

DEAD END



KAELY QUINN PROFILER

BOOK THREE

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I dedicate this book to my dear friend,
Debbie Dunagan.

The Bible talks about the kind of friend who is willing to lay down their life for you. Few people fulfill this scripture, but Debbie does. She is a true and selfless friend to many people, not just me, but I count myself blessed to be in that group. I thank God for bringing her into my life. I love you, Debbie!

PROLOGUE

Norman Webber offered his wife a tight smile as he dealt with yet another one of her awful presents. He felt like a fool walking back and forth in this abandoned rail yard. It was a beautiful spring morning, and he wanted to be out on the golf course with his friends. They were already there, but here he was, looking for treasure he would never find. What in the world had he ever said to make Rita think he wanted a metal detector for his birthday? When he'd opened the gift, she'd screeched with joy. If only she'd given him the golf clubs he'd hinted for.

Rita was a good wife, really, but in the thirty years they'd been married, she'd never given him one decent present. He had all kinds of weird things put away in a closet. A singing fish you were supposed to mount on the wall. A police scanner—not something he wanted to listen to when he got home from work. A key chain you could record a message on. He never could figure out what to say. Anyway, why would he want his key chain talking to him? Rita talked enough. He didn't need another voice telling him what to do.

The weirdest gift might be the antique anvil. He'd once mentioned that his great-great-grandfather was a blacksmith, and then Rita bought the anvil as a tribute to his long-dead relative. A sweet gesture, but who in the world needs an anvil? Where do you put it? Finally, he sat it on the floor next to his recliner. It took only three trips to the chiropractor to work out the strain he'd caused his back moving that blasted thing. At least now he

had a place to set his beer can while he watched TV. Living with Rita was definitely made better with alcohol. Frankly, he might do better joining AA than the gym she got him a membership to for his last birthday.

The detector beeped, and he leaned down to dig in the dirt with a small folding shovel. Rita ran over to see what he'd found.

"What is it, honey?" she asked, a little breathless. Her blond hair was pulled back in a ponytail, and her cheeks were flushed with excitement. He held up the fourth pop can of the morning. "Another one of these."

She took it from him and put it in the trash bag she'd brought with her. "A lot of people used to work here. I know we'll find something really valuable if we just don't give up."

Norman wanted to point out that they might do better at an abandoned casino than a rail yard, but Rita had her hopes up, and he didn't want to disappoint her. He sighed. He really loved this crazy woman. At least life with her was never dull.

"I just know we'll find a diamond ring or something," Rita said in her high, childlike voice.

He turned to look at her. "If you want a diamond ring, I'll buy it for you. We don't need to be digging around in the dirt, honey."

She frowned. "But this is *hidden* treasure. We have no idea what we might find. It's exciting, isn't it?"

Norman looked at the bag with the pop cans. "Sure. Very exciting."

He squared his shoulders and went back to walking back and forth across the rail yard. As he reached the fence that encircled it, the detector went off again. Rita had finally quit following him, and she stood a few yards back. He lowered the metal detector to the ground and then pulled the small shovel out of his jacket pocket. When he knelt and began to

dig, he was certain he was about to add to their growing pop can collection.

A few minutes later, he stood and turned to look at his wife. “I found that diamond ring you wanted,” he said, feeling as if he was going to lose his breakfast right there.

Rita squealed and clapped as she started toward him.

Norman held up his hand. “Stay there, Rita. And call the police.”

She came to a halt and stared at him with a look of confusion. “But there’s nothing illegal about keeping that ring.”

He sighed and dropped the shovel. “There is if it’s still attached to someone’s hand.”

Chief of Police Everett Sawyer stood over the body they'd just dug up in the old rail yard north of the city. The medical examiner, Jim Arndt, knelt next to the dead woman, his gloved hands carefully inspecting the evidence. She appeared to be in her early twenties, and she had dark hair.

"How long has she been dead, Jim?"

"Gotta get her back to the office to be sure, but I'd guess she's been deceased three or four days. Maybe five." He shook his head and pulled up her left hand. "Engaged. Nice ring. Dressed nicely too. This gal must have a decent job. Probably came from a good family as well."

"How can you tell that?" The chief was used to working with the medical examiner's office, but they constantly surprised him with their expertise.

"Her teeth."

He lowered the girl's hand and then pulled on her lips until her teeth were fully exposed. Everett looked away. He'd been the police chief in Des Moines for more than twenty years, but dead bodies still bothered him. An old detective, now retired, once told him if you looked into the eyes of the dead, you were responsible for them. He felt responsible enough. He tried hard not to get personally involved in the lives of victims. But sometimes . . . This girl was young. Pretty. Engaged to be married. She deserved better than this.

"What about her teeth?" he finally asked, knowing Jim would wait until he did.

“Straightened. And not recently. She had parents who made sure she had braces.”

Everett frowned. “We got a report about a gal who went missing a few days ago. I’m betting it’s her. Can’t remember the name right now.”

“I can’t give you a name either.” Jim sighed. “No purse.” He reached gingerly into one of the girl’s pants pockets. His hand came up empty. Then he reached into her other pocket and slowly pulled out a folded piece of paper. He opened it carefully. “Marriage license application. Filled out but not signed by the groom.”

“You got a name?”

“Rebecca Jergens. Twenty-three. Lives in town.”

“Yeah, that rings a bell. But she signed it?”

Jim nodded. “Maybe she was on her way to meet her fiancé. Have him sign.”

“Or maybe he’s a suspect.”

“Maybe.” Jim drew out the word as if he didn’t really want to release it.

Everett glanced at the couple who found the body and were now being interviewed by one of his detectives. They were obviously traumatized by their discovery. The man kept muttering something that sounded like *no more birthday presents*, but that didn’t make any sense. Everett chalked it up to shock.

He took a step closer to Jim. “Something bothering you?”

“Yeah.”

“What?”

“Red ribbons.”

“What? Are you serious?”

Jim brushed the dirt off the victim’s shoes to further expose a red ribbon. Then he reached for something next to the body

and held it up. Another red ribbon. “It came off when your men pulled her out of that hole. I’m guessing it was around her hands.”

The butterflies in Everett’s stomach turned into wasps. “Some joker thinks he’s funny.” He noticed the victim’s right hand was still covered with dirt. Jim hadn’t examined it yet.

The men looked at each other. They didn’t need to say anything to know they were thinking the same thing. Jim finally reached for the girl’s closed fist. When he pulled it open, something fell to the ground. He carefully picked it up and held it out for Everett to see. A twisted piece of wire.

Everett felt as if the breath had been sucked out of his lungs. It took everything he had to clear his throat and speak. “Is that what I think it is?” He was praying it wasn’t.

Jim looked closely at the object. Then he looked up at the chief and nodded.

“Of course, it’s not him,” Everett said, his voice unsteady. “He’s in prison.”

“I realize that. But how could this killer know about the angel? You never released that information, right?”

Everett had no answer for him. Twenty-one years had gone by since the serial killer known as The Raggedy Man had terrorized Des Moines. Ed Oliphant had killed fourteen women—that they knew of. He hunted at night, dressed as a homeless person, looking for women who might show compassion toward him so he could pull them off the street and into an alley or a deserted building. One night a little girl saw him drag a woman away. She told her parents about it, but they hadn’t understood the seriousness of her story until later.

The little girl had described Ed Oliphant as a *raggedy man*.

When her parents were interviewed by a local paper, the media started calling the killer The Raggedy Man. Then in an article

written to warn the public, a talented FBI behavioral analyst predicted this man would not only change his disguise but perhaps take on the persona of a law enforcement officer. That's exactly what he did. When they caught him, he was wearing a cop's uniform. After his arrest, it didn't take long to match his DNA to DNA found with one of the victims. And not long after that, they found his stash of keepsakes hidden behind a wooden wall panel in his house. He had a trinket from almost every woman he'd murdered.

Olyphant pleaded guilty to all the charges, saving the state from the expense of a trial. Currently, Iowa didn't have the death penalty, so he sat in prison serving life without parole, allowing taxpayers to house and feed him. That didn't seem right to him, but Everett couldn't do anything about it. At least Olyphant's reign of evil had come to an end. Everett had been the lead detective on the case, many times forced to look into the faces of family members who'd lost a loved one. It was the toughest thing he'd ever done. Not long before they caught Olyphant, Everett had a mild heart attack brought on by the stress of the case.

Thankfully, he recovered and was able to return to work, but those faces still haunted him. Honestly, he wasn't sure he could make it through another serial killer case.

"When are you going to transport her?" he asked.

"Soon. We'll look her over a little more closely when we get to the lab, and of course, we'll contact you after the autopsy."

"Holler when you're ready so my people can process the scene."

"I will. Don't want to miss anything. Especially with this one."

Everett was about to echo Jim's sentiments when one of his officers came up. Officer Malone's face was ashen.

"What in the world?" Everett asked.

“Uh, sir. We found another body.” The young officer’s voice was raspy with obvious distress.

“Another body?” Everett repeated. What was going on?

“Actually . . . there could be more. A lot more.”

Everett’s knees went weak. *Not again. Please, God, not again.*