

# Prologue

Fifteen minutes before Cassie Lyons would return to her home in the Pleasant Vista Apartments, the killer had parked along the curb, twenty yards from the driveway leading to the complex. Sitting motionless, a little after noon on a bright, cloudless October day, parked in the shade of a blue spruce planted three decades ago in the grass strip between the sidewalk and the street, the killer was nearly invisible.

Fifteen minutes later, the killer watched as Cassie Lyons's Nissan pulled briskly into the driveway, the car's plastic air deflector scraping on the small speed bump. Her car passed the row of visitor spots and rocked as it came to an abrupt stop at the entrance to the gated parking garage. A few moments later, the metal gate clanged and began to rise. The killer, already wearing nylon gloves, exited the car and closed its door gently.

Knowing that the garage door would not descend for fifteen seconds, the killer walked unhurriedly. By the time the killer entered the garage, the Nissan had disappeared into the darkness of the garage and turned right, toward the spot labeled 84 in faded white paint on the concrete floor.

Walking close to a row of parked cars and pickups, the killer could not be seen. With the low rumble from the two HVAC fans, one at the north end of the garage and one at the south end, each amplified by the concrete-block walls, the killer could not be heard.

Cassie Lyons had opened the driver's door slightly to activate the dome light in the Nissan. Slipping her keys into her purse and gathering her books, her laptop, and a light jacket, she did not hear or see the killer. When the passenger door opened and the killer slid into the seat, Cassie jumped.

"What the fuck?" Her voice was high-pitched. "You scared the shit out of me." The killer looked at her, silent and expressionless. "What the hell do you want?" Cassie said.

The killer paused, as if considering whether the question called for a simple, specific explanation of what was about to happen, or something more abstract, closer to a rationale. "You went too far."

"What are you talking about?" Cassie's voice quavered with fear, although she probably could not have said whether she was more frightened by the killer's ambush of her or the

message itself.

Perhaps realizing that every extra minute in the garage increased the risk of being seen, the killer replied curtly. "I'm not here to debate your actions. You know what you did."

Cassie was not sure what the killer was referring to. "What do you want? What can I do?"

Satisfied that Cassie had been given sufficient explanation for what was about to happen, the killer removed a long steak knife from an inside pocket. In the dim light from the small bulb above the rearview mirror, Cassie could not quite make out what the killer was holding. As the knife penetrated the yellow silk of her blouse and slid into her side, just above her hip bone, she screamed in pain and shock. The killer withdrew the blade, then inserted it again, more forcefully, only an inch away from the first insertion point.

Cassie's eyes were now wide with terror. Her breathing was shallow and rapid, and she made hoarse choking sounds. A thick strand of saliva mixed with blood ran down her chin. Her body convulsed for a moment, and then her torso bent forward. Her head made a soft thunk as it hit the top of the steering wheel.

The killer looked down at the site of the stab wounds. The blood stain, already the size of an outstretched hand, expanded on either side of the wounds and began to darken the pale blue denim of Cassie's jeans and the grey cloth of the car seat. Satisfied that the knife would no longer be necessary, the killer reached into a jacket pocket, removed a large plastic freezer bag, placed the knife inside it, sealed the bag, and replaced it in the pocket.

The killer gently pushed Cassie's body upright so that her shoulders touched the car seat, her head against the headrest, as if she were napping. Next, the killer reached across Cassie's body, grabbed the driver's side armrest, and pulled the door shut. The dome light went dark, and the killer scanned the garage for witnesses. Satisfied that there were none, the killer balled a fist and knocked the rearview mirror askew, then scattered Cassie's books and laptop at her feet. Then the killer tore loose the plastic cradle used to hold the cellphone on the dashboard and tossed it aside. Next, the killer ripped open the top button of Cassie's silk blouse and pulled the blouse out of her jeans in the front.

The killer opened Cassie's purse, retrieved her phone, and tossed the purse at her feet. The killer turned the phone on, then turned off the GPS. The killer opened the browser, typed "domestic abuse hotline," and, once the list appeared on the screen, shut the browser. The killer opened the photos, swiped the screen repeatedly, pausing a moment before deleting a video. The

killer then opened the messages and scrolled through them, stopping momentarily to delete a thread.

The killer turned on the phone and dialed 9-1-1. When the operator picked up and said, “9-1-1, what’s your emergency?” the killer held the phone at arm’s distance and made gasping sounds. With one hand partially covering the screen, the killer shouted “No,” and smacked the phone against the pillar between the windshield and the passenger window, cracking the screen.

The killer opened the passenger door and exited the car, closing the door firmly, and once again scanned the garage in all directions. Crouching, the killer threw the phone, in a sidearm motion, as if skipping a stone at the beach. The phone scratched across the concrete floor until it hit the eastern wall of the garage.

The killer walked deliberately toward the garage door and pushed the button mounted chest-high beside the door. As the door clattered and began to rise, the killer removed the nylon gloves, slipped them into a pocket, and walked toward the car parked along the curb beneath the blue spruce.