

Chapter 4

DETECTIVE NATHAN LONG rested the phone in its cradle and leaned back in his leather chair. Tufts of padding sprouted through several tears in the cover, irritating the skin under his pants. Slamming his feet on top of the desk caused his five equally sharpened pencils to roll off to one side, clattering to the ground.

“You know, you break one of those leads, you’ll be sitting here for hours trying to even them up in that electronic sharpener of yours. We don’t have time for that,” Brett Sawyer observed, sitting in the worn metal desk that faced Nathan.

Taking a pen from his inner suit pocket, Nathan flicked it at his partner. Brett dodged it easily.

“At least you won’t have to sharpen that.”

“That was SMC on the phone.”

“You only have one concern there, and it’s Torrence.” Brett leaned forward.

“They just pronounced her and the baby.”

“They both died?”

“One of those cosmic events. The baby wasn’t doing well in the nursery so they brought it to her. Nurse said within ten minutes they were gone.”

“Funny how humans are,” Brett said.

“Yeah, funny.”

“What’s got your feathers ruffled?”

“Other than the fact that my one witness who could ID this serial rapist just died?”

“You’re ready to call him that?” Brett crossed his arms. “A serial rapist?”

“That ER doc was right. We have to notify the public about this creep.”

“Speaking of her, did I notice something between the two of you?”

Nathan paused, his silence a giveaway. “You weren’t even in the room.”

“I was hovering.”

“I don’t know how to say it. No doctor has ever been that protective of a patient.”

“She wouldn’t let you get your way.”

“Something like that. I can’t get her out of my head.”

“Let’s get back to your theory. We only have DNA confirmation on semen samples positively linking Heather Allen and Jacqueline Randall.”

“But we have suspicions linking this guy to four women.”

“Yeah, but the evidence isn’t strong.”

“It isn’t that weak, either.” Nathan crossed one foot over the other on the desktop. “I think the first victim in the series is Celia Ramirez.”

“Because her keys were missing?” Brett asked.

“No, because she stated that his eyes were different colors—one blue and the other brown. That unusual physical characteristic links her to Heather Allen, the third victim, who reported the same information in her original statement to the responding officer.”

“Just to keep playing, who else are you thinking of?”

Nathan leaned to one side, pulling a slim manila folder from the center of a stack at the side of his desk, straightening the remainder of the pile before consulting his notes.

“Torrence, of course. She stated her keys went missing but then reappeared. She remembers an odd tattoo of an animal creature, but she couldn’t describe it in great detail. I think this is the same tattoo that Heather Allen was also trying to describe.”

“The lion’s head with a dragon’s tail?” Brett ran his knuckles over his three-day stubble.

“Have you ever wanted to do something in law enforcement that was unusual but you thought it would play out in the end to your advantage?” Nathan lowered his feet.

“Are we talking legal or illegal?” Brett asked, one eyebrow ridged.

“You’ve done an illegal kind?”

“I’ll plead the fifth on that one.”

“Have you ever done much reading about the Green River Killer?” Nathan asked, closing the folder and realigning it with the rest.

“They use that case a lot in teaching about serial rapists. I can’t say I’ve done any reading on my own about it.”

“Gary Ridgeway was convicted of raping several women in the SeaTac area of Washington. Early in his crimes, he left semen behind. At the time, they weren’t doing DNA typing, and what they could do wasn’t very effective at identifying a single suspect. One of the detectives came

across Ridgeway several years into the investigation during a prostitution sting. He had him chew on a cotton ball for evidence even though they were limited in what they could do with it. When DNA typing came along nearly a decade later, they matched that saliva with semen at several of the crime scenes. It's what led to his conviction."

"And how does this relate to our case?" Brett rested back in his equally abused chair.

"It's Torrence's baby I'm most disturbed about."

"Why?"

"Our guy is very interesting in the type of evidence he leaves behind."

Nathan stood from the desk and approached a large, dry-erase board with photos of several women aligned vertically to one side. He ran his finger slowly over each one.

"I made this link chart to illustrate what I'm proposing as his series. We'll start at the beginning." Nathan pointed to the photo at the top of the board.

"Victim one: Celia Ramirez. Victim two: Torrence Campbell. Victim three: Heather Allen. Victim four: Jacqueline Randall. Semen samples positively link the last two victims as having the same perpetrator. It's what's missing from the crime scenes that I find unusual. No hair, no saliva, no skin scrapings from under their fingernails that would otherwise identify him."

"We know he spends time bathing them. It's likely his ritual versus him trying to clean up evidence."

"Victim one, Celia Ramirez, likely destroyed the semen sample. She states that she showered and douched several times before notifying police of the rape." Nathan paused a moment before placing his finger next to Torrence's photo. "Torrence did the same thing—showered and douched. No recovery of a sample from her, but she ends up pregnant."

"Obviously sperm was left behind in Torrence, but you also think there would have been in Celia?" Brett clarified.

"Yeah, and I wonder why our criminal doesn't care that he leaves it behind. He's highly intelligent. It's not him being sloppy." Nathan turned his back to the board.

"Maybe he doesn't like to wear his raincoat when it's raining." Brett smiled.

"I don't think that's it."

“Then what do you think?”

“I don’t know. Why would he hunt down the only victim that became pregnant?” Nathan pressed.

“We’re not sure it was him.”

Nathan hit the board with an open palm. “She was run off the road on her way here!” Several sticky notes drifted to the floor.

“All right . . . all right. I’ll give you that it likely was him. He could have caught wind of the ID.”

“That’s even worse—it would mean we have a mole tipping him off.”

“You’re right. That would be worse and an unlikely possibility.”

“It’s not just the hit-and-run. It’s that he made contact with her, telling her to get rid of the baby.”

“Doesn’t want to be sued for future paternity.”

Nathan ignored the comment. “It’s perplexing me, but something within me wants a DNA sample from Torrence’s baby. I just want to have it to hold in reserve, like that Green River detective did with the cotton ball.”

“So get a sample.”

“I’m trying, but there’s a problem.”

“What?”

“It’s the grandparents,” Nathan sighed, leaning against one edge of the display. “They flat-out refused. They want Torrence and the baby cremated.”

“We’ll have to get a court order.”

“I know. I already have a judge on board. I know this has to be done, but I don’t want to traumatize the family anymore.”

“Catching this guy will be good for them in the end no matter what they think. It’s not going to be that invasive getting the samples we need.”

Nathan nodded in agreement. “This guy is very crafty. He takes his time. He watches them long enough to get a copy of their house keys.” He turned back to the board. “It’s odd. They don’t even resemble each other. He starts with Celia, a Hispanic woman. Torrence is next—the all-American girl with blonde hair and blue eyes. He follows with Heather Allen; a young woman, early twenties, brunette with brown eyes. Last is Jacqueline, an older mom with four kids. They have different occupations, social status. The attacks are spread all over the city.”

Nathan returned to his chair and placed his palms on the desk. Brett returned his gaze.

“I think he leaves his semen because he doesn’t believe it will connect him to the crime.”

“Well, that just proves he’s another dumb criminal. Science is way too advanced to let this guy get by. We just need one ID.”

“Unfortunately, we’ll probably get our chance.” Nathan leaned into his chair. “If I’m correct in the fact that these are all his victims, then there is a pattern. The last attack was Jacqueline. He usually strikes every other month, sometime within the first week.”

“And that would be any day now.”