



# Sins of a Husband

**Author:** *Fiona Rivers*

**Category:** Suspense Thriller

**Description:** Someone doesn't want Katherine to have her happily ever after.

Thirty-year-old Katherine (Kat) has always dreamed of the perfect husband—a man she could love and who would love her for eternity. Her search comes to an abrupt and violent end when her perfect husband, Brian, is brutally murdered in their own home. Left for dead herself, Kat struggles to rebuild her shattered life, leaving the quiet town of Rockestead, Maine.

But fate has other plans for her as she moves to New York City and begins a new job at a prestigious law firm. Just when everything seems to be falling into place again, she meets Oliver Tate. He is everything she ever wanted and more, a perfect match in every way.

However, their blissful marriage is short-lived when Oliver meets the same tragic fate as Brian. As Kat searches desperately for answers, she realizes that someone is determined to keep her from finding happiness, no matter the cost. But Kat isn't the sole victim of targeted murders among husbands. Other women in the city face the same tragedy, and they all have one thing in common.

In this gripping psychological thriller, Kat must navigate through a tangled web of lies and deception to uncover the truth of the murders and free herself from the nightmare that keeps haunting her.

18+

**Total Pages (Source):** 48

# Page 1

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I lay on the kitchen floor, my body lifeless as crimson blood pours from my wounds. I try to breathe, but it hurts most unimaginably. The only thing I focus on for now is the refrigerator before me. I'm in shock, to say the least. My eye catches the pink Post-it note with the words, Pick up Brian's dry cleaning .

My husband—Brian.

My head turns to the side as I see the silhouette of Brian's body in the living room, lying on his back, his arms spread to the side, and a pool of blood beneath him. I whisper his name. It was all I could manage. He didn't move as tears streamed down my face.

All I could think about was I had to get to him. I start to get up. My feet slip on the crimson-red liquid, returning me to the black and white checkered tile. My head hits the floor hard. Everything goes blurry.

In and out of consciousness, I hear footsteps—multiple footsteps. Did the person responsible for this come back to make sure we were both dead?

“There's a body in the kitchen!” I hear a man's voice .

Turning my head, I see a man in a uniform—dark blue kneeling beside me. It's Sheriff Strange.

“Katherine, help is on the way. Stay with me.” He places his hands on my wounds to control the bleeding. “Can you tell me who did this to you and your husband?”

I try to shake my head, but one attempt to move felt like a billion tiny needles bludgeoning my body. I moan.

“Katherine, I won’t let you die. You have to fight,” he says.

“It looks like a break-in,” I heard another officer say.

“My husband,” I manage a low whisper.

Sheriff Strange stares at me with sympathy in his eyes. It was at that moment I knew my husband was dead. Everything went black.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 1:43 pm*

### Chapter One

I stand in the living room, an empty box sitting at my feet, staring at the half-finished mantle on the fireplace—the only thing Brian had left to do was paint it.

“Kat, are you okay?” my friend and co-worker, Cindy, asks.

She pulls me from my thoughts, and I turn and look at her.

“I’m fine,” I lie, grabbing an empty box and taking it to the bookcase.

It has been two weeks since the break-in and my husband’s murder. Cindy and her husband, Mark, took me back to their house after my week-long hospital stay. They wouldn’t allow me to stay here. Frankly, I didn’t want to. I never wanted to step foot in the home Brian and I loved so much again.

I was only here to pack up everything because the house was going on the market soon. Georgette, my realtor, expressed concerns because she would have to disclose that a murder happened inside the home, and she was afraid she wouldn’t be able to get enough to pay off the mortgage or sell it at all.

A knock at the door rattled me. Cindy walks over and invites Sheriff Strange in.

“How are you holding up, Kat?” he asks.

“Doing my best, Lucas. Please tell me you have a lead in the case?”

“Unfortunately, we don’t. Whoever did this was meticulous. They made sure to leave nothing behind. You can’t remember anything about that night?”

I tried hard to remember for the past two weeks, but my mind was like a black screen.

“No. The only thing I remember was waking up on the kitchen floor.”

Which is the truth. I have no recollection of anyone being in the house that night or the horrific events that took place.

“Okay.” He sighs, rubbing the back of his neck. “Are you still staying with Cindy and Mark?”

“Yes, she is,” Cindy chimes in. “She will be staying with us for as long as she wants.”

“Okay.” He nods. “If we find anything, I’ll let you know.”

“Thank you, Lucas.”

He leaves the house, and I plop down on the couch, placing my face in my hands. Cindy sits down next to me and places her hand on my knee.

“Everything is going to be okay, Kat.”

But I wasn’t so sure about that. I wasn’t sure my life would ever be okay again.

Rockstead, Maine—the small town where we lived. Quiet and quaint. There hadn’t been a murder in town in over ten years. It was an accidental murder, but nonetheless. Why us? We didn’t have much. We lived in a fifteen hundred square foot cape cod-styled home with two bedrooms and two baths. It was a steal when we bought it because it needed so much work. That’s what I loved about Brian. He was a

handyman and could do almost anything. We fixed up the house ourselves—new kitchen, new bathrooms, new paint, and a new staircase. It was perfect, just like he was—just like our marriage.

We were married for two and a half years and were the envy of the town. The residents called us the perfect town couple. Everyone knew everyone and everyone's business. When I moved to Rockstead and worked at a small law firm, I never expected to meet someone as wonderful and perfect as my husband. It was love at first sight for both of us.

Brian worked for a construction company. I was an attorney, fresh out of law school when I moved here from Richmond, Virginia. My parents were killed a year before I graduated from law school in a horrible car accident. The brakes on my father's car went out. He lost control, went off the road, and crashed into a tree. They died instantly, according to the medical examiner. They were all I had, except for Brandon, a guy I was in a six-month relationship with. After my parents were killed, I became so distant he dumped me, which was fine because I wasn't sure why I kept seeing him in the first place. He was nice enough—even a little cute. But he wasn't the perfect man I was searching for.

The police ruled my husband's murder as the result of a break-in. Some of the jewelry Brian had given me was taken, along with my wedding ring. Other than those few items, nothing else in the house was touched. Detective Strange told me that they put an alert out to all the pawn shops across the country with a description of my jewelry in case the psychopath tried to pawn it.

I'm sitting in Cindy's guestroom on a queen-sized bed, my knees planted into my chest with my arms securely wrapped around them. I sit like this often—ever since I was a child. Brian used to make fun of me and tell me I looked like a scared little girl who got in trouble, which was further from the truth. I was never scared as a child. My parents were the best any child could hope for. They took care of me, guided me,

loved me, and were always there when I needed them. I probably had the best childhood of any kid in the world.

I glance at the old-fashioned clock on the nightstand. It's two a.m. Ever since that night, I wake up at precisely two a.m. The officers found me and Brian in our home at three a.m. Brian's time of death was two a.m., according to the medical examiner. I can't sleep. I stare at the bottle of sleeping pills Dr. Leary prescribed sitting on the nightstand. I'd only taken two in the last two weeks. I didn't want my body to become dependent on them. I'd never taken a sleeping pill in my life, and I wasn't about to become addicted now.

## Page 3

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### Chapter Two

#### THREE YEARS LATER

With a grocery bag in one hand, I insert the key into the lock with my other and open the door to our home: 236 East 72 nd Street—a four-bedroom, four-bath, three thousand square foot brownstone that Oliver and I picked out together.

I moved to New York City six months after what happened back in Rockstead when Reynolds, Burns & Nelson offered me a job as an attorney for their property law division. I had no choice but to leave the charming town of Rockstead for apparent reasons. It was hard enough being there without my husband and the horrific memories of that night, but I had become the talk of the town and was labeled as that poor widow . I saw the way the people of the town looked at me: the whispers, the pity. I couldn't stand it anymore. At that point, the police hadn't found my husband's killer, and Lucas Strange informed me that they probably never would. Cindy said I was suffocating and needed to make a fresh start. She was the one who found the ad for the job at Reynolds, Burns & Nelson on Indeed and sent me the link .

I set the brown paper bag on the kitchen island. I loved my kitchen—an incredible chef's kitchen with a wall of windows, ample white cabinets, top-of-the-line appliances, Caesarstone countertops in a Carbo Brushed color, a built-in banquet, and a breakfast bar (the island) with two bar stools.

I hear the front door open, and my nose immediately picks up his scent. Armani cologne fills the air, a mix of earthy musk and citrus—two scents that are nothing short of alluring and powerful.

“There’s my beautiful wife.” A smile graces his face as he strolls into the kitchen.  
“Did you just get home?” He leans in and kisses my lips.

“I did. On my way home, I had to stop at the store to pick up some things, and there was a line.”

“I’m going to head upstairs, change out of this suit, and go into my office to do some work. When will dinner be ready?” he asks.

“In about an hour.” I smile.

I watch as my husband winks at me and leaves the kitchen.

After Brian died, I never thought I would find someone as perfect as him. A year after his death, I dipped my toe into the dating pond after a colleague of mine, Samantha, pressured me into joining a dating app—something I had never done before. She assured me it was safe as long as I followed the rules.

Always meet publicly.

Always tell a friend where you’re going and with whom.

Know what you want.

Ask questions.

Follow your gut. If your gut tells you to run, fake a phone call and get out.

And that’s precisely what I did. If my gut wasn’t feeling it, I would excuse myself to the bathroom, text her to call me in five minutes, and head back to the table. I only went on a date four times after that first year. Every man I thought was nice, my gut

was telling me something else. I finally realized I wasn't ready to date and deleted the app.

"How are you ever going to meet a man?" Samantha asks.

"Maybe the old-fashioned way?" My brow arches.

"Don't be ridiculous. Nobody meets the old-fashioned way anymore, Kat."

Maybe she had a point, but I knew I wasn't ready. When I was, the perfect man would come along—and he did—the old-fashioned way.

"It smells wonderful in here," Oliver strides into the kitchen and grabs a bottle of wine from the rack.

He has never once complained about my cooking in our two years of marriage. But to be fair, there was nothing to complain about. I learned from my mom. She was the best cook I ever knew and shared her secrets and tips with me.

I reach into the cabinet and grab two white plates with gold trim. On each plate, I carefully place four perfectly seared scallops drizzled with lemon caper sauce, surrounded by steamed broccoli florets and a perfectly baked potato with two pats of butter and a dollop of sour cream.

"Dinner looks delicious, darling." Oliver pours two glasses of red wine .

I carefully carry the plates to the dining table and set them down. We settled into our usual spots, ready to enjoy our dinner together.

"You know this is my favorite dish of yours." He smiles, placing the linen napkin on his lap.

“I know.” I smile. “Consider it an early anniversary gift.”

“I can’t believe we’ll be married two years tomorrow. Where on earth has the time gone?” He shoves a scallop in his mouth and savors the taste. “I made a reservation for us at Daniel at six o’clock, and then we’ll head to Chelsea and visit the art gallery.”

“Sounds like fun. I can hardly wait.” I smile. “I told my boss I must leave the firm no later than four-thirty. That’ll give me enough time to come home and change.”

I’m bathing in our luxurious double bathtub with massage and ambient lighting. You’re probably wondering how a bathtub can massage you. A waterfall on each side of the tub jets out and massages the body. It really sealed the deal for me when we looked at the house. Oliver could have cared less until he bathed in it for the first time after we moved in. Sometimes, if he has a hard day at the office, he comes home, kisses me hello, tells me he had a hard day, and flies up the stairs to bathe before dinner.

I sit in the tub and count my blessings. After what happened back in Rockstead, I never would have believed this would be my life now—married to a handsome financial analyst, working at a prestigious law firm, and living in a five-million-dollar brownstone.

The bathroom door opens, and Oliver walks in, a handsome smile gracing his lips and a bottle of wine and glasses in his hands.

“Care for some company?” He holds up the wine bottle.

“I’d love some.” I smile.

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### Chapter Three

“You wanted to see me, Carter?”

“Kat, have a seat,” my boss, Carter Nelson, gestures. “Your work here over the last three years has been impeccable.”

“Thank you.” I smile, folding my hands in my lap.

“Unfortunately, we must make some cuts in our property law division.”

“Cuts?” My brows furrow.

He must have sensed the panic on my face.

“Don’t worry. You’re too valuable to let go. Effective tomorrow, you’ll be moved to family law, mainly handling divorce cases. How does that sound?” He leans back in his chair.

“Well...I...fine, I guess. Is that why you asked me a couple of months ago if I kept up with the latest family laws?”

“Yes.” He points at me. “Smart woman. Anyway, I think you’d excel in family law.” He glances at his watch. “I know you must be out of here by four-thirty, so I want you to finish what you’re working on and then pack your office. You’re moving up to the tenth floor—a corner office with an excellent city view.”

“Wow, Carter. I don’t know what to say?”

“Thank you will do.” He smiles.

“Thank you.” I stand, smoothing out my skirt.

“Happy Anniversary, Kat. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Thank you, Carter.”

After finishing my case, I started packing my office with the boxes maintenance brought. When I was finished packing, I called Stuart, the head of maintenance, and told him to move my things to the tenth floor.

Just as I arrive home, my phone pings in my purse. When I pull it out, I find a text message from Oliver.

Stuck in a terrible meeting trying to avert a crisis. Unfortunately, I’m not going to make it home in time. I’ll meet you at Daniel at six o’clock.

Disappointment washes over me. I love it when we drive together for dinner. But my disappointment quickly evaporates because nothing can ruin this day.

That’s fine. I’ll see you at the restaurant. I love you.

I love you too, darling.

I touch up my makeup to give my blue eyes a smoky evening look and dust my cheeks with a little more blush in Petal Pink. After dabbing my lips with Charlotte Tilbury’s Pillow Talk lipstick, I brush through my long brown hair, spritzing the ends with texture spray to help maintain the subtle waves .

I go to the closet and pull out the new dress I picked up at Bloomingdales a month ago—black, square neckline, long sleeves with contrast bell detail, fitted and sophisticated, stopping an inch above my knees. I slip my feet into my three-inch heel, tall, black boots that make me three inches taller than my existing five-foot-six stature.

I enter Daniel, and Karla, the hostess, smiles enthusiastically.

“Good evening, Mrs. Tate.”

“Good evening, Karla. Is my husband here yet?”

“Not yet, but we do have your table ready. Follow me.”

She sits me at a private table in the corner and sets two menus down.

“Your server will be with you shortly. Enjoy your dinner.”

“Thank you.” I pleasantly smile.

I glance at my watch. It’s six-fifteen. Where the hell is Oliver?

“Darling, I’m so sorry,” he speaks breathlessly, leaning in and kissing my cheek.

My brows furrow at the smell of perfume radiating off him.

“Do I need to be concerned that you’re fifteen minutes late and smell like you’ve been with a woman?” My brow arches.

He removes his suit coat and hangs it on the back of his chair.

“Don’t be silly. You know me better than that. You’re the only woman my eyes see.” A smile crosses his lips as he sits down. “But, to ease your fears, I better give you this now.” He pulls out a small gift hiding in the bag he brought with him.

I smile as I remove the dark blue ribbon, hugging the matching paper. It is a bottle of Joe Malone English Pear and Freesia perfume.

“I’ve always wanted a bottle of Joe Malone perfume.” I smile.

“I know. And now you know why I smell the way I do. I stopped at Bloomingdales on my lunch, and the sales associate kept spraying different scents until I decided on that one.” He points to the perfume.

“Thank you, Oliver. I love it.”

“You’re welcome, my love. You look incredible. I’m sorry I had to meet you here instead of us driving together.”

“It’s okay. I understand.”

Oliver works on Wall Street as a financial analyst, making more money than he knows what to do with. Between his job and mine as an attorney, we’re very well off, and money is never an issue.

Michael, our server, walks over and sets two glasses of champagne before us.

“Happy Anniversary, you two.” He smiles.

“Thank you, Michael. We’re ready to order,” Oliver says.

After Michael took our order, Oliver picked up his glass and held it up.

“To us, forever and always. Happy Anniversary, Darling.”

I pick up my glass and notice something red sitting at the bottom. My eyes dart up to Oliver, sitting there with a handsome smile plastered across his face.

“What did you do?” I ask, grinning.

“I only do the things I do because I’m so in love with you,” he says.

I reach into the glass and pull out a 14k white gold cushion- cut Garnet ring with a halo of diamonds around the center stone and beveled diamonds along each side.

“Oh, Oliver. It’s stunning.” I slip it on my right ring finger and hold out my hand.

“Garnet is the gemstone for a two-year anniversary. The moment I saw it. I knew it would look gorgeous on you.” He smiles brightly.

After thanking him with a kiss, our food was brought over and set down.

“Thank you, Michael.” Oliver smiles.

“Yes, thank you.” I smile. “I got some news at the firm today,” I tell my husband.

“They’re making you partner?” He grins.

“No.” I laugh, shaking my head. “They have to make some cuts in the property division, so Carter moved me to family law on the tenth floor.”

“And that’s a good thing?”

“Yes, because I have a corner office with a city view and my own secretary. No more

sharing secretaries with the other associates.”

“That’s excellent news, darling. It looks like we’re celebrating more than just our anniversary tonight.”

### Chapter Four

We leave the restaurant and wait while the valet fetches Oliver's Bentley.

"Thank you, young man." Oliver graciously tips him.

"Thank you. Enjoy your evening."

We head to Taglialatella Galleries in Chelsea. Typically, they close at six p.m., but tonight, they're hosting an invite-only private art viewing for elite customers. Oliver is obsessed with art and was an elite customer before I met him. We didn't need any more artwork for the house, but we decided to come anyway because the gallery holds profound memories for us—our first meeting.

I had only been in New York for six months and was whisked out of my apartment by my friend and colleague Samantha. Out of the corner of my eye, a painting caught my attention and held me in a trance. I couldn't tear myself away until a deep voice suddenly rang from behind, startling me.

"What do you think it means?"

"Oh, my gosh." I place my hand over my heart. "You startled me. "

The man is now beside me. Six feet tall, short, dark, meticulously styled hair, masculine jawline, baby blue eyes, and a warm smile that would captivate any woman.

“My apologies. I didn’t mean to sneak up on you. I was across the room and noticed you’ve been standing here for fifteen minutes, staring at that painting.”

“Something about it called out to me.” I place my finger on my lips.

“It’s different. That’s for sure,” the handsome man says. “So, I’ll ask again. What do you think it means?”

“The artist named it Eyes Without a Face,” I say. “Perhaps someone is always watching. They have eyes, but you can never see their face. I have no idea.” I laugh.

“I know the movie,” he says. “It’s a French horror film about a plastic surgeon’s daughter who was in a terrible car accident and was left with a disfigured face. She wore a mask to hide it, and all you saw were her eyes. Her father, the surgeon, murdered people and collected different facial features to restore her face.”

“That sounds awful.” I glance at him.

“It was.” He laughed. “I’m Oliver Tate.” He extends his hand, and I am eager to shake it.

“Katherine Grisham. You can call me Kat.” I place my hand in his.

That night changed my life.

The painting is still here. I spot it the moment we step inside the gallery. I’m drawn to it again, like the night I met Oliver. Eyes Without a Face. A bunch of random eyes, different shapes and sizes, staring back. Only eyes. Lurking in the shadows, watching .

“There you are.” Oliver walks over and wraps his arm around my waist.

“I need this painting, Oliver,” I say.

“Excuse me?”

“Oh, please, darling.” I turn and place my hand on his muscular chest. “You know I never ask for much.”

“And where would you put it? Because there is no way that painting is going in our bedroom.”

“It’ll go in the corner of the living room by the window. We still have that easel in storage, right?”

“We do.” He nods. “All I want is for you to be happy. If you want the painting, it’s yours.”

I smile, wrapping my arms around his neck and kiss him. “Thank you, Oliver.”

We arrive home. He immediately picks me up and carries me up the stairs to our bedroom to finish celebrating our second wedding anniversary.

My gaze lingers on Oliver sleeping, taking in every detail of his handsome face. His dark hair is tousled on the pillow, and his lips are slightly parted as he breathes softly. I can't help but smile as I think about how perfect he is. Not only is he incredibly handsome, but he is also considerate and thoughtful in everything he does.

He was the first man I slept with after Brian’s murder. Date six is when I finally worked up the courage to show him my scars. I didn’t have to worry about that with the four dates I went on with the other guys because we never made it past the first date. I was scared he would be turned off and not want me when he saw them, but he wasn’t. He was kind, gentle, and caring. He made me feel comfortable to the point I

forgot about them.

He. Is. My. Perfect. Man.

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### Chapter Five

“Mrs. Calloway.” I extend my hand. “It’s nice to meet you. Please, have a seat.” I smooth out my skirt before sitting behind my desk.

“You can call me Britney,” she says.

“So, tell me what I can do for you.”

“I found out my husband is cheating on me, and I want to file for divorce.”

“Okay. Do you know how long the affair has been going on?”

“About six months.” She looks down in embarrassment.

I don’t blame her for being embarrassed. I know I would be. It’s humiliating when your husband doesn’t find you attractive anymore and seeks the company of another woman. Not that I would know because I have never been cheated on, but I know how I would feel—humiliated.

“Here is a list of all of our assets.” She hands me a file folder loaded with papers inside.

I opened it and did a quick scan. “Thank you. We’ll be needing this at a later date.”

“Nothing is negotiable, Mrs. Tate. I want the apartment in the city, the house in the Hamptons, and I believe I’m entitled to half his money. I’m not budging on a single

thing.” She folds her arm.

“Is there a prenup?” I ask.

“No. There isn’t. We had very little when we got married.” Tears begin streaming down her cheeks. “I gave him twenty years of my life. I cooked, cleaned, cared for our two children, and did all the shopping, while he was out screwing around. I know there were probably more women over the years, but she’s the only one I learned about.”

“May I ask how you found out?”

“The constant late meetings at the office and the lack of sexual interest. But the last straw was when he forgot my birthday. The look on his face told me everything when I confronted him about not acknowledging my birthday two days later. He lied and said he lost track of the days and didn’t realize what day it was. That night, I went through his phone while he was sleeping and found text messages and racy photographs.”

“I’m so sorry this happened to you. Do you know the woman?”

“I do. She works at his office. Cliché, right? I hate that man so much.” More tears streamed from her eyes.

“Don’t worry. We’re going to bleed your husband dry. By the time I’m finished with him, he’ll be sorry he ever laid eyes on that other woman.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Tate.” She stood and extended her hand.

“You can call me Kat.” A sympathetic smile falls on my lips.

After a long day, I insert the key into the lock and push open the front door, dropping my purse and black leather Christian Louboutin Cabata tote next to the foyer table. I have work to do, but not right now. I need to change out of my work clothes and into something more comfortable.

I go upstairs to the bedroom and pull a pair of black Lululemon leggings from the dresser drawer and a pink zip-up hoodie from the closet. After slipping my feet into my UGG slippers, I descend the stairs and hear my phone pinging in the kitchen. I picked it up from the island and noticed three text messages from Oliver.

Don't make dinner for me. A client just came in from out of town, and I have to meet with him. I'm sorry, darling.

I promise to make it up to you.

Kat?

My heart aches because I hate it when he works late. After my day, I only looked forward to spending the evening with my husband.

Sorry, I was upstairs changing and didn't hear my phone. What time do you think you'll be home?

Pretty late. Don't wait up. If I could cancel, I would. But this client just flew all the way from Los Angeles, and he wants to meet for dinner.

Can't you tell him you have plans for tonight and meet with him tomorrow? I'm sure he's in New York for more than one night.

I wish I could, darling. Unfortunately, he's one of those clients who dislikes waiting. We can't afford for him to go elsewhere. I don't have a choice. I'm sorry.

It's okay. I understand. I have work to do tonight anyway.

I love you, Kat. I'll be extra quiet when I come in so I don't wake you. I love you so much.

I love you, too.

I planned on making pasta carbonara for dinner, but now I'm not. I'm not going through all that trouble just for me, so I grab the menu to the Chinese place around the corner. I pour a glass of Pinot and walk into the living where my eyes catch the painting Eyes Without a Face. A chill courses through my body. Why? I have no idea. Oliver is right. The painting is creepy, but I'm drawn to it for some reason.

The ringing of the doorbell startles me from the painting. I open the door and smile at Mr. Kim, who is holding a plastic bag in his hand.

"Good evening, Mrs. Tate." He smiles, handing me the bag.

"Good evening, Mr. Kim." I pull some cash from my hoodie pocket and hand it to him.

"Thank you." He nods. "Enjoy your dinner."

"You know I always do," I say. I gently shut the door and retreat to the kitchen, setting the plastic bag on the Caesarstone island. The tantalizing scent of General Taos Chicken wafts up from the container, making me realize how hungry I am. I grab a plate from the cabinet and carefully scoop a generous serving of the savory dish onto it. Next, I reach for the grease-stained glassine bag and deftly unwrap the egg roll, setting it on the plate next to the chicken.

I look around for my wine glass and remember leaving it in the living room. Taking

my plate to the table, I set it down and walk into the living room, where my wine sits on the coffee table. I grab it and momentarily stare at the painting again—Eyes Without a Face.

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### Chapter Six

#### TWO WEEKS LATER

“Sorry, I’m late.” Samantha sets her purse in the booth and slides in across from me. “I just got the most disturbing phone call.”

“What happened?” My brows furrow.

“One of my client’s husband was found dead this morning in his hotel room.”

“Oh my gosh. That’s terrible,” I say. “Why was he in a hotel room?”

“He recently moved out of the home and was in the process of looking for another apartment. My client found out he had been cheating on her with the same woman for over two years. The divorce was just starting to get really nasty.”

The waitress walks over and takes our order.

“You don’t think your client did it, do you?” My head cocks.

“Unfortunately, she was the first person who came to my mind, but she has an airtight alibi for last night.”

“That is just awful.” I shake my head. “How was the poor guy murdered?”

“He was stabbed to death.”

Hearing her say that shook me to my core. An unsettling feeling washes over me as vivid memories of seeing Brian lying on the living room floor in a pool of blood come to the surface.

“Hey, are you okay?” She reaches over and places her hand on mine. “You’re shaking.”

I never told anyone, except for Oliver, what happened back in Maine. As far as other people knew, Brian died in a car accident.

“My blood sugar is probably low.” I force a small smile. “I haven’t eaten yet today.”

“That’s why you’re so skinny.” A smile falls on her lips.

The waitress walks over and sets our grilled chicken cherry salads before us. After what Samantha told me, I immediately picked up my fork and began eating, even though my stomach was tied in knots.

“Travis and I decided to host a dinner party Saturday night. You and Oliver will be there, right?” she asks.

“Oliver is leaving for a business trip on Thursday and won’t return until Sunday.”

“Then you’ll just have to come.” She grins.

“What can I bring?”

“You’re in charge of the dessert. Anything you want.”

“Got it.” I stab my fork into the salad.

“I hate when you go on business trips,” I say, grabbing pairs of Oliver’s socks from the drawer.

“Me too, darling. It’s only for a few days, and then I’ll be back to my beautiful wife.”

I toss the socks into his suitcase, walk over, and place my hand on his muscular chest.

“You better.” A smile plays on my lips as I reach up and kiss him.

“There’s no place in this world I’d rather be than here with you.”

I say goodbye to my husband and watch as he walks down our porch steps and tosses his suitcase into the back of the sedan waiting at the curb. After watching it pull away, I shut the door and sigh.

After pouring a glass of wine, I grab my bag from the foyer floor and take it into the living room. Tonight is the perfect night to get a lot of work done. I set my wine glass on the end table next to the couch, pull out a file, and look it over. My eyes divert to the painting in the corner—Eyes Without a Face. I can’t concentrate, so I pick up the remote and turn on the news.

“So far, the NYPD does not have a suspect in the murder of real estate mogul John McCormick, who was found stabbed to death in his hotel room two nights ago. Mr. McCormick was stabbed twenty-two times and was found by the cleaning staff when they entered his room the following morning to clean. The police are asking anyone with information to please step forward.”

My heart is a jackhammer in my chest. He was stabbed twenty-two times—twenty-two—the exact number of stab wounds that were inflicted on Brian. I often wondered why I was only stabbed two times. Did the person who broke in get spooked as he cut

into my flesh? Maybe he heard a noise outside and ran before finishing me off. Ever since Mr. McCormick's death, the nightmares have returned, and the worst part is that Oliver isn't here. Maybe it was time I called Dr. Burton and set up an appointment .

It was now Saturday. I tried to reach Oliver all day, but his phone went straight to voicemail, and my text messages were unread. I was starting to worry because I hadn't spoken to him on the phone since yesterday, and all I got last night while I was sleeping was a text message from him telling me he missed and loved me.

I stop at my favorite bakery two blocks from our home and pick up the world's best flourless chocolate cake and a box of blondies. As I'm leaving the bakery, I hear my phone ringing. Pulling it from my purse, my fears are erased when I see Oliver's handsome picture flashing on the screen.

"Hello."

"Hello, darling."

"Oliver, I've been trying to get in touch with you all day."

"I'm sorry. We were on the boat all day, and I didn't realize my phone was dead."

"We?" I ask.

"The firm's client and his wife. I sealed the deal, Kat."

I smile. "That's great, Oliver. I'm happy for you. I miss you."

"I miss you too, darling. I'll be home tomorrow afternoon, and we're staying in all night—just the two of us."

“That sounds wonderful. I can hardly wait.”

“What are your plans for tonight?” he asks.

“Remember, I told you that Travis and Samantha are having a dinner party. I just left the bakery with a flourless chocolate cake and blondies to bring.”

“That’s right. You did mention the dinner party. I’m coming,” I hear him say. “I have to go, darling. We’re meeting for dinner and drinks to finalize the paperwork.”

“Okay. I love you. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“I love you too,” he says and ends the call .

My belly finally settles, and the worry that consumed me all day has ceased.

I take a cab over to Samantha’s Park Avenue Penthouse. Her husband, Travis, runs a multi-billion-dollar advertising company in the financial district—one of the best in all of New York. Although Oliver is seven years older than me, Travis is fifteen years older than Samantha, putting him at fifty. They’ve been married for ten years and opted not to have children. According to Samantha, both of them are too selfish to have kids. I, on the other hand, want children. I always have. Oliver and I recently discussed it. I want two kids. He thinks three is the perfect number but in the future.

“Good evening, Mrs. Tate.” Greg, the doorman, tips his hat.

“Good evening, Greg.”

“You can go right on up,” he says.

“Thank you.” I head to the elevator and push the button.

When I reach the penthouse, the elevator opens, and I step into the grand foyer of the five thousand square foot space. It's beyond me why two people who never want children need a place this big. But then again, Samantha is all about status.

"There you are." A grin crosses her lips as she hugs me.

"I bring dessert." I hold up the white plastic bag with two boxes in it.

"Magnolia's? Please tell me the world's best flourless chocolate cake is that bag."

"It is. Along with some blondies." I smile.

She excitedly takes the bag and offers me a glass of wine. I accept as I look around at the six people gathered in the living room .

"Who are they?" I quietly ask Samantha.

"People Travis works with. See the short guy with the balding head?"

"Yeah." I glance over my shoulder.

"Travis told me that he's cheating on his wife with a nineteen-year-old."

"Him?" My brows furrow.

"Right? What nineteen-year-old would see something in him? It has to be because he's filthy rich."

"His wife doesn't know?" I ask.

"No. She's been ill for the past six months. Something about her liver. I don't really

know.” She hands me a glass of wine.

“That’s terrible. His poor wife is battling a serious illness, and he’s out screwing around with a nineteen-year-old? What the hell is wrong with men?” I shake my head.

“They only think with one thing. You should know that by now. But I will tell you. If I ever caught wind of Travis cheating on me, I’d be the first one to castrate him.”

“And who are you going to castrate?” Travis walks over and hugs me. “It’s good to see you, Kat.”

“You too, Travis.” I smile.

“I was just telling Kat that if you ever cheated on me, I’d castrate you.” A happy smile dances on Samantha’s lips.

“Ouch. You know I’d never cheat on you. You’re mine for life.” He places his arm around her waist and kisses her.

I’m envious because I wish Oliver were here.

“Hey,” the cheating bald man shouts, “Travis, turn on the news. I just got an alert that another murder took place last night.”

Travis walks over and turns on the TV with the remote.

“Robert Bennett was found stabbed to death in his home late last night after his wife arrived home and found him in the living room.”

“Oh my God. Mrs. Bennett is Leo’s client,” Samantha places her hand over her

mouth.

“Two rich, successful men, twenty-two stabs wounds each, two deaths in one week, ” the newscaster says. “Police are asking anyone with any information to contact the police station.”

“I can’t believe this,” Travis says.

I stare at the TV, my belly tied in knots again. I can’t stop thinking about Brian and the incident. It's a good thing I have an appointment with Dr. Burton on Monday.

### Chapter Seven

I'm giddy with excitement as a black sedan pulls up to the curb. I open the front door and fly down the steps just as Oliver exits the car. The driver gets out, opens the trunk, and pulls out my husband's suitcase.

"Thank you, sir." Oliver reaches into his pocket and hands him some cash.

"Have a nice day, Mr. Tate."

"You as well." Oliver turns to me and wraps his loving arms around me. I notice a perfume scent on him. It's the same Joe Malone perfume he bought me.

"You smell like a woman," I smirk.

"My God, Kat." He grabbed the handle of his suitcase, and we climbed up the steps.

"The woman sitting next to me on the plane bathed in it before boarding."

"Was she pretty?" My brow arches, stepping into our home.

"She was very attractive for an eighty-year-old woman." He smiles. "I told her she smelled nice because it made me more eager to hurry home to you. She told me it was her favorite perfume. Her husband bought it for her, and it's the only perfume she's worn for the last fifteen years."

"I'd say her husband has good taste. Just like someone else I know." Happiness coursed through me that he was home.

He grabs my hand and leads me up the stairs. “We need to make up for lost time,” a smirk dances on his lips. “I missed you so much, darling.”

“I missed you more.”

For the next hour, we celebrated his return.

“I should go away more often,” he says, running his fingers through my hair.

I lift my head from his shoulder. “No, you shouldn’t.” I press my lips against his. My happy, euphoric feeling quickly dissipates as I stare into his eyes and think about the two men who were brutally murdered this week.

“I don’t know if you heard, but another man was murdered Friday night,” I say.

“What?” His brows furrow. “Who?”

“Another client of the firm’s husband. He was stabbed twenty-two times like the last guy was.”

I never told Oliver how many stab wounds were inflicted on Brian’s body. All he knows is he died of stab wounds.

“That is terrible. Do the police have any suspects yet?”

“Not that I know of.”

It is awful and hits too close to home. What are the chances that Brian and the two other men were stabbed twenty-two times? Not once, not twice, not even ten times. Exactly. Twenty. Two. Times.

“I don’t know what to say. What are the chances that both men were the husbands of two of your firm’s clients?” he asks.

“Carter called just before you got home to inform me of a mandatory meeting at the office tomorrow at 8:00 a.m.,” I say.

“I can tell you’re upset.” His grip around me tightens. “I’m sure it’s just a big coincidence.”

“Yeah. Maybe.” I lay my head on his shoulder.

“As you all have heard, two men, the husbands of two of our clients, were murdered last week,” Dave Reynolds says. “I spoke with the detective handling the case, and she told me they don’t have any leads at all so far.”

And they never will. I silently think to myself.

After the meeting ends, I glance at my watch to see how much time I have before we meet with Mr. Calloway and his attorney. Ten minutes. Just enough time to hit the bathroom before heading back to my office.

I exit the stall and stand before the sink, holding my hands under the warm water. The bathroom door opens, and Samantha walks in.

“What a horrible meeting,” she says, reaching into her purse and pulling out her lipstick. “Like we need to be reminded of the murders. It’s all that’s been on the TV for days. You know what I did last night?”

“What?” I ask.

“I held Travis really tight all night. At one point, he told me I was hurting him

because I was squeezing so hard.”

“I can relate to that. I pretty much didn’t let go of Oliver all night either.”

“I’m sure this is worse for you considering—way to go, Sam.” She shakes her head.  
“Me and my big mouth. I’m really sorry, Kat. I didn’t mean to?— ”

I lightly touch her arm. “It’s okay, Samantha. I know what those women are going through losing a husband.”

“You do, Kat. Maybe you could talk to them. Tell them your story about the accident and how you moved on.”

That was the last thing I wanted to do. “Yeah, maybe.” I smile. “I have a client meeting. I’ll see you later.”

When I enter my office, Britney Calloway sits in the chair, waiting for me.

“Are you ready?” I ask, grabbing her file from my desk.

“You bet I’m ready.” The look on her face startled me. It was pure hatred and anger.

I opened the door to conference room three and gestured for Britney to take a seat.

“Gentlemen,” I say, sitting across the table. “Let’s get started, shall we?”

“Mr. Calloway has agreed to everything Mrs. Calloway wants except for the house in the Hamptons and alimony,” says Mr. Striker, his attorney.

“Fuck you, Steven!” Britney points at him. “You built that house for me! That is my house!” she shouts.

“I built it for us, Britney,” he shouts back.

“Like I said. You can fuck off because I’m not letting you have it.” She folds her arms. “The only reason you want it is to take her there.”

Two hours later, the argument was still going on. I didn’t think Britney Calloway had it in her. When I first met her, she seemed timid—overly thin in plain clothes and mousy with straight black hair and little makeup. She didn’t strike me as the wife of a multi-millionaire.

“He’s not getting the Hampton house,” Britney says as we leave the conference room. “I’ll kill him before I let that happen. ”

I was taken aback by her statement, considering two other husbands who were in the middle of a divorce were just murdered.

“Don’t worry. You’re getting the Hampton house.” I lightly touch her arm.

### Chapter Eight

“It’s been a long time, Katherine. How have you been?” Dr. Burton’s deep, soothing voice echoes through the spacious office as he leans back in his plush brown leather chair.

I shift nervously on the couch opposite him, studying the diplomas and family photos on the mahogany desk behind him. “I’ve been good, Dr. Burton, until recently. I’m sure you’ve seen the news about the two men who were brutally murdered last week.”

“I have.” He nods.

“It has stirred up a lot of bad memories,” I say, fiddling with my hands.

“How are things with Oliver?” he asks.

I stare at him momentarily. Dr. Burton is a handsome and distinguished man in his late 50s. The little bit of hair he has left is snow white, accentuating his piercing blue eyes, framed by wrinkles and deep laugh lines. “Things with Oliver are perfect.”

“I’m happy to hear that.”

“I feel like I’m being watched, Dr. Burton. ”

“Explain to me why you feel that way now. You said the same thing when you first came to see me, and I thought we resolved it.”

“It’s always been there, but I manage it. The recent murders with similarities to Brian’s has been very unsettling. I’m beginning to think it might be the same person—the one who murdered my husband and left me for dead.”

“These men that were killed. They were the husbands of your firm’s clients, correct?”

“Yes.”

“All divorce cases?” His brow arches.

“Yes. Both women were divorcing their husbands because they found out they were cheating,” I say, staring out the window.

“And the wives are not suspects?” he asks.

“No. They both have alibis. The police don’t have anything on anyone yet.”

“I saw on the news that the only connection between the murders is that both men cheated,” he says. “If that’s the case, the person who murdered those men isn’t the same person who attacked you and Brian back in Rockstead. Brian never cheated on you, did he?”

“No.” I shake my head. “He would never have done that to me.”

Dr. Burton’s head cocks. “So why is the feeling you’re being watched back into play?”

“It never fully went away. I always felt it in the back of my mind, but I was able to keep it there. Now, after recent events, it’s back with a vengeance.”

“You said the feeling started when you turned sixteen, yes?”

“That’s right. ”

“Describe the feeling to me.” He pushes his pen to his notepad.

“I—I don’t know how to describe it. When the feeling hits, I scan my surroundings multiple times but never see anyone or anything strange. Yet, I swear I can feel a pair of eyes burning into the back of my head. I sound crazy. I know.”

“It’s obvious the murders have opened the door to your own past trauma. Considering everything you’ve been through, those fears are not uncommon to rush back. I’m going to write you a prescription for Risperidone. It’ll help with the paranoid feelings and anxiety.”

“I hate taking medication, Dr. Burton.”

“I know. But it’s only temporary.” He glances at his watch. “I’m afraid our time is up. I want to see you weekly. Stop at the reception desk before you leave, and Beth will schedule your appointments.” He rips the script from his pad and hands it to me.

The pharmacist told me my prescription would be ready in about fifteen minutes, so I browsed around the store. I stop in the aisle where the pregnancy tests are and stare at them. I wish I had a reason to pick one up, but I started my period last night. I want nothing more than to have a child with Oliver. Brian and I used to talk about kids all the time. I wanted to start trying, but he wanted to wait another year. I never understood why, and he never offered an explanation.

It’s been twenty minutes, so I return to the pharmacy and get my medication. I climb into the back of the cab, and the driver takes me home. Unlocking the door, I can’t wait to talk to Oliver, but I am quickly disappointed when I walk in, and the house is empty. I pull out my phone and send him a text.

Hi. I'm home. You're not.

I set my phone on the island, grab a bottle of wine, and pour some into a glass. Fifteen minutes have passed, and still not a word from Oliver. I walk into the living room and sink into the leather couch. My eyes go directly to the painting—Eyes Without a Face. The invisible gaze from the painting seems to burn a hole in my mind, as if the eyes of a predator are boring into me, watching and waiting for the right moment to strike.

“You are being ridiculous, Kat,” I mumble. “There is no way on this planet the person who murdered those men is the same person who launched his attack on Brian and me—no possible way. That happened years ago and states away.” I try to reason with myself.

I look at my phone again. Still no message from Oliver. It's been forty-five minutes, and I'm freaking out. Suddenly, I hear the handle to the front door turn and footsteps enter the foyer. I jump up from the couch. Oliver is taking off his coat and hanging it on the coat rack in the corner when I see him.

“What the hell, Oliver?” I snap. “Where were you?”

“I'm sorry, darling. I was stuck in a meeting downtown.”

“And you couldn't bother to tell me? I've been worried sick about you—like you were in an accident or, worse, murdered.”

“I'm sorry, Kat. My phone died right before I entered the meeting. I had nowhere to charge it. I'm going to plug it in right now.” His lips meet mine. I follow him into the kitchen. “I'm sorry I made you worry. Did you cook dinner?”

“No. I've only been home for forty-five minutes. I had to stop at the pharmacy and

get my prescription filled.”

“What prescription?” His brows furrow.

“I saw Dr. Burton today, and he put me on something to help me relax. Those men who were murdered drugged up some bad things.”

His arms wrap around me, and I lay my head on his shoulder, feeling the safety I always do when he’s near me.

“I figured that would happen,” he says, holding me tight. “We need not look into the past, but only into the future. You’re safe, darling. I will never let anything happen to you.”

“I know you won’t.” My arms around him tighten.

### Chapter Nine

#### TWO WEEKS LATER

I get out of the shower, wrap a fluffy white towel around my body, and walk into the bedroom to figure out today's outfit.

Grabbing my navy blue pantsuit from the closet, I lay it across the bed, staring at the empty side where Oliver lays. He was on an overnight business trip to Chicago and would return later this evening. Thank God, it was only for one night because my paranoia about being watched was in full swing.

I called Dr. Burton a few days ago and told him I felt the meds were making my paranoia worse. He told me to stop taking it, and we'd talk at my next visit.

I turn on the TV in the bedroom. I like to listen to the news while getting ready for the day.

I was putting on my makeup in the bathroom when I heard the breaking news.

“Multi-millionaire Steven Calloway of Calloway Industries was found murdered in his office last night by twenty-two stab wounds to the chest and abdomen.”

My stomach twists as I run to the toilet and hover over it, tossing up the coffee I drank. My phone rings. I wipe my mouth with a tissue and toss it in the toilet, pushing the handle down. Samantha is calling when I reach for my phone on the nightstand.

“Hello.”

“Oh my God, Kat. Did you hear?” She sounds shaken.

“I just saw the news.” I place my hand on my belly.

My knees feel like they’re going to give out, so I sit on the edge of the bed.

“I can’t believe this. What is happening?”

“I don’t know, Samantha. Listen, I’ll talk to you at the office. I’m running late.”

“Okay. I’ll see you there.”

I dial Oliver’s number and wait for him to answer. I was sure he was up by now. It goes to voicemail after the third ring, so I leave a voice message.

“I just saw on the news my client’s husband was murdered last night. I really need you, Oliver.”

I end the call and get ready for work.

When I arrive at my office, I notice a woman sitting in one of the chairs across from my desk.

“Can I help you?” I step into my office.

“Mrs. Tate?” The attractive woman stands. “I’m Detective Paige Walker.” She extends her hand.

“It’s nice to meet you, Detective Walker.” I lightly shake her hand and sit behind my

desk. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm sure you heard about Mr. Calloway's murder last night."

"I have." I nod.

"Mrs. Calloway is your client, correct?"

"Yes, she is."

"Did you ever hear her make a threat against her husband?" she asks .

I recall that day a couple of weeks ago when she told me that she'd kill him before she'd let him have the Hampton house, but I can't tell the detective that. Besides, there is no way that Britney Calloway could have murdered her husband. He was a big guy and towered over her.

"No. She never made any threats against him. Does she have an alibi?"

"Yes, and it checked out. She was having dinner with a friend last night. But something isn't sitting right with me."

"Like what?" My brows furrowed.

"I don't know. I can't quite put my finger on it." She stands from her chair and hands me a small rectangular card. "This is my number. Please call me if you can think of anything that might help with this case."

I took the card from her and stared at it. I wonder if I should tell her about Brian and how he was stabbed to death twenty-two times like the three other men. I decided against it because I didn't want to be involved in any way, shape or form.

She walks to the door, and I call out her name.

“Detective Walker?”

“Yes?” She sharply turns and looks at me.

“The news said he was stabbed twenty-two times like the other two men.”

“That is correct.”

“Why twenty-two times?” I ask.

“I don’t know, Mrs. Tate. It seems like the number 22 has some meaning for this psychopath. Thank you again for speaking with me.” She walks out.

An hour later, my phone rings and startles me. I look down to see Oliver is calling. By this time, I’m pissed.

“Where the hell have you been?” I seethe.

“I was in a meeting, closing a deal. You know damn well I’m here on business, Kat. I listened to your voice message. I’m so sorry. I wish I had been there. I’m on my way to the airport now. I’ll stop by your office before I head to mine.”

“Don’t bother. I have an appointment with Dr. Burton in a couple of hours.”

“You’re angry with me,” he says.

No shit, Sherlock.

“I am a little bit. I very rarely call you when you’re away. And if I do, you know it

has to be important. What if there was an emergency?"

"I know, and I'm sorry. From now on, no matter what, I'll pick up."

His answer didn't satisfy me. "I have to go. I have a client waiting for me," I lie.

"I love you, Katherine. I'll see you later."

"I love you, too." I end the call and place my face in my hands.

### Chapter Ten

#### DETECTIVE PAIGE WALKER

I throw my phone on my desk and sink into my chair. Steven Calloway is the third victim to die of twenty-two stab wounds in this city.

“Why twenty-two?” I turn to my partner, Elijah. “I mean...I know the repeated number has some personal significance, but what?”

His shoulder raises. “It could be anything.”

“We know the victims have one thing in common: they were cheating on their wives and in the middle of a divorce, which the wives initiated because of their husband’s infidelity. Attorneys in the same law firm represent the women, but the women have air-tight alibis.”

“All three cases are connected,” Elijah says. “We’re dealing with a serial killer—a killer who knows about these women and their cheating husbands. None of the women share the same circle of friends, but someone knows their business.”

“You mean the people who work at Reynolds, Burns & Nelson?”

“That’s exactly who I mean.” He picks up his coffee mug and tips it to his lips. “I think someone at that law firm has it out for men who cheat.”

“The thought crossed my mind,” I say. “Let’s go talk to Arti and see what he found.”

I grab my phone and stand up.

We went to the morgue and pushed open the double steel doors.

“Detective Walker. Detective Matthews. I was just going to call you.”

“Hey, Arti. What did you find?” I stare at Mr. Calloway’s dead body lying on the cold steel table.

“As suspected, traces of M99 were found in his system like the others before he was stabbed to death. Injected right here.” He points to the side of Mr. Calloway’s neck. “It’s really a form of torture because the drug immobilizes the victim, and they can’t move but are entirely aware of their surroundings. The killer ensures the right amount is given based on body size. Because Mr. Calloway here is a larger man than the other two victims, he received a larger dose.”

“So, are we talking about a doctor? A med student?” I ask.

“Perhaps. Or maybe a veterinarian,” Arti says. “I know you can buy the stuff on the black market. So, technically, it could be anyone.”

“Thanks, Arti.” Elijah smiles.

“Yeah. Thanks, Arti.”

We leave the morgue and step outside.

“Let’s check and see if the three victims maybe saw the same doctor and if there’s any connection between the wives and doctors,” I say. “Also, we need to find out where M99 can be bought on the black market.”

“I have an informant who might know,” Elijah says. “I’ll go check with him now.”

“Okay. I’m going back to Calloway’s office.”

I ease into my car, the leather seats hugging my body as I press the button, and the ignition starts. My fingers drum against the steering wheel to the beat of my anxious thoughts as I steer toward 137 West 25 th Street. As I arrive and take the elevator up to the eleventh floor, a sense of foreboding settles in my stomach. When I reach Mr. Calloway’s office, it is sealed off with bright yellow tape, like a warning sign. I lift the tape and walk under it. The forensic team is still here, combing for evidence.

“Find anything, Ben?” I ask.

“Nothing, Paige. This crime scene is just as clean as the others. We do know that he was murdered while sitting in his chair.”

“Arti, the medical examiner, says that M99 was found in his system via injection to the neck like the others.”

Ben looks around and points. “That closet over there.”

“What about it?”

“If the victim was sitting in his chair with his back turned, someone could have been hiding in that closet, snuck up from behind, and injected him.”

“So it had to be someone who knew he was working late last night,” I say.

“Did you interrogate the mistress?” Ben asks.

“Elijah did, but I’m heading over to her place now. Thanks, Ben.”

“Anytime, Paige.”

“By the way,” I turn and look at him, “don’t mention anything about the M99. We’re keeping it out of the press for now.”

“My lips are sealed.”

### Chapter Eleven

KAT

After my appointment with Dr. Burton, I headed home to work instead of returning to the office. Considering the circumstances of the day, my boss, Carter, told me he thought it was a good idea.

I quickly stopped at the pharmacy and turned in my prescription. The pharmacist apologized and told me their system had been down all day, that they were significantly behind in filling people's medications, and that mine wouldn't be ready until tomorrow. I graciously thanked him and left the store. One day didn't matter.

I arrive home, unsure if Oliver is home. I'm still mad at him for not picking up this morning. I insert my key into the lock, push open the door, and drop my purse and bag next to the sofa table. Walking into the kitchen, I see a large vase on the island filled with two dozen red roses and a small white envelope leaning against the vase with my name on it.

My darling Kat.

I'm sorry about earlier.

I hate it when you're mad at me .

Forgive me? I'll be home

around six o'clock, and we're

going out to dinner tonight.

I love you so much.

Love,

Your loving husband

I lean in to smell the roses, their alluring scent filling the kitchen. The petals are soft against my fingertips as I deftly touch them. Red roses are my favorite. Red has always been number one on my favorite colors list. Most little girls love the color pink—not me, though. It was always about the color red.

As a child, my parents refused to let me paint my entire room red but agreed to compromise with one accent wall. The deep crimson color contrasted against the white walls and made the room feel bold and vibrant. My bed was adorned with a white comforter embellished with tiny red hearts, perfectly matching the tufted red headboard. Long, flowing red curtains framed the window, making it a cozy nook for me to spend my days dreaming and playing.

Oliver isn't a fan of red but compromised to let me paint the accent wall in our half-bathroom red.

I grab my phone and send Oliver a text.

Thank you for the beautiful roses. I love them.

You're welcome, darling. Am I forgiven?

You are. I'll show you how much I forgive you after dinner tonight.

I can hardly wait. Love you.

Love you too.

I pick up my wine glass, grab my bag from the foyer, and enter the living room. I toss my bag on the couch and walk over to the painting that caught my attention again—Eyes Without a Face. I stare at the various eyes staring back at me as if they are silently screaming for help. I turn and sit on the couch, pulling case files from my bag that I must work on.

My phone rings on the coffee table. I reach over and pick it up, only to find that Britney Calloway is calling.

“Britney, I was going to call you. I’m so sorry.”

“I appreciate it, Kat, but I’m not. That homicidal maniac did me a favor. I was out to dinner with friends because Steven was supposed to be packing and moving out. But when I arrived home, I saw his things were still there and figured he was with his whore. Do you think something is wrong with me because I haven’t shed a tear?”

“No, Britney. I don’t. Everyone handles grief differently,” I say. “I’m sure you’re still in shock.”

“I’m really not. As I said. That homicidal maniac did me a favor.”

I inhale a breath. Maybe this woman was crazy after all.

“I have to go,” she says. “I just wanted to thank you for helping me with the divorce. Now, we no longer have to worry about it, do we?”

“No, we don’t.” My brows furrow.

“I’ll talk to you soon, Kat. Enjoy the rest of your evening.”

“You too, Britney.”

I hear the front door open. Jumping off the couch, I run to the foyer and wrap my arms around Oliver.

“I’m happy you’re home.”

“Me too.” His lips press against the top of my head.

After we arrive home from dinner, I kick off my shoes and go into the living room while Oliver pours us a drink. We sit on the couch, his arm wrapped around me and my head on his shoulder.

“Dinner was wonderful. Thank you,” I say.

“It was. Wasn’t it? Now, I believe you told me earlier that you would show me how much you forgive me.”

I lift my head and smile at the playful smirk across his lips. I brush mine against his, and his fingers unbutton my blouse. His lips trail the side of my neck and then stop.

“What’s wrong?” I ask.

“That painting is watching us.” He stands, grabs a blanket from the corner, and tosses it over the painting. “There. Nobody is going to watch me make love to my wife.”

### Chapter Twelve

#### DAHLIA

##### Before

I'm five years old, crouched in the living room corner, my knees to my chest and arms hugging them. My mother is shouting at my father. She knows I'm in the corner and doesn't care. She doesn't send me to my room. My father admits to the affair.

"How long has it been going on?" my mother demands.

"Twenty-two months." My father runs his hand through his dark hair.

"Twenty-two months!" she screams. "You've been cheating on me for twenty-two months?" She pounds her fists on his chest. He grabs her wrists to stop her.

"Calm down, Renee."

"Don't you dare tell me to calm down!" she shouts, breaking from his grip.

He paces the room, unaware I'm in the corner. I'm partially hidden on the side of a large wooden bookcase. "Things haven't been good with us for a long time. You know that!" he shouts .

"So instead of talking about it, you go out and find someone else?"

“I tried to tell you multiple times I wasn’t happy anymore, and you ignored me. But now that you found out, it’s time for me to leave. I’ll contact my attorney in the morning and start divorce proceedings.”

With his back turned, my mother ran out of the room and into the kitchen. Within seconds, she returns, holding a large black-handled kitchen knife.

“Bill?” she says.

He turns around, his face contorted in fear. She lunges forward, the sharp blade glinting in the dim light as she thrusts it into his stomach and twists it before pulling it out. Her once loving eyes were now cold and dark with rage.

My father stumbles back and falls to the ground, gasping for air. She stands over him, her hand clutching the bloody knife as she repeatedly stabs him, each strike accompanied by a thud. I cower in the corner, my heart racing as I count each brutal stab wound inflicted on my father's body as blood pools underneath him.

“One stab wound for each month you were screwing around behind my back!” my mother shouts.

Stab number twenty-two. She realizes he’s dead and leaves the knife buried in his chest. She stares over at me, cowering in the corner, tears streaming from my eyes.

“Your father did an evil thing, and he needed to suffer the consequences. All men who cheat on their wives or girlfriends behind their backs need to be punished for their sins. They need to be punished. Do you understand me?”

I slowly nod, my frightened eyes staring into hers.

She walks over to where her phone sits on the table. She dials a number and puts it on

speaker.

“911. How can I help you? ”

“My husband is dead. Can you please send someone to my home?”

“Ma’am, what happened to your husband?”

“He’s lying on the living room floor with multiple stab wounds.”

“I’m dispatching the police and an ambulance. Are you safe?”

“Yes. I am now,” she says.

“Ma’am, do you know who could have done that to your husband?”

“Yes. It was me. I murdered him.”

I look at my sister, Katherine. I didn’t know what the future held for us, but it was my job to protect her now.”

### Chapter Thirteen

KAT

One Month Later

The police still haven't found the person responsible for those men's deaths. They aren't any closer than when the murders took place. Just like they never found who murdered Brian and tried to kill me.

Over the past month, most of our divorce cases were because of irreconcilable differences. Cheating wasn't mentioned. I was sure the men in this city were being extra careful because they were afraid.

"Do you think they'll ever find the person who committed those murders?" Samantha twirls her fork around the spaghetti noodles on her plate.

I invited her over for dinner and a girls' night since Oliver was out of town again.

"I hope so," I say, picking up my wine glass.

"This spaghetti is amazing. I know I shouldn't have another helping because of the carbs, but it's too good not to." She smiles.

"I'm happy you like it. "

After cleaning up, we refill our wine glasses and enter the living room. Samantha

walks over to the painting in the corner and studies it.

“This is the creepiest painting I think I’ve ever seen. Why on earth would you buy this?”

“Honestly, I don’t know. Oliver isn’t a fan and has repeatedly suggested we move it into one of the guestrooms.”

“I agree with him. I feel like these eyes are staring into my soul.” She shudders and sits on the couch. “I’d feel like I’m always being watched if that painting was in my home.”

She has no idea.

“Oh, did Oliver give you those?” She points to the mantle above the fireplace at the white vase filled with a dozen red roses.

“He did.” I smile.

“Apology roses?” Her brow arches. Nothing gets past Samantha.

“Yeah.” I bite my bottom lip. “He didn’t get home until one a.m. the other night.”

“Why? What was he doing?”

“He has a new client, and this guy is a total asshole. He’s one of those jerks who thinks the world revolves around him because he’s a billionaire. When he comes to town for meetings, Oliver has to entertain him, which I don’t mind. I get it. But it doesn’t mean he needs to keep my husband out until one a.m.”

“And where did Mr. Tate jet off to this time?” she asks, tipping her wine glass to her

lips.

“Chicago again. The firm opened an office there and told him he must fly there every other week for a couple of days. He’ll be home tomorrow night.”

“I would hate it if Travis traveled like that. He only goes on the occasional business trip, and I usually tag along. You should go with Oliver the next time he goes to Chicago. Have some fun together. I’m sure he’s not working twenty-four hours while there.”

“Yeah. Maybe I will.” I smile. “The firm rented an apartment for him while he’s there. I’d love to see what it looks like.”

“Then it’s settled. You tell him that you’re going with him next time. Just tell Carter you’re taking a couple of days off.”

I give her a simple smile. Samantha and I have been friends since the first day I started at the law firm. I can ask her anything, and she won’t judge me.

“Do you ever feel like you’re being watched?” I ask.

A perplexed look crosses her face. “What do you mean?”

“Do you ever feel like someone is watching you? If you’re walking down the street, do you ever feel someone is following and watching your every move?”

“I can’t say I have. Do you?” Her brows furrow.

“Sometimes.” I tip the wine glass to my lips.

“Well, I’m not surprised, considering that painting is in your home.” She points and

then glances at her watch. “I didn’t realize what time it was. I have to get home and prepare for court tomorrow.” We walk into the foyer, where she grabs her purse from the table. “Thank you for dinner. It was wonderful.” She hugs me.

“Thanks for coming over and keeping me company. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

My feet move along the crowded sidewalk, my eyes darting back and forth as I search for the source of the prickling sensation at the back of my neck. People bustle around me, their faces alert, but no one seems to be paying me any attention. Yet I can't shake the feeling that I’m being watched, a sense of someone’s eyes following my every move.

I pick up the pace and stand in the Conservatory Gardens in Central Park. The sun is shining, and the heat is stifling. The flowers should be in full bloom this time of year, but they’re not. They’re wilted, brown, and dead. I couldn't help but bend down and run my finger across the lifeless blooms, feeling the crunchiness of their decay beneath my fingertips. The hairs on my neck stand up for someone is behind me, watching. When I slowly turn my head, I gasp at the pair of eyes staring back at me—Eyes Without a Face.

My eyes fly open as my fingers are gripping the sheets. My heart is pounding out of my chest, and I’m drenched in sweat. Sitting up, I reach over and turn on the lamp, taking in several deep breaths the way Dr. Burton taught me. I wish Oliver were here. If there was ever a time I needed him, it was now.

I climb out of bed and flip the light switch in the bathroom. Turning on the cold water, I splash some on my face and stare at myself in the mirror.

“It was only a dream, Kat,” I whisper.

The following morning, when I reach the bottom step, my eyes instantly go to the

painting in the corner of the living room. Lately, having the painting in the house is making things worse for me, heightening my paranoia. So I walk over to the easel, grab the painting, take it to the curb, and lay it next to the trash bin. Thank God today is garbage day. I never want to see that painting again.

### Chapter Fourteen

#### DAHLIA

##### Before

She deserves better than him. I wish she would open her eyes and see him for what he truly is. But she's always been oblivious to things.

I follow him and Julia Freemont to Kelly's Diner. He texted Katherine after school and told her he had to cancel their plans because he was sick. She bought his story and offered to bring him some chicken soup—stupid girl. I knew he was lying. Just like he lied the five other times he canceled their date.

They're seated at a booth in front of the window. I stand on the corner across the street and watch. It's cold out, and light snow is falling. I keep my hands tucked inside my coat pockets to keep them warm. I should have worn gloves.

They're laughing, and Julia rests her hand on his, their fingers intertwined. The server walks over and sets down their food. He ordered a burger. She ordered chicken fingers. A mountain of golden fries sits between them, waiting to be devoured. He picks one up and tosses it at her. She throws her head back and laughs before picking one up and tossing it at him. It's disgusting. I want to claw his eyes out. He's a cheater and a liar and needs to be punished for his sins.

After they eat, they climb into his blue Ford Focus. I climb into my car and follow them back to Julia's house. He pulls into the driveway five minutes before her

curfew. The street is dark, and my black car blends with the night. I watch as he opens the car door for her and walks her to the porch. He grabs her and pulls her into him for a make out session. He will be punished.

His parents are out of town, which makes this the perfect night to punish him for his sins. I drive to his home, park down the street, climb out of my car, and look around to make sure nobody is around. It's quiet. I need to hurry and get inside before he comes home.

I reach into my bag, pull out the syringe with M99 I scored from some thug in a sketchy part of town, and tuck it into my pocket. I slip the latex gloves over my hands and grab the chef knife I purchased from the thrift store for a dollar. It wasn't very sharp when I bought it, so I took it and had it sharpened.

As I walked around the back of the house, I peered through the sliding door. I knew there was no security system because this neighborhood was very safe. I wouldn't be surprised if people slept with their doors unlocked.

I look down at the ground and pick up a medium-sized rock, smashing it into the glass. The glass cracks, and I can break through it with one elbow push. I reach inside, unlock the sliding door, open it, and step inside. He should be home at any moment.

I'm hiding in the laundry room off the kitchen. He'll enter through the front door, throw his keys down, and walk into the kitchen. At least, that's what I'm hoping for.

The front door opens, and I hear footsteps. My heart is jackhammering in my chest, and adrenaline has overtaken me. I hear his keys hit the table in the foyer and then footsteps walking into the kitchen. Good boy. He flips on the light and opens the refrigerator. I quietly come up from behind and press the thin needle into his neck. He suddenly turns, and his eyes widen when he sees me. In an instant, he's on the

ground, unable to move.

I wave the knife in front of him.

“You’ve been a very bad boy,” I say. “Instead of telling Katherine you don’t want to see her anymore, you’re sneaking around behind her back with that whore Julia.”

His eyes look like they’re going to pop out of his head. I take pleasure in his fear.

“Katherine thinks you’re perfect, but I know the truth. You must suffer the consequences for your sins.” I raise the knife as I stand over him and then plunge it into the flesh of his abdomen—a blank canvas that will shortly consist of twenty-two stab wounds.

I’m careful not to step in any blood and risk leaving a bloody shoe print. I walk over to the sink and wash off the knife, watching the crimson liquid go down the drain. I run upstairs and into his parents’ room, opening drawers and looking for anything of value. It needs to look like a robbery gone wrong.

I find a diamond bracelet, a few pairs of diamond earrings, a Rolex, and an emerald gold ring and stuff them into my pockets. Before I leave, I stop and stare at the lifeless body lying on the kitchen floor. Now, Katherine is free to resume her search for the perfect man.

### Chapter Fifteen

KAT

Present

“Uh, what happened to the painting?” Oliver asks, walking into the living room.

“I threw it out.”

“Threw it out?” His brows furrowed. “Why?”

“Because you were right. It was creepy, and I felt like my paranoia got worse with it being here.”

“I’m happy you realized that, but that painting was very expensive. You could have donated it instead of throwing it in the trash.”

“I just wanted it out of the house as soon as possible, and it was trash day,” I say.

He walks over to the couch and presses his lips against my head. “We can find a better painting to put in its place. I’ll be in my office. I have some work to finish for a meeting tomorrow morning.”

“Okay. Oliver, wait,” I say. “Can you sit for a moment?” I pat the couch.

“Of course. What is it?” He sits beside me .

“When are you going back to Chicago?” I ask.

“In a couple of weeks. Why?”

“I’m going to put in for some time off and go with you.”

“I’m afraid you can’t do that, Kat.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s nothing but non-stop work when I’m in Chicago. I leave early in the morning and don’t return to the apartment until late. We won’t be able to have breakfast or dinner together. You’ll be miserable and then get mad when I can’t spend time with you.”

“That is not true, Oliver.” I cock my head.

“Yes, it is, darling.” His lips press against mine. “I would love nothing more than for you to go with me, but I also know how it would end.” He winks, stands up, and walks out of the living room.

After finishing some work, I go upstairs and get ready for bed. Once I’m in, I grab my book from the nightstand and set it on my lap. Picking up the remote, I turn on the news, featuring the weatherman's forecast for next week. I open my book, where the bookmark lays between the pages, and start reading. Suddenly, my eyes divert up to the TV.

“We have some breaking news this evening. Nolan Brown, from the Tribeca area, was found murdered in his home by his assistant when he didn’t show up for work this morning. He was stabbed twenty-two times in the chest and abdomen. Nolan Brown and his wife were in the middle of a nasty divorce. The police are now calling

this serial killer The Widowmaker.”

My heart jumps out of my chest just as Oliver walks into the bedroom.

“What’s wrong?” he asks, stopping and staring at the TV .

“Oh my God. Nolan Brown? I know him. I just spoke to him last week,” he says in shock.

“His wife is Lucinda’s client,” I try to catch my breath, but it isn’t easy. “He was cheating on his wife.”

“I know.” Oliver removes his clothes, slips on black pajama bottoms, and climbs into bed.

“You knew that?” My brow raises.

“Yes. I saw him with her last week at the Beverly Hills Hotel.”

“Why were you at the Beverly Hills Hotel?” I frown.

“Lunch meeting with Garrett Willoughby from Texas. I can’t believe this.”

“They’re calling the killer The Widowmaker,” I say.

“I sure hope they catch the person.” He leans over and kisses me. “Goodnight, darling. Sweet dreams.”

“Goodnight, Oliver.”

I set my book on the nightstand and settle under the covers. I try to get some sleep,

but I can't. Now, I'm more than convinced this is the same person who attacked me and Brian back in Maine.

### Chapter Sixteen

#### DETECTIVE PAIGE WALKER

“Damn it. We’re missing something,” I say, pacing around the room. “We have to catch this guy before any more cheating men get killed.”

I stare at the pictures of the men’s lifeless bodies on the board. Sticky notes in all colors are plastered all over the white background.

“Maybe this will make men think twice before cheating on their wives,” Elijah says, dipping chopsticks into his carton of beef and broccoli. “I, for one, don’t believe in cheating. If I’m unhappy, I get out of the relationship first before pursuing someone else. But that’s me. You know most men are pigs.” A smirk crosses his lips.

“I do know that.” I sigh. “Is that why you’ve been divorced three times?”

Elijah raises his shoulders. “I get bored. What can I say? But I have never once cheated.”

I roll my eyes and look back at the board. “We have four men who were injected with M99 and inflicted with twenty-two stab wounds. All four men were cheating and in the middle of a divorce, which their wives initiated. All four homes were made to look like break-ins. Jewelry was taken, but so far, nothing has been pawned.” I bring my finger to my chin. “The break-in is staged. No robber goes to rob a house and brings M99 with them. Whoever is doing this is a perfectionist and a strategist. They know precisely when the victims are alone—almost as if he’s watching them first. He

knows exactly where to park where no cameras are on the streets.”

“I don’t think the wives are telling us everything,” Elijah says.

“What do you mean?” I turn and look at him.

“You mentioned that the killer knows when the victims are alone. All the wives had iron-clad alibis. Maybe they hired someone to kill their husbands. Maybe there’s some secret number you can call for cheating husbands. I suppose it wouldn’t be cheap to hire someone like that.”

“We combed through all the couple’s financial statements, and no large cash withdrawals were made. I’m telling you the connection is with that law firm.”

“Did you stop to think that it could be the husband’s lawyers or firms?” he asks.

I stare at him perplexed, wondering how he even made detective in the first place.

“None of the men had the same lawyer or used the same firm,” I say, turning around and staring at the board again.

“I’m still going with the theory that there’s a secret number to call for cheating spouses.”

“You’re an idiot, Elijah.” I sigh and walk out of the room. “Any hits yet on any of the jewelry that was stolen?” I ask Officer Lee.

“Not yet, Paige. You’ll be the first to know if something comes through.”

“Thanks.” I smile and head to my desk.

“Walker, in my office!” Captain Rivera shouts.

I walk in and shut the door.

“Where is Elijah?” he asks.

“In the conference room, being an idiot.”

“The mayor is up my ass about this Widowmaker killer. Tell me you found something, anything.”

“Not yet, captain.”

“Damn it, Walker. You’re one of the best detectives we have. What is the problem?”

“This guy is good, and his crime scenes are meticulous. He leaves behind nothing.” I can feel my blood pressure rise from frustration.

A knock on the door interrupts us.

“What is it?” Captain Rivera shouts.

The door opens, and Officer Lee pops his head in.

“Paige, we got a hit on a piece of jewelry that was just pawned. It’s a pawn shop in Brooklyn.”

“Brooklyn?” My brows furrowed.

“Yeah. The owner just sent a picture. It’s a diamond ring.”

“Thanks, Lee. I have to go, captain. Are we done here?”

“Yeah, we’re done. You better bring me back something we can use to nail this asshole.”

I grab Elijah, and we head to the pawn shop in Brooklyn. Traffic was a bitch, and it took an hour to get there. An hour in the car with Elijah, talking about how he still believes his theory that there’s a murderer for hire phone number.

“Can I help you?” a stocky bald guy asks when we step inside the shop.

I flash my badge. “I’m Detective Walker, and this is Detective Matthews. Someone pawned a diamond ring that was stolen in a homicide case.”

“Yeah. I got it right here.” He grabbed the ring and held it up.

“Who pawned it?” Elijah asked.

“A homeless guy.”

“What?” My brows furrows.

“The guy was a homeless man. He camps with the others a couple of blocks from here in the alley. You can’t miss him. He’s wearing a long, brown, tattered coat and a knit hat with a hole in the back of it.”

“Thank you,” I say, and Elijah and I leave the store.

We walk a couple of blocks until we find the alley where some homeless people call home. I look around for the homeless man in a tattered brown coat and a knit hat with a hole in it, but I only see one man sitting in front of a garbage can, warming his

hands with the roaring fire pouring from it.

“Hey. Have you seen a man in a long, tattered, brown coat and a knit hat with a hole in the back?”

“You mean, Max? Yeah, he’s across the street at the diner.” He points.

“Thank you.” I nod.

We walk across to the diner. When we step inside, Max is sitting in a corner booth. Elijah and I slide into the seat across from him.

“Max?” I ask.

“Who wants to know?” He bites into his large double burger.

“I’m Detective Walker, and this is Detective Matthews. You just pawned a diamond ring at the pawn shop a couple of blocks from here.”

“Yeah? So? ”

“Where did you get the ring?” Elijah asks.

“I found it.”

“Where?” I ask.

“I woke up this morning, and it was lying on the ground next to me. I’m not the only one, though.”

“What do you mean?” My brows furrow.

“There was a bunch of jewelry scattered around all of us. We each got a piece of the pie.” A piece of burger flew out of his mouth and hit Elijah in the face. It took everything I had not to burst out into laughter. “We all split up and hit different pawn shops.”

That’s why there was nobody around the alley except that one man. My phone rings. Pulling it from my pocket, it’s Officer Lee calling.

“What do you have, Lee?” I answer.

“Jewelry is being pawned all over Brooklyn,” he says.

“That’s because it was dumped around homeless people. Thanks for letting me know.” I end the call and turn my attention back to Max. “So you didn’t see or hear anything last night?”

“Nothing. I woke up, and the ring was lying there, so I pawned it. A good meal is hard to come by these days.”

“Okay.” I slide out of the booth. “Thank you for your time.”

Elijah and I leave the diner. “So our Widowmaker is giving to the poor? Like he’s some kind of Robin Hood.” Elijah’s brow arches.

“It’s not about the money. He has no interest in the jewelry or what it costs. He only takes the items to make it seem like a robbery after he murders them. It’s all about the cheating. He’s punishing the men for cheating. Or should I say she?”

### Chapter Seventeen

DAHLIA

Before

I thought Kat had found the perfect man this time after moving to Rockstead. Brian Grisham was cute. He worked in construction and had the muscles of a God. The town envied them. They were the perfect couple—always smiling and happy and not shy about showing public affection. Brian loved Kat. I do believe that. But his love for her wasn't enough to keep him from finding comfort in the arms of another woman.

Bastard.

How could he do that to her?

He needs to be punished for his sins. His fate was determined the moment he cheated on her.

Yes, Katherine will be devastated, but she'll survive. She'll rebuild her life and continue her search for the perfect man. Hopefully, when she does, I won't have to kill him.

### Chapter Eighteen

KAT

Present

“I can’t believe Oliver wouldn’t let you go with him to Chicago,” Samantha says, sitting in the chair across from my desk.

“I know. I’m still a little upset about it.”

“It doesn’t matter if he’s busy all day or not.” She shakes her head. “The point is that you’d be together at night. You don’t think he’s cheating on you, do you?”

Hearing her words made me gasp. Why would she even ask that?

“No. Oliver would never cheat on me in a million years.” My tone is snippy.

“I don’t think he would either, but it doesn’t make sense why he wouldn’t let you go with him.”

“It’s because he’ll feel bad not being able to spend a lot of time with me. It’s not like he goes there for vacation.”

“You’re right.” She smiles. “Oliver loves you to death and would never betray you like that.”

Damn right, he wouldn't .

Samantha glances at her watch before standing from her chair. "I have a client coming in soon. I'll talk to you later."

"See ya." I smiled.

I won't lie and say that somewhere in the back of my mind, the idea of Oliver cheating on me doesn't float around because it does. But I know him inside and out and how demanding his job is. I pick up my phone and dial his number. He answers on the first ring.

"Is it important, Kat? I'm in the middle of an important meeting."

"No. I just wanted to tell you that I miss you."

"I miss you too. We'll talk later." The other end goes silent.

"Excuse me, Kat?" My secretary pops her head inside my office. "There's someone here to see you."

"Send them in," I say, looking back at my computer.

The man steps inside my office, and when I look up, it's Mark, Cindy's husband, from back in Rockstead.

"Mark? Oh my goodness." I stand from my chair and walk over to him. "What are you doing here?" We hug.

"It's good to see you, Kat."

“It’s good to see you, too. Have a seat.” I gesture. “How’s Cindy?”

“She’s the reason why I’m here. There’s something you need to know.” He shifts in his seat, and his nervousness startles me.

“Okay. What is it?”

“Brian and Cindy were having an affair before....well, you know.”

“Excuse me?” My brows furrow. “How do you know?”

“I was looking for an old fishing rod of mine a couple of weeks ago for a friend, and I found a small box hidden way back in the closet. I opened it and found her old phone. Not too long after Brian died, she told me she lost her phone and had to get a new one.”

“I don’t understand, Mark.”

“I couldn’t for the life of me figure out why she lied and stored the phone in the closet. So, I took it to work with me and charged it up. There were tons of pictures of them together in bed at a hotel outside of town. And then there were the text messages—mostly sexting, but there were a number of ‘I miss and love you’ texts, too.”

It felt like I had been stabbed all over again, and the killer was twisting the knife into my gut.

“I confronted her, and she admitted it. They had been carrying on for six months. That’s why, after what happened to you and Brian, she pushed for you to leave Rockstead. She couldn’t look at you anymore, knowing what they had done. She says she’s ashamed, but I don’t believe her. I hired an attorney and filed for divorce. I’m

really sorry, Kat.”

My heart was thumping rapidly, and nausea swept over me.

“I know how much you loved Brian, but I wanted you to know that he wasn’t the perfect man you thought he was. You never looked through his phone after?”

“His phone was missing and never found,” I say. “Thank you for letting me know, Mark, but it doesn’t matter. I’m happily married and have a great life. Brian was my past, and that’s where he’s staying.”

“I get it, and I’m happy for you, Kat. Again, I’m sorry to come here and tell you. But you had a right to know.”

I walked him out of my office, said goodbye, and ran to the bathroom and vomited.

I grip the edge of the sink and stare at myself in the mirror as a single tear falls from my eye. I thought Cindy was my friend. After Brian was murdered, she took it hard—really hard. I didn’t think much of it at the time because I was grieving. But looking back, she acted like it was her husband who died, and she was the grieving widow. Yet, she took me in and let me stay in her guestroom. She helped me pack the entire house and Brian’s things. She was never my friend. She was just playing the role. I run back into the stall and vomit again.

### Chapter Nineteen

The sounds of screeching tires and crunching metal fill the air as I peer out the window, trying to assess the situation that a massive pile-up is standing between me and my destination. We were trapped in a gridlock of idling cars. Horns were honking, people were throwing their arms out the window, and some were shouting obscenities.

My heart sank when I checked my watch and saw that I only had fifteen minutes until my appointment with Dr. Burton.

“Is there any way you can navigate around this mess?” I plead with the cab driver.

“Look around, lady. Does it look like I can move an inch?”

Dr. Burton’s office is only two walkable blocks from where we are gridlocked. Pulling some cash from my wallet, I hand it to the driver.

“I’ll get out here. Thank you.”

“Suit yourself,” he says.

I pull my coat tighter, trying to shield myself from the biting wind that whips through the city streets. My heart pounds with nerves and dread as I make my way to Dr. Burton's office. Every few steps, I look over my shoulder, convinced I'm being followed. The wind is fierce today and muffles the bustling sounds of the city. All I can hear are my own footsteps and those of the strangers passing by. Yet, I still look

over my shoulder every few steps.

“Thank you for seeing me on such short notice,” I tell Dr. Burton as I take off my coat and sit on the couch.

“You sounded very frantic on the phone. What happened?”

“Do you remember when I first came to see you a few years ago and I told you about my friends Mark and Cindy?”

“Yes. Didn’t they take you into their home after the break-in?” he asks.

“Yes. And Cindy was the one who helped me pack my entire house up. Anyway, Mark came to see me today at my office and told me something awful.”

“What did he tell you?”

“That Cindy and Brian were having a six-month affair before he was murdered. After Brian was killed, Cindy told Mark she lost her phone and needed to get a new one. Mark found her old phone hidden in the back of their closet with pictures of Cindy and Brian in bed together and multiple text messages—some sexting and some I love and miss you.”

“Katherine, I’m sorry. You had no idea that your husband was having an affair?”

“No. None at all. I still can’t believe it. What am I going to do, Dr. Burton?”

“You’re going to have to process your feelings. Listen, Katherine. I know you’re extremely hurt right now over this revelation, which is to be expected. Your feelings are valid. But you have a new life now. You cannot let what happened in your old life affect your new one. You’re happily married and have a rewarding career. Those are

the two things you need to focus on, not the past. Your first husband left you alone twice, once in grief and now in betrayal. Do not make it so you're forced to be alone again. Because if you start obsessing over Brian's affair, it will cause problems with your current husband. So, take some time to process it, go through the stages, and then lock it away in the back of your mind and never give attention to it again. Do not let what Brian did hold power over you. You're stronger than that."

I carefully listen to Dr. Burton and realize he's right. What hurts the most is how stupid I am that I didn't see the signs. Or maybe Brian was just that careful.

"Thank you, Dr. Burton." I manage a soft smile.

I walk out of his office. The moment my feet hit the pavement outside the building, a feeling rushes over me, and I hit the ground.

### Chapter Twenty

I can feel soft fingers stroking my hand. Opening my eyes, I struggle to focus amidst the blinding overhead lights and the pounding that's going on in my head. Oliver is sitting in a chair by my bedside, holding my hand.

“You’re awake. Darling, I was so worried.”

“Oliver? What are you doing here?”

“The hospital called, and I got on the first flight back to New York. You have no idea how worried I was.”

“What happened?”

“You fainted on the street and hit your head on the cement. I spoke to the doctor, and he said that your blood sugar was a little low but not enough to make you pass out.”

“Then why did I?”

“The doctor isn’t sure. How are you feeling?” His thumb softly stroked my forehead.

“Okay, other than the disco dance party going on in my head.”

“You’re lucky you didn’t need stitches. ”

“I can’t believe you came back from your business trip early,” I say, staring into his

handsome eyes.

“Why wouldn’t I? You’re my wife, and you had an accident. I’m so relieved you’re okay.” His lips press against my forehead. “As I said earlier, you have no idea how worried I was.”

“You can relax. I’m fine, Oliver.” I lift my hand and place it on his cheek. “I’m going to close my eyes for a while.”

“Go ahead. I’ll be here when you wake up.” He takes my hand from his cheek and presses his lips against my palm.

I close my eyes, letting the darkness soothe my aching head. I’m not going to tell Oliver about Mark’s visit earlier. The last thing I want is for him to worry about me. He’s already doing that and doesn’t need any more reasons. Dr. Burton was right. I am strong. I am a survivor, and I will get through this. That chapter of my life is closed, and closed is how it’ll stay.

As Oliver leads me through the front door, the warmth of my home envelopes me. In the kitchen, I spot a glittering gold vase proudly displaying a dozen long-stemmed red roses, filling the air with their sweet fragrance.

“Oliver, they’re beautiful. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. They’re beautiful like you are, darling. Let’s go upstairs, change into your pajamas, and get you into bed. You heard what the doctor said. You need to rest.”

“Can you bring the roses up to the bedroom?” I ask.

“Of course. ”

I settled in for the rest of the night, reading the book I should have finished by now. Oliver is downstairs working in his office. I glance over at the bottle of medication the doctor gave me to help me sleep. I open the bottle, shake the tiny white pill into my hand, grab my phone, and text Oliver.

I just took a pill and am going to sleep. I love you.

I love you too, darling. I'll be up in a little bit. Good night.

I settle under the covers, my head snuggled against the pillow. Before I knew it, I was out.

### Chapter Twenty-One

I wake the following morning, unaware of what the day will bring. Opening my eyes, I place my arm over my forehead. With a slight turn of my head, I glance at the space next to me. Oliver's side of the bed was still made—like he didn't come to bed last night.

I stumble out of bed, slip my feet into my black slippers, and put on my robe.

“Oliver?” I say, walking down the stairs.

No answer.

As I step into the foyer, my heart races. Shock and horror course through me as I see my husband, my love, lying motionless on his back in a pool of dark crimson blood, staining the pristine marble floor of our foyer. The only thing I could manage was a high-pitched, piercing scream as tears poured from my eyes.

“Oliver!” I scream, running over to him, checking for a pulse, but there isn't one. He's gone, dead, and once again, my life has trapped me in another hellish nightmare. I try to stand, but my legs are like Jello. I stumble back and hit the console table, gripping the edge for support. I run up the stairs and grab my phone, dialing 911.

“911. What's your emergency?”

“My husband is dead! I scream into the phone. “Someone murdered him!”

I'm shaking so badly that I feel like I'm going to pass out again.

"Ma'am, I'm sending someone to your home right now. Is anyone else in the house?"

"No," I can barely speak, wiping my tears with the back of my hand. "I have to go." I end the call and lay down on the bed, staring at the ceiling while the taste of bile rises in the back of my throat. I struggle to hold back the vomit, threatening to escape. I fly off the bed and race into the bathroom, lifting the toilet lid and hovering over it. I stay like that for at least ten minutes, and then the doorbell rings.

I stumble down the stairs and close my eyes as I pass by my husband's lifeless body. Opening the door, I see Detective Walker. Instantly, I step onto the porch and fall into her arms, sobbing like a lunatic while the other officers step inside the house.

"Shh. It's okay." She tries to console me.

"Walker, you need to see this," one of the other officers says from inside the house.

"Come on, Mrs. Tate." She leads me back inside the house, shielding my eyes from my husband's body and over to the couch in the living room. "Hank, can you please stay with her?"

"Of course, Detective Walker."

A few moments later, Detective Walker walks over, sits beside me, and takes hold of my hand.

"Can you tell me what happened here?" she asks.

"I don't know." I'm shaking. "I woke up this morning and noticed he didn't come to bed last night. I found him when I came downstairs. Oh God," I sob.

“The lock on the front door is broken,” one of the officers says. “It looks like a break-in.”

“Do you know what your husband was doing last night when you went to bed?” Detective Walker asks.

“He was in his office working.”

“And you didn’t hear a sound the entire night?”

“No.” I shake my head. “I took a pill last night before I went to sleep. It knocked me out.”

“What kind of pill did you take?”

“I forgot what it’s called. I fainted on the street yesterday and hit my head. I was in the hospital for most of the day. One of the doctors who saw me prescribed it.”

“Can I see the bottle?”

“It’s on my nightstand upstairs.”

“Hank, go up to the primary bedroom and bring me her bottle of pills. Make sure to put gloves on first before touching it. Mrs. Tate, do you know of anyone who would want to hurt your husband?”

“No! Nobody. Everyone loved Oliver. Excuse me. I’m going to be sick.” I jump up from the couch and run into the half bath.

By the time I was finished, Oliver’s body was being taken out of the house. I fall to the floor, with my back against the wall, covering my mouth while tears stream down

my face. I can't believe this is happening again. My husband, the love of my life and my perfect man, is gone, and he's never coming back.

"Mrs. Tate, is there somewhere you can stay for a while? Your home is now a crime scene, and you can't be here. Can I call someone for you?"

I gave her Samantha's name and number. She was the only one I could trust. I overhear one of the officers talking to the other detective who showed up with Detective Walker.

"Twenty-two stab wounds. It looks like The Widowmaker strikes again."

Why? Why would he say something like that? The Widowmaker kills men who cheat on their wives. Oliver didn't cheat on me. I would know. I would know if my husband was cheating. But then again, I didn't know Brian was.

"Mrs. Tate, Samantha is on her way," Detective Walker says. "I still need to ask you some more questions, but I can hold off until your friend arrives."

### Chapter Twenty-Two

#### DETECTIVE PAIGE WALKER

I pour myself a cup of coffee and take it to the table. I have some time before I have to leave for the station. My phone rings, and it's Elijah.

"Morning," I answer.

"Another husband was murdered."

"What?" My head falls to the side. "Where?"

"236 East 72 nd Street. Mr. Oliver Tate. The wife found him on the floor in the foyer. The captain wants us there now."

"I'm on my way." I end the call, dump my coffee into a to-go cup, grab my purse, and fly out the door.

When I reach the Tate residence, Mrs. Tate falls into my arms, sobbing so hard that I try my best to calm her down. But I suppose I would act the same way if I found my husband lying on the floor, murdered. Not that I'm married. But if I were, I'm sure my reaction would be the same.

I guide her to the couch and instruct Hank, another officer, to stay by her side. I slip on a pair of latex gloves and approach Mr. Tate's lifeless body sprawled out on the floor. My eyes take in the scene—his shirt is completely unbuttoned, revealing

multiple stab wounds across his chest and abdomen. I count them. Twenty-two. Twenty-two knife wounds like the others.

“Did you ask her if he was cheating?” Elijah speaks softly so Mrs. Tate doesn’t hear.

“No. Not yet. Look at her. She’s a wreck. That question will have to wait.”

“Detective Walker, the lock on the front door is broken. It looks like a break-in.”

“I wish it were that simple.” I sigh.

“Do you think she did it?” Elijah asks.

“Really?” I cock my head. “Look at her? She is shaken to the core. I’ve seen some good acting in my career, and she’s not acting.”

After speaking with Mrs. Tate, she runs to the bathroom. When she returns, I tell her that her friend is on the way.

“Can I get you anything?” I ask. “Perhaps a glass of water?”

She shakes her head and doesn’t say a word.

“Where is she?” I hear a woman’s voice at the door.

“It’s okay, Hank. You can let her in,” I say.

She runs over to Mrs. Tate and embraces her.

“Would it be possible for Mrs. Tate to stay with you for a few days? The house is officially a crime scene, and she can’t stay here.”

“I can stay at a hotel,” Mrs. Tate softly speaks.

“No, you’re not. I’m not leaving you alone. You’ll stay with Travis and me,” she tells her. “Come on. Let’s go pack a bag.” She helps her up and leads her up the stairs.

I am no closer to finding the son-of-a-bitch who’s committing these murders than I was after the first one. I ran my fingers over the smooth surface of the floor where Mr. Tate’s body was. My frustration was building—my desperation was growing. Not only did I have the captain up my ass, I also had the police chief and the Mayor up there. They wanted this person found and found now.

“Elijah, talk to the neighbors and see if they saw or heard anything last night.”

“On it.” He walks out of the house.

I’m standing in the foyer, staring at the floor, when Mrs. Tate and her friend walk down the stairs.

“I’m taking her back to my house now,” Samantha says.

“Okay. I’ll need your address to stop by later and ask Mrs. Tate more questions.”

She rattles off her address as I type it in my notes on my phone.

“One more thing before you go,” I say. “Do you know if anything was stolen?”

“I have no idea,” Mrs. Tate says.

I walk up the stairs and enter the primary bedroom. I stare at the king-size bed, which only one side was slept in last night. Other than that, the room is pristine. I walk over to the dresser and lift the lid to what I suspected was a jewelry box. Inside, I find all

types of jewelry: diamond earrings, necklaces, bracelets, and other expensive gemstone jewelry.

“I talked to the neighbors. Nobody saw or heard anything last night,” Elijah says, walking into the room.

“It doesn’t look like anything was stolen,” I say. “Her jewelry box is filled with expensive jewelry.”

“Maybe the killer came up here after he killed the husband, saw her sleeping, got scared, and ran off. Remember, with the other murders, the wives weren’t home. He probably thought Mr. Tate was home alone.”

“Maybe,” I say, looking out the bedroom window. “Something is off with this one, and I can’t put my finger on it.”

### Chapter Twenty-Three

KAT

Samantha set my bag on the bed in her guest room. I sat on the edge and gripped the gray comforter with little white flowers on it.

“Here.” Samantha walks into the room, hands me a glass of water, and drops a little white pill in my hand.

“What is this?”

“It’s a Xanax. You need it, so take it. It’ll help you relax a little bit. I called the firm and talked to the partners. They told me to tell you to take off as much time as you need, and they’ll reassign your cases until you return.”

“Thanks, Samantha.”

“Oh, sweetie.” She sits on the bed and wraps her arms around me. “I am so sorry this happened. I can’t even imagine what you’re going through.”

I can because I’ve already gone through it once before.

“If you don’t mind, I’m going to lie down,” I say.

“Of course.” She grabs my bag and sets it on the chair in the corner. “I’ll be right downstairs if you need anything.”

She leaves the room, and I climb under the covers. Tears pour from my eyes, for I can't believe my Oliver is gone. I never should have taken that damn pill last night. If I hadn't, I would have heard him or something. I could have stopped it. How? I have no idea, but I would have tried.

The first time it happened, the killer tried to kill me. This time, I don't have a scratch on me. Did the killer think I wasn't home? Did he come into my bedroom, see me, and freak? I wish he would have killed me because I'm sure I won't ever get over this. It may be enough to land me in a mental facility. The thought twisted inside me, squeezing my chest and making it hard to breathe. If I didn't get myself under control, I might end up in a sterile white room with padded walls, surrounded by people in lab coats and clipboards.

I slept for four hours. I only woke up because I heard the creaking of the door.

"I'm sorry, Kat. I didn't mean to wake you," Samantha says. "I was just checking on you."

"It's fine." I sit up.

"Why don't you come downstairs? I'm just about to start dinner."

"Okay." I climb out of bed and follow her downstairs.

Travis is home already. He takes one look at me and holds his arms out. I fall into them, holding back the tears that inevitably escape.

"God, Kat. I'm so sorry. Oliver was a good man. He didn't deserve this."

"He was a good man," I sob.

“Let me pour you a drink. What would you like?” he asks. “Wine?”

I shake my head. “Something stronger. ”

“Scotch?”

“Scotch is fine. Make it a double.”

I perch myself on a stool in the kitchen while Samantha preps dinner. Travis hands me my scotch, walks over to Samantha, and kisses her cheek. “I’ll be in my office working.”

“Okay. I’ll let you know when dinner is ready,” she says.

I stare at them—jealous, envious. I’ll never get a kiss or get to kiss my husband again.

Dinner is ready—roasted chicken, scalloped potatoes, steamed carrots, and a loaf of freshly baked bread from the bakery fill the middle of the table. I mostly pick at my food. I’m sick to my stomach. I know I should eat, but I can’t.

Travis gets up from his seat when he hears the elevator ding. A few moments before, the doorman called to inform us that Detective Walker was heading up.

“I’m sorry to interrupt your dinner. I can wait until you’re finished.”

“It’s fine. I can’t eat anyway,” I say, standing up and walking into the living room.

We sit on the couch, and she reaches over and places her hand on mine.

“I know this is very difficult, Mrs. Tate. But I have to ask. Did you know your

husband was having an affair?"

"NO!" I snap, shaking my head. "Oliver would never do that to me."

"How well did you know your husband?" she asks.

"What do you mean?" I furrow my brows. "I knew my husband better than anyone."

"But you didn't know he was having an affair?"

"He wasn't!" I cup my face in my hands.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Tate, but he was."

"No." I shake my head and sob .

"Okay," she sighs. "That's enough for tonight. I'm sorry for having to put you through more pain, but we're trying to catch the psychopath who is walking around the city murdering men. Please call me if you can think of anything or remember something that might help."

She gently pats my shoulder and leaves the room. Samantha walks over, sits beside me, and softly runs her hand up and down my back.

"Does she really think that Oliver was cheating on you?"

I nod, my face still buried in my hands.

"That is ridiculous. Oliver was madly in love with you. He would never."

With a slight turn of my head, I stare at her. "I'm not sure I knew him at all."

### Chapter Twenty-Four

#### DAHLIA

Katherine will be fine. She just needs a little time to get over it. The look in Oliver's eyes when I plunged the knife into his chest was priceless.

Christine. His whore's name was Christine. A twenty-eight-year-old woman with long auburn hair, green eyes, and a stick for a body. She works at the Chicago office, but that's not where they met. They met at his firm when she came to New York to train.

He boarded a plane to Chicago every other week, but not for business as his wife thought. He flew there to see her . And when she was in New York, they would meet at the luxurious Mandarin Oriental and spend a few precious hours together in a private room.

Oliver was careful—very careful. He even bought Kat the same perfume Christine wore. He was responsible for paying all the bills, so it was easy to hide them. The hotel stays, flowers, jewelry, and expensive dinners—all charged to his credit card. He didn't have to worry because he received all his statements online to an email account Kat didn't know about .

Shady son-of-a-bitch.

When I first discovered his affair, I was surprised. And it doesn't take much to surprise me. The affair had been going on for months. Why did I hesitate to punish

him for his wrongdoings? Why didn't I act when I first saw him with that woman? Because Kat needed him. She had been struggling with the recent murders.

Poor Oliver. All he had to do was stay faithful to Kat, and he would still be alive. But he couldn't manage one simple task and paid the ultimate price.

### Chapter Twenty-Five

KAT

One Week Later

My shoulders slump while my hands are tightly clasped in front of me. My face is streaked with tears, and my eyes are red and swollen from crying. The minister's voice fades into the background as I focus on Oliver's mahogany casket adorned with a vibrant spray of red roses. My eyes trace the intricate carvings on the wood, but my mind is blank. The world around me feels distant and consumed by grief.

I scan the cemetery, staring at the people who attended my husband's funeral. That's when I notice her—a lanky, tall woman with long auburn hair in the back row, dressed in all black—a woman I've never seen before.

The funeral ends, and friends offer their condolences. But my eyes are more interested in the woman sitting in the back row. She stands up and begins to walk away. I run after her.

“Excuse me!” I shout .

She stops and turns around, her eyes swollen and red. She grips her coat and tightens it around her.

“Did you know my husband?” I ask, not knowing if I want to hear her answer.

“Uh, yeah.” Her voice trembles slightly, and her hands fidget nervously. Her eyes dart around the area, avoiding direct eye contact with me. “He was my mentor at the firm,” she explained with uncertainty in her tone, unsure how much to reveal about their relationship.

“So, you worked with him?”

“Briefly. As I said, he was my mentor. I work out of the Chicago offices.”

I cock my head. “I wouldn’t say you worked with him briefly then. He traveled to the Chicago offices every other week.”

“I know. But we didn’t work together. Anyway, I’m sorry for your loss.” She scurries away.

“Who was that?” Samantha walks over and places her arm around me.

“I believe that was the woman my husband was having an affair with.”

She stares at me in disbelief. “You do think he was cheating on you?”

“I didn’t until now.” I walk away.

I see Detective Walker standing by a tree with her arms folded. So, I walk over to her.

“Detective Walker.” I nod.

“I’m sorry for your loss, Mrs. Tate.”

“You can call me Katherine,” I say.

“I wanted to let you know we’re finished at your house. You can go back there when you’re ready.”

“Did you find anything?”

“No. Unfortunately, we didn’t. But we’ll get the son-of-a-bitch who did this. I promise.”

“I appreciate it. Thank you for coming.”

Two Days Later

With trembling hands, I insert the key into the new lock and slowly open the front door. My heart races as I step inside, cautiously scanning my surroundings. But my eyes are immediately drawn to the large crimson stain on the foyer floor where my beloved husband had laid. Tears swell in my eyes as I struggle to process the sight before me, unable to believe this is my reality.

I set my bag down. First, I go to the utility closet, grab a bucket, and fill it with soapy warm water. I grab a sponge from underneath the cabinet and take it with the bucket to the foyer. Getting down on my hands and knees, I begin to scrub. After an hour, the floor is clean. I take my bag upstairs, set it on the bed, and stare at the side of the bed where Oliver used to sleep. My legs feel like they’re going to give, so I sit on the edge of the bed and cup my face in my hands.

I honestly thought the next time I’d have to grieve my husband’s death, I would be at least pushing ninety. But here I was, facing the unimaginable loss while still in my prime.

It felt like the world had been ripped out from under me, leaving me unsteady and lost. The thought of carrying on without him by my side is suffocating as I try to wrap

my head around this new reality. It is a cruel twist of fate and the second time I grieve the loss of a husband. I need answers, and I'm getting them one way or another.

### Chapter Twenty-Six

My mind pretends that Oliver is on a business trip. It's unhealthy, I know. But it's the only way I get through the night—along with a sleeping pill.

After stumbling out of bed, I walk down the stairs and to the kitchen for a cup of coffee to help wake me up. I have an appointment with Dr. Burton in a couple of hours, and I need to get ready.

With my hands wrapped around the warm mug of coffee, I lean against the counter and scan the empty kitchen, waiting for Oliver to walk in and take a mug down from the cabinet like he did every morning. But today, he won't. He won't ever step foot in this kitchen again.

I spoke to Detective Paige Walker yesterday. They still haven't found any clues about who The Widowmaker is, and she's frustrated. I can tell she's an excellent detective and trying, but The Widowmaker is more intelligent than all of them. I never told her about Brian. If I had, I'd be the prime suspect—one woman, two husbands, two murders. I'd even believe I did it if I were her.

Dr. Burton meets me at his office door, grabs my hands, and gently squeezes them. "How are you doing, Katherine?"

"I'm taking it one day at a time and trying to survive."

He leads me over to the couch. I sit, and he perches himself in his usual leather chair.

“She was at his funeral,” I say.

“Who?”

“The woman Oliver was having an affair with.”

“Did she come out and tell you they were having an affair?” he asks.

“No. She didn’t have to. I could see it in her grieving eyes. She grieved as if he were her husband.”

“I assume you’re not back to work yet.”

I shake my head as I fiddle with my hands. “No. I can’t go back there just yet.”

“What have you been doing since the funeral?”

“Not much. Thinking, sleeping, and trying to get through the days. I can’t bring myself to clean out his closet or get rid of any of his things.”

“That will happen when you’re ready. I know I don’t have to tell you that it’s very important for you to get back to a daily routine.”

“I know that. You know I’ve been through this before. But this time, it’s different.”

“How?” His brows furrow.

“I don’t know. Maybe it is because I’m older now, and this is my second husband that was murdered. Dr. Burton, I know this sounds crazy, but I think The Widowmaker has followed and watched me since I left Rockstead. ”

“I think it’s your paranoia making you believe that, Katherine. Who would do that? And why?”

“I have no idea. But Oliver was murdered the same way Brian was—twenty-two stab wounds. That’s not a coincidence.”

“But this person didn’t just target you. He’s also targeting other cheating men.”

“Men who were the husbands of my firm’s clients. It’s someone at my firm who knows about the cases.”

“And you believe this ‘someone’ followed you from Rockstead? You’ve worked at your firm for a few years now. Did you ever notice someone that looked familiar to you?”

“No.” I shake my head. “But?—”

“Katherine,” he interrupts, “I’m going to write you another prescription for something that will calm your nerves. I want you to take it twice a day and start returning to a daily routine.” He rips the paper from his pad and hands it to me. “I’ll see you next week.”

I’m walking out of Dr. Burton’s office when my phone rings. Pulling it from my purse, I notice the call is from Oliver’s attorney, Stanley Ruffalo.

“Hello,” I answer, pushing the door and stepping outside the building.

“Katherine, It’s Stanley. I have Oliver’s will ready. When do you think you’ll be available to meet?”

“I’m not too far from your office. I can come by now.”

“Okay. I’ll be here waiting.”

I step inside the tall glass building and take the elevator to the twenty-first floor.

“It’s good to see you again, Katherine.” Stanley shakes my hand. “Please, have a seat.” He gestures to the dark gray chair across from his desk. He strolls over to his chair, sits down, and opens the large file before him. “Oliver has left you everything—his personal bank accounts, the joint account, his investments, his Bentley, and the brownstone. His will states that upon his death if the brownstone isn’t paid off, it is to be paid off immediately with money in a separate account he funded. I’ve already taken the liberty and paid off the mortgage. The home is free and clear of any debt.”

“I appreciate it, Stanley. Thank you.”

I sign some papers, grab my purse, and leave his office.

### Chapter Twenty-Seven

#### DETECTIVE PAIGE WALKER

“What the actual fuck?” I say.

Elijah glances up at me. “What?”

I stare at the information on the computer screen. “Katherine Tate was married before to a man named Brian Grisham. They lived in Rockstead, Maine.”

“So?” He shrugs. “Half of the world has been married more than once.”

“Her husband, Brian, was murdered in their home during a break-in. According to the police report, Katherine was stabbed and left for dead. I bet you can’t guess how many stab wounds were inflicted on her husband.” I stare at him.

“Don’t even say twenty-two.”

I slowly nod.

“So, we’re dealing with the same guy here?”

“I need to go talk to the captain.” I stand from my desk and walk into his office.

“What’s up, Walker?”

“I need to take a trip to Rockstead, Maine.”

“What for? ”

“I just found some interesting information on Katherine Tate. She used to live there with her first husband. One night, someone broke into their home, stabbed her husband twenty-two times, stabbed her, and left her for dead. It was ruled a break-in.”

“Wait a second. You’re telling me that she had two husbands who were murdered the same way? How long ago was this?” he asks.

“A few years ago.”

“So, we’re either dealing with the original Widowmaker or a copycat,” he says. “Go to Rockstead and see what you can find out.”

“Thanks, captain.”

“Make sure you stay at a cheap hotel,” he shouts as I leave his office.

After landing in Maine, I make my way to the rental car counter. With keys in hand, I hop into the compact vehicle and begin the scenic drive toward Rockstead, fifty miles from the airport. The trees on either side of the road are coated with thick snow, their branches drooping under the weight along the winding roads. This is the first time I’ve seen snow this year, for New York City hasn’t been blessed with it yet.

As I pass quaint towns and historical landmarks, I see a sign that says Welcome to Rockstead . I pull into the Rockstead Bed and Breakfast parking lot, a few miles into town.

I stare at the Victorian-style home with the blue clapboard siding and wraparound

porch as I climb out of my car and grab my bag from the back seat.

“Welcome to Rockstead Bed and Breakfast. Do you have a reservation?” an older woman with gray hair in a tight bun asks.

“I do. My name is Paige Walker. ”

She types away at the keys on her computer. “Yes. Here you are. You’ll be in room ten.” She grabs the key.

The bed and breakfast is beautiful. Its space is filled with ornate wallpaper featuring intricate floral patterns in shades of gold and burgundy and antique furniture.

I follow her up the stairs as she inserts the key into the lock and pushes the door open. I walk in and look around at the mahogany dresser, velvet armchair, four-poster bed, and lace curtains that hang over the large window.

“You mentioned over the phone that you are a detective for the NYPD. Is this visit in an official matter, or are you just visiting our quiet little town?” she asks.

“I’m here on official business. There was a murder that took place here about four years ago,” I say.

“Oh, yes. It was Brian Grisham. He was a good man and didn’t deserve what happened to him. Why are you here about a murder that happened four years ago?”

“We’ve had similar murders in New York. I’m hoping to find a connection.”

“Well, I hope you catch that horrible person. Enjoy your stay, and keep warm. It’s cold out there.”

“Thank you.” I give a friendly smile.

After I settle in, I hop into my rental car and drive to the Rockstead Police Station.

“Can I help you?” A younger man behind a desk asks when he sees me.

“I’m Detective Paige Walker from the New York Police Department. I’m looking for Sheriff Strange.”

“That would be me.” He smiles and extends his hand. “It’s nice to meet you, Detective Walker.”

“You can call me Paige.”

“And you can call me Lucas. Let’s go into my office.” He gestures. “Now, how can I help you?”

“There have been some murders in New York which are similar to the one you had here four years ago.”

“The Grisham case?” he asks.

“Yes. All of the victims’ homes were broken into, jewelry was stolen, and the men were murdered via twenty-two stab wounds.”

“Interesting.” He rubs his chin.

“Including Katherine Tate’s husband, Oliver. But you knew her as Katherine Grisham.”

“Katherine? She remarried?”

“She did, and her second husband was killed the same way as her first. We call the killer The Widowmaker because all of the victims have one common connection: they were all cheating on their wives.”

His brows furrow in confusion. “You think it’s the same person doing these killings?”

“I do. Do you know if Katherine’s husband, Brian, was unfaithful to her?”

“He was.” He looked down. “I just found that out a few weeks ago when I met Mark at the bar after work for a drink.”

“Mark?”

“Cindy’s husband. Mark recently found out she was having an affair with Brian. It’s been the gossip all over town.”

“You never had a suspect for Brian’s murder?” I ask.

“No. The crime scene was meticulous. The jewelry that was stolen was never pawned, either. Four years later, we still have nothing. I’ll never forget that night when I walked into that home and saw Brian lying on the floor with all those stab wounds, then when I went into the kitchen and found poor Katherine bleeding out. That girl is lucky she’s alive. ”

“Did she see or hear anything?”

“She said she couldn’t remember a thing, but that’s because of the traces of Rohypnol that were found in her blood.”

“She had Rohypnol in her system?” I furrow my brows.

“Yeah. She did. But it was strange because Brian was injected with M99. I guess the killer got spooked by something and ran out of the house before he could finish Katherine off. That poor woman.” He shakes his head. “Tragedy seems to follow her wherever she goes.”

“Where can I find this Mark guy?”

Sheriff Strange glances at his watch. “It’s after five. I’m sure he’s drinking at Rutger’s Bar up the road. It’s been his thing since he found out about Cindy’s affair.”

“Thanks. I’ll go see if he’s there.” I stand up and extend my hand. “It was nice talking to you, Lucas.”

“Same, Paige. You know where to find me if you have any more questions.”

I climb into my car and drive up the road until I see the bright flashing sign that displays Rutger’s Bar & Tavern. I walk into the dimly lit bar with faded wooden floors and walls decorated with vintage signs advertising local lobster and beer. A long, polished bar stretches across one side of the room, lined with stools and shelves of liquor bottles. Only one man is sitting at the bar, and I bet his name is Mark.

I take a seat on the stool next to him.

“What can I get you?” the bartender asks.

“Whiskey. Straight. Top shelf.”

“Here you go, pretty lady.” He sets a glass down and pours some whiskey into it.

“Thanks. Excuse me? Is your name Mark?” I ask the man sitting beside me .

He turns his head and holds my gaze. “Yeah. Who’s asking?”

“Detective Paige Walker with the NYPD.” I extend my hand.

He stares at my hand momentarily, lifts his, and places it in mine. “Mark Rutkowski.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Mark. You know Katherine Tate, I mean Grisham, correct?”

“Yeah. I know Katherine. Why?”

“When was the last time you spoke to her?”

“A few weeks ago, when I flew to New York.”

“You spoke to her recently?” My brows furrowed.

“Yeah. I needed to tell her about Brian’s affair with my wife.” He tips his glass to his lips and sucks down the last of his bourbon. “Greer, pour me another.”

“How did she act when you told her?”

“I guess like anyone who finds out their husband was cheating on them. She was upset, shaken.”

“So, she didn’t know about the affair before the murder took place?”

“Nope.” He shook his head.

“Would you mind if I talk to your wife?”

“Almost ex-wife.” The hurt in his eyes is undeniable. “I don’t give a shit if you talk

to her. In fact, I don't give a shit about anything to do with her anymore."

I pull some cash from my wallet and toss it on the bar. "This is for his drinks and mine," I tell the bartender.

"You don't have to do that, detective," Mark says.

"I know. I want to." I place my hand on his shoulder. "Anyway, can I get your home address?"

He rattles it off, and I type it into my notes.

"Thank you, Mr. Rutkowski. Take care."

### Chapter Twenty-Eight

#### DETECTIVE PAIGE WALKER

“Can I help you?”

“Mrs. Rutkowski, I’m Detective Paige Walker with NYPD. May I speak to you for a moment?”

“I don’t understand. Why do you need to speak with me?”

“I need to ask you a few questions about Katherine and Brian Grisham.”

“Come in.” She gestures. “Can I get you some coffee or something?”

“No. I’m good. Thank you.” I sit on the light gray sectional that occupies most of the living room.”

“It just happened, you know,” she blurts out.

“What did?” I ask.

“The affair with Brian. It just happened. It wasn’t planned or anything.”

“I’m not here about that. Do you remember anything out of the ordinary about that night or after the attack on Brian and Katherine?”

“No.” She shakes her head. “There was nothing out of the ordinary. ”

“What about Katherine? How was she?”

“She almost died, detective.”

“I’m aware. Did she say anything to you while she was staying here? Anything that you thought was odd or strange?”

“No. Nothing. Are you saying that Katherine killed Brian?”

“No. I’m not saying that at all. There have been some murders back in New York that are identical to what happened here. Break-ins, missing jewelry, and the men were all stabbed twenty-two times.”

“Oh my gosh. That’s horrible. You have no idea who did it?”

“No. Unfortunately, we don’t. That’s why I’m here. I’m trying to find something that could connect the murders.”

“I’m sorry, Detective Walker. I wish I could help, but I can’t.”

“You were the one who helped Katherine pack up her home after the murder, correct?”

“Yes.”

“You didn’t find or see anything strange to you?”

She shakes her head. “No. I’m sorry.”

I let out a long sigh. “Thank you for your time.” I stood and headed toward the front door. “Was he going to leave her?” I turned and asked Cindy.

“No. And I wasn’t going to leave Mark either. It was just fun we were having. Please, don’t judge me.”

“I’m not. Thank you again.” I leave the house.

I am so totally judging her.

I was starving, so I pulled into the parking lot of Patty’s Diner and grabbed a booth when I walked through the door.

“Welcome to Patty’s. I’m Linda. What can I get you?” the perky waitress asks .

“I’ll have the club wrap with fries and a cup of coffee.”

“Regular or decaf?”

“Regular, and just black.” I smile.

“Coming right up.” She takes the menu from me and walks away.

I pull my phone from my purse and call my captain.

“Walker, tell me you found something.”

“It’s a dead-end. Rockstead is a small town where the only crime is someone shoving a pack of gum in their pocket without paying for it. Even if there was something four years ago, I don’t think the Sheriff’s Department was equipped to handle it. I wouldn’t be surprised if some things were overlooked.”

“Damn it. Get your ass back here. We need to find that damn killer before he murders another cheating husband.”

“I’m on the first flight back to New York tomorrow.”

“Good. We’ll talk when you return.”

“Did I hear you say you’re from New York?” Linda sets down my coffee.

“I am. I’m a detective with the NYPD.”

“Wow. What brings you to Rockstead?”

“I’m trying to locate any information anyone has on the murder that took place here four years ago.”

She slowly shakes her head. “That murder really shook the town.”

“You didn’t by any chance see or hear anything out of the ordinary, did you?”

“Can’t say I did. It was recently discovered that Cindy Rutkowski and Brian were having an affair. Poor Katherine. She was such a sweet woman and a good friend. I can’t believe Brian would cheat on her. They were the perfect town couple. Everyone envied them. ”

“So perfect that her husband felt the need to sleep with another woman?” My brow arches.

“I guess you never know what goes on behind closed doors. Let me go see if your dinner is ready.”

Linda returns with my wrap and fries. I grab the bottle of ketchup and squirt some on my plate. Just as I shove a fry in my mouth, Sheriff Strange walks over to my table.

“Do you mind?”

“Not at all. Have a seat.” I smile.

“Did you talk to Mark?” he asks.

“I did. And I spoke with Cindy. Dead end.”

“I figured it would be. How many men in New York have died at the hands of that killer?”

“Five.”

“Jesus.” He throws his head back.

“Hey, Lucas. The usual?”

“Yeah, Linda. Thanks.” He smiles at her.

“Linda tells me that everyone in town was envious of Brian and Katherine’s relationship.”

“Yeah.” He chuckles. “They were known as the perfect town couple. They were always happy, kissing, hugging, goofing around. You could see the love they had for each other. That’s why I was so shocked when I heard Brian was having an affair—poor Katherine. I had no idea she remarried. I can’t imagine losing three people I loved to murder.”

“Excuse me?” My brows furrowed. “What do you mean by ‘three people?’”

“There was that guy she was dating when she was sixteen, Brian, and her most recent husband.”

“The guy she was dating when she was sixteen was murdered?”

“That’s what she told me when I visited her in the hospital. She asked me why God would do that to her again.”

### Chapter Twenty-Nine

KAT

Before

The school bell rings, signaling the end of class. I quickly gather my things—a purse and stack of textbooks—from my desk and head to my locker. Walking down the bustling hall, I feel a sense of relief, knowing that I'll see Jack, my boyfriend, waiting for me at my locker. When I reach it, I find him leaning casually against the metal door with a charming grin.

"Hey there, beautiful," he greets me.

"Hi," I reply with a smile and lean in for a kiss.

I open my locker, shove my heavy books inside, and then pull out only what I need for my next class.

"Did you finish your paper last night?" I ask.

"Yeah. But I don't think Mr. Jacobs is going to like it. It's all about football."

"Of course it is." I laugh.

Jack is tall and lean, with broad shoulders and muscular arms. His sandy blonde hair is messy yet effortlessly attractive, and his bright blue eyes sparkle in the sunlight. He

is the quarterback of our high school's football team. Jack lives and breathes football—a sport that consumes him entirely. His talents have caught the eye of top scouts from around the country, who watch his every move with awe and admiration. He's every girl's dream—my dream.

We have been wrapped up in each other's arms for nearly a year, lost in the intoxicating embrace of teenage love. He is my first and only. Losing my virginity to him was the best night of my life.

He hooks his arm around me as we walk down the hall, heading to the English class that we have together.

The final bell rings as we walk into the classroom and take our seats next to each other.

“Good afternoon, students. Please get your papers out, and I will walk by and collect them,” Mr. Jacobs says.

He walks by the desk and grabs the paper I wrote. He turns to Jack's desk and grabs his.

“Football? Why am I not surprised, Mr. Dillard?”

Jack shrugs.

While Mr. Jacobs stands at his podium, discussing Romeo and Juliet, I discreetly pass a note to Jacob.

Am I still coming over tonight since your parents are out of town?

Jacob looks at me and winks. I smile like a teenage girl in love because I am.

The bell rings, and school is over. Jacob and I grab our notebooks and leave the room.

“I have to get ready for football. I’ll swing by and pick you up after practice.” He kisses my lips.

“I can’t wait.” I smile .

“Me either, babe.”

Normally, Jack would drive me home after school since my car was in the shop. But since he has practice, I catch a ride with my best friend, Kourtney.

“Wanna hang out later?” Kourtney asks, pulling into my driveway.

“Jack’s parents are out of town, and I’m going over there tonight, which reminds me. I’m going to tell my mom that I’m spending the night over your house because your mom is working the night shift at the hospital, and you don’t want to be alone. We can hang out tomorrow.”

“Okay. I’ll be your cover for sexy time with your boyfriend.” She grins.

“Thanks for the ride. I’ll talk to you later.”

I step through the front door of my home and drop my backpack on the floor.

“Kat, is that you?” I hear my mother shout from upstairs.

“Yeah.” I walk into the kitchen and grab a can of Coke from the refrigerator.

She walks into the kitchen, her hands covered in yellow rubber gloves, holding a

bucket.

“I just scrubbed your bathroom floor upstairs. So, if you go in there, be careful.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

“How was school?” she asks, dumping the dirty water in the sink.

“It was good.”

“Homework?” She turns and looks at me.

“Yes, and I’m going upstairs to work on it now. I’m spending the night at Kourtney’s tonight. Her mom has to work the night shift at the hospital, and she doesn’t want to be alone. She’ll drive us to school in the morning. ”

“Okay. You’re not seeing Jack tonight? Usually, you two are glued at the hip.” A playful smirk crosses her lips.

“He’s hanging with his friends tonight,” I lie.

I grab my backpack from the floor and take it to my room. I throw myself on my bed, pull out my phone, and fall down the rabbit hole of Instagram. After a while, I take out my physics book and read today’s homework assignment.

An hour into studying, my phone pings with a text from Jack.

Hey, babe. I have to cancel our plans for tonight. I’m really sick.

My heart sinks.

What's wrong?

I was in the middle of practice and started throwing up. The coach sent me home early. I barely made it home before I threw up again. I'm sorry.

That's okay. I hope you feel better. I can bring you some chicken soup.

That's sweet of you, babe, but I don't want you coming anywhere near me. I don't want you to catch this bug. I'm going to lie down now and try to sleep. My stomach is killing me. I'll talk to you later. I love you.

I love you too, Jack. Feel better. Text me if you need anything.

Disappointment courses through me. Shit. Now, what do I tell my mom? I climb off the bed and head downstairs.

"Hey, Mom." I walk into the kitchen where she's cooking dinner. "Change of plans. Kourtney just texted me that her mom is sick and she's not going to work tonight."

"Okay, sweetie." She smiles. "Oh, by the way. Your father just called. Your car is ready, and he's picking it up after work from the mechanic."

"Thank God. I hate depending on people for rides."

After dinner, I went upstairs and texted Jack. After waiting a while, I texted him again. He must still be sleeping and really sick. Poor Jack. I hope he's better tomorrow.

I hear my alarm sound, reach over, and turn it off. Rolling over, I grab my phone and look at it, expecting to see text messages from Jack. Nothing. He never responded to my text messages last night.

I get up and dress for school. Jack doesn't show up, and he won't text me back. I can't help but worry about him all day. I'll stop by his house when school lets out and check on him.

School is over, and I still haven't heard from Jack. I pull out of the school parking lot and head to his house. When I turn on his street, several police cars take up most of the space outside his home. I see his parents in the driveway. They must have returned from their trip this afternoon. His mom is shaking and screaming, and his dad, who is visibly upset, tries to comfort her.

I climb out of my car and run down the sidewalk to their house. A police officer stops me.

"I'm sorry, miss. You can't go any further. This is a crime scene."

A crime scene? What the hell is he talking about ?

"Mr. and Mrs. Dillard!" I shout as the police officer holds me back.

Mr. Dillard looks at me and walks over.

"What happened?" I'm so nervous I want to throw up.

"God, Kat." He sobs. "We got home from our trip and found Jack?—"

I look up as his body is being wheeled from the house, covered from head to toe in a white sheet.

"NO!" I scream.

His father grabs and hugs me. "He was murdered, Kat. My son was murdered."

The police say it was a break-in gone wrong, and Jack must have tried to fight the intruder off, ending up on the floor with twenty-two stab wounds.

I will never be okay again.

### Chapter Thirty

KAT

Present

The door to Oliver's home office has been shut since the night he was murdered. I couldn't bring myself to go in there, but today, I have no choice because I need to start cleaning it out to put the brownstone up for sale. As much as I love our home, I can't stay here after what happened. It's too much of a reminder of him and the life we built. And every time I step into the foyer, I see his body lying there.

I open the door and step inside. Mahogany bookcases line the back wall filled with books on finance, investing, art, and English literature. I sit in his black leather executive chair and run my hand along the expensive mahogany desk that matches the bookcases. The desk has a total of four drawers—a top drawer and three going down the left-hand side. I open each one and look inside, except for the bottom drawer, which is locked.

“Where did you keep the key, Oliver?” I say, rummaging through the open drawers. I can't find it, so my eyes scan the office. I reach my hand under the lip of the desk and feel around until my fingers hit a piece of metal.

“There you are.” I pull the key from the double-sided tape and hold it up.

I insert the key into the lock and turn it, opening the drawer. Inside are a stack of papers and receipts. I pull them out and examine them. Many receipts are from the

Waldorf Astoria Hotel in Chicago—a two-night stay every other week and multiple room service charges. My heart sinks deep into my chest. He never had an apartment there. He lied to me. I pull another receipt from the pile from Marshall Pierce & Co., a high-end jewelry store in Chicago, in the amount of \$4,500 for a diamond pendant. I glance at the date. It was from a month ago. But he never gave me a diamond pendant. He bought it for her . Among the receipts were for purchases of flowers from a flower shop in Chicago. Flowers he bought for her .

My stomach twists, and a wave of nausea sweeps over me. Tears swell in my eyes. Just like Brian, I never knew Oliver. My hands shook as I held the receipts and stared at them. I took the pile to the shredder and shredded them ten at a time.

“Fuck you, Oliver. I hope you’re rotting in hell.”

My shredding is interrupted by a knock at the door. I turn my head and stare out into the hallway. Who is at my door? I enter the foyer and open the door to find Detective Walker standing there.

“Detective Walker.”

“Hi, Katherine. Can I come in? I have some things to discuss with you.”

“Of course. Come in.” I gesture. “Can I get you something to drink?”

“Coffee would be great,” she says.

We walk into the kitchen, and she immediately heads towards the island, dropping her purse onto a stool. I pop a K-cup into the Keurig and brew her a cup of coffee, trying to ignore the tension in the room. My mind races as we sit down at the table, and I wonder why she's here unexpectedly. Has she found new evidence? Has she found the killer?

“Why didn’t you tell me that your first husband, Brian, was murdered the same way the other men here were?”

“I don’t know.” I look down at the steam rising from my cup. “I guess it slipped my mind.”

“How does something like that just ‘slip’ your mind? You also failed to talk about your boyfriend, Jack, who was murdered by twenty-two stab wounds when you were sixteen.”

“It slipped my mind, detective. What do you want me to say?”

“I want you to explain to me why three men in your life were all murdered the same exact way!”

I slam my fists on the table and stand. I walk to the window and stare at the lightly falling snow.

“That’s why,” I say. “Because you’re accusing me of murder!”

“I’m not accusing you of anything, Katherine. I’m asking why you failed to divulge pertinent information.”

“Maybe I was afraid you’d think I did it. I didn’t kill Jack or my two husbands, Detective Walker. Someone is out to make sure I live the rest of my life in misery. Someone is out there following me—watching me.”

I know I sound like a lunatic, and I’m sure she thinks just that.

“Who would want to hurt you?”

“I don’t know, but I have these to prove it.” I lift my shirt and show her my scars. “Whoever is doing this tried to kill me back in Maine. He left me on the floor to bleed out.”

“Then why didn’t he try to kill you when he broke into your home and killed your husband, Oliver?” she asks.

“I don’t know. Nothing about any of this makes sense,” I shout. “If only I hadn’t taken that pill that night.” I shake my head as tears stream from my eyes.

“Did Jack cheat on you?” she asks.

I stare at her momentarily and then wipe my eyes. “No...I don’t...I don’t know. Every other man in my life has, so why wouldn’t he?”

“But you don’t know for sure?”

“No. I have no idea.”

She finishes her coffee and takes the cup to the sink. “You look exhausted.” She grabs her purse and hooks it over her shoulder.

“I am.”

A soft smile frames her face. “Get some rest. I’ll keep you posted if anything turns up.”

### Chapter Thirty-One

#### DETECTIVE PAIGE WALKER

Katherine Tate is the link to these murders. But what is her connection? I need to investigate her background more thoroughly. So when I return to the police station, I sit at my desk and start typing away on my keyboard, delving deeper into her past.

“Wait a second...what the—” My eyes widen as I stare at the screen.

“What’s wrong?” Elijah sets his gun on his desk.

“Katherine Tate was adopted by a couple when she was five.”

“So?” He shrugs.

“The records are sealed.” I look at him. “Why are they sealed? Hey, Jaun? Come over here.”

“What’s up, Paige?”

“I need your magic powers.”

“Yes.” A grin crosses his lips as he rubs his hands together. “What laws do you need me to break?”

“I need you to get into this woman’s sealed adoption records. Discreetly, of course.”

“On it. I’ll be in my lair.” His brows wiggle .

“That guy is so weird,” Elijah says.

“No, he’s not. He’s a nice guy.” I rise from my seat and fixate on the whiteboard, filled with photos of the murdered victims and their spouses. “She’s the key to all of this?” I point to Katherine Tate’s photo. “Her boyfriend and two husbands were all murdered the same way—twenty-two stab wounds. All break-ins and missing jewelry—nothing else. The Tate’s had a painting in their home worth thirty thousand dollars. Why didn’t the killer take that? The Calloway’s had expensive crystal pieces in their home. Why wasn’t any of that taken?”

“Because they weren’t really robberies,” Elijah says.

“Exactly!” I glance at him.

A couple of hours later, Jaun walks over and sits on the edge of my desk, holding a file.

“You’re going to want to kiss me after what I found for you.” He smiles.

“What did you find out?”

“Bradly and Caroline Yearn adopted Katherine. Want to know why?”

“Duh, Juan.” I throw up my hands.

“Her mother, Renee Fields, was convicted of murdering Katherine’s father in front of her—cause of death....twenty-two stab wounds. One stab wound for each month her father cheated on her mother.”

My heart raced with excitement. This was the break I needed.

“Which prison is her mother in?” I ask Juan.

“She’s not anymore. She passed away ten years ago. Hung herself in her cell.”

“You said Katherine was there when her father was murdered? ”

“Yeah. The article is in here.” He hands me the file, and I open it.

“We need to question Katherine again.” I throw the file down on my desk.

### Chapter Thirty-Two

KAT

“Have you spoken to the realtor yet?” Samantha asks, stabbing her fork into her salad.

“She came by this morning to take photos and said the listing will go up next week.”

“The apartment below us just went up for sale. You should look at it.” A happy smile dances on her lips.

“Maybe I will.” I pick up a French fry from my plate.

“Any idea when you’re coming back to work?” she asks.

“All I know is that I’m not ready yet.”

We finish lunch and hug each other when we leave the restaurant.

“I’ll talk to you later,” Samantha says, climbing into a cab.

I’m in Chelsea. Samantha wanted to meet at her favorite restaurant for lunch since Travis doesn’t like it and never takes her there. I walk down the street, my feet crunching through the blanket of soft, powdery snow that has settled on the ground. The air is frigid, sending shivers down my spine as I pull my coat tighter around me. I pass by the art gallery where Oliver and I first met. I stop and stare through the

window. Mallory, the owner, sees me and waves. Now, I feel obligated to step inside.

“Oh my gosh, Kat.” Mallory hugs me. “How are you? I’m so sorry about Oliver.”

“Thanks.” I manage a fake smile. “Can I ask you a question?”

“Of course.”

“Did Oliver ever come in here with another woman?”

Her brows furrowed. “No. Not that I ever saw. Why?”

“I was just wondering. I’m going to take a look around.”

I study the displays in the gallery, some new art pieces, some old. Then I see it—that painting—Eyes Without a Face. My heart jackhammers in my chest as I stare at it.

“Mallory?” I call out, and she walks over. “You have another one of these?” I point to the painting.

“What do you mean?” Her head cocks. “You gave it back to us.”

My stomach twists. “No, I didn’t.”

“Yes, you did. Kat, are you okay?” She rests her hand on my shoulder.

“I have to go.” I run out of the gallery and slip on the ice on the sidewalk. Thankfully, I was able to catch myself before hitting the ground.

My phone rings. With shaking hands, I manage to fish it out of my purse. It’s Detective Walker.

“Hello.”

“Katherine, it’s Detective Walker. I need you to come down to the station.”

“Why?”

“I have some more questions for you. Can you come now? I can send a car to pick you up?”

“I’m in Chelsea. I’ll grab a cab and head over there.”

“Okay. I’ll be waiting. ”

I toss my phone back in my purse and hold my hand up for a cab. One stops, and I climb inside. As I sit in the back on the way to the precinct, I think about what Mallory told me about the painting. I distinctly remember taking that painting out to the curb on trash day.

My heart beats rapidly, and the pain in my belly worsens when the driver pulls up to the precinct. I walk in and find Detective Walker. She takes me to a room and tells me she’ll be right back. I sit in the plastic chair, my hands resting on the metal table. I fidget with my fingers as my eyes shift nervously around the sterile walls of the interrogation room. What questions does she have now? I don’t know anything.

The door opens. Detective Walker steps in, sets a bottle of water in front of me, and sits down.

“You know, Katherine. Every day, I learn something new about you—things you should have mentioned but failed to.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, Detective Walker.”

“That you were adopted by Bradley and Caroline Yearn when you were five.”

My eyes widen in shock and disbelief, and my hands begin to shake. “What are you talking about? Bradley and Caroline are my birth parents.”

Detective Walker studies me momentarily.

“No, Katherine. They’re not. They adopted you when you were five because your birth mother was sent to prison for murdering your father.”

I place my hands over my ears. I don’t want to hear anymore. “Stop it! You’re wrong. They would never lie to me.”

“Your birth mother murdered your father in cold blood with you in the room. She found out he had been having an affair for twenty-two months, so she stabbed him twenty-two times. When the police arrived, they found you crouched in the corner of the room next to a bookcase. The Yearn took you in as foster care but then they wanted to adopt you. After a year, it was finalized.”

“I don’t know what kind of sick game you’re playing, detective, but I’m out!” I kick the chair back as my fists slam on the table.

“You killed those men, Katherine. Admit it.”

“I didn’t kill anyone! Give me a polygraph. I can prove it. I can prove it.”

“Maybe you should contact your lawyer first,” she says.

“I don’t need a lawyer. I didn’t do anything. Please, Detective Walker, give me a polygraph test.”

“Okay. Let’s go.”

She leads me to another sterile room. I’m strapped to a chair with electrodes attached to my fingers and chest. The technician sits across from me and fiddles with the machine.

“Yes and no answers only,” he says.

I nod.

“Are you an attorney?”

“Yes.”

“Is your current name Katherine Tate?”

“Yes.”

“Was your previous married name Katherine Grisham?”

“Yes.”

“Are your birth parents named Burton and Caroline Years?”

“Yes.”

“Did you know you were adopted at the age of five?”

“No.”

He studies the machine.

“Did you watch your mother murder your father?”

“No.”

“Did you murder your husbands and those other men?”

“No.”

He studies the machine again.

“Do you feel like someone is always following and watching you?”

“Yes.”

### Chapter Thirty-Three

#### DETECTIVE PAIGE WALKER

I stand silently behind the one-way mirror, my eyes trained on Sean as he reads Katherine the questions I carefully penned down. My heart races with anticipation as I watch their interaction, waiting for Sean to complete the test so I can make an arrest.

He finishes, walks out of the room, and steps inside the room behind the one-way mirror.

“Well?” I ask.

“She’s telling the truth about everything.”

“And you don’t think she’s capable of outsmarting it?” I cock my head.

“I was watching her carefully, and no. I’m confident she’s telling the truth.” He leaves the room.

“Damn it!” I shout, placing my hands on my hips and pacing around the room.

“You have to let her go, Paige,” Elijah says.

I sigh and enter the room, where Sean removes Katherine's electrodes.

“You’re free to go,” I say.

“I told you I wasn’t lying,” she says. “My parents taught me right from wrong. We were the picture-perfect family—family dinners, annual vacations, and no secrets.” Her voice trembled as tears welled up in her eyes. “I swear I’m telling the truth. My parents raised me with love and compassion. They would never condone something as heinous as murder. I’ve never even killed an insect.”

“Don’t leave town, Katherine.” I stare at her.

She leaves the room, and I fall into the chair, tapping my fingers against the table as I study Katherine’s polygraph results. Even though I’m back at square one, something isn’t right. I feel a knot forming in my stomach as I try to piece together the puzzle of Katherine’s life.

I return to the whiteboard and stare at it. Oliver Tate was the last man who was murdered. It’s been a month now, and there hasn’t been anyone else, which leads me back to Katherine. She hasn’t been back to work at the law firm yet.

“You do know the more you stare at that board, nothing changes,” Elijah says.

“How you ever became a detective is beyond me.” I shake my head.

“I take offense to that, Walker.”

“Good, because I mean it. Let’s go over the timeline. Katherine witnessed her father’s murder when she was five. At the age of sixteen, her boyfriend was murdered. Her first husband was murdered, and she moved to New York City and took a job at a law firm. Not too long after she’s moved from property law to divorce, cheating husbands start getting murdered. Then, her second husband was murdered. All the victims, including her father, were stabbed twenty-two times. Twenty-two. At least now we know why that number is so significant.”

“But if Katherine didn’t commit the murders, who did? Who else knew about her father?” Elijah asks .

“I don’t know. It could be anybody from her past. Or, it’s her.”

“Come on, Paige. She passed the polygraph. She’s telling the truth. You’re so fixated that she’s the killer you aren’t seeing what’s in front of you. Besides, there’s absolutely no evidence tying her to the murders. For God’s sake, she was almost killed herself the first time.”

“Which makes no sense,” I say.

“Her husband was found a few feet away from her in the other room. Why wouldn’t the killer finish what he started?”

“Like we said before. Maybe he got spooked and ran out of the house.”

“Then why didn’t he try and kill her again the second time?” I arch my brow. “She was right upstairs passed out from that pill. He could have done it within seconds.”

“I don’t know,” Elijah sighs. “This case is a shitshow of nothing.”

### Chapter Thirty-Four

KAT

My phone rings as I step through the front door. Pulling it from my purse, it's my realtor.

"Hello," I answer with agitation.

"Good news, Katherine. The house is officially listed, and I already have someone who wants to look at it."

"Did you tell them a murder took place here?"

"Well, of course not. We don't have to disclose that information in New York. But if the potential buyers ask, I'm obligated to tell the truth. What they don't know won't hurt them, right?"

I make a mental note: Ask the realtor if anyone was murdered in the home before I buy.

"When do they want to see it?" I asked.

"Tomorrow morning at ten o'clock."

"Fine. I'll make sure I'm out of the house."

“Excellent. I’ll be in touch.”

Her happy, chipper voice irritates me, and I’m happy our conversation is over. With the house officially listed, I know I must begin my search for a new place to live. The apartment directly below Samantha’s was snatched up within hours of being listed, leaving me with no chance to call the landlord in time.

I pour some red wine into a crystal glass, the liquid sloshing as I carry it to the couch. With trembling hands, I lower myself onto the soft cushions and take a long sip, trying to calm my racing thoughts. Detective Walker’s words echo in my mind, each one like a knife twisting in my gut. A cold chill runs down my spine as I contemplate this revelation about my parents’ true identities. I don’t believe her. She said such horrible things, trying to get a confession out of me—to confess to something I didn’t do. But if she were telling the truth, I would need answers, and I wouldn’t stop until I got them. I pick up my phone and call her.

“Detective Walker.”

“It’s Katherine Tate. You said my real mother murdered my father. If she did, then she’s in prison somewhere. I need to know which one so I can talk to her.”

“I’m sorry, Katherine, but your mother passed away ten years ago. She hung herself in her cell.”

I gasp and place my hand over my mouth.

“Katherine, are you still there?”

“Yes,” I speak softly. “Thank you, Detective Walker.” I end the call and pull up flights to Richmond, Virginia. Even though Detective Walker told me not to leave town, I am. My entire life has been a lie, and I need answers.

Before I head to the police station, I stop at the library and search for all the murders that took place in the area twenty-five years ago. I stumble upon an article that makes my stomach churn.

### Wife Stabs Husband to Death in Front of Five-Year-Old Daughter in Chester

Renee Fields, age thirty, stabbed her husband twenty-two times after discovering the affair he had been having for twenty-two months. According to the police, the brutal crime was discovered after Mrs. Fields called 911, confessing to killing her husband. When the police arrived at the home, they found Katherine Fields, age five, and the daughter of Renee Fields, crouching in the corner of the living room with splatters of blood on her face and bloody handprints on the arms of her shirt. Detective Song states it was one of the worst crime scenes he'd ever seen.

I cup my mouth as terror rushes through me. I pull my phone from my pocket, call the Chester Police Department, and ask if Detective Song still works there. To my surprise, the officer on the phone tells me yes.

With shaking hands, I climb into my rental car and punch the address of the police station into the GPS. I ask for Detective Song when I arrive, and the kind female officer leads me to him.

"How can I help you?" He stares at me.

"I need to speak to you about a murder that happened here twenty-five years ago. You were the lead detective."

"Okay." His brows furrow. "Have a seat. Which case?"

"Renee Fields."

His face pales at the mention of her name.

“Who are you?” he asks.

“Apparently, I’m the daughter who witnessed my mother kill my father.”

“Katherine?” His head cocks.

“Yes. ”

“I’ll be damned.” He shakes his head. “You have grown up into a beautiful woman. How are you?”

“Not good, detective. I need you to tell me what happened that night.”

“Why?”

“Because the Yearns adopted me, and I just found out. They never told me who I really was or that I was adopted. My entire life, they led me to believe that I was their biological daughter. I have no memory of this woman named Renee or that I witnessed a murder. All I’m asking for is some answers so I can move on with my life.”

“I found you crouched in the living room corner when I walked into the house. Your mother was sitting upright on the couch and told me to ensure you were taken care of. I contacted the social worker, who took you to the Yearns’ that night. I had just made detective; it was my first homicide case as the lead. I didn’t know what to make of it at the time. The look on your face frightened me, and a part of me hoped you would recover. I kept in touch with the Yearns, and after they decided to adopt you as their own, they moved to Richmond. They wanted you away from Chester and all the bad memories here. They gave you a new life, Katherine.”

“And I’m grateful to them for that, but they also lied to me my entire life.”

“Did you express how you felt when they told you?”

“They didn’t tell me. They were killed in a car accident a year before I graduated from law school.”

“Oh gee, Katherine. I’m sorry. I had no idea. If they didn’t tell you, who did?”

It wasn’t any of his concern, and I wasn’t about to tell him anything. I was only here to get information. So, I deflected the question and steered the conversation back to its original purpose.

“What else did Renee say when you interrogated her?” I ask.

He inhales a sharp breath and leans back in his chair. He then picks up a pen from his desk and taps it against the metal edge.

“She said all men who cheat on their girlfriends or wives need to be punished for their sins. She told me that God told her to punish him. Your mother was a very sick woman.”

“She wasn’t my mother,” I say, looking out the window of the precinct. “Did she say anything else?”

“Not really. She just wanted to make sure you were cared for because she knew she would be spending the rest of her life in prison. I guess it got to be too much for her, though.”

“Thank you, Detective Song.” I stand from my chair and extend my hand. He places his hand in mine and gently shakes it. As I begin to walk away, he calls my name.

“Katherine?”

“Yeah?” I turn and face him.

“I’m happy you don’t remember anything about that night. The Yearns did right by keeping what happened and who you were from you. No child would be able to escape those memories.”

“Was anyone else there that night?” I ask. “I mean, in the house when you arrived?”

“No. It was only you, your mom, and your dad. Why?”

“Just curious.” I walk away and leave the precinct.

### Chapter Thirty-Five

#### DAHLIA

Katherine is getting close to the truth. That damn Detective Walker had to go and stick her nose into our business, stirring up everything I hid from Katherine all these years. Now, Katherine is in Virginia, speaking to Detective Song about that night. Since her brownstone is up for sale, she will start looking for another home, but I don't think it's a good idea. She needs a fresh start away from New York—somewhere nobody knows who she is or what she's been through. Fuck. She loves it here, and she likes the firm she works for. She won't leave the city. That much, I know.

Perhaps it is finally time for the truth to come to light, though I fear it may be too much for her to bear. For a quarter of a century, I have shielded her from this knowledge, but now my time for protection is coming to an end. My heart beats faster in anticipation and dread as I prepare to reveal the truth, no matter how painful it may be for her.

### Chapter Thirty-Six

KAT

I'm back from Virginia. My realtor called and told me an offer had been made on the brownstone. It wasn't a bad offer, but it could be better. So, I make a counteroffer. I feel like I'm losing my mind. Every breath I take hurts my soul. My life has been a total lie. I have no idea who I am anymore.

I pull up Dr. Burton's number and call his office.

"Dr. Burton's office. This is Beth. How can I help you?"

"Beth, this is Katherine Tate. I need to see Dr. Burton as soon as possible. It's an emergency."

"Hold one moment, Mrs. Tate." Elevator music filters through the phone, intensifying the migraine I already have. "Mrs. Tate, Dr. Burton said he can see you in an hour."

"Thank you." I let out a breath. "Thank you so much."

Dr. Burton will help me. He'll know what to do after I tell him everything I discovered. I sit on the couch and lay my head back to try to relieve this excruciating headache. I open my eyes and jump up when I see that my appointment with Dr. Burton is in fifteen minutes .

"Shit," I say, slipping on my boots and coat and grabbing my purse.

I'm five minutes late as I burst through the door.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Burton. I fell asleep. I have this killer headache."

"It's okay, Katherine. Have a seat. What is this emergency?"

I kick off my shoes and sit crisscross applesauce on the couch. I lower my head and stare at the stain I managed to get on my pants.

"Katherine?" Dr. Burton says.

"I discovered that my parents, Bradley and Caroline, are not my biological parents. They adopted me when I was five after I watched my birth mother stab my father twenty-two times because he cheated on her."

"Excuse me, what?" His eyebrows furrow in confusion, his face scrunching up as he tries to comprehend the situation.

"My mother killed my father and then went to prison to serve life but only made it to ten before she hung herself in her cell."

"Jesus, Katherine." He places his hand on his head. "I can't believe this. How did you find out?"

"Detective Walker did some extensive research and told me. Then, I flew to Virginia and talked to the lead detective in charge of the case twenty-five years ago. Dr. Burton, everything I thought I knew is a lie," my voice trembles, and suddenly, I let out a bitter laugh. "What a crock of shit my life turned out to be. I'm thirty years old, almost killed, my two husbands were murdered, my mother was a raving psychopath, my adopted parents lied to me, and I'm completely alone. Where's my happily ever after? Where's this amazing life my parents promised I would have? "

“After everything you’ve been through, it’s easy to fall into that mindset. It sounds like your adoptive parents set out to protect you in every possible way.”

“Someone is out there killing the men in my life, Dr. Burton. I have no one to protect me.”

After our lengthy conversation that seemed to fly by, I finally left his office, my emotional state no different than when I first entered. My steps were sluggish and weighted down with disappointment, each one a struggle as I made my way out of the building. I couldn't help but feel defeated and drained. Our discussion left me feeling uncertain about the future—my future.

I arrive home and set my purse down. Walking into the kitchen, I open the refrigerator and grab a yogurt. As I turn to grab a spoon from the drawer, I see a sealed envelope sitting on the island.

“What the hell is this,” I quietly ask, picking it up.

I open it and take out the folded piece of paper with a key taped to it and the words:

622 W. 51 st Street

#165

Safe lock: 4266519

### Chapter Thirty-Seven

“What the hell?” I remove the key and hold it up.

I reach for my laptop on the kitchen table. The smooth surface is cool against my fingertips as I lift and open the device. My brows furrow in confusion as I look at the address given to me, which brings up a storage unit on Google Maps. Anxiety bubbles in my chest as I wonder who the hell left this in my house. I run out of the kitchen and over to the front door to ensure it’s locked. Then I walk into the living room and pull the curtains shut.

I stare at the note and key in my trembling hands, debating whether to call Detective Walker. My heart races as I think about what could be inside that storage unit. But then I remember her accusing tone and the fear of being arrested as The Widowmaker consumes me. I can't risk it. I have to find out what's in that storage unit first. Maybe I'm not crazy. This proves someone is following me, watching me, and has access to my home. If I want any sleep, I can't stay here tonight.

I race up the stairs, toss a few things into my bag, and then grab the spare key to Oliver's Bentley. I open the garage, throw my bag onto the back seat, and climb inside. His scent envelopes me immediately as if he had just been sitting here moments ago.

My hands grip the steering wheel tightly as I drive to the storage unit, my stomach twisting in knots with each passing mile. Dread fills me as I think about what I might find there. But I can't turn back now. Someone wants me to see what's in there. I have to face whatever awaits me at that storage unit. The anticipation is almost

suffocating as I pull into the parking lot.

My fingers fumble in the cup holder, finally closing around the familiar shape of the key. I step out of the car and make my way down the long row of storage units. My footsteps echo on the concrete floor as I pass rows of metal doors with vinyl numbers above each unit.

Finally, I arrived at unit 165, located at the very end of the corridor. My hands shake as I insert the key and unlock the lock. Removing it, I bend down, lift the door, step inside, and close it. My hand instinctively reaches for the taut string hanging from the ceiling, and a bright light fills the dark space with a firm tug. As my eyes adjust, I see that the only object in the space is a large black safe.

The ringing of my phone startles me, and I jump. Pulling it from my pocket, I see Samantha is calling.

“Hey,” I answer.

“Hi. Travis and I are going out to dinner, and we’d like you to join us. I haven’t seen you in a while.”

“As much as I’d love to, I can’t tonight.”

“And you can’t stay locked up in that house all the time either,” she says.

“I’m not.” I have to come up with an excuse quickly. “My friend from Rockstead is in town. She just got in today, and I’m showing her around the city. She’s never been to New York.”

“Oh. You didn’t mention you had a friend coming to visit.”

“It was last minute. She heard about Oliver and wanted to be here. She’s only staying a couple of days.”

“Okay. As long as you’re not alone. Let’s do lunch soon.”

“We will. I promise.”

I shove my phone back into my pocket and pull out the small paper I had pushed into it before I left the house. Walking over to the safe, I punch in the number 4266519 and open it, staring at a box inside. Taking it out, I open it and gasp. It contains my jewelry that was stolen when Brian and I were attacked, along with his phone. I keep digging and find Oliver’s phone, which went missing when he was murdered. I throw my hand over my mouth as I realize this is The Widowmaker’s unit.

My legs give out beneath me, and I collapse in front of the safe. The world spins as my body trembles with fear. My gaze lands on a scrap of black fabric peeking out from behind the safe's corner. I reach for it and unwrap it, only to discover that a large chef's knife is inside. Realizing it’s the murder weapon, I drop it, and it thumps against the concrete.

### Chapter Thirty-Eight

I grab my bag from the backseat and walk through the doors of The Peninsula.

“Welcome to The Peninsula. How can I help you?”

“I need a room, please.”

“I.D. and credit card,” the older woman behind the desk says.

I pull out both from my wallet and hand it to her.

“How many nights?” she asks.

“Uh, two nights.”

“We have a deluxe suite on the fifteenth floor for two nights.” She smiles.

“That’s fine.”

I just need her to hurry up and give me my room key.

“You’re all set.” She smiles, handing me the keycard. “You’re in suite 1508.”

“Thank you.” I grip the strap on my bag and push the button to the elevator.

I stand in front of the hotel room door, scanning the keycard until I hear the click of

the lock unlocking. As I push open the door, I feel a rush of cool air hit my face. Flicking on the light switch by the door, I enter the room and immediately drop my bag and myself onto the king-sized bed. I don't know what to think about this—the storage unit, the safe, the jewelry, and the knife. The killer led me to his lair, but why?

As I lay on the bed, my stomach growls loudly, reminding me that the only thing I had eaten all day was a yogurt. The thought of food makes me feel nauseous, but I know I need to keep my strength up.

I grab the in-dining menu from the nightstand and look it over. I order a turkey sandwich and fries. While I wait for room service, I jump into the shower and press my hands against the wet marble, letting the hot water soothe my body. After I finish, I wrap myself in the fluffy white robe the hotel provides. The knock at the door startles me.

“Room service,” a man's voice echoes from the hallway.

I open the door, and he steps inside and sets my food on the small table by the window.

“Thank you.” I hand him some cash for a tip.

“You're welcome. Enjoy your dinner.”

I nibble on the turkey sandwich and barely touch my fries. I can't stop thinking about that storage unit and safe. I turn on the TV, and the news is on. I watch, waiting for the news of another murder. But there hasn't been one since Oliver.

I keep the TV on for background noise as I try to sleep. I toss and turn ferociously on the king-size bed, nightmares filling my mind. I swear I hear voices.

My eyes fly open, and the bright rays of sunlight pierce through the window, temporarily blinding me. I realize that I forgot to pull the curtains closed before going to bed last night.

It's a new day. I stumble out of bed and use the bathroom. My phone rings, and when I grab it off the nightstand, I see it's my boss, Carter Nelson.

"Hello."

"Good morning, Katherine. How are you?"

"I'm okay, Carter. How are you?"

"Good. Good. Listen. When do you plan on returning to the firm?"

"I don't know yet. Is there a problem?"

"No. You do plan on coming back, right?"

"Yes, Carter. I just need a little extra time."

"Okay. Do me a favor and try to get back here as soon as you can."

"I will."

I sigh and toss my phone on the bed. It rings again. This time, it's my real estate agent.

"Hello."

"Kat, I have great news!" Her voice beams through the phone. "They accepted your

counteroffer and would like to close quickly.”

I slowly close my eyes and inhale a breath. “That’s great news. Thirty-day closing and two-week occupancy thereafter.”

“Thirty days? They were thinking next week.”

“I don’t care what they were thinking. They’ll agree to my terms if they want the brownstone badly enough. If not, someone else will buy it. I have to go, Julie.” I end the call.

I go into the bathroom to put on some makeup and fix my hair. As I stare at myself in the mirror, I swear I catch a glimpse of someone standing behind me. My heart jackhammers in my chest as I quickly close my eyes. When I open them, there’s no one there. I am certifiably crazy now.

### Chapter Thirty-Nine

#### DAHLIA

I dial Dr. Burton's office number and use Katherine's name to secure an emergency appointment. I knew that her fragile mental state would get her in to see the doctor immediately.

He's sitting behind his desk when I step into his office. He looks up and removes his black-rimmed glasses.

"Katherine, please have a seat." He gestures.

"The name is Dahlia, Dr. Burton." I smile, taking a seat on the leather couch. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

A small frown creases his forehead, causing his brows to furrow in confusion. He leans forward slightly with a questioning look as he asks, "Excuse me?"

"My name is Dahlia. Katherine is my sister."

"I don't understand. Katherine never mentioned she had a sister."

"Well, that's because she thinks I'm an imaginary friend. So, this is where you come in. I need you to record our session and play it back for her when she comes to see you. It's the only way I can reach her to help her understand what's happening. "

He leans back in his chair, folding his arms and holding my gaze with a narrowed eye.

“Go ahead. Push the record button and start recording,” I say.

He leans over and pushes the red button on his small recording device.

“How old are you, Dahlia?”

“Same age as Katherine. She was terrified that night twenty-five years ago. The poor girl heard her parents arguing. She was so frightened, especially when her mother grabbed her, threw her in the corner, and made her watch. Dear old Daddy was having an affair, and Mama didn’t like it, so she stabbed him twenty-two times—one stab wound for each month he was cheating on her. Katherine was too scared to move, so she cowered in the corner, shaking uncontrollably and crying. She begged for an escape, so I took over and protected her. I took her place that night so she didn’t have to watch the horrific things her mother did. I sent her away to a happy place. A place where there is no sadness and pain. Men who sin need to be punished, Dr. Burton. All Katherine ever wanted was to be happy and find the perfect man. I wanted that for her, too, but I had no choice but to step in when they sinned. Do you think it’s okay for men to cheat on their wives or girlfriends, Dr. Burton?”

“No, I don’t.” He shakes his head.

“You’re a good man.”

“We’ll start with a boy named Jack. He told Katherine he loved her, but yet he was seeing another girl behind her back—a cheerleader whore who sunk her claws into him. I had to take care of him before he hurt her.”

“You don’t think killing the men hurt her worse than Katherine finding out they

cheated on her?"

"It doesn't matter. They sinned and needed to be punished." I arch my brow.

"Then, there was Bradley and Caroline. Such a shame." I shake my head. "That went terribly wrong."

"What are you talking about, Dahlia? What went terribly wrong?"

"Daddy Bradley was having an affair. It had been going on for months. As much as I wanted to plunge a knife into his chest twenty-two times, the opportunity never presented itself because Katherine and I were away at college. So, I drove home one night and drained the brake fluid from his car, causing the brakes to fail. Only Caroline wasn't supposed to be in the car with him that night, but she was. I do feel bad about that. I don't want you to think I don't."

He sits in his leather chair and slowly nods, his finger hanging from his chin.

"After Katherine graduated law school, a small law firm in Rockstead hired her to work for them. When she met Brian, I liked him and thought he was the perfect man she had been searching for. The problem with Katherine is that she gets caught up in her happy little world and doesn't notice the signs."

"What signs?" Dr. Burton asks.

"The signs that your man is cheating. I noticed Brian's behavior take a turn, so I followed him one night to a hotel outside of town. He and Cindy met in the parking lot and walked inside together. They were in there for three hours. It broke my heart that I had to kill him, but he wasn't the perfect man Katherine thought he was. I was delighted when Cindy pushed for Katherine to move away from Rockstead and start a new life. But it was too much when Katherine was moved to family law, handling all

those divorce cases. All those distraught women, crying and hurt that their husbands were cheating on them. They had to be punished for their sins.”

“And Oliver?” Dr. Burton asks, shifting in his seat.

I sigh, bring one leg up, and tuck it under the other. “Oliver.” I shake my head. “He started out perfect until he met that whore at the office. Then his lies started.”

“I want you to tell me why Katherine was stabbed and left for dead back in Rockstead. Did you stab her?”

“I had to make it look like a break-in so nobody would suspect her. After I killed Brian, I broke the lock on the door. Then I called 911 from a burner phone, pretending I was a neighbor, out walking my dog, when I saw something suspicious at the house. After I smashed the phone and threw it in the neighbor’s garbage can at the curb, I went inside the house, injected us with the slightest dose of Rohypnol, picked up the knife, and plunged it into our belly. I knew the police were on their way and exactly where and how to stab, so she didn’t die.”

“And what about after you killed Oliver? Why didn’t you stab Katherine again to make it look more real. Detective Walker suspects she has something to do with the murders.”

“Katherine believed she took that pill. Before she could swallow it, I took over and spit it in the toilet. The pill was enough to make the police believe that she was knocked out all night. And yes, I know Detective Walker suspects her, but she will never find any evidence proving it. I’ve hid my tracks well, Dr. Burton. You can go ahead and stop the recording.”

He leans over and pushes the button. “Aren’t you worried I’ll go to the police with this?” he asks.

“I know that you can’t go to the police because that would break doctor/patient confidentiality unless I tell you I’m going to commit another murder, which I’m not—at least not here in New York.”

His eyes steadily narrow at me. “You are not a patient of mine.”

I reach into my purse, take a dollar bill from my wallet, and toss it on the table in front of the couch. “I am now.” I smile. “You know what I’m capable of, Dr. Burton. And I know you won’t say a word, or I’ll have your license snatched away from you so fast it’ll make your head spin.”

“What do you think Katherine will do when she hears this?”

“It’ll be hard for her to accept at first, but in time, she’ll adapt.”

“She’s too fragile. I think it’ll break her,” he says.

“Perhaps you’re right.” I tap my lip with my index finger. “But she needs to know, or else she’ll go on with the rest of her life thinking someone is watching and following her. Make sure you convince her that she wasn’t the one who killed those men. She will call you for an emergency appointment when I wake her up. Give her one. Understand me?”

“Yes, of course.” He nods.

“Good.” I stand from the couch and pick up my purse, hooking it over my shoulder and gripping the strap. “It was nice to speak with you finally, Dr. Burton. Have a pleasant day.” I smile as I leave his office.

### Chapter Forty

#### DR. BURTON

The door slams shut. I let out a sigh of relief and walk over to my computer. My fingers automatically type 'Dissociative Identity Disorder' into the search bar, a term I've heard of but never encountered in my practice as a therapist. The cursor blinks impatiently as I scroll through patient cases and medical articles, trying to understand what just happened in my office.

Dahlia calls herself Katherine's sister, but she's not. She emerged from the depths of Katherine's subconscious, taking over to protect Katherine from the devastating trauma her mother inflicted on her.

Dahlia is braver, stronger, and more resilient than Katherine could ever be. It was uncanny how different her voice was from Katherine's. Every word and movement seemed calculated and precise. She radiated a confidence I had never seen before. It was eerie how different they were, leaving no doubt in my mind that the woman who spoke to me was not Katherine.

I need to do some more research before Katherine calls to schedule an appointment, so I press the intercom button on my desk phone.

"Cancel the rest of my appointments for the day. But if Katherine Tate calls, put her through."

### Chapter Forty-One

KAT

My hands tremble as I shake a white pill into my hand and chase it down with some water. I take in a breath as I grip the bathroom counter and lower my head. I need to talk to Dr. Burton. I have to tell him about the storage unit and what I found.

I enter the bedroom, grab my phone from the bed, and dial Dr. Burton's number.

"Dr. Burton's office. How may I help you?"

"Hi, this is Katherine Tate. I was hoping to get in to see Dr. Burton today. It's an emergency."

"Hold one moment, Mrs. Tate."

The staff probably thinks I'm crazy, too.

"Hello, Katherine. It's Dr. Burton." I found it strange that he answered the call.

"Oh, Dr. Burton. I was hoping to get an appointment with you today. Something happened last night that I need to tell you about."

"I'm very booked right now and am currently behind on my patients. How about I stop by your house tonight, and we can talk there? It sounds like you need to speak with me today."

“I do. My house will be fine. What time?”

“Will seven o’clock work?”

“Seven is fine. I’ll see you then, Dr. Burton.”

I gather my things, toss them inside my bag, and head down to the lobby to check out, even though I rented the room for two nights. After handing the valet guy my ticket, and he brings the Bentley around, I climb in and drive home.

With my heart racing in anticipation, my hand trembles as I insert the key and turn the doorknob. I push the front door open and slip inside, my senses on high alert as I scan the foyer and every corner of the house for any signs of an intruder. It doesn’t look like anyone has been here since I left yesterday.

I’m hungry. So I go to the kitchen and open the refrigerator. There isn’t much because I haven’t shopped recently. I notice cheese slices, so I open the cabinet and see the loaf of bread is still good. I make a grilled cheese sandwich. As I carefully slide the sandwich out of the pan and onto a plate, my hand reaches over to the block of sharp knives. I pull the biggest knife out, noticing my reflection in the shiny blade. My fingers give way when I see a distorted version of myself, and the knife falls onto the Caesarstone island, making a loud sound. I jump back and place my hand over my racing heart. I’m no longer hungry, so I push the sandwich away.

I feel like I’m in a daze. I’m losing my mind, and I don’t know how to stop it. I walk up the stairs, grab a blanket from the corner of the bedroom, crawl on the bed, and cover myself. If I sleep for a while, maybe I’ll feel better when I wake up .

I slept most of the day, which was fine by me. The less I’m awake, the better. Dr. Burton will be here soon, so I brew two cups of coffee. The knock at the door startles me—everything these days startles me. I walk over and invite Dr. Burton in. He

removes his black coat and matching Fedora and hangs them on the coat rack.

“Let’s sit in the living room. I made us some coffee. How do you take yours?” I ask.

“Just black.” He sits in Oliver’s wingback chair facing the couch.

I rush to the kitchen, grab the coffee, and hand Dr. Burton his cup. Then, I take a seat on the couch.

“I’m losing my mind, Dr. Burton. I think I need to be institutionalized,” I say, my hands wrapped around the piping-hot mug. I reach into my pocket and pull out the storage unit key and the crumpled paper that The Widowmaker left for me yesterday.

“What is this?” he asks as I reach over and hand them to him.

“When I came home yesterday from running some errands, I found that on the kitchen island. They were sealed in a white envelope.”

“Is this a storage unit key?” He holds it up and studies it.

“Yes. So, I went there last night. Inside was a large black safe. When I opened it,” I covered my mouth with my trembling hand as tears swelled in my eyes, “All my missing jewelry and the knife that was used to kill my husbands and those other men were in there. Dr. Burton, The Widowmaker, was in my home again. Why is he doing this to me? Torturing me the way he is.” I cup my face in my hands as tears begin to fall.

“Katherine, I need to ask you something. ”

I sniffle and wipe my eyes. “What?”

“Who is Dahlia?”

“What?” My brows furrow.

“Have you ever known anyone named Dahlia?” he asks.

“When I was a little girl, I had an imaginary friend. Her name was Dahlia. She showed up when I was five.”

“How long did she stay with you?”

I brought my hand up to the back of my head and smoothed down the hair.

“I don’t know. I think at least a couple of years. One day, she was gone. Why?”

He shifts in his chair and pinches the bridge of his nose before pulling out his small black recorder.

“Dahlia visited me today.”

“Excuse me?”

“She’s more real than you think.” He presses the button on the recorder, leans over, and sets it on the coffee table.

I listen. Her voice is familiar but also different—like a distorted version of mine. My heart pounds against my chest, threatening to choke me as I struggle to hold back the tears. It's overwhelming—this flood of emotion and memories brought on by her words as she describes what she’s done. Dr. Burton can see I’m highly upset, so he reaches over and turns off the recording.

“The trauma you experienced when you were five is what formed Dahlia,” he says. “During trauma, the brain can compartmentalize the traumatic experiences. You couldn’t cope with watching what your mother was doing to your father, so Dahlia took your place and sent you far away to protect you—to a place that made you happy. She is what is called an alter. And what you’re experiencing is dissociative identity disorder. The times when you felt someone was watching and following you were real because Dahlia is inside you, watching your everyday life unfold.”

“This is too much,” I say, getting up from the couch. I pace around the room, holding my head. “So you’re saying that I was the one who killed Jack, my parents, my husbands, and all those other men?” Tears streamed from my eyes.

“It wasn’t you, Katherine. It was Dahlia. She is a completely separate person from you. After I leave, research D.I.D. so you can better understand.”

I drop to my knees and sob in the middle of the living room. Dr. Burton stands from his chair, walks over, and tries to comfort me.

“Dr. Burton, I need you to commit me to a mental hospital.”

“I think that’ll make things worse for you. I can help you, Katherine. I’ve spent the entire day reading literature on the disorder, and I will continue to do so. If you come to my office three times a week to start, we can work on putting Dahlia to rest so she can’t come out again.” His hand softly rubs my back while his soft voice soothes me.

“I need to call Detective Walker and tell her I killed all those people.”

“No, you don’t. You must understand that you did not kill those men. Dahlia did.”

“How can I not remember anything?” I shout.

“Because when Dahlia comes out, you go to sleep and stay asleep until she lets you wake up. Let me help you. You do not need to ruin your life because of this. It isn’t your fault, Katherine. Okay?”

I nod, and he helps me from the floor.

“She killed my parents, Dr. Burton.”

“I know.” He hugs me. “Everything will be alright. I promise. Just get some rest, and we’ll talk tomorrow.”

I nod again as the tears freely flow from my eyes. After Dr. Burton leaves, I bathe, hoping it will relax me. When I finish, I climb into bed and open my laptop. I bring up Google and type dissociative identity disorder into the search bar. I began reading articles and watching YouTube videos of people who ‘supposedly’ have the same disorder. I can’t deal with this. It’s too much, and Dahlia needs to be stopped.

I glance over at the bottle of pills on the nightstand. It’s the only way. I pick up the bottle, shake the pills in my hand, and pop them in my mouth, chasing them down with water before I choke. I sink into the plush mattress, pulling the soft comforter up to my chin as I try to find a comfortable position before facing my demise.

### Chapter Forty-Two

I slowly open my eyes and take in the sterile white walls with the fluorescent light above casting a harsh glow, hurting my already sensitive eyes. I turn my head and notice a small window high up near the ceiling. Where am I?

I look down at my wrists that are strapped down to the bed, along with my ankles. I try to break free, but when I do, it hurts my wrists, so I stop. I scream, yell, and make every noise I can to get someone's attention.

My memories are hazy, and my mind struggles to piece together the events leading up to where I am. All I can recall is the swallowing of countless pills out of desperation to stop a killer. Now, I'm in this strange place. Is this purgatory? Am I being punished for all of my sins? Perhaps this is just another hellish realm I have stumbled into.

I hear a click, and the door opens. A nice-looking man enters and walks over to my bedside.

"You're awake."

"Where am I? "

"You're in Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital. You tried to commit suicide, Katherine."

"How long have I been out?" I ask.

“A couple of days. We had to heavily sedate you to keep you from hallucinating. You were screaming that someone named Dahlia was trying to kill you.” He picks up the clipboard hanging off the end of the bed. “You have been assigned to Dr. Seagram. I’ll go let him know you’re awake.”

“No. I want Dr. Burton.”

“I’m afraid that’s not possible.” He leaves the room, and I hear the lock clicking when the door shuts.

I tightly close my eyes, praying this is nothing but a nightmare. They open when I hear the door open.

“Katherine, I’m Dr. Seagram,” he smiles, holding an iPad. “How are you feeling?”

I know if I tell him anything other than ‘fine,’ I will probably be sedated again.

“Fine,” I say.

“That’s good to hear.”

“Can you untie me? My wrists and ankles are hurting.”

“Sure. I don’t see why not. You seem to be in a calm state.”

If he only knew.

He takes off the restraints, and I massage my wrists, trying to soothe the throbbing pain.

“Thank you,” I say.

“You’re welcome.”

“Is there any way you can call Dr. Burton? I need to speak with him.”

His face pales. “Katherine, I’m sorry, but Dr. Burton passed away a couple of nights ago.”

My eyes widen. “What? How? ”

“He was in a bad car accident not too far from his home.”

My hand flies over my mouth. I gasp, struggling to breathe.

“Dahlia,” I whisper.

“Excuse me?” Dr. Seagram says.

“Nothing. He was my therapist. I can’t believe he’s gone.”

“I know. He was a well-respected doctor and will be missed. Now, let’s talk about you and what made you want to end your life.” He pulls the chair from the desk over to my bedside and sits down.

I tell him about my past, Dahlia, and the murders. At this point, I don’t care. Lock me away for eternity if it’ll help get rid of Dahlia.

He listened carefully to every word I spoke, occasionally nodding and typing on his iPad.

“Dr. Burton has a recording. Dahlia visited him at his office and made him record everything she said. You need to find that recorder.”

“I’ll see what I can do.” He places his hand on mine. “It’s almost time for lights out, so we will have another session after breakfast tomorrow.” He put the restraints back on me.

“I don’t need these!”

“They’re just a precaution, Katherine. Just try to relax.”

“No!” I scream, trying to fight my way out of the restraints.

“I need some help in here,” Dr. Seagram opens the door and shouts.

The nice-looking man in my room earlier walks in, holding a syringe. He shoves it into my arm, and I drift off to sleep.

I find myself standing at the shoreline. My toes sink into the wet sand as the waves gently lap at my feet. The ocean water is surprisingly warm, like a soothing bath. I tilt my face towards the sky and bask in the sun's rays, feeling its warmth ooze into my skin. I smile. I feel nothing but happiness, safety, and peace. I look around the area and see a white house—not just any house. The house stands tall and proud, with a wraparound porch, large windows, multiple floors with balconies, and a perfectly manicured garden.

“Hello, Katherine,” I hear a voice from behind.

I turn around and stare into the eyes staring back at me.

“Do you remember me?” she asks.

“Dahlia?” My brows furrow.

“Yes, it’s me.” She reaches out to grab my hand, and I involuntarily take a step back. I should be scared, but being in this place doesn’t allow fear.

“Where am I?” I ask.

“You’re in your happy place.” She smiles. “This is where you come when I need to take care of things. You like it here.”

“It’s a beautiful place. I don’t remember being here before.”

“Come with me. I’ll show you the inside of the house.” She extends her hand. “Come on.”

I slowly place my hand in hers—our fingers curl around each other’s. She leads me to the house, and we step inside. It’s grand and elegantly decorated.

“There you are.” A handsome man smiles, emerging from the kitchen. He walks over and kisses my cheek. “I’ve missed you. Did you have a nice trip? ”

I’m confused. What the hell is going on? I look down at my left hand and notice a large diamond ring with a band. It’s not my wedding ring from Oliver. It’s much more extravagant and different. I play along.

“Yeah. The trip was good.”

He wraps his arms around me, and I feel nothing but pure love.

“I miss you when you’re gone. Hopefully, that’s the last trip for a while.”

I break our embrace and smile as I stare into his beautiful green eyes. “Me too.”

“I have to go outside and tend to the flowers. Would you like to join me?”

“I’ll be out there soon.”

“Okay.” His lips press against my forehead.

He walks out of the house; the door creaks as it closes. I turn to Dahlia.

“Who is that?”

“That’s Elias, your husband. He’s your perfect man, and this is your perfect life.”

I feel overwhelming peace flowing through me for the first time in forever. I have no worries, fear, or impending doom—just peace.

“This is where you belong, Katherine. The real world is too much for you. You’ll never find a more perfect man than Elias. He loves you more than life, and he would never cheat on you or hurt you.”

I step onto the beautiful wraparound porch and feel the sun's warmth on my skin. White columns line the edges, supporting the roof, which provides shade for the white wicker furniture. Colorful potted flowers from the garden decorate the windowsills.

“It’s so beautiful here,” I say, staring at the handsome man watering the flowers. He catches my stare and smiles with a wink. My belly involuntarily flutters.

“You need to stay here, Katherine. This is your dream home. And Elias is the man you’ve always dreamed of. There will be no more fear, pain, or anxious thoughts. What do you say?”

I stare out onto the beach, the vast water stretching to infinity as the sun begins to set, casting a golden glow over this place called paradise. I feel different, and I don't want to leave. My heart is filled with peace and serenity, and I wish to stay in this magical haven forever.

“Okay. I want to stay.”

“Did you hear that, Elias?” Dahlia shouts. “Kat isn't going on any more trips. She's here to stay forever.”

He sets down the hose, walks over, and his strong hands grip my hips.

“I am so happy to hear that. I love you so much, baby. You have no idea.” His lips meet mine. “Let's go inside and celebrate.”

“I'll be in in a minute,” I say. I turn to Dahlia. “Is this goodbye?”

“Yes, I'm afraid so.”

“Thank you, Dahlia.”

“You're welcome, Katherine.”

I stare at her momentarily, step inside the house, and shut the door.

### Chapter Forty-Three

#### DAHLIA

##### Present

My eyes fly open, and a smile perches on my lips. It doesn't take long to realize what predicament I'm in as I stare at the sterile white walls while restrained in an uncomfortable bed.

I think about Dr. Burton—poor man. I had no choice. I only showed myself to him so he would tell Kat. I knew the events of her life made her unstable. I also knew that she'd try to take her life to end the misery and pain that gripped her. It was all part of my plan. Now, I'm free. She's in her happy place with her perfect husband and beautiful home, where she'll spend eternity. I, on the other hand, need to think of a way to get out of this godforsaken place. I have no choice but to play the game and pretend to be Katherine Tate. I will be the best and most rehabilitated patient this place has ever seen. It might even be kind of fun.

I'm unrestrained and taken to the dining room for breakfast the following morning. Cereal, toast with various spreads, yogurt, fruit, eggs, bagels, and French toast fill the buffet table. I scoop some scrambled eggs onto a plate and fill a bowl with yogurt and fresh fruit. I sit with four other women—some younger, some older. The one with the greasy red hair and face full of freckles talks to herself. She won't make eye contact with anyone. The woman with the short brown hair has fresh scars going across both wrists. She barely eats as she picks at her food.

After breakfast, I'm escorted by a nurse to Dr. Seagram's office.

"Katherine, come in and have a seat." He smiles. "How are you feeling today?"

"Honestly, Dr. Seagram. I feel good. For the first time in ages, I feel good."

"That's what I like to hear, but we have a lot of work to do."

"I have to ask. Am I allowed to use my phone in here?"

"Well, we have rules regarding the use of personal phones. We keep them locked up. You may have phone privileges for one hour after two weeks of treatment."

"Is there any way I can have that privilege after our session? I only ask because I need to speak to my realtor. My house is pending sale, and I need to know if the couple who made an offer are still interested in the terms I presented."

"We'll see." He smiles.

We have our session, and I tell him what he wants to hear. When our session ends, he tells me to stay put and excuses himself. A few moments later, he returned with my cell phone and handed it to me.

"You have to call your realtor here, and I must be present during the call. Once you're finished, I need to lock your phone back up."

"No problem." I smile as I dial my realtor. She answers on the first ring.

"Katherine, I've been trying to reach you!" Her irritating voice rings in my ear. "The couple backed out. They don't want to wait."

“I figured. Just keep trying. I’m out of town and will be for at least a month. So make sure you let them know.”

“Where are you?”

“I’m away on business. You won’t be able to reach me for a couple of weeks. I’ll call you when I can. Have a great day.” I end the call and hand my phone to Dr. Seagram. “Thank you, doctor.” I politely smile.

I’ve been in this damn place for three weeks now. The brownstone sold, and I must be out of here before the closing date. I’m the perfect patient, and Dr. Seagram is highly impressed with my progress—fake progress.

Since today marks week three, I’m allowed visitors. I walk into the visiting room and see Samantha sitting at a table by the window. She jumps up, runs over, and hugs me when she sees me.

“Oh my God. I can’t believe they wouldn’t let me see you until now. How are you?” She breaks our embrace, her hands gripping my shoulders.

“I’m okay.” I smile. Honestly, she is the last person I want to see. Katherine may have liked her, but I find her annoying.

“You look a little different. You seem a little different,” she says.

“That’s because I’m getting the help I need.” We sit down at the table.

“Why did you do it, Kat?” she asks, her face taut and despair in her eyes.

“I guess Oliver’s death was too much. But all is good now. I’m getting the help I need.”

She takes hold of my hand. “Listen, I’m giving you a heads up. I overheard the partners talking, and they’re looking for a way to keep you from returning to the firm.”

“That’s okay. I wasn’t going back anyway. I’ll make it easy for them. I’ll call Carter and tell him I quit.”

“What are you going to do?” she asks.

“I don’t know. That’s the beauty of it. Oliver left everything to me, and I don’t have to worry about working, especially with the sale of the brownstone. Once I put my life back together, I’ll figure out my next move.”

“I’m so happy you’re okay.” She leans over and hugs me. “As soon as you get out of here, I’m taking you out for a fun night on the town.”

“That sounds nice.” I smile.

### Chapter Forty-Four

#### DETECTIVE PAIGE WALKER

Oliver Tate was the last victim of The Widowmaker's deadly game. His body, like the others before him, had been discovered in a gruesome state. Despite the relentless search for answers and justice, no suspects or leads have surfaced in connection to these murders—except for Katherine Tate. My gut tells me she's behind the murders. Perhaps the guilt was too much for her, and that is the reason she tried to take her own life.

Dr. Burton, her therapist, tragically passed away in a car accident after losing control of his vehicle on the road when his brakes failed. It seems like every person Katherine Tate comes in contact with dies one way or another.

"She did it." I look up at Elijah, who is doing paperwork.

"Who? Katherine Tate?"

"Yep. I know she did."

"There's no evidence proving it, Paige."

"Don't you find it odd that the murders stopped after her husband?"

"Yeah, but as I said, we don't have a shred of evidence against her. And even if she did commit those murders, she's locked up at Bellevue. The cheating men of New

York City are safe.”

I roll my eyes, roll my chair back, and stand up. Grabbing my purse from the drawer, I hook it over my shoulder and grab my phone from my desk.

“Where are you going?” Elijah asks.

“To Bellevue.”

I push open the doors and step into the lobby at Bellevue. After signing my name on the clipboard at the reception desk, I wait for the door to buzz and open. I make my way down the hall until I see a window with a woman in maroon-colored scrubs sitting behind it.

“I’m here to see Katherine Tate.”

“You can wait in that room right there.” She points behind me. “I’ll have someone bring her in.”

“Thank you.”

I walk into the room. The sterile white walls are cold and impersonal. A few patients sit around tables, visiting with their loved ones. I settle into a chair at a small round table near the window, my fingers tapping against the smooth surface as I stare at the snow slowly melting away.

“Detective Walker.” Katherine smiles, walking into the room and sitting across from me.

“Hello, Katherine. You look well.”

“Thank you. I feel much better. What brings you here?”

“Something is nagging at me,” I say.

“Okay? What is nagging you?”

“The fact that there hasn’t been another cheating man murdered since your husband.”

“That’s a good thing, right?” She cocks her head.

“Yes. It’s very good. But do you see where I’m going with this? ”

“No. I don’t.”

She’s different somehow. Her mannerisms, her tone. My gaze lingers on her face, trying to figure out what's changed.

“You haven’t been back to work since your husband’s death, and the murders have stopped. Don’t you find that coincidental?” I narrow my eyes.

“No.” She shakes her head. “I don’t.”

“Where’s the knife, Katherine? What did you do with it?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, Detective Walker.”

“I think you do.” She leans in, mere inches from my face. “I know you’re The Widowmaker. You killed those men.” I grit my teeth, desperate for her to confess.

“Are you okay, Detective Walker? You’re looking a little pale.”

“Just admit you killed those men. You’re already locked up in this place. I can get the district attorney to cut a deal. I can make it so you stay here and not behind bars.”

She lets out an eerie laugh. “Why would I admit to something I didn’t do? This is harassment, Detective Walker. Maybe I should call your captain and tell him you’re harassing a mental patient in a mental facility.”

“I know you did it.” I point at her and stand up.

“Believe what you will, detective. I do believe this case has your mind twisted. Maybe speaking to one of the doctors here will do you some good.”

I stare at her with contempt. “Enjoy your stay here, Mrs. Tate.”

A sinister smile dances on her lips. “I am. Thank you.”

### Chapter Forty-Five

#### DAHLIA

#### Two Weeks Later

I'm finally out of the place. With the click of the lock, I'm free.

The warm spring breeze hits my face as I push open the heavy glass doors of Bellevue and step outside. I take a deep breath and savor the sweet scent of newly blooming flowers. The sun is shining, and birds are chirping in the distance. For the first time in forever, I feel truly alive.

I check on Katherine from time to time. She's as happy as a clam with her new life, tucked away on an island with her perfect husband and home. But now that I'm out, I won't check on her anymore. I have a new life to live.

When I step inside, the brownstone is empty. During my stay in Bellevue, I had arranged for all the furniture to be moved out and put into storage. I only came by to collect what was left in the bedroom closet. The door opens, and the new owners walk in. They wanted to be here when I retrieved my things since it is now their home.

I fill the large suitcase. Mr. Brown is nice enough to carry it down the stairs for me and load it into the cab at the curb.

"I hope the two of you will be very happy here," I tell them.

“The house is so lovely. We will be.” Mrs. Brown smiles.

“My husband and I were very happy here.” I walk to the door, place my hand on the knob, and turn around. “Until he was murdered.”

“Excuse me?” Mr. Brown’s brows furrow.

“The realtor didn’t tell you? My husband was murdered in this house. He was stabbed twenty-two times, and his body lay on the floor right over there, I point. “It was a break-in.”

“I—I...we weren’t told any of this,” Mrs. Brown’s voice is shaky.

“You’ll be fine. You might want to install a better security system, though.” I smile, open the door, and walk out of the house.

Before climbing into the cab, I see a car parked down the street. Detective Walker is following me, and I don’t like it.

After checking into The Plaza, I toss my suitcase on the bed, unzip it, take out the blonde blunt-cut wig with a bang, and hold it up. This will have to do until I can get my natural hair this color. After placing the wig on my head, I take the box of colored contacts out and place them in my eyes, changing the color from blue to a beautiful emerald color. Now, what to do about Detective Walker and her incessant following. She won’t recognize me in this disguise.

I waited until midnight to check out of the Plaza, leaving behind any ties to my old life. Then, I instructed the bellman to load my luggage into the back of a cab and told the driver to take me to the 1Hotel Brooklyn Bridge in Brooklyn. As we drove through the city streets, I couldn't help but feel a sense of excitement and determination for the new plan I was about to implement.

If I don't leave this city, Detective Walker will not stop trying to prove I'm The Widowmaker. Every move I have made since my first kill has been carefully calculated down to the smallest detail. That's why I had paid a hefty sum to have the large, black safe containing all the evidence dropped into the depths of the Atlantic Ocean. The thought of it sinking deeper and deeper, out of reach from prying eyes, gave me a sense of relief and satisfaction. I couldn't risk getting caught now when I had come so far and accomplished so much.

I stretch across the plush bed and open my laptop, pulling up a map of the United States.

"Where would I like to go?" I press my finger to my lips as I study the map. Florida wouldn't be too bad. I hear the Florida Keys are lovely. Or maybe Hawaii. No. Key West.

I pull up houses for sale and study the few that are available. One catches my attention and is located on Frances Street. It's a beautiful multi-level, white-sided home surrounded by a white picket fence. Black shutters grace the windows, and the wraparound porch reminds me of Katherine's house. I review the photos of the four-bedroom, four-bath, three-thousand-fifteen-square-foot home that has been completely renovated. It's perfect, and I can see myself living there—no more brutally cold and snowy New York City winters. Just plenty of sunshine and warm weather. No more boots or coats—just shorts, tank tops, maxi dresses, and sandals. Tomorrow, I will call the realtor and put in an offer.

### Chapter Forty-Six

#### DETECTIVE PAIGE WALKER

#### One Month Later

I stand in disbelief over the lifeless body of Travis Moore, the husband of Samantha Moore. Blood pools around him, staining the hardwood floor beneath. But what truly captures my attention is the sharp blade of a chef's knife strategically placed on his abdomen, covered in his blood.

"How many stab wounds?" I ask.

"I counted twenty-two," Olin says.

"Bag up that knife and get it to the lab to be tested ASAP."

I walk into the kitchen, where Mrs. Moore sits at the table, sobbing.

"Mrs. Moore, I need to ask you some questions."

She nods and blows her nose into the tissue I hand her.

"Was your husband having an affair?"

She nods again as more tears stream down her face. "I had no idea until I came home, found my husband in the living room, and this letter next to his body." She points to

the paper with cut-out letters pasted to it.

Your husband needed to be punished for his sins. He was cheating on you with a twenty-year-old intern from his office. Every Thursday, when he told you he played cards with the guys, he took her to room 2416 at the Waldorf Astoria. Talk to the concierge there. He will confirm it. You deserve better.

I place my hand on my forehead and sigh. I pick up the letter with my glove-covered hands and hand it to Olin.

“Bag this and get it tested immediately for fingerprints other than Mrs. Moore’s.”

I climb into my car and head back to the station.

“Was it The Widowmaker?” the captain asks when I enter his office.

“Yes. But this time, he or she left the murder weapon on top of the victim. They also left a letter telling Mrs. Moore that her husband was cheating on her with some twenty-year-old intern.”

“The murder weapon and a letter?” the captain’s brows furrowed. “Do you think this is a copycat?”

“It’s possible.”

“Find the son-of-a-bitch doing this.” He points at me.

Like I haven’t been trying for months.

Katherine Tate vanished. One minute, I followed and watched her every move; the next, she was nowhere to be found. She walked into the Plaza one day, but I never

saw her leave. When I asked the hotel manager when she checked out, he told me they had no record of her ever staying there, so I requested the video footage from the day she arrived at the hotel. With a heavy sigh, the manager told me that the cameras had malfunctioned that day, and he was forced to call in a team to fix them.

After running a check on Katherine, I was at another dead end. There were no recent credit card transactions under her name, no evidence of plane tickets purchased, and no rental properties tied to her identity. It was as if she had vanished without a trace.

A few hours later, Olin walks over and throws a file on my desk.

“Results from the letter and knife,” he says.

“And?” I pick up the file and open it.

“Nothing. No fingerprints at all. Only Mrs. Moore’s was found on the letter. The crime scene was clean, too.”

“Of course it was.” I sigh, throwing down the file.

“Sorry, Paige,” he says before walking away.

I refuse to give up. Despite Katherine Tate's successful cover-up of murder, I will keep a watchful eye out for any murders resembling The Widowmaker. A callous killer like her cannot resist the urge to strike again. And when she does, I'll be there, patiently waiting for justice to be served no matter where in the country it may occur. She will screw up one day, and I vow never to let her get away with another crime.

### DAHLIA

The plane lifts off the ground, and I press my face against the window in first class as I watch the city shrink to a blur of lights and buildings. A rush of excitement and some nervousness course through my body as I leave the familiar behind and head to my new life.

“May I get you something to drink?” the flight attendant asks.

“I’ll have a glass of red wine.” I smile.

She’s back in a flash and hands me my wine. I sip it, thinking about Travis—another cheater.

One day, I was walking down the street and saw him and the twenty-year-old intern exit a cab and walk into the Waldorf Astoria. I follow them inside and step into the elevator with them. He doesn’t recognize me with my short blonde hair and oversized sunglasses. The doors open. They head down the hall to 2416. He swipes the keycard, and they enter the room. I remember Samantha telling Katherine that her husband started playing cards with the guys every Thursday night after work. She complained how she hated it because he never returned home until after midnight.

The following week, I sneak my way into room 2416 when the maid is in there cleaning and plant a bug. Then, I reserved the room next to it and waited for them. I heard everything: the loud sex and their conversations.

“Are you ever going to leave your wife?” the intern asks.

“Yeah. In time, baby. I just have to get all my financials in order.”

“I hate that we can never go anywhere or do anything in public,” she whines. “I love you and only want to be with you.”

She was in love with his money.

“I love you too, baby. Everything will work out. I promise. You must be patient. Maybe we can go on a trip together—somewhere tropical. Would you like that?”

“Yes. I would love it, Travis.”

“Then I’ll give you the money, and you can book the trip with your credit card. I can’t leave a paper trail for the wife to find. I’ll tell her I’m going on a business trip.”

It's a shame he never made the trip.

Two days later, I discovered that Samantha was going to Connecticut for a couple of days to visit her sister, who was ill in the hospital. Getting into their penthouse was easy. I still had the spare key that Samantha gave Katherine when she stayed there. I walked into the lobby in complete disguise, oversized sunglasses covering my eyes, and stepped right into the elevator, no questions asked.

I waited for Travis to return from work, and when he did, I plunged the knife into his flesh twenty-two times, telling him he was being punished for his sins.

I made a promise to myself that when I arrived in Key West, the killings would have to stop. I was starting a new life and couldn’t risk any more police involvement in my life. Although I am very careful, nobody is perfect.

The plane lands, and a smile dances on my lips as I step off and breathe in the salty air. I take a cab from the airport to the Key West car dealership and pick up my new

BMW 8 series convertible in Mineral White Metallic. I punch the address of my new home into the GPS and pull out of the lot. The crystal blue water shimmers in the bright sunlight as palm trees line the streets, and colorful houses remind me I'm in paradise.

I arrive at my new home.

Lifting the latch on the front of the picket fence, I step onto the sidewalk leading up to the house. I insert the key and open the door. I'm in awe of this place. The online photos didn't do it justice. The house is empty and echoes as I walk through it. I ordered all the new furniture online, and it's being delivered early this evening.

A knock on the door startles me. Who the hell would be at my door? Walking over to it, I see a woman in her early forties with long, blonde, curly hair standing on my porch, holding a wicker basket.

"Hi." A bright smile crosses her lips, showing her perfectly bright white teeth. "I'm Kris from next door." She points. "This is for you. It's a welcome to the neighborhood gift." She hands me the basket.

"How sweet. Thank you. Come in. I'm Dahlia."

"It's nice to meet you, Dahlia. Where are you from?"

I wasn't about to tell her I was from New York, so I lied.

"Seattle."

"Oh. What brings you to Key West?"

She's nosy, and I don't like it.

“The rain. ”

“Excuse me?” Her face contorts.

“The rain. It rains too much in Seattle. It’s depressing, and I grew sick of it. So, I packed up and moved to the sunny state of Florida to soak up all the Vitamin D.” I smile.

“Well, we do get rain here. But usually for only five or ten minutes at a time. And we do get the occasional hurricane.”

I smile and hope she leaves.

“So, is it just you here? Or you and your husband?”

“Just me. I’m not married.”

“Oh, Kevin will be so disappointed. He always liked talking to the guy who lived here before.”

“Well, maybe I can find a guy and have him over so they can talk.” I smile.

Her brows furrow as she stares at me. She thinks I’m weird, and I like it that way. Maybe she’ll leave me the hell alone from now on.

“Anyway, thanks so much for the lovely welcome basket. I really need to start unpacking.”

“Oh, okay. Well, if you need anything, I’ll be right next door.”

“Thanks, Kris. I appreciate it.”

She leaves, and I shut and lock the door.

One Month Later

So far, life in Key West has been fantastic. My days are filled with sitting on the beach, dipping my toes in the ocean, reading, swimming in my fabulous in-ground pool, and shopping .

After one of my shopping trips, I stop at Jack Flats on Duval Street for a drink.

“Hey, Dahlia,” Tom, the bartender says. “Whiskey?”

“Yes. Thanks, Tom.” I smile as I perch myself on a stool.

“How about a Cajun chicken sandwich and a side of fries to go with this drink,” he says, setting down my glass.

Before I can answer, I hear a voice next to me.

“She’d love it.”

My gaze drifts to the man standing a few feet away. His striking blue eyes lock onto mine, and I can't help but admire his chiseled jawline and dark, perfectly styled hair. He's dressed in khaki pants that hug his toned legs, and a crisp white button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up, revealing muscular forearms. My heart skips a beat as he flashes me an incredible smile, and I can feel my cheeks flush.

“I would, would I?”

“Yes. This place has the best Cajun chicken sandwich on the continent.” He makes himself comfortable on the stool next to me.

“Okay, then. Tom, get me a Cajun chicken sandwich and a side of fries.”

“I’ll have the same,” the man says. He turns and stares at me, his lips curled with the same smile as moments before. “I’m Alex.” He extends his strong-looking hand.

“Dahlia.” I place my small hand in his.

“What a beautiful name for a beautiful woman. Are you from around here?”

“I am. I just moved to Key West a month ago. You?”

“I just moved here last week.”

“Then how do you know this place has the best Cajun chicken sandwich on the continent?” My brow arches .

“My parents have lived in Key West for the last ten years, and we always come to eat here when I visit.”

“And now you moved here?”

“I did. I’m an English teacher over at the University.”

“And where did you teach prior to moving here?” I ask.

“New York University. After this last winter, I decided to move somewhere warmer without snow.” He flashes a sexy smile, and I can’t help but be turned on.

We talk over whiskey and Cajun chicken sandwiches. He seems like a nice guy and incredibly handsome. He pays for my drinks and meal, takes my phone number, and tells me he’ll call as he walks me to my car. My belly flutters at the thought.

After a few nights of texting, I finally invited Alex over to my place. He boasted about his cooking skills and wanted to make me dinner. "I'll have you over to my house once the renovations are done," he promised.

The doorbell rings, and when I open it, I see Alex juggling three grocery bags.

"Let me take one of those," I say, grabbing one of the bags.

"Thanks." He steps inside and sets the bags on the island in the kitchen.

"What can I do to help?" I ask.

"You can cook?"

"Yes, I can cook." I laugh.

"How good are you with a sharp knife?"

A smirk tugs at the corner of my lips. "You have no idea the level of expertise I possess when it comes to wielding a knife." I reach for the wooden block resting on the counter, and my fingers automatically wrap around the handle of the large chef's knife as I remove it from its slot .

Thank you for reading Sins of a Husband.