

ALL ALONG

I try to jiggle my hands, but it doesn't help. I hear the clank of the handcuffs against the metal chair I'm sitting in. They're so tight on my wrists. They have me here, in these, in this dark room, under this hot light, while the killer is allowed to roam free.

The door opens. In walks a man with glasses and a small, white goatee, wearing a sweater vest and holding in one hand a notepad and a pen, and in the other a cup of coffee. He didn't look like the other cops who had been harassing me all night about the murders. He shuts the door and steps into the light. He pulls out a chair on the opposite side of the table in front of me and has a seat.

"Hello, Mr. Burton. I'm Dr. Goldwyn," he says as he takes a sip of his coffee.

"They've been questioning me all night," I tell him. "I'll give the same thing to you."

"I'm sure you would, but I'm about to ask you very different questions. I have a hunch about your case."

"You're not a cop. I can tell," I say to him.

He laughs. "That's right, Mr. Burton. I'm not a cop. I'm a psychologist. I specialize in cases like yours."

"Cases like mine? You mean you study vigilantes?"

"Not quite."

"Then what are you supposed to know about me?"

"More than you would think," said the doctor. "I've been told you have been very cooperative all night. You're not about to stop now are you? I'd like to ask you some more questions."

"Then ask away. I'm not the killer. You'll realize that eventually. You'll all realize that."

"I believe you, Mr. Burton, and I'm not saying that to patronize you. I truly believe you are innocent of these crimes," the doctor says to me.

"Then let me go. I've done nothing. I passed the polygraph test with flying colors..."

The doctor interrupts me, "But there's far too much evidence here that suggests that you killed that woman last night, and perhaps many before that. You have the victim's blood on your clothes, your fingerprints are on the murder weapon, and most incriminating—you have photos, photos of the victims all over your walls. You know a lot about the women that were killed."

"Like I said to these other guys, I have been hunting the killer for over a year now. I know him better than any of these cops. The detectives on this case are light years behind me. I've discovered a pattern in the victims. Last night I finally knew when and where he was going to make his next kill... I just arrived too late."

"Do you often blackout?" asks the doctor, seemingly ignoring everything I had just said.

"What are you talking about?"

"Blackout. Do you blackout often? Are there periods in your day where you can't remember what you were just doing, or where you had been recently?"

"What does that have anything to do with?"

"How much do you remember of last night? Do you remember how you arrived at the victim's house?"

"What? I don't know. It was all a frantic rush. I remember screaming."

"Yes, yes, I'm sure. But do you actually remember driving to the victim's house? Do you remember entering the victim's house? Or do you just remember being there, holding the victim in your arms?"

"No, I..." For a moment I had to stop. I didn't exactly remember how I got there that night. "What are you getting at?"

"Were you abused as a child?" asks the doctor.

"No! What are you asking me now?"

"I hate to be the bearer of bad news," says the doctor reluctantly, "but you are one of the few people in the country that are unaware that they have multiple personality disorder."

"That can't be," I reply.

"I have a feeling that every once in a while you can recall memories, things that happened to you, but they don't feel like your memories—they feel like someone else's."

"That..." I can't think of anything to say. I can't believe what I'm being told.

"Sometimes when children are consistently abused in extremely painful ways, the brain reacts to the abuse by developing another personality to take the brunt of the reaction to the abuse. Unfortunately, once that personality is

created, it doesn't go away once the child reaches adulthood. Equally unfortunate is that the personality is usually negatively affected by the abuse it took. In this case, that personality relieved its pent-up emotions by murdering these women."

No! I was trying to save the women, but I ended up leading the killer to them.

"There is no cure for multiple personality disorder. I'm so sorry."

This can't be.

"I can't imagine a greater punishment than to serve life in prison for crimes you did not commit. Only God knows why you have that to bear."

I was the killer all along.

