

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JENNIFER ST. GILES

KAYLEE'S  
JUSTICE

CASE FILE 1

### **Kaylee's Justice**

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CASE FILE 1





Golden Gate Bridge State Park  
San Francisco  
November 3rd  
Friday, 10 PM

THE WIND COMING OFF the choppy, black bay had Adam Frasier by the short hairs. He shivered with a bone deep chill as cold as the crime scene. Ten years of Washington D.C. winters had yet to beat the need for warmth out of his Southern hide. He watched Matt Hessler, a Bay area homicide detective, walk from the cordoned off area. Matt's only concessions to the cold drizzle were an Oakland A's baseball cap and a zipped windbreaker. Adam had the collar of his trench coat turned up against the November rain and a fedora planted on his head; he either wasn't as stupid or as tough as Hessler.

"Makes your skin crawl, don't it, Frasier?"

"Teri McClutcheon's murder?" Adam studied Hessler's expression as the cop exhaled smoke then snuffed his cigarette against a bear-proof trashcan before dumping the butt. Any evidence had already been collected from the can. Not that there'd be any viable clues in it. The state park had seen a hell of a lot of traffic over the past four years.

The Artist of Death had yet to be wrong. Adam didn't doubt Teri had been a victim of the Route 101 Butcher, which meant the son-of-a-bitch had killed her and buried her here four years ago, *before* being caught and convicted for the murders of three women up in Eureka.

"Hell no, bones like these are easy." Hessler nodded toward the crime scene scattered about twenty feet along the hillside. She'd been buried in pieces. "It's the flesh and blood crime scenes that are hard to take. I'm talking about the Artist of Death. How does he know this shit? We get a mailed envelope with a drawing of Teri's face, the 101 Butcher's mug, and dead-on coordinates where we find her buried, undisturbed bones. She's been in the ground for something like four years. Logic demands that this Artist of Death witnessed the murder, but it's impossible for him to have seen all the murders he reports. How many does this make?"

Adam clenched his teeth. "Twenty-six." He'd been searching for this Artist of Death for five years. Once the mystery of the Artist of Death's work grabbed the FBI's attention, Adam obtained special permission to head up the investigation. So far, the Artist had sent to various police departments across the country, accurate sketches of twenty-six victims, their killers, and the GPS of the remains. At first, Adam theorized the Artist had gleaned his information from the dark web, where killers bragged about their deeds in detail. Then the Artist sent in information for Alice Bell, a sixteen-year-old girl who'd disappeared from Layton, Utah in July of 1975. She, along with two other teens from the town, went missing that summer. All had been never found victims Ted Bundy confessed to killing. So, how had—decades after Bundy's execution—the Artist of Death known Bell's remains were buried in a Wasatch Mountain picnic area not far from Layton? Unless Bundy had secretly told another person, or left behind an unknown map to Bell's body, there weren't many ways for the Artist to have known.

"It's a mystery," Adam muttered.

“That’s all you can say? I mean how in the hell does this Artist know where all these people are buried?”

Adam shrugged. “Your guess is as good as mine.” He sounded nonchalant, but he was far from it.

Adam had left his position in the FBI’s Critical Incident Response Group to focus on finding the Artist of Death. He had to know how the man knew the things he did. So far the Artist had left nothing behind to identify him. He never used the same paper twice, never used the same pencil twice, never left DNA, a finger print, or any consistent fibers. Hell, he never even mailed his pictures from the same city. There were no patterns to follow—only a trail of locating victims and exposing their killers.

Hessler’s grim mouth curved to a smirk. “You suits don’t know any more than we do, do you? What the hell is the government paying you guys for?”

Adam was immune to local resentment. He expected it whenever he nosed uninvited into a breaking case. Being on the trail of the Artist of Death trumped any protocols or niceties. He always caught the first plane out as soon as reports of the Artist came in. Adam fruitlessly hoped that by being on scene as soon as he could, he’d find a clue. “You got any theories, Hessler? I’m all ears.”

Hessler pulled out another cigarette, lit it, took a drag, and puffed into the rain. “None that I can believe in,” he finally conceded.

Adam sat in the same boat. He gazed out over the bay for a long moment, frowning. Fog blanketed the Golden Gate Bridge in a ghostly mist as if all of the spirits haunting him had converged here to cry for justice. The one that cried the loudest, his sister Jenna, had been with him twenty-eight of his thirty-two years. All professional duty and morbid curiosity aside, deep down it was because of her he wanted to find the Artist of Death. He was obsessed. He knew it. He also knew how self-destructive obsessions were. “I’ll let you know when I figure it out.”

Inhaling the damp, salt air, Adam gave Teri's crime scene one last glance.

The Route 101 Butcher had hunted the west coast from California to Washington State, plucking young women right from the arms of their happy towns. From the beginning the bastard had refused to give up any information on his other victims or where they were buried. He sat on death row with a smug smile at the secrets he kept. Psychologists were still piecing together when and where the Butcher began killing, so it was anybody's guess how many of the hundreds of women missing from California this man had killed.

Adam should take comfort that the Artist of Death had made it possible for one more family to bring a loved one home for closure. He didn't, though. He needed answers and wouldn't stop until he had them.

The drizzling rain and depressing fog made the evening piss-ass miserable and as chilly as a morgue. Turning, he left the craggy area where Teri's body had been spread. Cars crept along the nearby Golden Gate Bridge, lights marking the passage of people going about their lives, oblivious to the stalking monsters among them. Hunching in his overcoat, Adam braced for another lonely hotel bed and the memories he could never seem to escape no matter how far he ran.



DAY 1

SATURDAY, MAY 10<sup>TH</sup>





EVA ST. CLAIRE HUNG up the phone. Mason T. Smith had just made her day.

“From that smile you’d think you’d made a date with a four-star general instead of a serial killer.”

Eva looked up to see live-in housekeeper, Lannie Andrews, shaking her head as she brandished a Swiffer dust broom over the marble floor. Her sprayed-in-place, iron-gray hair was as stiff as her starched uniform. They stood in the foyer of the St. Claire’s ancestral home, an old Victorian built in 1860. The ex-army nurse with her crew of two cleaning women, Shirley and Elena, and Larry the handyman kept the historic house in tip-top shape.

After Eva’s parents died, free-spirited but loving Aunt Zena moved in to take care of the St. Claire orphans. Long story short, disaster ensued. Though no Mary Poppins, Lannie had stepped into the fray and immediately became indispensable. The semblance of order and normalcy she brought had been, and still were, lifesavers for Eva, her brother Devin, and her sister Iris.

Lannie, along with Paddy their father-like chauffeur, kept the St. Claire’s grounded—something essential given their cursed gifts and the

constant battle to keep them hidden. Before their deaths, their parents had drilled deeply into their minds that keeping the St. Claire's psychic abilities secret was essential to their survival. Apart from family, only Lannie and Paddy knew.

"I've been trying to see Smith for months."

"And once you do will that be the end of it then? You're as haunted and pale as a victim."

Eva shook her head. "Considering what Smith did to his victims haunted and pale would be a picture of health. But to answer your question, no, it won't be the end of it. Not until he gets the death penalty he deserves."

Lannie sighed. "You need to live, laugh, and love a bit. Or this work *will* be the death of you. Your aunt agrees with me on that. She'll be here in two weeks."

Eva had forgotten her aunt's impending arrival. Having Lannie and Aunt Zena in cahoots on anything spelled trouble. She patted her hip and grinned. "What's doing me in is your irresistible cuisine. After your lobster Eggs Benedict this morning I'll be eating oatmeal or toast for a month."

"Avoiding the subject—"

"I know. I know. Won't change the problem." Lannie never let anything slide. "I promise I will think about it. Where are Devin and Iris?"

She expected her brother and sister to be chomping at the bit to leave. As usual, she'd made them all late. At least Sheriff Doug and Trisha Kendrick, who were in charge of the charity auction today would forgive Eva anything, whether she deserved it or not.

"Iris and Devin are already in the car. Your migraines are worse after every vision, Eva. You're past the thinking stage."

Eva winced, truth was a bitch. "I promise I'll do something then. Yoga is good for stress."

Lannie rolled her eyes. "Make it naked in a sauna with a man, and it would be a start."

“Later, Lannie.” Eva shook her head as she hurried out the doors and down the double staircase to the waiting car. Opening the sedan’s door, she stuck her head in, surprised to find Iris at the wheel instead of Paddy.

Barely creasing his gray suit Devin sat stiffly in the back, impatiently tapping his fingers on his cane, a heavy frown visible above his dark glasses.

Eva set her gaze on Iris and tightened her grip on her purse. She’d been about to drive separately to the charity auction so she could get to the penitentiary faster after the event. Now that Smith had finally agreed to see her, she wanted to get there before he changed his mind. Tomorrow he’d be transported several hours away to maximum security at Georgia State Prison near Reidsville.

Instead of asking Iris if she was ready for this step Eva bit her tongue and got into the car, buckling her seatbelt. At some point, they all had to get back to the way things were before her sister’s breakdown. They never had, and never would, have a normal life, but at least before then, every moment hadn’t been balanced on a broken eggshell.

Leaving the house, Iris rounded the gray marble fountain of a blindfolded Lady Justice with her sword in her right hand. She stood dead center of the circular driveway. Unlike her counterparts, this Lady Justice held unbalanced scales in her left hand where a broken heart was outweighed by a lounging, horned demon. Not even the sparkling water at the statue’s feet nor the bright yellow pansies at the fountain’s base, could alleviate her grim presence.

Eva hated the daily reminder of the St. Claire’s curse. She used to believe that she, Iris, and Devin would escape their dark fates, but they hadn’t.

Their ancestors’ circumstances and stories of fighting evil might differ, but the end results were too similar to ignore. Blindness, brokenness, and a fruitless battle for justice that always ended in tragedy.

"You both need to say something before you explode. I won't shatter." Iris's teasing tone didn't match her white-knuckle grip on the steering wheel. Iris was sunshine and bohemian compared to Eva and Devin's dark coloring and conservative style. She had long, blond hair, bright blue eyes, and wore silk T-shirts over stone-washed jeans—everywhere. Her concession to dress up for an occasion was to wear killer shoes and a blazer. Today's jacket gleamed a bright jade; her shoes, zebra striped platforms.

Eva wore a navy suit and matching flats.

Devin snorted. "As if anything we said could make a difference. You will do as your impulsive heart leads you to do. But if you're fishing for a premonition, I haven't had one of us dying in a fiery crash. So, we may be good to go."

"Great," Iris said, dryly.

Eva dug in her purse for her sunglasses. With a headache already edging closer, she needed shielding. The bright Georgia sun stabbed shards of blinding light between the live oaks lining the equestrian estate's driveway. She also wanted to hide her doubt and fear from her sister.

A lot of ground lay between "good to go" and a "fiery crash," so Devin's answer didn't help matters much. He'd be the first to admit that sometimes his allegorical premonitions were as "tunneled" as his vision. Every year, Retinitis Pigmentosa stole a little more of his sight while his psychic gift carved out another chunk of his soul.

"I'm surprised Paddy stepped aside to let you drive," Eva said, searching for a gentle way to address her worry without causing Iris to doubt herself even more. The transplanted Irishman had been more than the family's driver for twenty-five years, he'd stood in for the father they wished they'd never had.

"We've been practicing on the commute to Dimensions for the past few weeks." Before turning onto the main road, Iris met Eva's gaze. "I—we—uh, even rode MARTA the other day."

Eva searched her sister's expression. "You should have told me. I would have come with you."

"You were up at that horrible cabin, and had enough to deal with investigating Kaylee's murder. Dr. Caro rode with me and Paddy. She asked about you, Devin." Iris glanced into the rear view mirror.

Before Dr. Caroline Ward became Iris's psychiatrist, she'd dated Devin for a few months. He'd yet to say why he'd broken off the relationship.

"You told her I was never better, I hope," Devin said.

"I told her you were a stubborn ass in desperate need of her attention."

Devin leaned forward in the seat, mouth open to start a World War with Iris. Eva held up her hand. "She's jerking your chain to change the subject, Dev." She glared at Iris. "You're not getting off that easy, missy. What happened on the ride?"

Iris exhaled. "Nothing really. Just the normal bombardment of random thoughts from the people around me. Heard one guy thinking over and over again the 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.' I keep thinking about that, but otherwise I'm fine."

Eva froze then blinked with shock. Was it happening again? Had a killer linked to Iris's mind? Thanks to Stephen King's *The Shining*, the "all work and no play" phrase would be forever connected to horror as would the possession of a man's mind by evil spirits.

Devin broke into laughter. "Now she's jerking your chain, Eva. Even I can see that's too coincidental to be believable."

Iris giggled. "I only said what she was *dying* to hear."

Eva practically collapsed in the seat with relief and laughed, too. "You, brat. That wasn't funny."

"Then why are you laughing?"

"Because . . . because I need to." Eva wiped a tear from the corner of her eye. Everything from her head to her toes seemed less tense than it had seconds ago.

“Exactly. And FYI, the Marta ride went without a hitch. I’m back in control.”

*For now*, Eva couldn’t help but think. Her sister wouldn’t be in the clear until they found the bodies of the murdered women and caught their killer, whose mind had trapped Iris’s. Why the killer’s thoughts had suddenly bonded so strongly to Iris during a month-long killing spree that she couldn’t shut them out was a mystery. Somewhere, five women had disappeared during that month. Given that proximity usually factored into Iris’s telepathic abilities, Eva and Devin had done as much under the radar investigating as they could in the surrounding area, but had come up empty handed. No stories of five missing women had appeared in the media. Were the victims homeless? Or prostitutes? Or runaways? Crimes against those that mattered least, rarely made the news.

To Eva, every person mattered. Even though she only saw things after it was too late to save the victim, she didn’t let that stop her from doing what she could to give the victims justice and their families’ closure, no matter the cost.

Iris helped Eva in her mission, and Eva wondered if by doing that, Iris had become more susceptible to being overwhelmed by the killer’s thoughts. The horror for Iris had stopped as suddenly as it had begun and none of them, with all of their abilities, had been able to help.

Eva refused to consider the killings had only been in Iris’s imagination. Though that’s what they’d led Dr. Caro to believe, so Iris could get help. It had been an easy enough deception to call Iris’s readings of the killer’s thoughts “nightmares” and to blame the “nightmares” on a childhood trauma she’d suffered. That they had all suffered, really—and had all purposely buried in the past.

Their shared trauma was likely why none of them had ever sustained a relationship with a significant other for any length of time. God only knew what role their parents’ psychic gifts had played in their deaths.



Their father had been telepathic as well as a medium to the spirit world. Eva didn't know which of their father's psychic curses had led him to kill their mother and then himself. She only knew the inescapable reality, that the St. Claire's history of tragedy would repeat itself.

"I am back in control," Iris said again, this time more forcefully. "And I'm giving you both fair warning. I'm going to expose and stop the son-of-a-bitch. He has to be close by. Somewhere in my routine I connected with his mind and I will find him."

Eva caught her breath. *Damn. Iris did not need to be actively trolling the minds of the populace for a killer who had come close to destroying her psyche.*

"Anger is good," Devin said. "There is strength in anger."

Eva glared at him. "There are also rash decisions and reckless actions in that foolhardy direction as well." She bit her lip and searched for reason. "Iris, you need to give your mind time to heal—"

"What? Are you the only one allowed to pick up the St. Claire sword for justice?"

"No, but—"

"Then stop trying to shelter me from the realities of our lives. I need to carry my load instead of spending all my time painting rose gardens and riding horses."

Iris could out-ride her and Devin, and had gained fame for the beautiful gardens of light she painted. She was known as the Thomas Kinkadee of the flower world. Her art demanded a high price, which was why they were on their way to do a benefit for the National Victim's Assistance Program. Among a number of other items from local talent, Sheriff Doug Grant and Trisha Kendrick, who ran the NVAP in Atlanta, had arranged for Iris's art and Eva's signed True Crime books to be auctioned.

"You do a lot to help, Iris," Eva said, trying to reassure her sister. "You draw what I see. Twenty-six victims have found justice and their killers exposed because of your skill."

Iris shook her head. "That's your fight and your gift. I just help out. Something I am more than grateful to do, but it's not enough."

Eva clenched her jaw and pressed her fingertips to her aching temple. "Then we'll talk and figure out a solution, but give me a few days. I'm overloaded right now."

"Are you going to tell us about it before your head explodes?" Devin asked. "You've been nuclear ever since taking on Kaylee Waters' story."

She bit her lip. Trying to put into words her disjointed visions of Mason Smith's torture and murder of the girl no one seemed to care about. "I don't know what to tell you. Something about my visions in the cabin are off. Everything is a doubled blur. I am seeing things from Kaylee's pain-hazed perspective. What Mason Smith did to her was so horrific that . . . it's hard to get through." She shuddered. Eva never knew if she would see a crime from the victim's point of view or from the killer's. Both were bad.

"You should have taken a break after writing *Hayden's Hell*," Devin said. "Smith is in prison and yesterday they sentenced him to life without parole for Angel Banning's kidnapping and rape. Why are you putting yourself through this? Why continue with Kaylee's book?"

"People need to know about cold-blooded monsters like Smith. He's lived off the grid for twenty years and is refusing to tell investigators anything about his life. There are more victims, but until we know where he's been, finding them will be hard. Putting his mug and MO in the hands of people everywhere, might bring in valuable information. More importantly, Kaylee deserves justice. Even the death penalty doesn't make up for what he did to her. The DA thinks Smith's DNA on Kaylee's clothes and her forensic report is enough to fry him, but I'm not willing to just sit back and see. If I can get Smith to talk about himself, about Kaylee, about anything, it might help. And if I see him in person, maybe then I can figure out what's bothering me about my visions of him."

"I'll come with you," Iris said. "I can get into his head and tell you everything—"

"No!" Eva shouted in unison with Devin.

Iris pulled to the roadside, hit the brakes then glared at her and Devin. "This is exactly what I am talking about. Either let me carry my load or . . . or I'll move out on my own."

Eva shook her head. She knew Iris was grandstanding. Her sister wouldn't last a week without the stained glass turret where she painted and her beloved horses she rode every day. Eva and Devin each kept one horse to ride. Iris had four. "I'll see you moved to Timbuktu before subjecting you to Smith. Seriously, Iris, it was bad. To do what he did, he is evil to the bone. There's no point in you suffering, too. We'll find a way for you to help, but there're some hells I just can't take you to. Please, can you understand that?"

Iris sighed and put the car back in motion. "Maybe. There were things from that guy's thoughts last month that were so twisted . . . I couldn't tell either of you about them. Some things are better left in the dark."

"And you're deliberately going to hunt him down, Iris?" Devin asked incredulous.

"That's crazy," Eva said.

"You're no better, Eva," Devin said. "Subjecting yourself over and over again to Kaylee's torture when her killer is already behind bars for life, is just as crazy. Unfortunately, the price for justice will be greater than any of us can imagine."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Eva demanded, wanting to snatch off Devin's dark glasses to see his expression. "Did you have a premonition?"

Devin shrugged. "Nothing I can speak about yet. Aunt Zena will arrive early for her visit, and I did see round circles dripping with chocolate."

“Krispy Kreme donuts await us? When?” Iris cried, eyes wide at the mention of her biggest weakness.

Eva inwardly groaned. The last things she needed right now were Aunt Zena and donuts.

Devin only smiled. “You just missed the exit for the auction, Iris.”