

Prologue

He should have killed the old man.

The second he'd realized Harris had spotted him trespassing, he should've flanked the old man. Just crept around behind him and snapped his neck. Instead, he'd disappeared. Blended right into the woods and slipped away.

And while he'd huddled in his car, cursing himself for getting distracted enough to let Harris spot him, the old man had kept looking. And the old man had found something.

An angry tirade screamed in his mind as he watched another police car swing into Harris's driveway, sirens blaring. All those months of scouting out the woods wasted. All that time finding the perfect place, making sure not even Harris would discover it, squandered. It'd been his secret hideaway, where he could display his trophies, revel in his triumphs.

And Harris was ruining everything. Damn it! Why hadn't he stopped the old man when he had the chance?

By now, the cops were digging out his women, taking them away. By now, the cops were calling the FBI. Same way they had three years ago.

Unease surfaced, mingling with the anger, blurring with guilt. Three years ago, he'd made one mistake. Made just one kill he regretted.

But besides Diana, no one had ever suspected. And here in Virginia, no one knew him. The cops could call whoever they wanted; he'd taken precautions. They weren't going to catch him.

And he wasn't finished yet.

One

“**B**aine. My office. Now!”

FBI Special Agent Evelyn Baine spun the chair in her tiny cubicle, but her boss was already slamming the door to his office.

She shrugged back into her suit jacket, buttoned it to cover the weapon at her hip and straightened her spine. Dan Moore’s tone didn’t bother her; the ASAC—Special Agent in Charge—was always curt with her. In fact, getting called into his office this early was a good thing. It meant she was getting a new case to profile.

Her anticipation grew as she wove around cubicles in the unmarked office building in Aquia, Virginia, where the FBI’s Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU) was housed. This was her favorite time, early in the morning before most agents arrived, before the smell of burned coffee and stale air-conditioning permeated everything, when it was just her and her cases.

She entered Dan’s office and found him settled at his oversize desk. The head of BAU was, as usual, surrounded by an aura of stress that gave his skin a grayish hue and constantly slanted his eyebrows toward his nose. Today, he also looked frazzled.

“Take a seat.” Dan popped three antacids into his mouth and took a swig of coffee. “Ever been to Bakersville?”

“No, but it’s north of here, right? Small and rural?” She leaned forward, ready for another chance to take on one of society’s worst predators. Ready for another chance to give someone else the closure she’d never had. “What happened there?”

Dan frowned, maybe because he hadn’t warmed to her in the past year despite her high success rate. Then again, maybe the antacids had gotten stuck in his throat.

Evelyn didn’t need to hear the answer to her question to know there were sleepless nights and more long hours in her future. When police had a problem so terrible they couldn’t handle it themselves, they came to BAU. Given the number of profile requests faxed into the office every day, to actually get a profiler assigned meant a police department’s problem was both unusual and deadly.

“Earlier this morning, two murdered women were discovered in the woods,” Dan said. “There are a few preliminaries in the file I emailed you, though not much. I took a lot of it over the phone, but I think it’s better if you go straight to the crime scene and get the specifics firsthand. Bakersville wants you on-site now.”

“Now? For only two murders?” The question might have sounded insensitive to her a year ago, but she’d been here long enough to understand that time was a commodity BAU agents didn’t have. Normally, the police would have to strike out big before BAU swooped in.

“It’s a weird one. The Bakersville police are leading the investigation and they’ve asked us to consult. Police Chief Caulfield wants a preliminary criminal personality profile immediately.”

Dan turned back to his computer, effectively dismissing her. “If you need help, ask Greg to go with you.”

Evelyn hid her annoyance. A year ago, Greg Ibsen had initiated her into the world of behavioral analysis. But she wasn’t a rookie anymore. She didn’t need anyone checking her work simply because she was the youngest agent in the office, the one with the least field experience. She’d earned her spot at BAU. And she worked her ass off every day to prove it.

“Is there anything else?”

“Just get to work. Bakersville’s never seen anything like this. They’re not equipped to handle this killer.”

She nodded and stood. “I’m on it.” As she left his office, she couldn’t stop herself from glancing at the partition near the coffeepot serving as a bulletin board for anything the agents found of interest. Next to an article on a new brain-mapping technique and a list of the Most Wanted, someone had thumb-tacked a sheet with the heading *Predator Still at Large*. Underneath was a computer-generated sketch of Dan.

The spot-on sketch had everything from the dome-shaped head that was only bald on top to the thin, pinched lips, but Dan hadn’t yet figured out who it was. Evelyn wasn’t going to be the one to enlighten him.

As soon as she was ensconced in her cubicle again, she quickly skimmed through the meager file in her

email, then grabbed her briefcase. When she turned around, she almost slammed into Greg.

He yanked his mug out of her way, sloshing coffee onto his shoes.

She grimaced. "Sorry, Greg."

He shrugged, setting his coffee down as he slipped out of his suit coat to reveal his standard dress shirt and some cartoon-character tie. "No worries. I'll spill it on myself later, anyway."

Greg Ibsen had been at BAU seven years longer than she had, logging thousands more hours profiling complicated cases. Somehow, he was still the most easygoing guy in the office—even after he'd gotten stuck training the newbie Dan didn't want.

Dropping into his chair, he said, "One of these days maybe you could sleep in a little. Stop making everyone else look lazy." The smile in his tone told her he was at least partly kidding.

Evelyn fiddled with the thin gold band topped with a small diamond—once her grandma's—that she never took off. If her grandma realized how much time she spent working, she would've told her the same thing Greg often did: to get a hobby.

But her grandma would have understood why she didn't. She'd been the one to pull Evelyn's life back together when her best friend, Cassie Byers, had been abducted. She was the only one who truly understood Evelyn's drive to find her, even seventeen years later.

Pushing back memories of the woman who'd raised her and now needed extensive care herself, she peered at Greg around their shared cubicle wall. Unlike her blank one, his was filled with pictures of his wife, Marnie, and their adopted children, Lucy

and Josh. "Dan just gave me a new case. I'm heading out the door."

"Really? What did you get?"

"Serial killer."

Greg's eyebrows reached for each other. "Really? And you're going to the site now?"

Serial killers were what the unit was best known for profiling, but between evaluating terrorist threats and interpreting the behavior of arsonists, bomb-makers and child predators, they didn't always get priority.

"Dan said it was weird." And considering the cases they dealt with regularly, that was saying a lot.

"Weird, huh? Tell me about it when you get back."

"Sure. Dan thinks I should ask for your help, anyway."

"What? The little lady can't handle the big, scary serial killer alone?" Greg joked. "Didn't you hear that BAU has a no-women-allowed rule?"

Evelyn wished Dan's attitude didn't bother her. "You know what a rule-breaker I am."

He snorted, because that was just as much of a joke as her being unfit to work as a profiler. "Good luck with the case."

"Thanks," she said. But luck had nothing to do with it.

She'd worked toward this for most of her life and she was a damn good profiler. Whatever the case, however wily the criminal, she'd write a profile that would bring him to justice.

The Bakersville, Virginia, police station squatted on a bare patch of land. The faded brick building with weathered windows seemed out of place amid the

hundred-year-old pine trees bracketing it on three sides. It was off the main road through town, beside a mom-and-pop coffee shop and a neighborhood of starter homes.

Evelyn slung her briefcase over her shoulder and trudged up the steps into the station. Inside, it was abuzz with uniformed officers. Two had a cuffed prisoner between them, obviously brought in on a drunk and disorderly charge. Others wore nervous, uncertain expressions, probably because of the murders.

Evelyn walked up to the desk, where a young officer sat. “Evelyn Baine. I’m the criminal investigative analyst. Chief Caulfield is expecting me.”

The officer’s gaze shifted over her questioningly, and Evelyn tried not to let it get her hackles up. Bakersville was rural, and despite the diversity surrounding it, almost entirely white. With the mocha-colored skin she’d inherited from her Zimbabwean father and the sea green eyes she’d gotten from her Irish-English mother, she stood out.

When she added, “I’m with the FBI,” the officer’s gaze traveled skeptically from her tidy bun, over her well-tailored suit to her sturdy heels, then squinted at the credentials she held up.

Finally, he nodded and she tucked them back in her pocket, tugging down the hem of her blazer on the side where she wore her gun. The expensive clothes sometimes raised eyebrows, but they helped bolster her self-confidence when she arrived at a crime scene and had to establish credibility immediately.

“It’s this way,” the officer told her, leading her through a bullpen packed with cops.

There were a few civilians, too, most demanding to know about rumors of a killer. One, a heavysset, bearded man, was asking about ViCAP.

Surprised at the mention of the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program, the database the Bureau used to match unsolved cases of violent crime, Evelyn glanced back.

The blue-eyed civilian was talking to an officer whose uncertain stance and red face labeled him a rookie. "I don't think we do that," the officer said with a shrug.

Evelyn made a mental note that no one had cross-checked the murders. Most small towns weren't plugged into ViCAP. Once she saw the crime scene, she'd try to determine whether these were the killer's first crimes; if not, she'd access the database herself and see if she could track him before he'd come to Bakersville.

The officer escorting her knocked on a door marked Police Chief Tanner Caulfield, then left her alone.

"Come in," a distinctly Southern voice barked.

The man inside was young for a police chief. When he stood, he looked like he had more than a foot on her five feet two inches and a past as a high school linebacker without quite enough bulk to make it into college ball.

Evelyn thrust out her hand. "I'm Evelyn Baine, from the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit. I'm here to consult on your murder investigation."

His thick eyebrows furrowed. He stared at her dainty hand with its short, unpolished nails, then took it carefully, as though he was afraid he'd break it. As

he shook her hand, he was also shaking his head.

“Sorry. You don’t look like an agent.”

“Really?” Evelyn replied, frustrated by the too-common reaction. “What does an agent look like?”

“Bigger. But yours is a desk job, right?”

His assumption annoyed her, but a year of consulting with outside law enforcement had shown her the best way to respond. He wasn’t going to respect her unless he thought she could hold her own in the field. “I was a field agent for five years before transferring to BAU. I worked violent crime.”

Tanner’s eyebrows jerked up, and he studied her a little more closely as he settled in his chair. “You’re going to give me a profile of the killer, right? Something that’ll tell us how to catch this bastard?”

“That’s right. It’s my job to study behavioral evidence the UNSUB doesn’t know he left at the crime scene.” That was what had always fascinated her about her job—turning an unknown subject (UNSUB) into an identified killer from clues he didn’t even realize he was leaving behind. “From that, I can tell you how to locate him and how to interrogate him once he’s in custody.”

“Okay,” Tanner said slowly. “What exactly do you mean by behavioral evidence?”

“What I find at the crime scene helps me see how he thinks, what he’s looking for in his victims, why he kills.”

“Uh-huh.” Tanner sounded as if he didn’t quite understand profiling, but that didn’t matter.

Because she understood Tanner. Her job wasn’t just about profiling the perpetrators. It was also about profiling the people who called her onto their turf. Most of them only came to the FBI if they were

desperate, and many of them resented it. She'd learned fast that sizing up whoever was in charge made her job easier.

Five minutes in Tanner's office was all she needed to figure out that his position was a major source of pride and that he'd felt underqualified *before* he'd been tested with a serial killer. As long as she was careful with his ego, he'd be eager to listen to her.

"Let's get started." Energy hummed in Evelyn's veins. Time to nail another predator to the wall. And he'd never see her coming.

"Do you have the profile for me now?"

Without knowing anything other than that there'd been two murders? Did Tanner think she was a psychic? "I'm afraid it doesn't work that way."

"How does it work?"

"You have cops at the scene? Let's start there. I want to join them."

Tanner frowned. "It's ugly, Agent Baine."

Evelyn nodded. As a woman, she got this reaction a lot. "Trust me, I've probably seen worse."

"Okay." He stood. "I'll take you."

Evelyn followed him out to a patrol car and, ten minutes later, they were talking to Jack Harris, to tell him they'd be joining the other cops on his property.

"I wanted him to know I was back. We wouldn't want him to think we were trespassing and shoot at us," Tanner told her as they returned to the car.

Evelyn glanced at the elderly man watching them from his doorway. He looked like he shouldn't be able to walk without assistance, let alone fire a weapon.

"Why are we driving? How far into his property are we going?"

Tanner gunned the engine. "Pretty far."

He pulled out of the driveway and headed back the way they'd come, then unexpectedly swung left onto a dirt trail. The police car slowed as it bounced over the uneven ground, and branches scratched both sides.

Finally, he pulled to a stop behind several other patrol cars and the medical examiner's van. The forest seemed to have swallowed them. Tall oak, hickory and pine trees blocked out most of the sun as Evelyn followed Tanner deeper into the woods.

"Does this area get much traffic?"

"The woods?" Tanner grunted. "None. Harris has a hundred acres back here and he guards it with his shotgun. He's the one who found the bodies, and only because he thought he spotted someone trespassing."

"So where you parked, that was the closest place to bring a vehicle to the crime scene?"

"Yes."

"Then the killer knows the area. And he's not looking for attention."

"He's not?"

Evelyn had no idea how deep into the woods they were going, but she couldn't hear the cops yet. "He didn't expect these bodies to be found. So he's not looking for press coverage."

"You might change your mind when you see the bodies," Tanner muttered.

Evelyn held back her rebuttal. It didn't matter what state the bodies were in, the drop site told its own story. And this one was already telling her they had a killer who liked his privacy, who was careful and even-tempered. Someone who'd be hard to track down

“There it is,” Tanner finally said, pointing.

Up ahead, crime scene tape had been strung around trees, and cops were working inside it. Two men in black coats with the words Medical Examiner’s Office stenciled on the pockets were carrying a gurney.

Evelyn picked up her pace, her heels sinking into ground that was still damp from last week’s rain, still littered with decaying leaves even as the first day of spring beckoned. She wanted to see the crime scene intact.

But the closer she got, the more she realized that would be impossible. The cops were trampling the scene. Reminding herself that these particular cops didn’t get many murders didn’t help.

Frustration bubbled to the surface. “Your officers are stepping on potential evidence.”

“We’re not incompetent.” Tanner caught up to her. “We took pictures before I sent my officers in to dig them out.”

The case file had mentioned partial burial of the victims, as well as knife marks so specific they suggested a killer’s signature. Evelyn had hoped to see at least one victim the way she’d been left by the killer. “Have both bodies been pulled out yet?”

Tanner gestured to the crime scene. “See for yourself.”

And when two cops moved aside, she did. “Shit,” she breathed.

There was a skull sticking out of the ground. Nothing but a skull, the long brown hair still partially attached. The killer had dug a vertical hole some five feet deep and put his victim in it, then shoveled dirt back over her until her chin rested on the ground.

Animals and the elements had violated her after the killer had.

They'd pulled the second victim out, which was one reason Evelyn knew there was a body underneath the head. The victim was laid out on the bag she'd be zipped inside to transport her to autopsy.

And being buried up to their heads wasn't the only indignity these women had suffered. The one who'd been dug up had been tightly wrapped in plastic sheeting, but the medical examiner had peeled it back. The woman was nude, her skin discolored and slipping from the bones. She was covered in circular bruises that had never healed because she'd been murdered before they could. In the center of her chest, slicing over both breasts, the killer had carved a circle into her now-rotting flesh.

The fact that Evelyn's immediate reaction wasn't to bring up her breakfast, but to step closer and study the details for what they said about the killer, suggested that she'd seen too many crime scenes in the past year. Still, like every other case, it put a familiar twinge in her heart, made her remember what it had felt like when she'd lost someone she loved.

But at least these bodies had been found. At least these families had closure. It was something she and Cassie's family might never get.

Tanner came up beside her and gulped, trying not to gag. "What does it mean?"

She didn't know. But Dan was right. This case was weird. Why display the victims if the killer wasn't showing off? The heads above the ground was shocking, the sort of action she'd expect from a killer who called the press and bragged about what he'd accomplished.

But this killer had done it for himself. Which meant he was nearby. And that he came back to visit.

“Who’s the medical examiner?” she asked Tanner instead of replying.

He pointed to a heavysset man wearing rubber boots and a scowl.

“How long have they been dead?” she called, making several cops with green-tinged faces look her way. Their curious gazes lingered, skipping over her from the top of her bun to her mud-caked heels.

“The one here, probably a month. The one in the ground, likely a week or two. Hard to be exact, given the unusually warm weather we’ve had in the past month, which would speed up decomp. I’ll know more when I get them back to my lab.”

“Have they been in the ground that long or were they moved here recently?”

He nodded at the victim still in the ground. “My guess is they’ve been here since they were killed.”

She turned back to Tanner. “Any evidence they were killed here?”

“None that we’ve found.”

“So just a drop site.” She edged a little closer to the body on the bag. This one wasn’t smeared with dried blood from the circle carved in her chest. There was only dirt around her neck, where the plastic hadn’t quite covered her. “And he cleaned them before he brought them here.”

“But do you know why?”

“Why he’s killing? To create an accurate profile, I need victim information, too. But I can tell you that this—” she gestured to the skull resting on the packed dirt “—is really unusual.”

She squinted at the skull, considering the killer's intended symbolism. Studying serial killers for a living had shown her depravity she'd never dreamed existed, but there was something singularly creepy about this.

An ominous feeling rushed over her, sending ice up her spine. She tried to shake it off, put confidence in her voice. "Typically, you'd see this sort of thing if the body was left in a public place. Since it's not, we aren't looking at showmanship. He's not trying to shock or disgust anyone. This display is personal. It has some meaning for him."

"What?" Tanner pressed.

"I don't know." She'd never seen anything like this before. "But once I figure it out, it'll tell me how he thinks."

She stepped closer to the body still packed in the dirt, knelt down next to it and felt her nose pinch at the stench of decay wafting up from the ground. Anger at the callousness of the murder knotted in her chest. She already knew the killer had gotten off on holding this woman's life in his hands, liked hearing her beg even though nothing she said would change the fact that she was about to die.

Behind her, she heard Tanner mutter under his breath, "How he *thinks*? He's a fucking head case who likes to hide in the woods and carve up women."

Studying the brunette, Evelyn replied, "If you're assuming he's insane, he's not. These crime scenes are neat, not disorganized the way they would be if the perpetrator was clinically insane. He does have an antisocial personality disorder, though."

Tanner let out an ugly snort. “Yeah, I figured anyone who could do *this* wouldn’t have tons of friends.”

“He can probably make friends,” she corrected. “He has no empathy for others, but he can fake it. He’s smart. I don’t need the autopsy results to tell you this is a sexually motivated serial killer. He’s intelligent, adaptable and extremely methodical. He enjoys outwitting the police and his victims.”

Goose bumps prickled her skin as she stared at what was left of the victim in front of her, knowing if she didn’t move fast there’d be another one. “He won’t be easy to catch.”

“Isn’t that your job? To make him easier to catch?”

Evelyn stayed perched next to the victim in the ground, but looked up at him. “It is. And to do it, I need to get inside his head, see the world through his eyes. So, tell me about the victims. Have you identified them?”

Tanner’s whole face hardened and a cold, determined sheen fell over his eyes. “Yes. The one in the ground is probably Barbara Jensen. The blonde victim on the autopsy bag is definitely Mary Ann Pollak—we identified a tattoo on her ankle. They both disappeared in the past month. They’ve lived in Bakersville for years. Mary Ann got married a few months ago.”

“What do they have in common?”

Tanner’s massive shoulders rolled. “Nothing as far as I can tell. They had totally different jobs and different interests. Friends and families said they didn’t know each other, except maybe in passing. The only thing I can see they had in common was getting grabbed by a psycho.”

“Did they look alike?”

“Well, they were about the same age. They were both white.”

The same age and race from one victim to another was normal, but a serial killer would be seeking a more specific quality. He’d have a type. “What about eye color or stature? Or anything else?”

Tanner frowned, shook his head.

Evelyn frowned, too. If this killer wasn’t searching for a physical attribute, there was something else. Something she couldn’t see.

“They were taken pretty close to when the M.E. says they were probably killed,” Tanner added.

Evelyn looked back at the brunette in the ground. So, the killer didn’t hold on to them for long. And that told her displaying the bodies was as important to him as the kill, perhaps more so.

But she didn’t know what to make of the display. Tension weighed down on her shoulders as she said, “Tell me about the abductions.”

“Like I mentioned, we’re pretty sure the one still buried in the ground is Barbara. She was last seen at a supermarket. A few hours later, her husband called to say she was missing. We found her car at the supermarket with a flat tire, but no sign of her. Mary Ann was last seen leaving a friend’s house around eleven at night. We found her car around the corner.”

She glanced at him. “Flat tire?”

“No.”

“What else can you tell me?”

“We couldn’t find any enemies. No one with a reason to hurt Mary Ann or Barbara.”

Of course not. Because these murders weren’t based on any typical motive, like revenge. If they had

been, solving them would be a simple matter of solid police work. Looking at who had a reason to hurt the women and digging into that person until he broke. If the motive was typical, a profile would be a waste of time.

Serial murders were a whole different crime. Normal motivations didn't apply and normal investigative methods didn't work. That was why she had a job. Profilers saw crime scenes differently.

"You're not going to find the killer by investigating people in the victims' lives who held grudges," Evelyn told him. "They didn't know him, at least not more than superficially."

"So I was wasting manpower?" Tanner's face broadcasted anger, but beneath it, she saw the regret.

"When they went missing, it was the right thing to do. Now that we're convinced we've got a serial killer, we go a different route."

"I'm sorry," he said, so low she barely heard him.

She wasn't sure if he was talking to her or Barbara, but she answered, "It's not your fault." He was a cop, not a profiler, so there was no reason for him to know how serial killers thought. Sometimes, late at night when she couldn't get a case out of her head, she wished she didn't know, either.

But she'd picked this job when she was twelve years old, when the world had been falling apart around her. And now, it was the one thing she excelled at, the one place where she could make a difference.

She dusted off her hands and stood, letting the cops with shovels move past her to dig Barbara out. She'd wait and see for herself, but she already expected

Barbara to be covered in strange bruises, with a circle carved into her chest.

“I don’t suppose we know cause of death yet?”

“The M.E. suspects blunt force trauma to the head on Mary Ann, but there’s no evidence of that with Barbara. He won’t be sure until he does the autopsies.”

“What about the bruising? Any idea what caused it?”

“No.” The medical examiner fixed his penetrating gaze on her. “But it wasn’t fists. And it was multiple objects, because the bruises aren’t the same size or shape.”

Evelyn took a closer look at Mary Ann. The bruising on her body was mostly circular, but the M.E. was right. The circles weren’t consistent. They suggested the killer was inflicting pain for his own pleasure, that he was a sadist. But something about that felt wrong.

As the cops started working, Evelyn moved farther back, taking in the sheer vastness of the woods, the isolation. Thinking about the two victims who’d been left here. “Two weeks apart,” she mused.

“What?” Tanner asked.

“Mary Ann and Barbara went missing two weeks apart. Assuming, of course, that this is Barbara. And now it’s been another two weeks.”

Tanner’s face had gone ghost-white and he rocked back on his heels. “Serial killers stick to that kind of pattern?”

“Usually. But two weeks between murders is short.” Evelyn scanned the scene around her, the killer’s playground. “Not a lot of time to find a potential victim, then stalk and kill her.”

Red flooded Tanner's cheeks, creeping up his ears to his hairline. "Another woman went missing two days ago."

"What?"

He shuffled his feet. "We don't think she's connected. She's not from Bakersville, either. She's from Kensington. Her husband told Kensington police she took off after an argument."

Evelyn tried to keep the frustration out of her voice. "And you think she isn't connected, why? Because you didn't find her buried here, too?"

"No, because apparently this is a repeat performance for her. The husband didn't even report it until twenty-four hours later."

"What do you mean, 'repeat performance'?"

"Apparently, after she argues with her husband, she leaves town with a friend. That friend is off on vacation and not answering her cell phone, but her husband says chances are this woman is with her."

With a serial killer on the loose, Evelyn didn't like to take chances. "You should coordinate with the Kensington cops. Make sure they follow up."

Tanner looked ready to snap at what had probably sounded like an order, so she asked quickly, "How far did we walk to get here from the car?"

He seemed surprised by the change of topic, but replied, "About a quarter mile."

"And there's no other way to get in?"

Tanner shrugged, letting out a heavy breath. "If there is, even Harris doesn't know it. And he's lived here his whole life, right on this property. It belonged to his parents before him."

“A quarter of a mile is a long way to transport two bodies. Did you see any ruts from wheels in this mud?”

“No. Definitely nothing like that.”

“That rules out a wheelbarrow to transport the bodies.”

“I guess that’s true. But does it really matter how he got them here?” Tanner demanded. “Shouldn’t we be more worried about finding him now?”

“If the UNSUB carried his victims a quarter of a mile, then he’s really strong. Carrying a grown woman’s dead weight would be unwieldy, especially if rigor mortis had set in.”

Interest sparked in Tanner’s eyes. “And?”

“And he’d have to be taller than his victims and weigh more. He had to know it was unlikely he’d be interrupted when he buried his victims, because if he was seen a quarter mile into the woods and the cops showed up, he’d be in trouble. How would he get away? And imagine how long this took him.” She gestured to Barbara, only partially dug out, even with three cops working.

When Tanner opened his mouth, she knew exactly what he was going to say, so she preempted him. “He *did* want to get away. People sometimes say serial killers try to get caught, but it’s usually bullshit. This guy is having fun. He doesn’t want to end up in handcuffs or with a bullet through his brain. He wants to get away with it. To keep killing.”

“Do you think he’s targeting the women in Bakersville exclusively?”

“I think he’s hunting where he lives.”

Tanner swayed, his expression queasy. “Bakersville is a small town, Agent Baine. I know pretty well everyone here.”

Bakersville was never going to be the same. She’d been to other small towns where the residents thought all serial killers looked like monsters, that no member of their community could hide such dark desires. Once upon a time, she’d lived in one.

And the monster there had ripped her life apart.

“The killer seems normal to everyone around him. He’s not a stranger. And he’s not an amateur. These aren’t his first murders.” Evelyn gave Tanner her profiler stare, the one that warned things were going to get worse before they got better. “This killer is not going to stop until we stop him.”

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