

# Prologue

The girl held her breath, hoping her pounding heart wouldn't give her away. She'd squeezed herself under her parent's four-poster bed, between totes of out-of-season clothes. It had been her favorite place to hide when she was little... but she was almost full grown now. A stupid choice. Wouldn't it be the first place they looked?

Fear wouldn't let her chance a move.

The roar in her head made it difficult to hear what was happening in the other room. Still, she listened.

She knew one thing. Her parents were dead. She'd heard their pleas, their screams. Then gunshots.

Silence after that.

She fought back her tears. Swallowed hard. Held her breath.

Now, the killer was rummaging through the house. Looking for something. Looking for her.

Heavy footsteps sounded in the hall and then stopped at the bedroom doorway.

She clamped her hand over her mouth. Tears dripped down her cheeks, gathering at the cleft of her chin before landing soundlessly on the carpeted floor.

Scuffed black boots walked across the room and came to a stop at the foot of the bed. So close, she could reach out and touch them.

She squeezed her eyes shut, unable to face her fate as it unfolded. She was next.

But a cell phone chimed, and the boots turned. The footsteps moved away and toward the door.

She opened her eyes and risked a small breath.

In her hand, she gripped the key her father had passed to her just before he'd told her to hide.

# Chapter One

## **Six months later**

I stuffed crackers in my mouth and washed them down with a Diet Coke before leaving my desk and heading for the probation department's training room. It was early morning, and I felt like I had a killer hangover. Strange, because I'd had nothing to drink in the last few days. I'd thought about calling in sick, but I'd never done that before, and I didn't want to ruin my perfect record. Even if no one else was keeping track.

Plus, this training was mandatory. I'd put it off until the last class offering, and I needed to get it done.

Most of the seats in the cramped room were already taken. I didn't have a record of being on time, so I didn't sweat it.

"Casey," my coworker Claire called from across the room. "I saved you a seat."

I dropped into the chair next to her, took another drink, and placed my Big Gulp on the table. "I can't take another day of this," I said, under my breath.

"Sorry to hear that," the trainer said, reaching around me and placing a binder in my lap. "Just for that, you get to go first."

I cringed. “Sorry. Didn’t know you were standing there.”

“Obviously not.” The trainer walked over to the dry-erase board, picked up a marker, and opened the cap with a flourish. I didn’t know her well, but she was on the fast track to becoming a supervisor. I also didn’t know she hated me until now. “So, Casey, give us your greatest weakness.”

Right now, it was my stomach. The leftover burrito I’d eaten for dinner last night must have been spoiled, but that wasn’t what she meant. I hated this question. The goal was to name something that you could turn into a strength. Nothing came to mind.

Hands shot up around the room. Apparently, not the case for those around me.

“Impatient,” someone yelled.

“Opinionated!”

“Sarcastic!”

“Workaholic!”

The trainer couldn’t write fast enough.

“Okay, that’s plenty,” I said. I loved my job but clearly had to work on my reputation.

The list was moving into a second column when my work cell vibrated in my pocket. I pulled it out. Betz, my ex-husband. Well, he was more than that, but I’d pumped the brakes on reconciling while I figured some things out. Still, taking his call was a good excuse to escape the room and the assassination of my character my peers were treating like a game show. “Gotta take this” I got to my feet and hurried from the room. “It’s a detective.”

“Evasive,” someone added to the list before I silenced them by closing the door. I answered as I walked down the hall. “What’s up?”

“Sorry to interrupt your day,” Betz said. I could picture him rubbing the back of his neck. Didn’t matter what he was calling about, most times when we talked, he rubbed his neck, shook his head, and I’m pretty sure his blood pressure rose. And yet, he wanted us to get back together. If we reconciled, he’d probably stroke out at the young age of thirty-five from the stress I caused him. Still, he loved me.

“No problem,” I said. “You’re saving me from a painful day of training. Please tell me you have something that can get me out of finishing the class.”

“You supervise Martin Phillips?”

“I do.”

“He’s a suspect in a double murder that happened six months ago. Think it’s over drug money. We want to take him into custody, but we don’t want to spook him since he’s armed and dangerous. Think you can trick him into showing himself?”

My adrenaline kicked in, stomach problems vanishing. A double murder was nothing to sneeze at. And if it had happened months ago, before he was on probation, there was nothing I could have done to stop it. Now we had to get my client off the street. “I can text him. Tell him I need to do a field visit, and I need him to be home.”

Typically, we didn’t warn our clients we were coming. But sometimes, if we had enough failed attempts, we’d set something up. Anyway, Phillips was fairly new on supervision. He didn’t know the drill. But he knew we had to do regular home visits, and he was due. He’d probably fall for it.

“That should work,” Betz said. “Gear up, and I’ll meet you at the employee entrance in ten.”

I disconnected the call and took the stairs two at a time to my cubicle. I loved playing with cops. Although I never wanted to be one. Too much blood and guts for me.