



Chapter Two

Without lifting her head from the pillow, Casey McKinley snapped up the ringing phone after the machine had picked up twice. "What?" she groaned.

"It's Billy," came the soft male voice that had been her only contact to the outside world for the six months since her husband and daughter returned to Virginia.

Propping herself on her elbows, she pushed her overgrown bangs off her forehead and looked around the dark room, blinking. "Where are you?"

Billy sighed heavily and Casey could picture his hand nailed dramatically to one hip. "I'm outside."

"Well, why the hell don't you use your key?"

"You didn't answer the door. I didn't know if you were dead or something." He paused and tapped on the phone. "I didn't want to walk in on a dead body."

"So you called?"

"Well," he snipped back. "It seemed like a better idea than just barging in."

"Hardly. Let yourself in, already," she said, hanging up on him and rolling over in the bed. It was nearly eleven a.m. and she'd been in bed at least twelve hours. Still, Casey was sure that without Billy's visit, she'd have spent all day in bed. Since her release from the hospital, nearly a year ago, zombie had been her role of choice. Hiding under the covers had been her favored pastime. Michael and Amy had fought with her for nearly five months to get off her duff and start living again. She'd refused until she had driven them away. After they left, the job became Billy's.

She looked down at her hands, as though by some miracle she might have regained the use of them during the night. Instead, her fists stared motionless back at her.

Using the forefinger on her left hand, Casey pulled open the drawer in the bedside table and lifted the picture of her daughter. The image was several years old--Amy holding a soccer ball, posing for a photo at the end of the season.

The picture's edges were tattered and bent. Casey ran a finger over her daughter's face and then closed her eyes, holding the picture to her. What was Amy doing now? What did she look like? Casey heard the front door unlock and returned the photo to the drawer, the ache of guilt sharp in her chest as she rolled herself into a tight ball.

She stared at her lifeless hands. In his savage beating, the killer she called Leonardo had broken nearly every bone in her right hand and almost as many in her left. Over twenty in all. She had spent six full days in and out of surgery. And still she couldn't write with her right hand or drive. She was lucky she could feel her hands at all, the doctors had told her. Lucky was the last thing she felt.

She struggled to move the fingers on her right hand. They formed a loose fist as she fought to clench them into a ball. Her hand refused to close. Frustrated, she kicked and flailed at the bedsheets and then collapsed.

"Hello!" Billy called, his voice growing closer.

"I'm not getting up," Casey yelled.

Billy stopped in the doorway and shook his head. "Oh, so you tell me to let myself in for nothing. Geesh, you can be such a bitch."

She glanced over and he caught her eye.

He clicked his tongue to shame her and shook his head again. He wore black jeans, a black turtleneck and cowboy boots. But today, his short dark hair had been carefully gelled to the side, exposing his bright blue eyes, full of mischief.

Casey pulled herself up onto her elbows, ignoring the difficulty of moving around with useless hands. "You have a date!" she accused.

Without responding, Billy moved past the bed and pulled the shades open. "It's like a cave in here. You need light, woman."

Casey moaned at the bright light as Billy opened the window. Billy's hair had caught her attention and the undesirable stream of sunlight became less important. "Who's the lucky guy?"

He ignored her, picking up the discarded clothing and throwing it over his arm as her mother had always done when she was avoiding an issue. "Have you eaten?"

"Not hungry. Tell me about him."

"You've got five minutes to get dressed and meet me in the kitchen. I'll start coffee." Billy set the clothes over a chair and then started out the door. "I'll tell you about him while you're eating breakfast."

Casey smiled, victorious. "Deal." With the door closed, she sat up and pulled her pajama bottoms off. Finding her jeans, she dropped them to the floor and pushed her feet into the legs. Her hands in fists, she worked the jeans up around her knees using her fists to move the fabric up over her legs. With the jeans around her knees, she lay on her back to let them shake down around her hips.

Halfway, her teeth clenched, she paused for a breath. Then, with a deep groan, she continued. It was getting easier, but the feeling of helplessness had once come close to drowning her.

Using the pinky of her left hand, she grabbed a belt loop and pulled the left side of the jeans over her hip. The jeans had fit her at one time, but they were much looser now.

Reaching around, she grabbed the belt loop on the other side and heaved it over her other hip. Using a hook and line her husband had made for her right after he'd come home, Casey looped the hook through the zipper's hole and tugged the line up with her pinky. Now, just the button remained. Casey sank down on the bed, wishing she had her sweatpants. Michael had bought her sweat suits in four colors when she got home from the hospital.

But Billy had taken them away, saying they were too close to pajamas and made her lazy. He had also told her that she looked like shit in them. It hadn't been their smoothest day together. But all her husband's love and affection had failed to have even a fraction of the impact Billy did.

Casey glared at the button hole, remembering the first time she'd fastened one after the attack. Concentrating, she set to maneuvering it through the hole with the knuckle of her index finger.

"What's taking so long?" Billy called from the other room.

Casey snarled at the door. "If it takes too long, bring back my sweats."

"No chance," he mumbled back.

Another minute passed and she heard two quick knocks. "Your eggs are ready." The click of Billy unlatching the door was followed by the sound of him padding back to the kitchen.

Casey smiled at the gesture. On one of Billy's first days, right after her husband and daughter had moved back to Virginia, the door had been latched and Casey had been unable to turn it. Sobbing, she'd waited nearly an hour before Billy had come to check on her. "What the fuck is wrong with you? Couldn't you hear me?" she'd shouted.

He'd shaken his head slowly.

In response, she had shoved her crippled fists in his face. "I can't open a goddamn door, I can't tie a shoe, or cut a tomato, or brush my teeth, or fasten a belt, or shoot a gun. I can't do anything."

Billy had been quiet the rest of that day. But afterward he'd never let the door remain latched for long. He also never expressed an ounce of pity for her. Perhaps that was the reason he had been able to motivate her as her husband had been unable to do. She had driven her husband away, unable to cope with his pity.

Looking down at her fists now, Casey opened and closed them in the same slow methodical way Billy had worked with her to do. The left one was better. While she still had trouble controlling the individual fingers, she could spread her

palm almost wide enough to hold a large grapefruit. But the right one was still stiff and worthless. Her shooting hand. He'd been sure to destroy that one completely.

"Stop your self-pity," he said.

She turned to see Billy standing in the doorway. "Lay off," she snapped.

"Don't give me that bitchy tone. Get in here and eat these eggs."

Casey shot him a dirty look and pushed past him into the kitchen. As always, Billy kept it immaculate. Like the rest of her house, the kitchen was sparsely decorated in light pines and whites. Sterile was how some would describe it. No pictures, diplomas or awards hung on the walls of the living room or den. When Billy had started, she'd had no wall hangings at all. But slowly he had convinced her to buy a couple of Ansel Adams prints. Even those kept the tone of the place cold in their black and white.

She sat hard in the pine chair and stared at her eggs, then raised an eyebrow. "Cheese?"

"Just a little," Billy replied sharply.

She smiled broadly and stood up. Crossing the kitchen to where Billy stood, she planted a kiss on his cheek.

Billy rolled his eyes. "Don't think that's going to get you more cheese next time."

Casey smiled and sat back down. Fastidious about what went in his body, Billy thought cheese was like hardened orange gelato. And cheese was the least of it. One of the first things he had done was to empty the house of alcohol, sweets, and most of the cigarettes.

At least Casey had a small stash of cigs hidden away to steal a smoke when Billy wasn't around. But Billy could always tell when she'd been smoking them. He had also refused to buy anything other than skim milk. Now that she was shopping with him, they compromised on one percent.

Coffee had been Billy's next intended victim, but she'd threatened to fire him. They had fought on and off for a few days, but in the end she had won. Though he had successfully weeded most of the vices from her life, Casey knew he had accepted that coffee was one he would be powerless to stop.

She drank her coffee slowly now, knowing Billy would make only one cup. Leaning forward on the table, she said, "Tell me about this man."

Billy stared into his cup, swirling his spoon in the ginseng tea.

"You promised," she reminded him.

He nodded. "I met him at the hospital. He was visiting a friend with AIDS when I was visiting Mrs. Levinski. She fell in the shower and broke her hip."

Casey smiled. "Go on."

"That's it. That's how we met. His name's Kevin. He's incredible. He reads palms--it's so sexy."

"That's his job?"

Billy shook his head. "That's his art. For work, he's a tax accountant."

"An accountant who reads palms?" He sounded like a freak. Casey thought about Leonardo.

"You're so closed-minded, Casey."

"I am not." Casey wondered what his last name was. She'd have liked to have someone check him out. "You met this guy at the hospital? What do you know about him?"

Billy crossed his arms. "I know plenty."

"Have you been to his house?"

"No."

"Have you met any of his friends?"

Billy scowled. "Don't you dare turn Kevin into one of your damn suspects. Not everyone is a killer, for God's sake. I really like him, so you pretend like you do too. You've got your head screwed on so tight that you can't even see the good in people anymore. I'm amazed you let me come work for you. Or did you do a background check on me too?"

Casey shook her head. She had done a background check on Billy--actually, she'd had the FBI do it. And no one was more thorough than the FBI. But he was right. Leonardo was always her first thought. "I'm sorry," she said. "You're right."

"I want you to meet him." Billy broke a crooked smile. "I like him." He stared into the distance and then waved her off, ending the conversation. "Go on. Go do something. I'll finish this up and we'll do your exercises."

In the months Billy had taken care of her, he had never mentioned dating anyone. As much as she hated the idea of sharing him, she knew it was good that Billy had found someone. Casey sat at the table and looked around. "Did you bring the paper?"

Billy turned and raised an eyebrow at her.

She shrugged and looked away. "Just curious."

He returned to the dishes. "I didn't think you'd like today's paper."

"Why?"

He shrugged.

"Why didn't you think I'd like it?" she asked again.

He didn't meet her gaze. "I just didn't."

"No, Billy. You had a reason. What was it?"

Billy cringed. "Some crazy guy killed another kid."

"A serial killer?" she asked.

He eyed her again.

"Do they think it's a serial killer?" she pressed.

He gave a curt nod and turned his back, flipping on the radio to end her questions. He tuned to his favorite jazz station and hummed along.

Casey paged through the GQ Billy had brought, using her knuckles to turn the pages. Since she'd left the Bureau, Casey hadn't been interested in the outside world. While Amy and Michael had been living there, they'd tried to entice her with the evening news or the paper.

But everything about it reminded her of what she'd had--and what she'd lost. She pushed Amy from her mind. Having her daughter grow up without her was one thing she forbade herself to think about. She could handle memories of that night, his voice, even the pain, but she couldn't think about the way she had pushed Amy and Michael from her life.

Billy's methods of drawing Casey back into reality had been much more successful. Though she knew they were ploys, she had to respect his ingenuity. At first, he brought the paper and kept it sticking out of his bag. Every few days, he'd watch the news while he folded laundry. But he only did it when Casey wasn't in the room. If she came back, he turned it off. Not abruptly as though it were forbidden, but always with some comment about the "crazies," or "stupid show," or "don't we have problems enough."

When he was on the phone, she would catch snippets of news from his conversations or from the radio while he cooked. Eventually, she lost interest in the novels she'd been devouring, growing hungry for real news.

Now, she couldn't help but wonder what this local killer was doing. For years, she'd been enthralled with multiple serial offenders, studied them. It had been her life. The attack had killed that. But recently she felt the tentacles of her old life begin to puncture her fear and wrap around her again.

Billy leaned against the sink and dried his hands.

"Tell me about it," she said.

He glanced down at the magazine and furrowed his brow. "What?"

"This crazy fuck killing kids."

He shook his head, waving her off.

She pulled a piece of paper from a notepad on the counter. "I'm serious."

His eyes widened.

"Tell me, damn it," she snapped, smacking her pen on the table. She gripped it in her left hand, the way she had practiced, and poised to write.

Billy pulled a chair back and sat, crossing his foot over one knee. For more than a month, he had been trying to get her to tell him about her work for the Bureau. But she hadn't wanted to. It hadn't interested her. Suddenly, now, it was starting to.

"What do you want to know?"

"Start with the criminal act--everything you can remember."

"The criminal act?"

"Seven steps to profiling," she explained, shoving aside her own excited reaction at having an opportunity to explain what she had done as a profiler. She had loved it. "First step is evaluation of the criminal act--he killed children--how? What weapon did he use? That sort of thing."

"Okay, let's see."

She looked at the paper. "But not too fast. This left hand shit is a royal pain in the ass."

"Nicely put."

"I was putting it politely. Do you want to hear the bad version?"

"That's not necessary." He crossed his hands in his lap and nodded.

"Okay, let's see. He's killed two kids so far."

"Male or female?"

"Two girls."

"Race?"

"One was white, one was black."

Casey wrote as quickly as she could move the pen. "Doesn't sound like the same guy."

Billy looked down at her notepad. "Why not?"

"Not usual to have different races, especially not in child killings." She rolled her hand. "Keep going."

"Well, maybe the papers are wrong."

"How old were they?"

"The kids?"

She glared.

"Oh, let me think. About the same age, I guess. Ten or eleven."

"And the abduction?"

Billy nodded, remembering something. "Both from shopping areas."

"Malls, grocery stores, what?" she asked, feeling herself fall into the rhythm of a witness interrogation. She watched his body language, read his crossed leg and remembered how a person's body language often told more than his words.

Billy glanced at the ceiling. "The first girl was in the Nordstrom center down on Market, I think. The second was taken from near Union Square."

"Where were the kids from?"

He furrowed his brow. "One was a tourist, I think--visiting from someplace like Michigan or Wisconsin--somewhere in the middle. I'm pretty sure the other grew up in the East Bay."

Casey continued writing. "How were they killed?"

Billy scrunched his nose. "Bled to death."

"Same M.O."

"What's an M.O.?"

"Don't you watch T.V.?"

Billy's eyes widened. "Not with violence."

"M.O. is modus operandi--how they kill. It tells you a lot about the killer's purpose. For instance, shooting someone is less common in sex crimes because it's not intimate. Drowning is very personal, especially if you have to hold them under versus throwing them off a boat with bricks tied to their feet. That's more execution-style. Regular drowning tends to be the result of personalized rage. Bleeding to death could be from stabbing wounds or gunshot wounds. It's not very specific."

Billy leaned forward, looking both enthralled and revolted. "Personalized?"

Casey nodded, smiling inside. People's response to her work had always run the spectrum from awe to fear and disgust. "Personalized means the killer's anger was directed at someone in particular, and he took his anger out on that person. Most killers attempt to depersonalize their victims by mutilating them. Allows them to avoid seeing them as people and treat them as objects instead."

"Oh, this guy did that too."

She looked up from her notes. "Did what?"

He waved his hand. "Depersonalized them."

"Really? How?"

He raised his eyebrows and shook his head. "Some really strange shit."

"Tell me."

"I don't remember the details. The kids were found wearing party hats."

Casey wrote down the words 'party hats.' "That's not depersonalizing them. The party hats are more of a signature, something the killer does to stimulate his own satisfaction that isn't necessary for the crime. Both kids had party hats?"

He nodded. "So what do you think?"

"There's not enough to go on."

"Have you ever had a case like this before?"

She thought about Leonardo and his penchant for cutting people up. His victims had bled to death as well. She shook her head, pushing the thought away. "It doesn't work that way. This type of killer doesn't work by normal motives and reason. We can't base one case on a previous one that looked or felt similar."

"How do you do it, then?"

"You start with what this killer did. I'd get the specifics on the crime scene, the victim, police reports, and the Medical Examiner's report, and work through them in that order. Once I'd pieced it together, I could start developing a profile."

"Can you take a guess?"

She frowned. "Not really. I'm sure I'm missing too much information, but it doesn't seem to fit. His whole obsession with the hats. That's clearly organized." Just like Leonardo had been. She suppressed the thought like nausea.

"What do you mean 'organized'?"

"An organized killer plans his captures and killings very carefully. Probably brings his own tools for the kidnapping, stages the bodies," she continued, looking at the few notes she had scribbled.

"And?"

She looked up to see Billy staring at her, wide-eyed. She shrugged and shook off the strange sensation that something wasn't right. "It's weird is all. It doesn't make sense for an organized killer to risk taking a child in a crowded place. Normally those sort of abductions are committed by someone who knows the child."

"You think he could know both children?"

She shrugged, downplaying the fact that Billy had just told her one was a tourist. If that bit of information was correct, it seemed virtually impossible that he could have known both children. "I'm sure the police are looking into it."

She looked back down at her notepad, frustrated at how little information she had. She wondered what the detective on the case was doing, how he or she was attacking the evidence. Suddenly, a tiny part of her ached to be back in the game.

Studying her notes again, she puzzled. Something wasn't adding up. The sensation reminded her of the Cincinnati case. The killer's methodology had been so mixed. It had taken them nearly three weeks to confirm all four killings had been the same killer. A chill jetted across her shoulders, leaving a tiny wake of shivers. She shook them off and pushed the paper away.

Dropping the pen, she began to stretch her already cramped fingers. It was a waste of time. She wasn't an FBI agent anymore. She would never be an agent again.

"Glad it's not my case," she said, sensing it was something less than the truth.