinging his skin. His head whipped to the side. Pain shot through his neck. "If you cared about me at all, you would have killed him."

"I'm sorry," Wyatt whispered. Suddenly, he was thirteen again and nothing he said or did could help her or stop bad things from happening to her. Just like the night he had told their parents what their grandfather was doing to her and they had laughed at him, he could not look at his sister.

Several minutes passed. He sensed Sarah's anger waning. Finally, she asked, "Why are you here?"

He leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees. He put his head in his hands. His neck throbbed. "I'm going away for a while. I want you to come with me."

"Where?" Sarah asked.

"I can't tell you that now, but it will be far away from here. I want you to come. I'll take care of everything—money, a place to live. You can change your name. Be someone else. Start over. I'll help you. I'll make it up to you—all my failures."

He glanced up at her without meeting her eyes. Her face was pale as she considered his offer. "What about the FBI agent?"

He realized his body was rocking to and fro and willed it to stop. He rested his hands on the table, straightening his back. "If you come with me, I'll forget about her. I'll leave her behind."

Sarah stared at him for a long moment, her thin lips forming a skeptical line. "I don't believe you. You're here for her. She's in town, and that's the only reason you're here. You'll never leave her behind. You never cared about me."

The words cut him. He grabbed her hand. It was soft and clammy. She recoiled slightly. He wanted to let go but forced himself to hold on as he met her eyes. "Just come with me."

She shook her head and pulled her hand away. She turned away from him. At the sink, she wet a washcloth and started wiping the countertop.

“I’ll find your daughter,” Wyatt offered.

Her wide shoulders slumped. The frenzied scrubbing ceased. Her voice was flat when she said, “I never wanted that baby.”

Another awkward silence filled the trailer. Finally, Wyatt said, “How can you stay here?”

She turned on him, eyes flashing, the venom in them startling him. The table was between them, but for a split second he thought she might toss it aside and come after him. This was an expression he had never seen. Fear tickled the nape of his neck. He stood and backed away from the table, from her.

“How could you leave me here?” she hissed, slapping both hands against the table.

“I told you, I—”

“Shut up,” she said, her voice rising in pitch and loudness. She slapped her palms against the table with each word. “Shut up, shut up! I hate you. You’re not here for me. You never cared about me.”

Wyatt shook his head, taking another step back. “That’s not true. Everything I did was for you. It’s all for you.”

“You never came back for me,” she shouted.

“I sent you money—”

“I never wanted your damn money. You left me alone here. You never cared about me.”

Wyatt raised his hands, shaking his head. “That is not true—”

“You’re only here for her—you never cared about anyone but her. Damn you. I hate you.”

He opened his mouth to offer some explanation, but she pounded the table again. Blind rage flattened her chubby face. Her palms were bright red from hammering against the table. Spit flew from her mouth as she screamed at him, “Get out! Get out, get out, get out!”

Wyatt slid along the wall of trailer until his hand felt the door knob. Her tone grew more shrill with each word. He had to get out of there before her neighbors came to see what all the commotion was about. Her sugar bowl narrowly missed his head as the screen door slammed shut behind him. He ran, hopping the tall fence that surrounded the trailer park. He was half a mile away, breathing hard, and he could still hear her shrieks.

CHAPTER

48

Kassidy

November 26th

My confrontation with Isaac had left me shaken. I went after him and stood in the driveway, watching as he pulled away in my SUV. He met my eyes once before taking off down the street. The pain in his eyes was palpable, like a slap in the face. My tears flowed freely and silently, dropping onto my night shirt like heavy raindrops. I ran back into the house, used the bathroom, and threw on some clothes and shoes. I snatched my mother's car keys out of the key bowl that she kept on the table in the foyer.

"Mom," I yelled. "I'm borrowing your car."

I heard her yell "okay" from upstairs. The dogs followed me, and I let them pile into the back of her Hyundai. There was a lot of panting and pacing before they settled in comfortably. I didn't go after Isaac. I had no idea where he might go, and I didn't know what to say to him. The memory of his daughter's face made my heart hurt. A sob rose in my throat. I rubbed my belly and the baby kicked. I sent up a silent prayer of thanks that she was okay, safe inside me. I wanted her so badly. I loved her even though I had never met her—never even seen her profile on an ultrasound. It was so strange. How would I feel when she came?

I drove to the cemetery. I parked inside the entrance and walked to Lexie's grave. The cemetery was in a deep, green, rolling valley dotted with oak and maple trees. It was beautiful and peaceful. The only sounds were the birds chirping and the wind sighing. Lexie's plot wasn't far from the

entrance. The dogs followed along behind me, sniffing everything frantically as if they might be ordered abruptly back into the car at any moment, torn away from all the new and exciting scents.

I stood before Lexie's simple granite headstone and stared at the dates. Every time I visited her grave I stared at the dates, expecting something. I wasn't sure what, but I never got it. It seemed like I should feel something standing at the grave of my sister, on the ground beneath which her body lay. It seemed as though there should be a sign or some tangible indication of her presence, but there was nothing. As always, her cold headstone greeted me with silence.

And in spite of this I spoke to her, feeling foolish but forging ahead anyway. My voice sounded strange and unrecognizable. I wondered if Blake Foster had followed me, if he was lurking behind a nearby headstone. Then I decided he couldn't possibly be—I hadn't seen anyone following me, and there were no other vehicles in sight. I talked to my sister, telling her all the things about the past few months that I would have told her if she were alive. Things I now shared with Linnea or Dale. Poor Dale. I told her about the baby and Jory, about Blake Foster and Isaac. As I spoke, Rocky sniffed her way over and pawed at the ground at one of the corners of Lexie's headstone.

I issued a stern "no," but Rocky returned to the patch of ground, dislodging an object from a loose patch of dirt.

"Rocky, stop it," I said. I grabbed her collar and pulled her toward me. In her mouth she held a clear plastic baggie. Inside it was an old book wrapped in two smaller baggies. I extracted the book—it was old, its brown cover crushed and faded, its pages brittle and yellow. I opened it up. It had been sixteen years, but I recognized the handwriting immediately.

It was Lexie's diary.

I sank to my knees, turning pages frantically. After so many years, the sight of her handwriting had almost the same effect as hearing her voice might have had. I felt like someone had punched me in the gut. Sensing the sudden change in my emotional stratosphere, the baby tumbled around madly. I tried to calm myself, but my hands shook.

Rocky sat beside me, her ears perked straight up, watching me. Smalls

and Pugsley roamed nearby, their attention still wholly engaged by the new smells. I flipped to the last two months of the diary. Some of the pages crumbled as I turned them. I tried to slow my manic hands.

I was breathing through my mouth. My whole body vibrated like a bell that had been rung. A buzzing began in my ears. The first entry read:

Today I was sitting in the café at Borders trying to study for that damn chem exam, and you wouldn't believe who came up to me. Blake Foster! I didn't even recognize him but he knew who I was. I really couldn't believe it. It was so weird. I thought he would be in jail for life, but there he was, and he looked good. I feel funny even thinking that—I mean he's a murderer—but he is really cute. He looks way different than he did in high school. He looks like a man now. I never would have recognized him. He was so nice, so mild mannered. I really wonder if everyone got it wrong. Maybe he didn't kill his parents. He says he doesn't remember—that he lost the time. He said they let him out when he turned eighteen since he was only a kid when he did it. I asked him if he really did it and he said yeah. He seemed so sad. I don't know what to think. Maybe there was someone else there that night. He was very sweet. He bought me coffee. We talked for hours. He's a student at Drexel in their computer program. I can't believe he's really here. It is so weird. I don't know what to think. I know I should be freaked out, maybe even scared by him but I'm not. I know I shouldn't have—oh my God, dad would kill me—but I gave him my phone number. Maybe he won't call. But I kind of want him to. Isn't that terrible? I'm just a terrible person!

Tears blurred my vision. I wiped them away with my sleeve. Next to me, Rocky whined. The baby's frantic movements slowed. I sniffed and read on. Two weeks after that entry Lexie had written:

I saw Blake today. I know—I KNOW—I shouldn't have. I could have just ignored his calls, but I thought there's no harm in just talking, right? It was a nice day. We went into center city and went to the Franklin Institute. Then he took me to lunch. He was such a gentleman. The whole time I kept thinking, "Oh my God, I'm walking around with a murderer." (Seriously, Dad would have a heart attack). But then Blake acted so nice and so normal. He said he knew I was thinking about his parents and that it was okay. He said he expected that. I asked him more about it, but he really doesn't remember anything. He said he is trying to make a clean start and that he should never have approached me, but he couldn't help it. He said Cassidy and I were the only ones who were ever nice to him in school. I asked him why he never talked to us at school after he got out of the psych ward. He said he was nervous, that he was afraid if we got to know him better we wouldn't like him. I told him he should have let us decide. We talked for hours. I haven't told Cassidy about him yet. I know he creeps her out.

The next two entries went on in much the same way. Lexie was curious and fascinated—attracted to and repelled by Blake Foster at the same time. He exploited the good in her, her sympathetic nature, that quality she had that

allowed her to find something worthy even in the heart of a killer. Like many people who had never been to a crime scene or personally known a victim, my sister had difficulty grasping the full extent and gravity of Blake Foster's crime—particularly in the face of his unfailing normalcy.

The last entry was dated just three days before Lexie's death.

Blake kissed me tonight. We were standing on the corner near my dorm, under a tree. We were just waiting for the light to change and he turned to me, took my face in his hands and kissed me. It was so soft and sweet. I kissed him back. I know I shouldn't have—God I know I shouldn't even be talking to him. I just can't help it. I know what he's done—what people say he did but I feel connected to him anyway. That kiss—it was so romantic, so nice. I wanted it. I didn't think I would feel that way about a guy again, well not for a really long time anyway. I felt alive again, and I think Blake did too. You know I'm not perfect either. I've made some pretty big mistakes. Of course I haven't told him yet about any of that, but I think when I do he will understand. I should probably tell him that it was me and not Cassidy who visited him in the hospital. And while I'm at it, telling people things, I should really tell Cassidy about Blake. I know she knows I'm seeing someone.

That was it. Three days later, my identical twin sister plummeted eleven stories to her death. For sixteen years, I'd believed in my heart that she'd been pushed. Now I knew who pushed her.

CHAPTER

49

Kassidy

November 26th

The sun beat down on me, blinding and impervious to my grief. My armpits were wet with sweat in spite of the chill in the air. I'm not sure how long I sat there, holding Lexie's long-lost diary, knees sinking into the damp earth until my pants soaked through. The dogs froze in place as a black Envoy turned into the cemetery. I watched it weave its way toward me.

The glare of the sun on the windshield made it impossible to see the driver. There was no reason to believe the driver was anyone but another mourner whose loved one was buried nearby, but I imagined that it was Blake Foster. He was stalking me. He'd been stalking me for twenty years. Surely he knew where I was at this moment. He must have planted the diary for me to find. I'd been to the cemetery thousands of times since Lexie's death. The baggies in which I'd found the diary did not look very old. Perhaps Foster had waited for this moment to come and confront me. I was alone. No one knew where I was. I had only my dogs to protect me. I'd left my gun at my parents' house.

I watched the Envoy approach and wondered what I would say to him—I wished I hadn't forgotten my gun. Maybe a bullet would be the best expression of my feelings toward him. The Envoy pulled to a stop behind my mother's Hyundai. The driver-side door opened, and TK stepped out.

The dogs rushed to him. I let out a breath I didn't realize I was holding. TK wore sunglasses, which he tucked in his jacket pocket as he walked over

to me. The dogs surrounded him. He patted their heads absently. “Bishop,” he said.

He put a hand out and pulled me to my feet. I clutched the diary to my chest with the other hand. “What are you doing here?” I asked.

“I told Isaac I’d be a day or so behind you,” he said.

“No. What are you doing here at the cemetery? How did you know I’d be here?”

TK grinned. “I’m a master psychologist, remember?”

I stared at him.

“I stopped by your house. Saw your folks. Your mom said she overheard you and McCaffrey having some kind of spat and that you’d both taken off in different directions. I guessed that you’d be here.”

I sighed and glanced at the ground. I looked once more at Lexie’s lifeless headstone. Then I handed TK the diary, the last vestiges of my precious sister, everything tangible I had left of her. I told him where I’d found it and what was in it. Although he was already busy skimming pages, his forehead wrinkled.

“Haven’t you been looking for this for almost twenty years?” TK asked.

We’d known each other long enough and well enough that he was familiar both with the particulars of my sister’s death and with my theories about it.

“He pushed her,” I said. “That fucking bastard pushed her. Blake Foster killed my sister.”

TK shook his head, the movement so minute I almost missed it. “Bishop, you know as well as I do that this diary doesn’t prove that.” He closed it. “All this proves is that Lexie was seeing Blake Foster at the time of her death.”

I put my hands on my hips. “He’s a killer.”

“Yes, he is,” TK conceded. “And you may be right, but I don’t think we can pin him for Lexie’s murder without a confession.”

My face was hot. I jutted my chin out. “Then I’ll get one,” I said.

The corners of TK's mouth rose in an amused smile. "And that'll be the next time you speak with Blake Foster, will it?"

I snatched the diary back from him and stomped off toward my mother's car. The dogs trotted after me. "You're goddamn right," I mumbled.

TK called after me, "What were you and McCaffrey fighting about?"

I stopped walking and looked down at the concrete. I thought about his little girl, his wife. I didn't even know how long they'd been dead. I'd been in his house. He didn't keep photos of them out—at least not downstairs. Maybe it was too painful. I inhaled deeply, a shudder working its way through my frame. I'd lost Lexie and now I'd lost Jory, but I just couldn't imagine what it must have been like for Isaac losing his child and his wife in a single day. The thought of his daughter's face made my chest ache as if someone were pressing down on it. How was he able to go on?

"Nothing," I replied to TK. "Nothing important."

I felt TK's gaze on my back as I loaded the dogs into my mother's Hyundai. "I'll meet you at the house," I said.

CHAPTER

50

Wyatt

November 26th

Wyatt had parked a mile from Sarah's trailer park in the crowded parking lot of a Denny's. He covered the ground easily without noticing the distance or the crisp air. He could not get away from the trailer park fast enough. He got into the MKX and drove to a nearby gas station. He needed to refuel and regroup. He had no idea what to do next. Everything was falling apart. He hadn't finished his list, and the FBI was onto his true identity. Cassidy wasn't working. She was pregnant, and now she was sleeping with McCaffrey. Then there was the Dale Hunter situation.

Wyatt sighed as he pulled up next to a gas pump. He took a quick scan of the place to make sure they were open. The place was dead. He saw a female clerk inside watching a small television affixed to the wall. Soap operas. Wyatt leaned against his car and started pumping gas. His mind wandered from the myriad issues he faced with Cassidy to the confrontation with Sarah. He had only been half serious when he asked her to come with him. He really had no idea where he was going or what he would do next.

He should have known from the hardness life had pressed into his sister's face and poured into her heavy frame that it was too late to reconcile with her. She would never forgive him. He heard her scathing words again and again: "I hate you." He could not shake the image of her face, like a rabid dog about to tear him to pieces.

He had thought about the meeting that had just taken place in her trailer

for twenty years. He had fantasized about how it would go, what they would say to each other. A small part of him, which was foolishly optimistic, had always hoped for some kind of tearfully happy reunion. Now he saw that that was wildly out of reach. He wasn't sure how he felt about it.

Wyatt didn't know if he had blacked out or if it was simply the thoughts of Sarah that consumed his attention at the expense of all else, but he was still pumping gas when Cameron Bishop appeared next to him. The man seemed to materialize out of the air. He was grayer than the last time Wyatt had seen him. His frame seemed to have thickened and shrunk. He looked stockier than when Wyatt was a teenager.

"You," Cameron said. The man's voice trembled. His face was so pale that for a split second Wyatt wondered if he was having a heart attack. Bishop's mouth moved soundlessly. Then came the accusatory "you" again. Bishop was close enough for Wyatt to smell the coffee on his breath. He poked Wyatt's sternum with a stiff index finger. "I know who you are." Wyatt tried to move away, but Bishop had him pinned against the vehicle. Suddenly, Wyatt was sixteen again. A younger, taller but equally pale Cameron Bishop descended the steps of Wyatt's childhood home and slapped cuffs on Wyatt's skinny teenage wrists. Momentarily, Wyatt wondered if he was hallucinating. He half-expected to hear thunder. He couldn't catch his breath.

"Let's go," Cameron said.

Wyatt's voice seemed to come from far away. "You remember me."

Cameron stared at him, not giving an inch. Wyatt couldn't read the man. "You recognize me," Wyatt said.

Bishop squinted, the skin around his eyes crinkling. He leaned in, his face even closer and looked hard into Wyatt's eyes, as if he were looking inside him. He wanted desperately to push the old man away, but he couldn't move. The moment stretched on until Wyatt's legs ached. Bishop's gaze burned his face. It was then that Wyatt noticed the town police car entering the parking lot.

"You're coming with me," Cameron said.

The cruiser pulled up crosswise in front of Wyatt's MKX. The officer

got out of the car. He was young, and he looked slightly confused. He rested one hand on his gun. Cameron waved him over. Wyatt gulped air, feeling dizzy. His heart pounded in his ears. He had to do something.

As the officer pulled out a pair of handcuffs, Wyatt yanked the gas nozzle from the MKX. He used one hand to hold the pressurization sheath back and the other to squeeze the handle. He sprayed both men, aiming for their eyes. He swept the nozzle back and forth, hitting the officer first. The young man let out a startled cry and stumbled back, rubbing his eyes frantically. As the gasoline splashed into Cameron Bishop's face, the old man lunged at Wyatt with a loud grunt. The two of them fell between the car and the gas pump, fighting for control of the gas nozzle. The strong-smelling fluid flew everywhere soaking them both. Wyatt tasted it in his mouth and gagged. The gasoline fumes made him nauseous.

Bishop's hands seized the nozzle. Wyatt relinquished it and rolled away from Bishop. Bracing himself against the car, Wyatt kicked the man repeatedly until Bishop found purchase on the gasoline-soaked concrete and scrambled toward the other side of the pump.

Before Bishop could come back at Wyatt for another try, Wyatt scurried to the driver side of the MKX and climbed in. His hands trembled as he started the car. He threw the vehicle in drive and gunned it, smashing the side of the police cruiser and pushing it out of the way. Sparks flew as metal hit metal and the hood of the cruiser erupted in flames. Wyatt heard the police officer yell for Cameron to run. The tires of the MKX squealed as he pulled out onto the road. In his rearview mirror, he saw the two men running away from the gas pumps. Then a powerful explosion rocked the ground beneath Wyatt's vehicle. He felt the heat even as he drove away from the gas station.

He headed for the nearest interstate and sped along the mostly deserted highway. He'd put ten miles between him and Bishop before he allowed himself to think about what the confrontation meant. He popped two Xanax and checked the speedometer. He didn't want to attract any attention to himself by breaking traffic laws, but soon police all over the state would be hunting down his vehicle. If Cameron Bishop had had time to call the local police before trying to detain Wyatt, then he had had time to take down Wyatt's license plate number.

Wyatt still did not understand how Bishop had recognized him after twenty years. Wyatt had been around other people who had known him as Blake Foster, and they had not recognized him. He'd broken his nose a couple of times over the years—once in a fight and once falling down icy steps. There was a kink in his nose that made his face look harder, his jaw line more pronounced. He had a few scars he hadn't had when he was a teenager. He often wore color contacts or glasses to change up his appearance, and he dyed his normally dark hair a light shade of brown. In the last couple of days, he had cut it close to his head. They weren't radical changes, but enough that in twenty years, only Cameron Bishop recognized him as Blake Foster.

Dizziness returned as he realized just how close he had come to being caught.

All of his plans had gone to shit. If the authorities were this close to finding him, he had no choice but to take Kassidy. It might be his last chance to convince her that they should be together. Now or never—it was time to act.

First, he would have to get rid of the MKX and change identities completely.

No more Wyatt Anderton.

CHAPTER

51

Kassidy

November 26th

“There was over \$300,000.00 in money orders in the package you overnighted us,” TK said.

Isaac gave a low whistle.

“Holy shit,” I said.

We were sitting around my parents’ kitchen table. My mother had gone to work, and my father had gone out. Isaac was already there when TK and I returned from the cemetery. We did not speak to each other. TK kept glancing back and forth between us as if he expected one of us to say something to break the tension. We weren’t talking.

“They’re processing the money orders now. It’s going to take a while. The last one he sent is dated seven weeks ago. It was purchased at a check cashing place in Portland, Oregon. It was bought one week after Megan Wilkins’ murder.”

“So he was there. He was in Portland when Jory died,” I pointed out.

TK nodded. “What did Remy say?”

I sighed. “The same thing he said last time. It’s going to take a couple of weeks to get a list of people who rented blue Hondas in and around the city of Portland for those two days, but he is working on it.”

TK flipped a page in his notebook. “The blood they found on Dale’s

wall was human blood. They took a DNA sample from his hairbrush, but it will take quite some time to match the two in order to determine if it was Dale's blood on the wall."

I hugged my belly as the baby kicked. I squeezed my eyes shut to stop my unshed tears from leaking out. I sent up a silent prayer that somehow Dale was still alive.

"We tried to notify his next of kin," TK went on. "But as you know, his father is in a nursing home with pretty advanced Alzheimer's."

I nodded. TK put his notebook down. "Did you know Dale was in the military?"

"What?" Isaac and I said in unison.

TK gave a short chuckle, as if in disbelief. "Yeah. He enlisted in the Army reserves at twenty, served for eight years. Honorable discharge."

"He never told me," I mumbled. I tried picturing Dale in the military, but the image would not come. I couldn't even imagine him holding a gun. "That seems so out of character for him."

"Yeah," TK agreed. "I thought they had the wrong guy, but we checked the social security number three times. He was in the Army."

"People change," I said. I looked into Isaac's blue eyes. "Life changes you."

He said nothing but continued holding my gaze.

TK cleared his throat and opened his mouth to say something else when my cell phone rang. I answered it to my father's labored breathing and the sounds of sirens in the background. "Dad?" I said.

"I almost had him. The fucker doused me with gasoline and took off. He blew up a police cruiser. I called the county and state police, but if your FBI friends are there, I sure could use their help."

My heart pounded. "Dad, slow down. What are you talking about?"

A grunt of frustration. "I'm talking about Blake Foster," he said. "I saw him at the gas station on Pine Street. I called the town police to come arrest him, but when he saw us, he sprayed us with gasoline and took off. He hit the

cruiser on the way out of the parking lot and it blew up. It's a goddamn mess out here."

Before I could ask, he added, "I'm fine. A little bruised. The townie and I hauled ass out of the parking lot as soon as we saw the spark. Jumped into the creek that runs behind the lot. I still stink to high heaven, but I'm fine. But I don't want you out here, it's too dangerous. Is your colleague there? The one who came by today? Put him on."

Stunned, I held out the phone to TK. I swallowed. "My dad wants to talk to you. He just tried to arrest Blake Foster."

CHAPTER

52

Kassidy

November 26th

TK and Isaac left me behind. Tires squealed as they tore out of my parents' driveway, laying rubber in the street. Isaac took my mother's car in case he and TK needed to separate later. TK took his rental, already on the phone to twenty different people. When my mother got home, I cried in her arms like a small child. My hormones were out of control, and the stress of the last few days finally got to me.

I couldn't stop the torrent of tears, the wracking sobs. Jory, Dale, Lexie, and today I had almost lost my father. My three dogs looked on in dismay, lined up all in row in front of the couch where my mother clutched me to her chest and rocked me back and forth.

The baby tumbled inside me as if the walls were closing in on her. I felt terribly guilty because I could not calm myself down. After a time, she was still. I stroked my stomach in jerky movements. My mother smoothed my hair back from my face and kissed my forehead gently like I was a little girl.

I thought I would never stop crying, but after a solid half-hour the tears dried up, leaving me puffy-faced and exhausted. Much to my shock, I actually dozed off. I woke with my head in my mother's lap. I sprung up, a wave of dizziness assailing me.

"How long was I out?"

"Not long," my mother said. She put a hand on my forearm. Her touch

was warm. “There hasn’t been any news.”

I checked the clock on my cell phone. It had been one hour. I called TK’s cell phone, but all he had to report was that the state police were looking for Foster. He promised to call me as soon as he knew anything. My mother took my hand and led me into the kitchen. The gesture reminded me of my sister. I realized that one day I’d have to turn over Lexie’s diary to my mother. But not yet.

“You have to eat,” my mother said.

“I can’t eat now,” I responded, but even as the words were out of my mouth my body craved food. Where before stress would cause me to go days without eating or sleeping, now my body, the baby, kept me on a regular schedule. Even when I didn’t have an appetite, I had an appetite.

My mother heated up Thanksgiving leftovers, and I ate like I hadn’t eaten in a week. As I stuffed my face, I checked my cell phone every few minutes to make sure the ringer was still on. Two hours passed. Finally, after four hours, Isaac came in. My father dropped him off and drove away. I was on the couch, dogs at my feet. I sprung up when he came in.

“We didn’t get him.”

“Where’s my dad?”

Isaac hooked a thumb toward the front door. “He went back out.”

He looked haggard. There were lines around his mouth I had never noticed before. He pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket. I recognized his handwriting. “The state police are still out looking for him. We notified all local police departments within a two-hundred-mile radius. Your dad and I went down the interstate after him. About fifty miles from here, on the side of a service road, we found the MKX.” He paused. Finally, he looked at me. His eyes were tired. “It was on fire. As far as the fire department can tell, there wasn’t anyone in it. The vehicle was registered to a Wyatt Anderton of RR 1, Box 49, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Sent patrols there. It’s nothing but a few acres of wooded land. No house, no garage. Nothing.”

“So he’s gone,” I said. Then I clapped my hands together as the idea came to me. “Surveillance video,” I said. “From the gas station. He would be

on it if he got gas. We could get his photo out.”

Isaac sighed. I knew what he was going to say. I’d lived in Sunderlin long enough to know it was not only technologically behind the times, but it was also a place where people didn’t even lock their doors. They didn’t have to. Crime was unheard of.

“There are no surveillance tapes,” Isaac said. “They don’t have cameras in that gas station.”

“What about a driver’s license photo?” I said.

“Your dad and TK are on their way to the State Police barracks now to see if they can get one. But look, this guy is pretty slick. I’m betting when they pull up that photo it won’t be Blake Foster. Your dad will give a composite if they can’t find anything.”

Isaac stepped toward me and peered into my face. “Have you been crying?”

I looked at the floor. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

Awkwardly, he touched my arm. “We’ll get him, Bishop.”

I shifted from foot to foot and nodded, my eyes still glued to the floor.

“Do you want me to wait up with you?” he asked. “For your dad to get home?”

“No,” I said. “I’ll be fine. Get some sleep.”

CHAPTER

53

Kassidy

November 26th

TK called a few hours later. The driver's license photo was not a match, just as Isaac had suspected. My father had helped a sketch artist put together a composite. A BOLO, or Be On the Lookout, had been issued across the state. TK was wired and had decided to drive back to Quantico that night. He promised to call me with any news. My father finally came home around nine p.m. with the gasoline smell that covered him filling up the house. My mother put his clothes in a trash bag and put them outside. She opened windows and sprayed air freshener. My dad spent almost an hour in the shower. We talked briefly about the pursuit before he went to bed, still stinking and exhausted.

Isaac had gone to bed in my father's study, but I was watching the eleven o'clock news when they showed the composite. It looked like any white male with buzz-cut, blonde hair, a slightly crooked nose and brown eyes. It looked nothing like the age-progression photo TK had presented me with a few days ago at the diner in Manassas.

I couldn't sleep. I lay in my old bed with Smalls beside me and Pugsley at my feet. Rocky slept in the doorway. I shifted from one side to the other, the weight of the baby heavier than ever, tugging at my back and stomach muscles. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw Dale's living room, the bloody words. I even tried to think of Jory instead, but it didn't help. It was too painful. I got out of bed and padded downstairs. I went to the door of my

dad's study where Isaac slept. I raised my hand to knock but couldn't work up the nerve, so I went back to bed.

I listened to the familiar sounds of my childhood home. The heater kicking on and off, the grandfather clock in the hallway ticking, the occasional creak of the house settling. The only thing missing was the sound of Lexie sighing in her sleep. Even after all these years, I still expected to hear it whenever I was home.

Another hour crept by. I went back downstairs, to my dad's study. The door was open this time. My father's screensaver, which showed the time floating across a black screen in red numbers, illuminated the room slightly. I could make out Isaac's prone figure on the cot. His back was turned to me. I watched him breathing evenly for a minute, then turned to go.

His voice startled me. "Just come in. I can't sleep either."

For a split second, as I stepped into the room, I thought of tip-toeing over and climbing under the covers with him, snuggling warm against his broad chest. Not only was the thought completely absurd, but we would never both fit on the cot. I went into the room and Smalls followed. Rocky and Pugsley had stayed upstairs. Smalls nudged Isaac's hand and laid down on the floor. Isaac sat up and stretched his arms over his head. I sat beside him on the cot, leaving a good foot and a half between us.

We sat side by side in the dark, both staring straight ahead like we were watching something, each lost in our own thoughts. It wasn't awkward. It was easy. It felt effortless, sitting silently with Isaac, not needing to fill up the silence between us with useless talk. It was soothing in a way.

Eventually, we did talk. After several minutes I said, "How long has it been?"

"How long has it been since what?" he asked.

"Since your wife and daughter died."

"Oh. Five and a half years."

"How do you do it?"

"What's that?"

It was easier to ask in the darkness. “How do you go on living after what happened to you? Losing your family?”

I felt more than saw him shrug. “Don’t know. When it first happened—most of that time is a blur. The funerals, the months after that—I don’t remember it all that well. Most of the time, even now, I try not to think about it too much.”

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“It’s okay.”

“Didn’t you ever just want to die?”

He chuckled softly. “Oh Bishop, I almost put a bullet in my brain every day for the first two years. Then about two dozen times after that. You tell yourself a lot of things to get through the days. Like they would want me to keep living, want me to be happy. Like one day you’ll see them again on some spiritual plane or something. You tell yourself they’re watching over you. You say to yourself what kind of man would I be if I just offed myself? I could tell you a million and one things that went through my head—me trying to find reasons not to put myself out of my misery. I don’t know the answer to your question. I just know I’m still here.”

I wanted to touch him, but I didn’t. “It was like that when Lexie died,” I said. “Probably not as bad though.”

A moment slipped past. Isaac said, “Then you know.”

“Know what?”

“That you never really get over it, get past it. You never stop missing them or stop wanting them back. You just get used to this strange new reality without them in it.”

I smiled even though he couldn’t see it. “It takes a long time,” I said.

“That it does.”

I changed the subject abruptly, and Isaac followed without missing a beat. “They’re not going to let me help—look for Foster, look for Dale, solve this case.”

“No, but they’ll catch Foster.” He said this with absolute certainty.

“What do I do?”

Isaac sighed. “Go home. Take your parents with you. Go to the ultrasound on Monday.” Finally, he looked at me. He smiled a little. “Get ready for your baby.”

We sat peacefully for another few minutes, tensing only when we heard my father cough and his footsteps in the kitchen. The scent of gasoline wafted through the house. Even after two showers, it still clung to him. The light from the kitchen stretched down the hall and leaked into the room. We weren’t doing anything. We weren’t even talking, but I suddenly felt like I was sixteen and about to get caught with a boy in my room. Neither one of us moved. We listened to my father shuffle around in the kitchen. Open the fridge, a cupboard. Pour something. Turn the faucet on and off. After about fifteen minutes, the light went out, and we heard him trudge back up the stairs. We laughed softly. I felt very tired all of a sudden, like I could sleep for a week. The baby turned over. I had to pee.

“I’m going to bed,” I said.

Isaac nodded. Then he reached over and squeezed my knee lightly. “See you in a few hours.”



The next morning, we packed up and left for Woodbridge. Blake Foster had disappeared in spite of a statewide manhunt and the composite sketch being widely circulated. There was nothing my father or I could do—I had been pulled from the case, and my father was retired. Although we hated not being in the thick of things, we had no choice but to remain on the sidelines and hope that our colleagues could find Foster.

My parents had decided they would stay with me indefinitely. I didn’t protest. I was relieved. I drove my mother and the dogs in my Trailblazer. My dad followed with Isaac in my mother’s Hyundai. I insisted on driving. It gave me something to do. I was trying to keep my mind off Dale—wondering where we would find his body and feeling guilty for having brought a killer into his life.

I called TK from the car. He had nothing new to report except that Wyatt Anderton had flown back and forth from Denver during the week of

Georgette Paul's murder. He'd flown out of Newark the day of Boyd Henderson's murder. He'd also taken a 10 a.m. flight out of Dulles to Portland the day of Megan Wilkins' murder. He had rented a blue Honda Civic the day of Wilkins' murder and returned it a week later in perfect condition. They'd check car rental facilities in all the cities where murders had taken place, but that would take a lot longer. Anderton seemed to always leave from DC.

"That makes sense," I said. "If he's stalking me, he's probably been nearby all along."

TK promised again to call me with any news. We arrived at Quantico at noon. My father followed me into the parking garage where Isaac's car was and let him out. Isaac came up to my window and said goodbye to my mother. Then he reached in and patted my belly. "Good luck," he said.

When he was gone my mother said, "I like him."

I shot her a stern look. "Do not start."

She feigned innocence. "What? I'm just saying I like him."

"Mom."

She smiled—a devilish smile. "He's very cute."

"Mom!"

"Oh, honey," she sighed.

"I'm trying to have a baby here. Can we not talk about this?"

"Okay," she agreed in a tone that silently added: *But we'll come back to it.*

I resisted the urge to stop at the office. I didn't want to go home, although having my parents there would help. As soon as we arrived at my house, my father set about changing the locks on all my doors. Then he went to work in the nursery putting another coat of primer on the walls. I couldn't sleep that night. I spent the night pacing back and forth from my kitchen to my living room, peeking out the windows at Dale's empty house.

My mother caught me at 3 a.m. "Honey, you have to get some rest," she said.

“I can’t get comfortable, Mom.”

“Just sit.”

I sat next to her, and she picked my feet up from the floor. I moaned in pleasure as she began kneading the soles of my swollen feet.

“Tomorrow, after Linnea gets here, we’ll go shopping,” she said. “We won’t know the sex of the baby till Monday, but tomorrow we can get the crib and all kinds of other things for your father to put together. Then on Monday after the ultrasound we’ll go pick out colors so your father can start painting the room . . .”

I closed my eyes and floated along on the sound of her voice. I tried to clear my mind—forget about Dale being missing, about Blake Foster stalking me, about Jory being dead, about the fact that we had come so close to catching him and he’d gotten away. I tried only to think about my baby. She deserved my attention. I stroked my belly absently as my mother massaged my feet. The baby thumped back a few times. Impulsively, I reached over and grabbed one of my mother’s hands. I put it on my stomach.

“Do you feel that?” I asked.

From the corner of my eye, I saw a tear slide down her cheek. “Yeah,” she said. “I do.”

CHAPTER

54

Wyatt

November 29th

Blake trailed Cassidy, her parents, and Linnea from her home to the hospital. He stayed as far back as he could. He had no idea just how actively the FBI and local police were looking for him. No one would recognize him, but the Bishops would be wary of any vehicle that seemed to be following them. The Camry made a rattling noise as he drove over the speed bumps in the parking lot. He stayed one car behind entering the parking lot and paused outside the emergency room entrance. He waited to see where Cassidy parked and then he found a spot a few rows over from hers and Linnea's car. He left his vehicle running as he watched them walk into the hospital together. It had to be the sonogram. He had found out via emails between Cassidy and Linnea. He left the Camry running. The heater whirred noisily even though barely any heat flowed through the ventilation system. He turned the temperature indicator all the way into the red, but the car began to emit a strange smell so he turned the heat off altogether. What could he expect for only \$3,000.00?

After leaving Sunderlin, he had burned the MKX and traveled on foot almost ten miles until he found a rental place. Lucky for Blake, a young guy had been working that day and hadn't asked any questions, despite the stink of gasoline all over Blake's clothes. In fact, the kid had been too busy texting on his cell phone to even take a good look at Blake before renting him a car. Blake had his backup identification with him—the same alias he'd used to fly to New York to see Dusty.

As George Harbison, he'd rented a car and driven back to Virginia. As

George Harbison he'd rented a room at a very questionable motel outside of Manassas and tried to come up with a plan. He had cash accounts and credit cards in George Harbison's name. For \$3,000 cash, he bought the Camry at some Mom and Pop dealership, the kind run by a guy named Jimmy out of the front yard of his trailer. It was very old, but it would do. He had driven past her house twice the day before. Long enough to see the FBI agents stationed outside, across the street, and to notice the Prince William County police drive by once. He had despaired of ever catching her alone, but then he remembered the sonogram appointment. Surely, she would still keep it. She would be away from her home—he might have a chance at approaching her. He might even have a chance to take her.

He waited almost two hours. He was shivering and dozing on and off, wishing he had picked up some coffee when Cassidy, her parents, and Linnea emerged from the hospital, looking jubilant. Mrs. Bishop clutched what looked like the sonogram pictures to her chest. She wiped tears from her eyes even as she smiled broadly at her daughter. Even Cameron Bishop was uncharacteristically flushed. Blake could see him trying to maintain his usual stoic demeanor. His brow creased and then relaxed—wrinkling, then smoothing out. The corners of his mouth twitched, as if he was trying to suppress a smile, but he couldn't. He beamed.

Blake rolled the window down, trying to hear what they were saying. Linnea's voice floated across the tops of the cars between them. "Well, that was very exciting," she said. She slung an arm across Cassidy's shoulders and gave her a squeeze.

Kassidy smiled and tried to take the ultrasound pictures from her mother, but Mrs. Bishop would not allow it. "Not yet," she said. "I just want to hang on to them a little longer."

Kassidy laughed. "Mom!"

He felt a stab, a sharp pain in his gut. It was the first time in years he had seen her face all aglow. He wanted her to smile that way for him and only him.

They stood between the vehicles—Kassidy's Trailblazer and Linnea's vehicle. "I'm going to ride with Linnea," Cassidy said, tossing a set of keys

to her father.

He caught them expertly in one hand. “We’ll meet you two at the restaurant?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Cassidy said. “You guys know how to get there?”

“Your mother does,” he assured me.

Blake watched her and Linnea climb into Linnea’s Impala and drive off. His heart sped up. Tiny beads of sweat popped out along his upper lip, in spite of the chill inside the car. Finally, he would have a chance at her. He backed out of his spot and drove parallel to them, turning at the end of the row of cars and pulling out behind them. He hung back as they turned out of the parking lot.

They passed through a light as it turned yellow. He sped up, the Camry making a strange gurgling sound as he tried to keep up with Linnea’s Impala. A blue blur flashed in his periphery, and then the whole car rocked. Metal screeched against metal. Glass broke. Dazed, Blake looked at the passenger side of the car. It was all crinkled. The grill of a large pick-up truck was visible through the shattered windows. He looked back toward the road, watching the Impala recede into the distance.

Then he was in the parking lot of a minimarket. It was like waking up. He blinked and looked around. He was in the cab of a truck. The smell of motor oil clung to the inside of it. His pale hands gripped the worn steering wheel. He looked out at the hood of the truck. It was blue with a small bump in it. He looked to the right where two cars sat parked at the front of the minimarket. One of them was Linnea’s Impala.

Then he was gone again.

CHAPTER

55

Kassidy

November 29th

“How awesome was that?” Linnea asked as we drove to meet my parents for lunch.

I grinned. “It was beyond awesome. I can’t believe that little person is inside me,” I said.

Linnea laughed. “It’s definitely weird. I don’t think you’re getting those ultrasound pictures back from your mom. She’s so excited.”

“I know,” I said. I put my hands over my belly. “I’m getting pretty excited myself.”

The yellow and blue sign of a minimarket ahead caught my eye. I poked Linnea’s shoulder and pointed. “Pull in here,” I said. “I need candy.”

She raised one eyebrow and shook her head slowly. “Are you kidding me? We are on our way to lunch.”

“They’re not going to have Twizzlers at the restaurant. Come on, it will only take a minute.”

“Good Lord,” she muttered in feigned annoyance as she parked the car. She grinned at me as we made our way inside.

There were only two other people inside including the cashier. Linnea stood near a bank of newspapers and magazines at the end of the candy aisle, perusing headlines while I searched for Twizzlers and any other candy that

called to me.

A woman screamed. Then a man's voice. "Hey, you can't—"

A gunshot exploded inside the tiny building. Linnea threw herself across my back, pushing me down to the floor and pulling her Glock. We looked toward the front of the store just as the shooter turned the corner to the candy aisle.

Dale Hunter walked toward us, his hair dyed blonde and shaved close to his head, a Smith & Wesson 22A at his side. He swaggered a little and smiled as if he'd just walked into a party thrown in his honor. He wasn't wearing his glasses. He looked like Dale but not like Dale. There was something different about him—his carriage, the way he was dressed, the confidence in his voice.

I said, "Dale?"

Linnea's hand was still on my back. I felt a slight tremor. "What's going on?" she said. She didn't lower her weapon.

"The jig is up," he said. "Not Dale anymore." He was still smiling that megawatt, toothy smile. It was Dale, but it was definitely not my Dale.

He waved the Smith and Wesson. "Linnea," he said with a menacing edge to his voice. "Get out of my way."

"What?" Linnea and I said at the same time.

I felt like I had just fallen into an alternate universe. Nothing was right. Things in my brain were coming together, but I wasn't quite there yet.

"I've come to get her, to take her with me, so put down your gun and get out of my way."

Linnea put it together before I did. Dale must have seen it in her face. What happened next took only seconds. Linnea reached up with her other hand to rack a round into the Glock's chamber, but Dale fired the Smith and Wesson before she could shoot. A scream tore from my throat as Linnea flew backwards. Blood blossomed over her left shoulder. Her Glock clattered to the floor a few feet from us. She lay on her back, her eyes wide with shock. I scrambled over to her, but she was already trying to get back up. I reached for my own gun—which was in my shoulder holster, beneath my coat—but Dale was on me, clamping his hand around my upper arm and dragging me away

from Linnea.

He kicked Linnea's Glock down the aisle, out of her reach. It slid beneath the display of newspapers and magazines. Dale released my upper arm and grabbed a handful of my hair. "Take your gun out and throw it on the floor," he instructed.

I hesitated, trying to think of a way out of this that didn't involve anyone else getting shot—or Linnea getting shot again. Her face had gone gray. She was frozen on her hands and knees, staring at us.

Dale yanked my head back again, eliciting a startled cry. "Don't make me shoot her again," he said.

My whole body felt light and unreal, weightless. When I pulled my Glock out, my hand shook. Releasing my hair, Dale wrenched it from my hand and tossed it onto the floor. He wrapped an arm around my throat and held the Smith and Wesson to my stomach. Slowly, he pulled me backward with him. I could barely breathe. Inside my body the baby was frantic.

"It's time to go," he said.

CHAPTER

56

Kassidy

November 29th

Dale, who was not Dale, dragged me outside, past a woman who lay bleeding from her abdomen at the front of the store. I didn't see the man who had been in the store but hoped he had escaped and called 911. An old, blue Ford pickup was parked at the edge of the parking lot, its engine running. I tried pulling away, but Dale held me tightly. The barrel of the gun pressed into my stomach. My breath caught in my throat.

Please don't take my baby. The words played again and again in my head. My prayer to whoever or whatever was listening.

"Dale," I said.

"You don't have to call me that anymore."

"What the hell are you doing? Why are you doing this?"

He pulled me along, urging me toward the truck. I felt his hands twitch, the gun knocking against my stomach. I chanced a look up at his face and saw his eyelids fluttering. For a moment, I wondered if he was having some kind of seizure, but then he glanced back down at me. His face paled.

"Dale," I repeated. "Stop. Let me go. Just let me go."

"I can't," he croaked.

He looked all around us and continued to herd me toward the truck. As we got further from the minimarket, a sob rose in my throat. "Linnea," I

cried.

“Linnea?” Dale said, meeting my gaze. His eyebrows drew together, puzzlement washing over his face. Quickly, he shook his head. It seemed like he was making a conscious effort to harden his expression. “Linnea wasn’t going to let me take you,” He said stiffly, craning his neck to look behind us.

I turned my body slightly and stared into his face. The pieces of the puzzle tumbled into place. How had I not seen it before?

“Blake?” I said.

Even as I said it, as I thought it, my mind built walls up against it. It simply could not be. This person I had lived next to for four years, this person I had trusted, let into my home, eaten with, laughed with, even spent holidays with—he simply could not be a killer. It just could not be.

I had an inkling in that moment of just how strong denial could be. I’d heard of so many cases where a husband, boyfriend, father, or son was doing horrible things—abusing a child, killing people, raping women—and their loved ones never had a clue. Naturally once the person was caught, the rest of the world looked on objectively and said, “How could she not know?”

Now I got it.

It was the ultimate mind-fuck. I stared at the man I thought I knew, the man I had trusted so implicitly. He was not at all what he appeared. “How?” I gasped.

Dale forced me the two steps to the truck and pushed me into the driver seat. The moment he started around to the passenger side I got out and ran. He caught up with me easily and with the barrel of the gun drew me back to the truck. We did that dance three times before he figured out to push me in through the passenger side while keeping the gun on me.

I never wanted my own gun so badly in my life.

“Drive,” he instructed, poking my stomach. The baby moved around inside me, kicking away.

I was close to hyperventilating. I had to concentrate hard on slowing my breath. My baby needed air. I put the truck in drive and pulled out of the parking lot. In the rearview mirror I saw Linnea run out of the store, one hand

wielding her Glock, the other hanging dead, blood streaming down her front. She ran after the truck, aiming her gun, trying unsuccessfully to get a good shot. At that distance, with one of her arms useless, aiming at a moving target, any shot she took could have disastrous consequences. She could accidentally hit me or cause the truck to crash. Finally, she stopped. I saw her stumble and sit down on the curb, her ash gray face receding into the distance.

I was on my own.

I drove slowly, in spite of Dale's repeated urging to go faster. He told me where to turn, although I had the sense he didn't really know where he was going. I had to think. My heartbeat thundered in my ears.

"You can't be Blake Foster," I said. "Your father—he has Alzheimer's. I went with you to visit him in the nursing home. He had your picture. The whole staff knew you."

Dale chuckled. "Smoke and mirrors. That man was my neighbor in Baltimore. His son's name was Dale. His son was a junkie. He got out of the military and couldn't keep it together. He stole from his father. Jim's Alzheimer's was pretty advanced by then. When I left Baltimore I took him with me—put him in a facility nearby where I could keep an eye on him."

I swallowed, looking ahead of me. We were weaving through a series of residential blocks. Each one looked exactly like the last. Dale kept giving me instructions: "Left here" or "Take a right." But he didn't seem to be going in any one direction.

"You stole Dale Hunter's identity," I filled in. "What happened to the real Dale Hunter?"

When he shrugged, the barrel of the gun pressed into my belly. My heart beat faster.

"Who knows? He's probably sleeping next to a dumpster in downtown Baltimore, sucking cock for his next fix."

I don't know why, but I felt relieved that the real Dale Hunter hadn't been murdered. We came out of the residential area and got into a more widely-used thoroughfare. It was two lanes in each direction. Traffic was

moderate. I continued to drive as slowly as possible. I had to think of a way out of this—one that didn't involve Blake Foster slaughtering me and my unborn child.

“How did you do it? Linnea saw you the morning of the Wilkins murder here, next door to my house.”

“She saw me at six a.m. as I was on my way to the airport. I caught a nonstop flight. Five hours. Plenty of time.”

“What about all the times you watched my dogs?”

“There is a very nice kennel a half hour from our neighborhood. I tip very well.”

Under other circumstances, this news would have upset me, but at that moment I was just trying to distract him—keep him talking so he'd be off guard when I tried to escape.

We were coming to a traffic light. I prayed for it to turn red. I slowed even more.

“Go faster,” Dale said.

“Your house—where did the blood come from?”

“What?” He, too, was watching the light. “Speed up.”

“The words were written in blood. Whose blood was it? How did you do it?”

I chanced a peek at his face. He looked genuinely baffled. “Words? What words?”

The light turned red. I came to a stop at the white line, and in one fluid motion, I opened the door and got out. As soon as my feet hit the asphalt I ran. The truck continued to roll forward. I heard Dale curse and the gears of the truck slam into park. I kept my eyes straight ahead. There were about seven cars behind us in each lane. I ran between them, along the dotted line. Half the drivers stared at me blankly. The other half stared straight ahead refusing to acknowledge my presence.

Dale caught up with me and wrapped a forearm across my throat. He pulled my weight back onto him and dragged me along. This time he pressed

the gun into my cheek. I struggled against him. One or two drivers got out of their cars. One of them, a woman, was on her cell phone, hopefully calling the police. The other, a man, came toward us and shouted, "Hey."

Without the gun against my abdomen, I was bolder. I tried to remember some of the hand-to-hand combat I had learned in the academy. It seemed like someone else's life. I wrenched downward on the arm across my throat and backed my rear up under his hips. I bent my knees and used my body to flip him over my shoulder onto the ground in front of me. It wasn't a good hip throw. It was sloppy and awkward, but it gave me access to the gun. I bent his pinky back and he relinquished the weapon with a yelp.

I put one foot on his chest, aimed at his head and pulled the trigger.

The ineffectual click of the gun misfiring was the loudest noise I'd ever heard. I fired again to the same sound. Again. Click. Again. Click.

On the ground beneath my foot, Dale smiled. "Love, there were only two bullets in there which I used on those two cunts back at the store."

I stared at the gun as if it were an extra appendage, some mutation afflicting my hand. "What?"

He swept my leg out from under me. I wobbled and he rolled to his knees, knocking me on my behind. He caught the gun before I dropped it. "There were only two bullets," he repeated. "One for you and one for me."

He hit me twice with the handle of the gun. Right on the side of my head. The first blow dazed me. The second knocked me out.

CHAPTER

57

Wyatt

November 29th

Blake knew Cassidy had struggled valiantly. He could tell by the large bruise on the side of her face, although he didn't remember hitting her. The blackouts were coming faster. He kept going in and out. It was a matter of minutes now instead of hours or days. It was hard to keep up. He had come to in the cab of the Ford pick-up truck—he had no idea where he'd gotten it from or what had happened to the Camry.

The next thing he knew he was dragging Cassidy across the parking lot toward the old truck, the Smith and Wesson pressed to her belly. He tried stuffing her into the drivers' side of the truck, but she kept getting right back out. Flustered, he had chased her three times before getting her behind the wheel. He told her to drive. He was relieved when she started asking questions. If he could keep her talking, she might not notice how confused he was. He just had to get his bearings. He had meant to take her, and clearly he had. He had no idea where they were, where he'd gotten the truck, why he'd switched vehicles, or what he had done to get Cassidy, but he had her. He knew he had done something to Linnea because Cassidy had cried out her name, but he had no idea what. He hoped he hadn't killed her.

He had resisted the urge to ask Cassidy what had happened to Linnea. Instead, he tried to project as much confidence as he could, make her think all of this was going according to plan. Make her believe it was all seamless. He gave her directions now and then as if he knew exactly where they were. She drove so damn slow. He knew she was doing it on purpose. She looked as

flabbergasted as he felt.

He looked her over as she drove. It didn't look like he had hurt her. He wondered again what he had done to get her to come with him. He flashed back to his parents' room, coming back to himself after the murders, standing at the foot of their bed, knife in hand. The knife was in his left hand, which was odd since he was right handed. It was a detail he'd never thought about before. This time in the memory Sarah was there. She stood in the doorway. She too, was covered in blood.

Blake shook the memory off and focused on Cassidy. His plan. He had to get her to safety so he could think. Finally she turned onto a road he recognized. He knew where they were. Relief flooded through him like a warm balm coursing through his veins. It froze when she started asking him something about words. Something to do with his house—Dale Hunter's house.

“The words were written in blood. Whose blood was it? How did you do it?”

He had no idea what she was talking about. Then she got out of the truck. He threw the truck into park and raced after her.

Then he was in the motel room he'd rented over the weekend. Cassidy was knocked out on the bed. She snored, all curled around her stomach. The side of her face was badly bruised. He stood beside the bed and watched her sleep. He touched her face where it swelled like a bruised plum. He felt a thrill as he touched her warm skin. He leaned down and smelled her hair. He had been this close to her before as Dale Hunter. There had been a handful of times that she'd hugged him or squeezed his arm when he was Dale, but he had never had access like this before.

He fingered her hair momentarily, and then the orgasm doubled him over where he stood. She didn't even stir. Quickly he changed his underwear and went outside. The truck was not in sight. Across the street was a gas station minimarket. Blake bought a bag of ice. Cassidy would need ice for her face when she woke up. He remembered the baby and her ravenous appetite. He picked up some snacks too. He checked his cell phone. Almost two hours had passed since he'd blacked out in the street.

Kassidy was still out when he returned to the motel room. He turned on the television to see if there was any news about him. The five o'clock news had a composite. They didn't name him. They only said that "this man" had kidnapped a federal agent at gunpoint after carjacking a man and shooting two people at a Woodbridge minimarket, one of whom was an off-duty DEA agent.

"What the fuck?"

He sprang up and banged on the television as if the news story had been the result of a bad reception. He flipped to another station, which also carried the story. Apparently he had walked into the minimarket wielding his gun and immediately shot a female customer, who was now in critical condition. He had then shot an off-duty DEA agent—Linnea obviously—who tried to intervene when he kidnapped Kassidy. The DEA agent was in stable condition. The newscaster recounted his "rampage" with an interactive map on the screen next to her. Small red X's marked the locations of his various crimes along with the time of day that he had committed them.

Apparently he'd gotten into a fender bender with an elderly man and carjacked him, taking his Ford pickup. That guy sustained minor injuries. Then the shooting at the minimarket and finally the scene at the intersection where he'd last blacked out.

"Holy shit."

He rested his head in his hands. He wished he'd seen the news before he went out for ice. The composite wasn't great, but there were a couple of grainy photos that people at the intersection had taken with their cell phones. Plus the police had the Camry which meant they had the name George Harbison. They'd be watching the Harbison accounts.

"Shit," he muttered.

Harbison was the last of his active aliases. It would take time and resources to create a new identity. Now the feds were looking for him. They had Wyatt Anderton and George Harbison. They thought Dale Hunter was missing. Blake was running out of money and options. He glanced at Kassidy. She sat up. She stared at him, one hand probing gingerly at the side of her head. She winced as she touched the center of the bruise.

“Where the hell are we?” she asked.

CHAPTER

58

Kassidy

November 29th

I watched Blake Foster curse the television for a full five minutes before he realized I was awake. It was difficult to look at him and not see Dale, my neighbor and friend. He seemed genuinely surprised by the newscast. I remembered his expression in the truck when I'd asked him about the bloody words scrawled across the living room wall. He didn't know what I was talking about. The more I thought about it, I could see the subtle changes in his personality between the school and the truck. Even between the truck and the point where he hit me in the head. Something very strange was happening to him. My brain worked frantically to think of all the psychology I knew.

He could have dissociative identity disorder which was the new name for multiple personality disorder. MPD drew a lot of attention in the world of entertainment and in the media, but usually the portrayal was inaccurate. All that was required for a diagnosis of dissociative identity disorder was two or more distinct states of personality emerging in the same person—each with its own unique perceptions of and reactions to the world around him. Gaps in memory were common. The Blake I had met at the store was colder, more callous than the one who sat before me now, looking more like a scared teenage boy than a serial killer. If he did have dissociative identity disorder it would certainly explain the disparities in the crime scenes, particularly the later ones.

When Blake turned to me, I blinked and touched the side of my face as

if I'd just woke up. I still saw Dale. My mind was having a difficult time accepting the fact that the Dale I had known and trusted for over four years was a fake, a charade. I couldn't let myself think of the implications—of how deeply I had let Blake Foster into my life under the guise of Dale Hunter. Every innocent moment I had spent with him replayed itself in my head. My heart thumped so hard it rattled my rib cage. Vomit rose in the back of my throat. I remembered how he'd come to check on me the night Jory came to my house. He hadn't been looking out for me, he'd been spying. A shiver ran through me.

My mind was too full. I had to focus. I had to figure out how to get out of this room alive. The pregnancy made me vulnerable. There was no way I could risk an ugly physical struggle. The smallest thing could result in my losing the baby. I could not risk that. Struggling, fighting, trying to overcome him physically was out of the question. That only left two options. I could wait for the cavalry and hope they showed up before he did something horrible to me, or I could try to outwit him.

I was a behavioral analyst. And this particular UNSUB I knew almost as intimately as a member of my own family. We had a shared history stretching back to our childhoods. I knew his delusions and motivations. I would have to manipulate him.

“Where the hell are we?” I asked.

CHAPTER

59

Kassidy

November 29th

My head throbbed. My mouth felt dry as if he'd stuffed it with cotton. My voice came out raspy. Blake stood abruptly, as if I'd caught him doing something he didn't want me to see. He went into the bathroom and came out with a handful of ice cubes wrapped in a white towel.

"You'll need this," he said as he handed it to me.

Grateful, I applied it to the side of my head.

"I'm sorry," he said. "About your head. Are you hungry?"

Inexplicably, I was hungry. It was the baby. Otherwise I would have no appetite in this situation. I told him I wasn't hungry, but he laid a smorgasbord of snacks across the bed in front of me. Combos, Ritz Crackers, granola bars, Doritos, and pretzels. I opened the crackers and stuffed two into my mouth. He watched me, staring at me like I was a beloved pet. The look of adoration on his face made me nauseous.

"Water," I said, crumbs spilling out of mouth. I stroked my belly with my free hand, still holding the ice to my head with the other. Silently, I urged the baby to move. I hadn't felt anything since I woke up.

"Oh right," Blake said. From the top of the dresser he pulled a bottled water. I put the ice down and drank down half the water in one swig. I nearly cried out when my baby kicked hard on the right side of my abdomen.

"Where are we?" I asked again.

Blake turned the volume down on the television. “We’re safe,” he said.

My first instinct had been to ask him why he was doing this, but it seemed like a pretty stupid question. Then I was going to ask what he wanted, but that too, seemed like a ridiculous question. Clearly he wanted me and that was why he was doing this. I didn’t want him in an adversarial position. I wasn’t quite sure yet how I was going to get out of this. I had to choose my words carefully. I asked him a more benign question that would tell me a lot just by his reaction to it. “What’s your plan?”

He wouldn’t look at me. He paced beside the bed, glancing at the television every few seconds. He was nervous. He didn’t have a plan.

“I’m going to take you away from here,” he answered. “Where we can be alone and be together.”

“What makes you think I can trust you now after you lied to me for four years? You pretended to be someone you’re not. How can I believe anything you say?”

Now he did look at me, the worried lines in his face softening. He dropped to his knees beside the bed, hands outstretched to me like a supplicant. “No, no, no, no. You don’t understand. I did that to protect you.”

“Protect me? How is lying on the grandest scale imaginable and betraying my trust protecting me?”

His eyes held a plea. “I had to be close to you in order to protect you. It was the only way. Last time—”

“Last time?” My voice went up an octave.

Its effect was exactly as I intended. He waved his hands like a bird flapping its wings. “Please,” he said. “Just listen.”

I put the ice back to my head and avoided his gaze. I looked straight ahead as if he was not in the room. The pouting lover. The petulant queen.

“Look,” he went on. “I never lied to you before. I mean I followed you. I lived nearby when you lived in Baltimore. I looked after you, but I never pretended to be someone else. I never took on another identity to get close to you. But then Nico Sala almost killed you. I had to get closer to you.”

“You were there that night, weren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“You untied me and gave me the gun.”

“Yes, yes. But you shot him.”

I thought of his sister. He’d known that someone was abusing her. How many times had she been molested and Blake was powerless to stop it? I said a silent prayer that I could pull off the act I was about to put on. I mustered some tears, which under the circumstances was not hard to do. I had only to think about Linnea. I turned to him with wet eyes and said, “Why didn’t you come earlier?”

He looked as if I had just slapped him. His shoulders slumped, and his face paled.

“He beat me. He stabbed me. He tortured me for hours. Doctors had to reconstruct my face. Why didn’t you stop him?”

“I was—I was too late,” he mumbled.

He reached out to touch my leg, but I drew it away from him. My disgust did not have to be feigned.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “Don’t you see that’s why I had to become Dale Hunter, become your neighbor, so I could keep a closer watch. Remember the night that detective from Portland came? I went out to see if you were home yet and saw him knock on your door. I was right there—I could monitor who came and went from your house so nothing bad would ever happen again.”

The mention of Jory threw me. I squeezed my eyes closed. I pushed thoughts of Jory out of my head. I had to focus. I had to get out of this.

“Why didn’t you just tell me who you were?” I asked.

He slapped the bed, his color rising as his temper flared. I jumped. “Don’t try to mind fuck me,” he said. “You’re a liar too. You’re fucking Isaac McCaffrey.”

My shock was genuine. I laughed. For some reason the mention of Isaac calmed me slightly. “Are you crazy?” I said. “I am not sleeping with him—or anyone.”

“But I saw you two at his house.”

“That was you that night—the night Isaac was attacked, wasn’t it?”

Blake dropped his gaze to the bed momentarily. “I didn’t know you would be with him.” He met my eyes again. “But I saw you at his house. You were on his couch. Your clothes were on the floor.”

I threw the towel of ice at his head. He ducked, but it caught his left ear and ice scattered everywhere. His eyes widened. His body stiffened as if he was afraid to move.

“We were changing clothes, you moron,” I said. “As you may recall that was after we spent two hours in the rain in pursuit of you. We changed into dry clothes. I slept on his couch. Nothing happened.” I shook my head as if I was disappointed in him. “You should have told me who you were. You never even gave me a chance.”

“You would have turned me away,” he said.

“You don’t know that.”

His eyes narrowed. “I read your sister’s diary. I ‘creep’ you out. You sent your sister to see me in the mental hospital and say she was you. You’re a liar too.”

I hoped I was right about just how deep his delusions went with respect to me. He’d been nurturing them since we were thirteen. Silently, I asked my sister to forgive me for the lies I was about to tell. Then I said, “My sister had no idea how I really felt about you. Yes, she wrote that in her diary, but the truth is that she and I never discussed my feelings for you. Those were her assumptions. My sister was in love with you. She wanted you to love her back. When you were in the mental hospital you asked for me. When you got arrested you asked for me. She knew you had a thing for me, that’s why she never talked to me about you. She wanted you for herself . . .”

With each word, he seemed to shrink a little. Relief coursed through me. It was working. “Did you kill Lexie?” I asked.

He sat back on his heels and rubbed his eyes with one palm. He sighed. “I don’t know.”

My tone was incredulous. “You don’t know?”

He stood up and paced again. “I went to see her. Well, you know we were seeing each other. It was—it was like you said. She said she had something important to tell me. That’s when she told me it wasn’t you who came to see me in the mental hospital. I . . . I didn’t believe her. We started arguing. That’s all I remember.”

I glared at him, not bothering to mask my anger or disgust. “You pushed her, you bastard. You killed my sister.”

He stopped pacing. His hands waved again. “No. No. I didn’t push her. I —”

“Do you send me the flowers every year on the date of her death?”

“Hyacinths, yes.”

I had looked it up while I was off from work. “Purple hyacinths symbolize sorrow or a plea for forgiveness, you bastard. I know you killed her.”

His voice rose. “I told you—I don’t remember. It’s like it was with my parents. I just lost time.”

“What?”

“I lost time. Blacked out. There are things I don’t remember.”

I was already working under the theory that he had Dissociative Identity Disorder, which was characterized by bouts of amnesia, but in order for my plan to work, I had to draw it out of him. “Things like what?” I said. “What things?”

He sighed and slapped his thigh. Back to pacing. “It’s like this—with Lexie, we were in her room. We were arguing, and then I was back in my apartment. Two days had passed. I saw it on the news. That’s how I found out she was dead.”

“You pushed her!” I shouted.

He shook his head vigorously. “No. I don’t know.”

“Yes. You do. You pushed her.”

“I don’t know,” he shouted back.

“You killed my sister, and you let Nico Sala beat me half to death. If you were really trying to protect me, you wouldn’t have done those things.”

“I’m sorry,” he said. He sat on the edge of the bed, his back turned toward me. He looked worn out.

I pushed myself to the edge of the bed and stood up. He caught my hand and pulled me back toward the bed. I felt dizzy and stumbled. “Where are you going?” he asked.

I snatched my hand out of his grip. “I have to pee.”

Blake had disabled the lock on the inside of the bathroom door. I really did have to pee, but I also wanted a minute to check out the bathroom and get my bearings. The window in the bathroom was far too small for me to fit through, especially with my burgeoning belly. I checked my pockets. He had taken my cell phone—not that I had any idea where we were. Obviously, we were in some seedy motel, but I had no idea where it was or even what the place was called. It stunk of cigarette smoke. The once white walls were yellowed and cracked. The brown outdoor carpet that covered the floor was frayed in many places. The furniture looked ancient. The night tables and dresser were scuffed and scratched. The bathroom looked like it hadn’t been cleaned in months. I looked in the mirror. My hair was all askew. The left side of my face was light purple and swollen.

When I came out of the bathroom he was pacing again. I perched at the foot of the bed and watched him. I had to be careful. I needed him to feel guilty but not so agitated that the other Blake would come out.

“Is that what happened at the Bittlers’?” I asked. “You blacked out.”

He nodded. “Yeah. She came home early—the wife. Do you know that she knew her husband was killing women and burying them in the back yard? She knew. I just—I lost it.”

“You don’t remember beating her to death?”

He stopped pacing and looked into my eyes. “No. I don’t. It’s been happening a lot lately. I’m taking pills but sometimes—”

“It happened today, didn’t it?”

He nodded.

“So you don’t remember shooting Linnea or the other woman at the store?”

He looked near tears. “No. I don’t remember any of that.”

“You came for me. What were you going to do?”

He shook his head. “I don’t know. It wasn’t well thought out. I just—I was going to take you.”

I motioned to the television. The story of his rampage was running again. He had muted it, but the images were unmistakable. His composite flashed across the screen, followed by grainy footage of him dragging me back to the truck with the gun to my head. I wondered if the person who had taped it to their cell phone had bothered to call 911 first.

“They are going to find you,” I said. “They’re closing in. They know who you are. Now they have your aliases. You took big risks today.”

“They won’t find us,” he said, but he did not sound confident.

“Where were you going to take me?” I asked.

“Away. Away from here. Look, I don’t know. I have to think, okay?” He dropped down in front of me. This time he rested his forehead against my knees. I wished it was like the movies, and I could just break his neck with one fluid movement or choke him out with a lightning-fast ninja technique. But all I had were my wits.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I’m sorry about Lexie and Nico Sala. I’m sorry about today. About Linnea. But I will take you away from here, and I will protect you.”

He lifted his head. I took a deep breath and put my right hand out, palm up. “Then give me your gun,” I demanded.

He sat back on his heels, incredulity battling confusion on his face. “What?”

I gave him an exasperated look, as if he were being stupid. “Give me your gun,” I repeated. “And your bullets.”

“You can’t expect me to—”

“You can’t expect *me* to trust you,” I shouted. “After everything you’ve

done, all the lying—”

“Keep your voice down!”

I lowered it only slightly. “I need something from you. A gesture of good faith. If this is going to work, if you expect me to trust you, then I want your gun.”

His eyes narrowed. “You’re just trying to fuck with me. You’re the liar. You want my gun so you can kill me. You’re going to kill me.”

I sighed, trying my best to sound like I was about to lose my patience with him. “I’m not going to kill you.”

“You killed Nico Sala.”

“That was different.”

Blake stood up. More pacing. “No, no, no. You’re just doing your FBI psychological profiling bullshit. You’re trying to convince me to give up my weapon so you can get the upper hand. Then you’ll either arrest me or kill me.”

Everything he said was true. I was setting him up. But it wasn’t to arrest or to kill him. It was to get him to turn himself in.

I thought about Talia Crossen—how no matter what she knew or did not know, she always projected total confidence. She always made you think she knew something you didn’t. She would find some small, seemingly insignificant detail and use it, twist it to her advantage. It made most people she interviewed think she was psychic. She wasn’t. She could just get into peoples’ heads and predict their behaviors.

I would have to do the same with Blake Foster if my plan was going to work.

“I’m not going to kill you,” I said. “I killed Nico Sala, but it never made me feel any safer than if he were still alive. You of all people should know that, *Dale*.” I spit out the name, my voice laden with sarcasm.

Blake looked at the floor. “You’ll arrest me, turn me in.”

I thrust my chin out, pouting. “I should after all the lies you told, all the people you killed. That’s what you deserve.”

He froze and stared at me. I held his gaze. “But I won’t.”

He said, “I don’t believe you.” But I could see his resolve wavering.

I sighed. “You came for me. After all this time you chose to reveal yourself. After all these years you know me better than anyone. So you tell me. If you thought I would kill you or arrest you, why did you risk everything to take me?”

He kept staring. I let my words linger before continuing. I was about to go out on a limb. “You must have known how I really felt, deep down.” I shook my head, feigning disbelief. “I didn’t even realize it but you’ve known all along how I felt. Why else would I have stayed single all these years? I think on some level I was waiting for you.”

His eyes glazed over. A smile lit up his face. “Yes,” he breathed.

“You killed all those people for me.”

“I tried to make it up to you—make up for Lexie and letting Nico Sala get to you. I tried to make up for doing the wrong things. For making it worse. I thought if I could make it up to you then you would see how much you mean to me.”

“You’ve been atoning for your sins,” I said solemnly.

“Yes. I kept waiting for the right time to talk to you, to approach you, but it just never came. Lexie died, and I knew I couldn’t approach you with her death on my conscience. Then Nico Sala—I failed you. I had to show you how sorry I was before you would accept me.” He talked fast, his tone breathless.

“I understand.”

“I’ve loved you since we were thirteen—since that day you stopped those boys from hurting me. Do you know that two other people walked by before you came? They saw what was going on, and they kept on going. You were the only person who stopped and got involved. I have loved you since that day.”

“I know.”

“I was waiting for the right time to come to you—to tell you all of this.”

I nodded and smiled wanly at him. “Well, I’m here now.”

“We can be together now,” he went on. He knelt before me again. His hands trembled as they groped for mine. “Do you see?” he asked. “Do you see that everything I’ve done and everything I am—it’s all for you.”

A tear slid down my face. The revulsion I felt when he touched me was so strong, it took everything I had not to push him away. “I see,” I said in a whisper.

He seemed to mistake my tears of frustration for tears of gratitude. He cupped my face in his hands. The room spun. I willed my body not to stiffen at his touch. I needed him to believe that we were in collusion. I needed him to believe his delusions were real.

“I love you,” he said.

I thought of Jory, tried to picture his face as I looked into Blake’s eyes. “I love you too,” I lied.

Blake released me and backed away. For a moment I panicked. Had he seen through me? Had I gone too far to be believable to him?

He blinked, and I saw tears gathered at the corners of his eyes. His hands quivered as he backed up another step. He leaned against the dresser. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I’m—I—you just—you’ve only ever said that to one man—I mean that I know about.”

I felt a stab in my chest. He was right. I’d only ever said those words to Jory, only once, and if Blake knew that then he’d been spying on us in Portland. He must have followed Jory from my hotel. Now I was certain he’d had something to do with Jory’s death. I knew it was risky to change the subject, but I had to know.

“Did you kill Jory?” I asked.

He shook his head. “I don’t know. I don’t remember.”

“Did you talk to him that day?”

His voice was small. “Yes. He saw me, and he came over to my car and said he was going to tell you that I was spying on you. Then I was in my hotel room. I found out on the news that he had been in a car accident. I think

I was in the car with him because I was in so much pain after that. But I don't know what happened. I must have been in the car though because I have his wallet.”

A high-pitched wail filled the room. I realized it was me. I was hyperventilating. The baby flailed inside me. All I could think of was that I was trapped in a room with Jory's killer. After all the things Blake had taken from me—my sister, my privacy, my trust in the world—Jory was the last straw. The room seemed to go in and out, my vision blacking out briefly. My breath came faster and faster until I thought I would pass out.

I was having a panic attack.

CHAPTER

60

Kassidy

November 29th

Before me, Blake's eyes grew wide as saucers. He looked around the room, unsure what to do. "What is it? What's wrong?" he asked.

I shook my head and held my belly with both hands. I couldn't speak.

"The baby? Is it the baby?" Blake asked. He scrambled into the bathroom and came back with a cold, wet washcloth, which he pressed against my forehead.

I pushed his hands away, but the cool cloth felt good against my skin. I closed my eyes and focused on the baby's frantic movements. I had to pull myself together. I had to do this. Our lives depended on it.

After several minutes, my breathing returned to normal. I steeled myself against the panic and opened my eyes. Blake knelt before me, brow wrinkled with concern. "Are you okay?"

I nodded, stroking my stomach. "Pain," I said. "I just had pain. False labor. I'm okay."

He let out a long breath, relief loosening his frame.

I had to get him back on track. "Blake, what are we going to do about my baby?"

"It will be our baby," he said. "We'll be a family. I'll take care of you both." He sat beside me and took my hand. Again, I resisted the urge to

snatch it away. “What are we having?” he asked. “Did you find out the sex?”

I thought of Sarah Foster and the baby she had given up. “We’re having a girl,” I lied.

“A girl,” he echoed.

Several minutes passed by and we sat side by side, hand in hand. In my mind I said a mantra to my unborn son: *This is just to get us out of this alive. This is just to get us out of this alive.*

Blake was remarkably calm when he said, “But why did you fight me today? Why did you try to get away?”

“You shot two people in cold blood—one of whom is my best friend. You scared me.”

He took his hand away from mine and rubbed his temples. “I don’t remember.”

“Blake,” I said softly. “If this is really going to work then I need to be able to trust you.”

“Fine, fine,” he mumbled. He opened the top dresser drawer and pulled out the gun. He handed it to me. I cradled it in my lap. He also handed me a box of ammo which I set on the bed beside me. I tried to calculate how long it would take me to load the gun and pull the trigger, but it would not be enough time to get a shot off before he stopped me, and then the work I’d done in the last hour would be for nothing.

“Thank you,” I said. “There’s just one more thing I need from you.”

“What?”

I held eye contact, unblinking. “I need you to promise me that the other Blake will never come back . . . that you won’t black out anymore.”

He grimaced as if he were in pain. “What?”

I put a hand over my belly. “I need to know that you’ll never become that person again.”

“But I can’t—I, I—” he stammered. He put both palms on the dresser and leaned against it, his back to me. “I can’t control it.”

“But you have to,” I said. “You have to or this won’t work.”

“It comes and it goes. When I’m under stress, it’s worse but maybe if we’re together, I can control it. I can try. I’ll try.”

I put the gun on the bed and stood up. Again, I did my best to mask my repulsion as I went to him. I tried to imagine that I was looking at Jory. I put a hand to Blake’s cheek. “Oh Blake,” I murmured. “That’s just not enough. I need to know for sure that the blackouts will never happen again.” I patted my stomach. “Our lives depend on it.”

His brow wrinkled. “What are you talking about?”

“Today when you were dragging me back to the truck it was you, but it wasn’t you. I got control of the gun, and you said there were no bullets.”

“I don’t keep it loaded.”

“But it was loaded,” I pointed out. “You shot two people at the store. Then when we were in the street and I aimed at you, you said that there were only two bullets in it—one for me and one for you.”

He looked horrified. He mumbled something. I thought it sounded like “the beast.”

“What?” I said.

He shook his head. “No.”

More tears were not hard to muster. They slid down my face. “Don’t you see? The other Blake is cold and violent. He was going to kill me. That’s what he meant to do. Murder-suicide.”

“No, no, no,” he protested.

“He will kill me,” I said. “And our daughter. I’m afraid of him.”

His face betrayed a range of emotions—confusion, anxiety, disbelief, and finally, skepticism. “Wait,” he said. “You’re trying to trick me. This is a trick. You’re lying to me. I don’t remember, so you’re filling my head with lies. You want me to think that.”

I shook my head. “I have no reason to lie to you other than I am scared, Blake. You say you don’t keep your gun loaded, but it was loaded today, and you shot two people. Check your ammo.”

He went to the bed and dumped the bullets, counting them up.

“Two bullets,” I repeated. “One for me and one for you.”

“No.”

“You know that when you black out you get violent—I saw what you did to Deborah Bittler and Mrs. Gerst.”

He sat on the bed next to the scattered bullets.

“And your parents,” I added. “Please. I’m begging you to keep that from happening to me. If you really love me, if you really want to protect me, you’ll make him go away for good.”

He looked like he might cry. “I can’t,” he said. “I can’t control it.”

I waited several minutes, letting his mind work through it, labor over it. I only had one shot at this, and even that was risky.

We both jumped when the phone beside the bed rang. Blake stood over the nightstand, staring at the phone. I glanced at the muted television and saw a live news break. The bottom of the screen said Manassas. A message scrolled along the bottom: Police corner suspected serial killer at local motel. Aerial footage showed a SWAT team and several other law enforcement personnel surrounding a motel, guns drawn.

The phone kept ringing. Blake turned to me, confusion knitting his brow.

I tried to look scared instead of relieved. It wasn’t over yet. “They’re here,” I said.

CHAPTER

61

Wyatt

November 29th

Blake slapped himself on the side of the head. Abruptly the phone stopped ringing.

“Stupid,” he mumbled. “I shouldn’t have gone into the store across the street. I knew it. I’m sorry.” Careful not to ruffle the stiff brown curtains, he peeked out the window. He counted at least three Prince William County police cruisers, one black, unmarked vehicle with its driver-side door hanging open and what looked like a large van behind it. Some kind of SWAT team, he realized. The phone rang again. He looked at it, then at Cassidy. “What do I do?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “They’ll want to negotiate.”

He paced in front of the phone. “Shit, shit,” he said.

Kassidy backed away from him, covering her belly. “Blake, I’m scared,” she said.

“It’ll be okay,” he assured her, but even to himself, he sounded weak and unconvincing. “I’ll figure this out. I can do this.”

Then he heard the thunder. He froze, cocking his head to the side, waiting for it to come again. It wasn’t raining outside. It wasn’t even overcast. “Do you hear that?” he said.

“Hear what? The phone?”

“No, the thunder.”

Kassidy shook her head. Her mouth turned down, her forehead wrinkling. “You’re scaring me,” she said again, her voice smaller this time.

“It will be okay,” he said, but he could not quell the rising panic. His stomach felt like it was in his throat. His hands shook. He looked down at them and squeezed them into tight fists. Squeeze and release. Squeeze and release. The tremors remained. He resumed pacing. His vision seemed to flutter. The room began to look far away, as if he were disappearing down a deep well.

“Blake,” Kassidy said, drawing him back. “He’s coming back. He’s going to come back. You said stress makes you black out—”

As the room came back into sharp focus, he held up a palm. “Stop,” he said. “I can do this.”

He cocked his head again, listening. The phone stopped ringing. No thunder.

“Then there’s only one option,” she said. “You have to turn yourself in.”

His head snapped toward her. Her words were like a slap to the face. “What?”

“It’s the only way,” she said. “You can’t control your other . . . you. What if he kills me and our child?”

He shook his head frantically, squeezing his eyes shut and opening them again, blinking hard, purposefully. “Then I’ll leave,” he said. “I’ll go away, and I won’t come back until I can control it.”

“But you can’t control it. Even if you go out on your own there’s always the chance that he’ll take over, come back, and kill us. I’ll never be safe. The only real way to protect me and to protect our family is to turn yourself in.”

“You’re trying to trick me,” he said, moving closer and peering into her face.

She held her ground, staring at him unblinking, her expression open and earnest. “No. I’m being honest with you. Do you love me?”

He nodded, wanting to reach out and touch her. Stroke her hair. Hold

her hand. Touch the skin at the hollow of her throat.

“You loved your sister too, didn’t you?” she murmured.

He nodded again, thinking of Sarah and her small, ruined life. He hadn’t been able to save her from one damn thing.

“You went to see her,” Cassidy said.

Surprised, he said, “She told you?”

She didn’t respond to his question. “Things didn’t really work out for her, did they? You loved her. You tried to protect her. Her life now—it’s not what you wanted for her, is it?”

He held up a hand. He had never discussed his sister with another living soul, not even Dusty. The subject was too painful. “Stop,” he said, his voice throaty.

“You have a chance right now to make things right—with me. You have a chance to do the right thing. They are out there right now. They’re here for you. You know if you try to get away, they’ll kill you. Just turn yourself in. If you want to protect me, you’ll do this for me.”

“What you’re asking—” he began.

Cassidy advanced toward him. “What I’m asking you is to do something that is in your power to do. What I am asking is that you not stand by and do nothing when you could easily take action.”

He thought of what that would mean. Prison. Being locked away with heartless, soulless criminals. Like when he was a teenager, only worse. He didn’t want to do it. He wanted to be with her. But he knew she was right. He couldn’t control his blackouts, not even with medication. He had tried so hard to show her how much he loved her—the lengths he would go to in order to prove his devotion, but if he couldn’t protect her from himself, why shouldn’t he go to prison? His other was violent and aggressive, mean and seemingly remorseless—he was no better than Nico Sala. Knowing this, and staying with her anyway, Blake would be no better than those men in the bathroom who knew something horrible was happening in the stall and did nothing to stop it. His shoulders slumped. He let his chin sink to his chest. When he spoke, his voice was low. “Who is worse? The person committing the crime,

or the person who sees it and does nothing?”

She said, “What do you think Deborah Bittler would say?”

“That’s not fair,” he replied, defeat spreading through his limbs like an ache. “Why not just let them kill me?”

She took a step toward him. She looked into his face, her eyes brimming with tears, making it impossible to look away. “I love you too much to let them kill you.”

His heart caught in his throat. God, how he wanted to believe her. But he knew she was capable of manipulating him. Her best option in this situation was for him to turn himself in. She wouldn’t want to take the chance of bullets flying with her baby at risk. How long would they wait before they stormed the room?

The phone started ringing again.

“If you want me to do this,” he said. “I’m going to need something from you. A gesture of good faith.”

“Like what?” she asked.

He smiled at her, his expression imploring. He reached for her cheek, the skin warm and soft under his fingertips. “A kiss,” he said.

CHAPTER

62

Kassidy

He cupped my face in his hands. I let him pull me in and tried to picture Jory—his lips, his eyes, his hands on my cheeks. *This is just to get us out of this alive*, I promised my baby again. I closed my eyes as Blake’s mouth sank onto mine. The kiss was light, tentative. I didn’t move, hoping he wouldn’t feel the tension in my rigid body. His hands moved down to my shoulders, snaking down my arms and sliding around my waist. He tried to pull me in closer, but my belly kept him from pressing his whole body against mine. I tried to keep from shuddering. I felt so nauseous, I thought I might vomit. The baby kicked rapidly.

Blake’s tongue probed my mouth. I hoped he would feel the gentle resistance of my sealed lips and stop, but the kiss only became more forceful, until he was crushing me against him. My teeth dug into the inside of my lips. One of his hands moved upward and tangled in the back of my hair. He pulled away from me, and I knew instantly from the cold gleam in his eyes that he had changed.

The phone stopped ringing. He jerked my head to the side. I cried out as he pushed me onto the bed. I fell onto my side but quickly scooted onto my knees. “You lying bitch,” he spat.

We both lunged for the gun at the same time. The ammo box tumbled off the bed, bullets flying everywhere. My hand closed around the handle first. It was useless, really. It wasn’t loaded. But he had pistol-whipped me once already that day, and I wasn’t about to let him do it again. I brought the barrel of the gun up, catching him under the chin. His hand flew to his face,

but he kept coming toward me. I took another swing at his temple with the gun, but his hands were already on my throat, squeezing. We went down together, on our sides. I dropped the gun and reached up with both hands, feeling for his pinky fingers. I pried one of them loose and bent it all the way back. I heard a loud snap and he screamed, the sound so high it was almost girlish.

I kicked at him, aiming for his crotch. “You fucking bitch,” he roared. I kicked again and again until he rolled off the side of the bed and fell onto the floor.

The muffled, incoherent sound of a man’s voice filtered through a megaphone came from outside. I scrambled for the door. I had one hand on the knob when Blake’s hand closed around my ankle. I looked down. His injured hand was tucked against his stomach. His face was contorted in pain, but with his good hand, he held onto my leg as hard as he could, his fingers digging into the soft flesh above my ankle. I braced myself against the door and kicked at his head with my good foot, until he let go in favor of covering his face.

I yanked the door open and stumbled outside, breathing heavily. My legs were weak and shaking. I fell to my knees and looked up into the barrels of at least six guns. My hands shot up into the air. I heard rustling behind me, inside the room. Then stuttered footsteps and Blake’s high-pitched voice. “Get back here, you ungrateful whore.”

The sound of a round being chambered sent an ice cold chill through my body.

“Don’t shoot!” I yelled.

At least three of them were screaming at Blake. “Hands up! Hands up! Get your hands up!”

I felt his hand clamp down on my shoulder and squeezed my eyes shut, bracing for the spray of bullets. Instead I heard boots, heavy and loud, like the sound of horses galloping. My body was jostled. Someone brushed against me. Loud male voices shouted, “Get down! Get down!”

Slowly, I started to bring my hands down to the asphalt when a hand nudged my arm gently. “Miss,” a man said.

I opened my eyes to see a police officer in full tactical gear, his rifle held at the ready in front of him, the barrel pointed toward the ground. To my left, three other officers had Blake Foster pinned on his stomach as they cuffed him. He struggled, his body flopping around like a landed fish. Then abruptly his body seized and went still.

“What the hell?” one of the officers said.

Blake’s eyelids fluttered again, just as they had in the parking lot before he had kidnapped me. He was changing.

The officer standing beside me touched my shoulder. I stared up at him, uncomprehending. “Are you okay, Miss?” he said.

He reached to help me stand. My legs were like rubber. More officers and EMTs converged on me. They herded me toward an ambulance. I looked back over my shoulder and met Blake’s eyes. Gone was the calculated rage. Instead, he looked sad. Very sad.

He opened his mouth to speak. I stopped, pulling back against the men surrounding me. “Wait, wait,” I mumbled. I strained to hear Blake’s words.

“You were right,” he said, his voice low and raspy. “I—I can’t control the beast.”

He closed his eyes, and I turned away, searching the faces around me for someone familiar. Finally, TK emerged from the crowd of law enforcement. He swallowed me up into his arms, holding me tightly.

“It’s over,” he said into the top of my head. “It’s over.”

CHAPTER

63

Kassidy

December 1st

I woke to a rustling noise and the overpowering smell of flowers. I opened my eyes to see Isaac grinning at me from behind an enormous flower arrangement. He set them on the table next to my hospital bed. It had been two days since Blake Foster was taken into custody. I saw no reason to be in the hospital other than the mild concussion Foster had given me, but the doctors insisted on keeping me for a few days to monitor the baby.

My father, who had been stationed in the chair next to my bed for forty-eight hours, stood up and stretched. He shook hands with Isaac and mumbled something about coffee before leaving the room.

Isaac jammed his hands into his jeans' pockets. "I saw your mom outside," he said. "She looks tired."

The baby had started kicking as Isaac talked. I put a palm over my stomach, feeling his tiny thumps. "Yeah, neither one of my parents has slept," I said.

Isaac sighed and kicked lightly at the leg of the chair my father had just vacated. "How do you feel?"

I shrugged. "Fine. I'm fine. I just want to go ho—"

He didn't let me finish. He covered the few feet between us in one easy stride, leaning over the bed and grabbing my face with both hands. He kissed me hard. My body went rigid with surprise. It started out wet and a little

sloppy. I gripped both his wrists with my hands and melted into the kiss. Isaac slowed down, his mouth softening and lingering on mine. He pulled away and plopped into the chair as if the kiss had taken a lot out of him.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

My heart raced. I touched my mouth, wondering if the kiss had really just happened.

“I promised myself if you came out of that motel room alive I would do that—at least once,” Isaac added.

Stunned, all I could say was, “Okay.”

For the first time since I had known him, awkwardness crept in between us. I couldn’t think of anything to say so I said, “Thanks for the flowers.”

He nodded. “I owed you some flowers. I didn’t make it to the hospital last time.”

“What?”

Isaac laughed drily. “Almost six years ago, I was on my way to the hospital in Baltimore to visit you—bringing you flowers—when I got the call about my wife and daughter.”

My voice sounded like a squeaky mouse. “What?” I said again.

His mouth pressed into a thin line as he met my eyes. “You were in the hospital for a while after Nico Sala attacked you.”

“Six weeks,” I said.

“Yeah. It was about a month after the attack. We all felt bad about what happened to you.”

“Who?”

“All of us who worked with you in my unit. Some of us felt responsible, but no one wanted to tell you that. Anyway, it bothered me. I liked you, respected you. You did great work on that case. You were brave to go undercover.”

I waved a hand in dismissal, but he kept going. “It kept me up at night—what happened to you. Finally, my wife—” He laughed, the sound hard and

clipped. “My wife told me to just go see you. She thought it might help if I went to see you. She thought you were a hero.”

“A hero?” I said skeptically.

“You killed Sala. Maybe I couldn’t sleep after what happened to you, but his victims could sleep because you killed him.”

I had never thought of it that way. As I had told Blake Foster, I never felt any safer knowing Sala was dead.

“Anyway,” Isaac continued. “I finally worked up the nerve to go see you. I wasn’t sure they’d let me in, but I picked up some flowers after work. I was driving to the hospital when I got the call that my wife and daughter had been in an accident.”

“I’m sorry.”

He sighed. “I didn’t tell you that to make you feel bad. I just wanted you to know that you may not remember me, but I remember you.”

“What were their names? Your wife and daughter?”

Isaac smiled. “My wife’s name was Lauren and my daughter was Sadie.”

“Sadie. That’s pretty.”

Silence eased in between us, not so awkward this time. A moment later Linnea sailed into the room, her arm in a sling. She was the true miracle of the whole debacle that had taken place two days ago. The bullet had gone straight through her shoulder. She would need a lot of physical therapy, but she would survive.

“McCaffrey,” she said, patting his shoulder with her good hand. She sat on the bed next to me. “What’s up? How’s our Superstalker?”

Isaac shrugged. “Last I heard he was still writing out his confession. It was going on forty pages. There’s a lot he doesn’t remember though.”

Linnea gave a low whistle. Isaac looked at me. “By the way, he had a storage facility in Woodbridge rented under the alias Wyatt Anderton. We found twenty years’ worth of your shredded bank statements that he’d pieced together and a few other items he was collecting. We think he had been going

through your trash.”

I shuddered. Linnea squeezed my arm. “Well since he was posing as Dale he could have taken anything he wanted right from her house,” she pointed out.

“Stop,” I said. “I can’t do this. I can’t talk about him right now.”

It was too much. I was already driving myself insane thinking about all the years Blake Foster had stalked me, spied on me, posed as my neighbor to get close to me. My life had not been my own until two days ago.

“Sorry,” Linnea said. “We don’t have to talk about him.”

I nodded and cupped my belly with both hands. “I just want to think about this baby right now.”

Linnea tucked a strand of hair behind my ear. “You got it,” she said.

“Hopefully you’ll never have to think about Blake Foster again,” Isaac added. “He’s going away for a long, long time.”

EPILOGUE

Kassidy

In the end, after being taken into custody and writing out a seventy-paged confession to the For You murders and to kidnapping me, Blake Foster recanted. Right before trial he took back everything, claiming coercion and entering seven pleas of not guilty—six for the murders he had committed as the For You Killer and one count of kidnapping. I was not surprised. It happened all the time, which was why a prosecutor could never hang their hat on a confession alone. I had expected it. Whatever spell I cast in that motel room the day he kidnapped me was not meant to last indefinitely. It was only meant to get me out of there alive.

Eventually the reality of living in a cell day in and day out would erode Blake's fantasy that he was somehow protecting me. Cold, unforgiving reality would set in, and he would try to save himself. With the six recanted confessions in the For You murders, physical and circumstantial evidence could only connect him to three of the murders. Eventually he was convicted of murdering Megan Wilkins, Deborah Bittler, and Evette Gerst. Michael Bittler lived on, and Blake was convicted of the lesser charge of attempted murder in that case. With video evidence, he was easily convicted of kidnapping a federal agent.

It wasn't the full measure of justice the victims' families or I would have liked, but it was enough to get him three life sentences plus forty-two years without the possibility of parole, all to run consecutively. My son would be four years old by the time all the litigation was over and Blake Foster started serving his sentences. Once he was incarcerated, I used my influence to get him mental health treatment, hoping he might recover memories of Lexie and Jory's deaths, although if he did, it never got back to me. Some of my

colleagues in the BAU interviewed him. They spent several hours with him. Part of our ongoing quest to understand the criminal mind.

Blake was acquitted of the attempted murders of Linnea and the other woman at the minimarket, found not guilty by reason of insanity since he had no memory whatsoever of having done it. Although Jory's wallet was recovered among Blake's personal effects, there wasn't enough evidence to convince a jury that Blake had killed Jory. He didn't remember the accident, and it was unclear exactly what had happened that day. Since we knew that Jory had left the gas station alone and that Blake had followed him, Remy and I surmised that Jory had noticed Blake following him and pulled over to confront him. At that point, for reasons we would probably never know, Blake got into the car with Jory, and they drove off together. There must have been a struggle in the vehicle that caused the accident. I theorized that it was Blake who had wrenched the steering wheel at the last minute, causing Jory's side of the car to make contact with the tree.

I wish I could say that with Blake Foster in custody I felt safe, but I still looked over my shoulder. Sometimes it felt like he was still watching me. I don't know if that will ever go away. I guarded my son zealously. The months after that day in the motel were the worst. My nightmares of Nico Sala were replaced by nightmares of Blake Foster. But I took comfort in what I had left—my family and friends.

I had months of therapy as well, most of it mandated by the Bureau when I decided to return to work one week after being kidnapped. I couldn't travel in my third trimester so I was assigned low-priority cases, which required mostly phone and letter consults and no traveling. I worked right up until my water broke. Everyone thought I was crazy, but working helped me. That and having my parents and Linnea around. She stayed with me through her recovery until she had to return to work with the DEA.

My parents were so excited about their grandson that they sold our family home in Sunderlin and moved closer to me. My father stayed at my house until my mother had all the particulars worked out. When I got too large to work on the nursery, he took over. He called Isaac to help him put up trim, paint, and assemble furniture. I got used to having Isaac around. Although he didn't kiss me again, he became a fixture—a part of our rag-tag

family: me, my parents, Linnea, and the Bennetts.

Alexander Ralston Bishop was born on a Thursday in April. I delivered by C-section after thirty hours of labor. Alex's head would not engage in my pelvis. My mother went into the delivery room with me. Alex was eight pounds, twelve ounces and twenty-one inches long. He was the most beautiful thing I ever saw. I loved him with an openness that was so unexpected it took my breath away. I loved him with the entirety of my being, and his very existence filled up every empty space inside me. For all the pain and suffering that Nico Sala and Blake Foster had caused in my life, none of it could hold a candle to the joy my son brought me.

Alex got used to having Isaac around too. Isaac came over almost every day to "help" with the new baby, even though I already had plenty of help. I saw the conspiratorial smiles that passed between my mother and Linnea whenever Isaac was there.

When Alex was six months old I found him and Isaac dozing on the couch, Alex sprawled across Isaac's chest. I nudged Isaac's leg with my foot. He opened his eyes, squinting up at me. His voice was thick with sleep.

"Bishop?" he said.

I put my hands on my hips. "Are you going to ask me out or what?"

Isaac grinned. He stared at me for a long time. Then he stroked Alex's hair and said, "Well actually I was thinking we should make this a family unit."

I couldn't hide the surprise on my face. My heart gave an uneven thud and in that moment, picturing a life with Isaac, I realized how much I wanted it. I still mourned for Jory and missed him, but I had lost so much. I didn't want to waste another second pushing away the people who remained in my life. I had to move on.

"You want to get married?" I said.

Isaac kept grinning at me.

I arched an eyebrow. "What if you're terrible in bed?"

He laughed, jostling Alex, who scrunched up his little face and turned his head away from us. "I'm just letting you know I'm not going anywhere.

Let's go on a few dates first and you can test out my skills."

I smiled wryly. "And when will that happen? When I'm collecting social security?"

"It won't be that long," Isaac replied. "Bishop, I'm not going to do this half-assed. I want to do it right. You deserve that. But now that I know that you're interested, maybe I'll move up my time table."

I rolled my eyes. I was about to reply, but the doorbell rang. The dogs rushed the door, growling. They had somehow learned to curb their barking with Alex in the house, although many a nap had been thwarted by an unexpected visitor, delivery person, or strange noise. A couple with two young children had moved into Dale's old house, and the children frequently made enough ruckus to warrant barking.

A woman in her sixties stood at my door. She was short and thin. Her hair was brown and gray, cut short and styled to soften the lines age had embedded in her face. Her face was very familiar, but I couldn't place it.

"Can I help you?" I said.

She clutched her purse to her stomach as if I might try to wrestle it away from her at any moment. She thrust her chin out and took a deep breath. In that instant, I knew that whatever she was about to say had been rehearsed in her head ad nauseam.

"My name is Amelia Ralston," she said, sounding proud and defiant. "I believe you knew my son. Now I know you and he were having an affair. While I'm not particularly happy about that, and I in no way condone or excuse it, I loved my son. I loved him and he's dead, and I think you're my grandson's mother."

I opened my mouth to speak, but she held up a hand. Her face was flushed. I sensed that if she stopped talking, she would lose her nerve so I let her go on. "Now I don't want to make trouble for you. I don't want to take anything from you. I just want to know my grandson. I've come a long way. I just want to see him, and then maybe you and I can talk. I just want to be a part of his life is all—and yours too."

My mother, who had come down the steps at the beginning of the

speech, rounded the dogs up and shooed them out the back door.

I smiled at Amelia Ralston and opened my door wide. “Come in,” I said. “He’s in the living room.”

Wyatt

Sunlight streamed into the small room through the barred windows. Blake Foster sat in the chair to which he was chained and turned his face to the sun. He closed his eyes and felt its warmth on his cheeks. It reminded him of the kiss. Even after four years he remembered the kiss as if it had just happened. The softness of her lips, how they lingered on his, the feel of her pressed against him. In his head it went on for hours—a perfect, sunlit, magical moment. He always had the kiss, even if he had nothing else. He started to get aroused and opened his eyes. He was waiting for Sarah.

In the four years since he’d been arrested, he hadn’t had one visitor. He wished Kassidy would visit him, but he realized that she never would. The beast had ruined everything, although he suspected that Kassidy’s professions of love had been lies designed to get him to turn himself in. A practical voice in his head told him that the kiss was probably a lie too, but he still could not bring himself to believe that. It had been so soft, so deep, so right. He chose to believe that she had simply gotten caught up in the moment—before the beast had taken over. Even though she had lied in an attempt to free herself, he knew that deep down she had feelings for him. The kiss proved that. But he knew she would never come.

It had taken quite a bit of stealthy, shady dealings, but he had finally been able to reach Dustin DeMeo through underground channels. A month after Blake’s message reached Dusty, Blake received photographs of Kassidy and her son secreted in a stack of magazines. She had lied about the child too—a son, not a daughter. Isaac McCaffrey was in the photos as well. They made quite the little family. Blake destroyed the photos of McCaffrey and the boy and kept the one of her. She was still lovely. The years since he’d last seen her made her more so.

He knew that it was Kassidy who had arranged this meeting with Sarah. He remembered Kassidy’s business card on Sarah’s refrigerator, the cell

phone number written on the back in Cassidy's graceful, loping handwriting. He could imagine Sarah's flat, dull tone as she asked Cassidy to intervene and allow her to see Blake. "I wanna see my brother. What do I have to do?"

He didn't have to meet with her, and perhaps a few months earlier he would have refused the meeting. But he'd gotten a lot of psychotherapy since he'd been incarcerated. There had even been FBI agents from Cassidy's division there to interview him.

The therapy had done nothing at first. Then the doctor suggested hypnotherapy. Blake had been able to recover a lot of his memories. Like pushing Lexie out of the window of her eleven-story dorm room. He had never really doubted that she had died at his hands, but other than the heated argument they'd had leading up to her death, the memory of that night was a black spot in his mind.

He'd remembered beating Deborah Bittler and Evette Gerst. He'd remembered destroying the house he had kept as Dale Hunter—overturning and splintering furniture. Slicing his arm and squeezing the blood from the wound so he could write I HATE YOU on the wall. He'd remembered the shooting at the store and the rest of what he'd blacked out that day. Cassidy had not lied to him when she told him the bullets were really meant for her and him.

He remembered what had happened the day Jory Ralston was killed. Ralston had caught Blake following him and pulled over. Ralston had dragged him out of the rental car, probably with the intention of kicking Blake's ass. Blake had done some fast talking, trying to seem as contrite as he possibly could, promising to give up his obsession with Cassidy, to go home immediately if Jory promised not to tell Cassidy that Blake had followed her to Portland. Ralston had been tight-lipped, pulling Blake along and stuffing him into the passenger side of the Taurus. Blake realized that Ralston had every intention of telling Cassidy about his stalking activities and was probably going to take Blake back to her hotel with him just to drive the point home. As Jory pulled back onto the road, Blake tried to get control of the car, but Ralston was strong. They struggled, the car flew off the side of the road and at the last minute, Blake was able to take control of the wheel and turn the car so that Jory's side took the brunt of the impact.

Some memories came back to him during sessions with the therapist. The therapy itself had opened a door in his mind. Other memories came back to him when he was alone, and he did not share them with his therapist. Like the memory of the night his parents were killed. It had come back to him whole, landing in his mind like a stone falling from the sky, the weight of it making him sluggish. One day all he had were pieces and the next day there it was, all intact and attached to him like a missing limb. It had surprised him, to say the least.

The sound of the lock turning on the other side of the door startled him out of his reverie. Sarah walked in, escorted by an armed guard. She had nothing with her, as they would not allow her to bring anything into the room with her, not even a purse. She sat across from him and folded her hands on the table. She looked the same as when he had seen her four years earlier. She wore a navy blue dress that hung on her large frame like a sheet. The guard left them alone.

Blake waited for the sound of the lock turning back before he spoke. “Why did you come?” he asked.

“This week it will be twenty-five years since our parents died. I wanted to see you,” she said. “I thought I owed you that.”

Blake laughed. “Owe me? You owe me much more than a visit in prison.”

Her voice was soft and low. “So you remember?”

The night his parents were murdered, he and Sarah had tried again to tell them that their grandfather was sexually abusing her. Again they chose not to believe their children. Blake had argued with them heatedly until his father threw him out of the house. At first he had walked aimlessly, letting the rage that had boiled over in the confrontation with his parents ebb and wane. He ended up outside the Bishops’ house. It was dark when he got there. He watched them through the windows until Cassidy and Lexie went to bed. He took note of which bedroom lights blinked on when they said goodnight to their parents and went upstairs. Then he walked home.

All the lights were on, but no one was downstairs. It was after ten. Everyone should have been in bed. He knew something was wrong as he

walked up the steps. The door to his parents' room was ajar. Inside, Sarah stood beside the bed. Her arm moved up and down in a scissor-like motion. Stabbing, stabbing, stabbing. The knife punched into their mother's body with a muffled *thwip* sound each time. Sarah grunted in time with each puncture. Blake looked at their father, but he was already dead. There was blood everywhere. On the sheets, on the walls, on Sarah. As he went to her, she raised the knife up and the blood flew off the end of it, spraying him.

He didn't say anything. He caught her arm on an upward arc and pried the knife out of her hand. He pushed her toward the door. He stood at the foot of the bed and surveyed their butchered bodies, wondering what to do next.

"Get cleaned up," he told his sister.

She stopped in the doorway and turned to him. "What about my clothes?"

He knew what he had to do then. "I'll bury them," he told her. "Just get cleaned up. Then go in the basement and don't come out until I tell you."

For years, all he had remembered was calling the police and telling them to come because he had killed his parents. Later, in dreams mostly, he recalled standing at the foot of the bed, knife in hand, but that was all.

"When did you remember?" Sarah asked.

"Last month, although days, weeks, and months seem to run together in here. Why didn't you say anything?"

She shrugged. "No one would have believed that a thirteen-year-old girl did that."

"Ah, but rage can make you stronger than you are," Blake said, thinking of the pastor in the airport bathroom.

Sarah nodded. "Besides, I thought you had done it for me."

Blake smiled wanly. He sighed. "I did do it for you."

Silence unfurled itself across the table between them. Then Blake asked, "So when I saw you before they sent me to juvie and you said 'you made it worse'—"

"I meant you made it worse by taking the blame and leaving me alone. I

didn't realize that you didn't remember until later," she answered.

Blake took this in. Everything in his past had to be viewed with different eyes now. "When I came to your trailer and you asked me why I didn't kill Grandpa—"

"I wasn't sure if you remembered or not. You didn't."

"Why didn't you kill him?" he asked.

Sarah met his eyes. He saw something in them that made his bowels uneasy. A kind of cunning. A black spark of malice. "What makes you think I didn't?"

"He died of a heart attack."

"He had a heart condition. He was taking pills for it. But one day the bottle was filled with vitamins instead of heart pills. He never even noticed."

Blake nodded. A few moments passed, and she stood up to go. "Will you come back to see me?" he asked.

She looked back at him. "Sure," she said.

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Lisa Regan is an Amazon bestselling crime/suspense novelist. She has a Bachelor's Degree in English and Master of Education Degree from Bloomsburg University. She is a member of Sisters In Crime, Mystery Writers of America and International Thriller Writers. She lives in Philadelphia with her husband and daughter. Her debut novel, *Finding Claire Fletcher* won Best Heroine and was runner up in Best Novel in the eFestival of Words Best of the Independent eBook Awards for 2013. Her second novel, *Aberration* won Best Twist in the 2014 the eFestival of Words Best of the Independent Book Awards. Her third novel, *Hold Still* was released by Thomas & Mercer in 2014 and has been translated into German. She is at work on her fifth novel.

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