

# MIND GAMES

KAELY QUINN PROFILER

BOOK ONE

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To God

Thank you for being with me every step of the way.  
You are my heart, my soul, my life.

## PROLOGUE

He stood in the middle of his secret room, staring at walls covered with old newspaper clippings. The aroma of aging paper was like a powerful drug, sparking his hate. His fingers clenched and unclenched. Stories full of fear and death. Pictures of people before they became victims of a vile murderer who had ravaged the people of Des Moines twenty years earlier. Women smiling in driver's license photos or family pictures, unaware that they were living on borrowed time. No hint of the horror awaiting them. And no clue that someday soon their pictures would be snapped again by police photographers pretending the carnage was routine. It never was.

He walked up to a picture of the monster who had finally been caged. Ed Oliphant. A husband, a father, a churchgoer. He had a lot in common with Dennis Rader, the infamous BTK Killer who had terrorized Wichita, Kansas, for so many years. But unlike Dennis, Ed never showed remorse for what he'd done. Of course, many experts dismissed Rader's so-called repentance. They didn't believe he was really sorry for his horrendous acts. He was only sorry he got caught. Unlike Rader, Ed hadn't even bothered to acknowledge the families of his victims.

He pulled the picture of Ed off the wall and stared into his eyes. Eyes full of darkness and evil. He had fourteen official kills to his name. Many experts believed there were more than that. Of course, not all his victims were dead. Quite a few people still lived under the shadow of Ed Oliphant. He spit on Ed's

picture and stuck it back on the wall, wiping the extra spittle from his mouth on his pant leg.

The Raggedy Man. Serial killers shouldn't be given nicknames. It only fueled their egos. It wasn't until his seventh murder that investigators began to hear the same thing from friends and family of victims. That the victims had come in contact with a homeless man before they were killed. A young girl who saw Ed approach a woman whose body was found twenty-four hours later called him a "raggedy man." Thus the moniker. He'd originally picked the guise of a homeless person because they were the invisible people. Most citizens liked to pretend they didn't exist, so Ed was able to hide in plain sight. It was a cruel irony that those who actually noticed Ed—those who were kind—became his targets.

Once law enforcement started looking for someone under the guise of a homeless person, Ed changed his MO and began to dress as a police officer. He realized that the frightened citizens of Des Moines were now overly cautious of strangers but gravitated toward the police since they represented safety. Which, of course, Ed Oliphant did not. His plan worked beautifully and made his hunting easier. Even so, The Raggedy Man nickname stuck all the way through his reign of terror and his subsequent trial. Ed was finally stopped by an FBI profiler who narrowed down the search, even guessing that Ed was hiding as a LEO, giving authorities what they needed to finally catch him.

He moved a few steps to his right until he stood in front of a picture of the Oliphant family. Marcie, Ed's wife. Submissive, quiet, kind. She'd insisted she had no idea her husband was a monster. He didn't believe her. Their daughter, Jessica, also claimed to be unaware. He cursed at the thought. People who knew her portrayed her as a bright, inquisitive girl who

excelled in school and made friends easily. How could she have been so clueless? She knew. She just didn't say anything. She let people die.

He stared at her picture. An angelic face framed by curly auburn hair and wide guileless eyes. An incredible smile. But in later pictures, after the truth came out, the look in her dark eyes changed. Innocence had been replaced by shadows. Her smile was gone. The public assumed her childish bliss had been overcome by a determined wariness. He knew better. She was dealing with the weight of what she'd done. She could have stopped him. Lives could have been saved.

After the trial, Marcie took Jessica and her younger brother, Jason, to Nebraska. Eventually, Marcie remarried. He wondered how she could ever trust another man. Did she believe men like Ed were rare? He snorted. Most men had secrets, their families living on borrowed time until the truth came out. Human beings were full of deceit, their hearts scarred by selfishness and hatred. Pretending otherwise was naïve.

Much to her mother's chagrin, after college, Jessica joined the FBI. Then she went to Quantico in Virginia and trained as a behavioral analyst—just like the man who'd been instrumental in capturing her father. Now Jessica was in St. Louis, driven away by the notoriety of her connection with an infamous serial killer. But the FBI didn't dare dismiss her. They needed her. She had a rare talent. She chased after evil. Sought justice—as if such a thing actually existed. She seemed to believe her efforts could undo some of the damage her father had done, but Ed Oliphant and his daughter wouldn't get away that easily.

No one could lessen the carnage he'd visited on the world, and Jessica could never erase the malevolent seeds that had been planted deep inside her heart. No one could live that close to

wickedness without being affected. Without being aware of its existence. He was convinced Ed Oliphant's iniquity was alive and flourishing in Jessica. He was certain her quest to dispel darkness was born from her desire to rid herself of guilt. But he had no intention of allowing her that kind of grace. Evil had to be eradicated.

He laughed quietly in the stillness. Jessica wasn't quite as clever as she believed herself to be. He planned to challenge her. Destroy her self-righteous crusade to make things right. The sins of the father were going to be visited on his child. And he was the person delivering that judgment. He couldn't trust God to do it. He and God had parted ways years ago. That door was closed forever.

He sat down at the rickety desk in the middle of the room and opened his notebook. It was all there. The plan, the way to implement it, and the keys to the destruction of Ed Oliphant's daughter. The woman who now called herself Kaely Quinn.

He smiled to himself, a feeling of euphoria overtaking him. It was time. Let the mind games begin.

# ONE

As she poured the sparkling red claret into the serial killer's glass, she wondered if it reminded him of blood. She pushed it toward him, but he ignored it. Kaely smiled. Just as she thought.

"You strangle your victims because you don't like blood," she said. "You took food from their refrigerators. You're on a limited budget and saw a way to profit. But you only took cheese, fruit, vegetables, desserts, yogurt . . ." She tapped on the base of the wineglass. "You're a vegetarian, but not vegan."

She pulled the wineglass away and pushed another toward him. This time she filled it with white wine. He reached through the shadows and picked it up.

Kaely riffled through the pages of the file she'd brought with her. Then she leaned back and stared at the chair across from her. He was a white male. Between twenty-five and thirty-five. He worked a menial job. Was shy around people. Probably awkward. Yet he seemed to have a purpose. But what was it? All of his victims were different. A successful black male attorney, a poor Hispanic female artist, and a white male college student. It wasn't something inherent about them, so whatever it was that drove him to punish them was something they did. He was angry with the people he killed, but he didn't enjoy the act of killing. Didn't feel good about it. Strangling them from behind meant he didn't have to look them in the eyes. Afterward, he



posed them, their arms folded across their chests. It was a sign of remorse.

"I'm confused," she said. "There's no connection between your victims. Different sexes. Different races. They don't live near each other. You don't seem to have a kill zone."

"You're confused?" he whispered. "That's new for you."

"Hush," she said. "I'll tell you when you can talk." Kaely frowned at him. The rules were very clear. They weren't allowed to speak unless she gave them permission.

A disturbance to her right made her shift her focus to the table nearest her. A chubby, florid-faced man and his haggard-looking wife scowled at her as they addressed the waiter they'd called to their table.

"What kind of place is this?" the man asked loudly. He pointed at Kaely. "You let crazy people in here? You need to remove that woman."

Louis Bertrand, the owner of Restaurant d'Andre, stomped up to the table, his face set and his hands gesturing wildly as if they had a mind of their own. "This is not a crazy woman, monsieur. This is the famous FBI profiler, Kaely Quinn. That is her table, and she is allowed to use it whenever she wants."

"But this is unacceptable," the man said, his face growing even darker. Kaely began to worry about his blood pressure.

"It is acceptable to me, monsieur," Louis stated simply. "But you are not. I will ask you to leave now. No charge for your meal."

The man began to sputter and curse. His wife, seemingly embarrassed about the entire incident, grabbed her purse, stood up, and hightailed it out of the dining room. Her husband continued to protest. He gestured again toward Kaely, his eyes wide with anger and confusion. "But she's talking to herself. There's no one there!"

Kaely felt her cheeks grow hot. She hadn't meant to use her private technique in front of other people. She'd been so focused on the information in the file she'd forgotten she was in public.

"I do not care what she does, monsieur. She is welcome in my restaurant any time." Louis grabbed the man's arm and helped him to his feet. "She caught the man who killed my only son. She cleared my Andre's name, and she will be shown the respect, *n'est-ce pas*? If you cannot do so, then you must leave, *oui*? And please do not cross my door again."

Kaely sighed to herself. She'd been judged and criticized for her process by those she'd worked with. She quickly scanned the room. Other diners stared at her too, although it seemed they wanted nothing more than to avoid Louis's wrath. She hated to embarrass the kind restaurant owner. He'd wanted to do something to thank her for her help in locating his son's murderer last year, but she couldn't allow him to disrupt his business. Tonight would be the last time she'd come here. For Louis's sake.

Kaely gave the restaurant owner a brief smile and turned her attention back to the file as Louis escorted the sputtering man to the front door.

"He's not the only one who thinks you're crazy, is he?" the killer said softly.

"No, he's not, but I'm used to it. Now be still. I can't talk to you anymore."

She was flipping through the file one more time when Louis came up to the table. "I am sorry for that man's rudeness. It will not happen again, *mon cher amie*. What have you decided for dinner tonight?" he asked.

"I'll have the *salade niçoise* with salmon, Louis," she said.

"Good choice. It is *délicieux*. Iced tea to drink?"

She nodded. Louis used to argue that a little wine wouldn't hurt her. She had nothing against wine, but she didn't like anything that softened her sense of control, including alcohol or drugs of any kind. Her mother had become addicted to pain medication when Kaely was seventeen. Thankfully, she'd kicked it, but watching her mother's struggle had convinced Kaely that pharmaceuticals were something to be avoided, if at all possible. She slowly pulled the glass of water she'd used for her invisible guest's wine back to her side of the table.

"And for . . . ?" He jerked his head toward the seat across from Kaely.

"You don't need to placate me, Louis. I know there's no one there. It's just . . . it's a way I work through information sometimes. I'm . . . I'm sorry I caused you a problem."

The restaurateur paused a moment before saying, "You could never cause me a problem, *mon amie*. You are my friend and always will be. Everything I have is yours. If it wasn't for you, Andre's death would still be considered a suicide. Proving he was a victim of a serial killer gave my boy back his dignity. You eased his mother's mind—and mine as well. We will always be grateful to you."

"Just doing my job, Louis. That's all."

"It might be just a job to you, *ma chère*, but to me it means more than I can ever say." Louis actually bowed and clicked his heels together before turning around and heading toward the kitchen. Kaely was happy to see how successful Restaurant d'Andre had become. The restaurant had been Louis's salvation. He'd put his heart and soul into it, and somehow it had helped to ease his pain.

Kaely turned back to the file. She stared at the reports and pictures spread out in front of her. The file had been overnighted

from Nashville, where three murders had recently occurred. Although Nashville could have asked for assistance from the FBI at Quantico due to the federal serial murder statute, the police chief there had called Kaely's boss, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's field office in St. Louis, Solomon Slattery. The chief had asked Solomon to let Kaely peruse it first. He was afraid there would be another killing before the FBI could gather their resources together.

Kaely reread the information. Each person had died in their own home, strangled with something that had been removed from the scene. The medical examiner narrowed the ligature down to some kind of leather strap, but that was as close as he could get. There were no signs of a break-in. Whoever killed them had been given access into the victims' houses or apartments. None of the victims knew each other, and they had nothing in common. The perpetrator had to be someone they felt safe with. He probably dressed as a public employee. Someone from the electric company, the cable company, the water company. But the victims didn't share any of these services. Two of them used the same electric company, but one of the victims lived in a house where all the utilities were paid for by the owner. True, the killer could have changed uniforms, but Kaely didn't think so.

This was an organized killer, but there was also an odd randomness involved. He planned his murders, which showed organization, but it was clear he wasn't certain when people might be home and within his reach. One of the murders happened when a victim had taken the day off to drive his mother to the doctor. It had been a last-minute decision. The killer couldn't have known.

"Your MO is the same, but what is your signature?" she

whispered to the man sitting across from her, making sure she couldn't be overheard by others around her. "What is it that drives you to kill?"

There was no response from her dinner companion.

As she carefully flipped through the file page by page, a waitress brought her food. Kaely quickly gathered the pictures together and closed the file so the young woman wouldn't see images that would shock her. When Kaely began training as part of the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit, referred to as the BAU, they horrified her too. Now they were just clues to a puzzle. It wasn't that she didn't care about the victims—she did. But this was the only way she could do her job. She worked for the victims. Getting justice was her way of caring. Allowing herself to fall apart wouldn't help anyone. Eventually, she learned how to build a wall of protection around herself and her emotions. Sometimes the wall cracked, but she'd always found a way to repair the breach.

Kaely thanked her waitress and took a bite of the salmon. Delicious, as always. After the waitress left, her companion picked up a soup spoon and began eating, slurping, making a mess.

"You're not refined," she said quietly to him. "Simple, really. Whatever it is that motivates you is simple too. Nothing complicated."

As he continued to gulp his soup, she realized he lived a very basic life. Unpretentious. A small apartment or boardinghouse. He owned an older car but probably kept it clean. Didn't throw trash around. Didn't like mess. She quickly wrote her thoughts down on her notepad. She wanted to stop. Wait until she was home to finish her "interview," but she felt compelled to finish. As if she had no choice but to keep going until she got the answer.

The waitress returned to refill her glass. “Sorry. I won’t bother you again for a while. I can see you’re working.”

“You’re fine,” Kaely said. “Don’t worry about it.”

The waitress smiled and walked over to another table. Kaely overheard the woman at the table ask, “Could I have a doggie bag, please?”

“Of course, ma’am,” the waitress said as she picked up some of the dishes on the table. “I’ll bring it right out.”

Kaely started to take another bite of her salmon. But before she could lift her fork, she froze. That was it. She dropped the fork and began looking through the file again. Finding the medical examiner’s report, she went through it carefully. Then she reread the crime-scene investigator’s notes. Sure enough, it was all there.

Finally, she began to shuffle through all the interviews. Friends, family, neighbors. Little by little, everything became clear. Kaely stared across the table.

A man sat there. Medium build, dumpy, in his early thirties. Blond hair, crooked teeth, wearing a T-shirt with writing on it.

“There you are,” Kaely said with a smile.

“It isn’t me,” the man replied, onion soup dribbling down his T-shirt, which had a picture of a panda and the words *Caring for Animals Isn’t What I Do. It’s Who I Am*.

“Seriously?” Kaely said with a sigh.

She pulled a cell phone out of her purse. “Solomon?” she said when he answered. “I have something for you on that Nashville case.” She listened for a moment. “I’m going to give you the profile, but I’m also going to tell you the name of Nashville’s UNSUB.”