

Cassy Klisch

THE SECRETS OF RAYNE

Chapter One

The moment I lowered myself onto the metal chair for the four thousand, seven hundred, and ninety-third time, the murderer's gaze darted to his cuffed hands. Years ago, I too would've focused on the deep wrinkles snaking across them, the circle branded above his wrist, the grimy smudges on his shirt—anything but his eyes. But it hadn't taken long for my heart to harden into the same solid stone of my prison's walls, reminding me it was pointless to avoid the criminals' eyes and the secrets they held. Though the criminals had never stopped avoiding mine. And Steven Capano was no different.

Criminal four thousand. Seven hundred. And ninety-three.

I didn't blame him. I didn't blame any of them. The entire country knew my name. Surely every criminal I'd interrogated these past seven years had helped spread word of Rayne Robbins—the girl who had the power to reveal their most guarded secrets—long before the FBI brought them to me. But I was nothing more than an empty threat until they sat on the other side of this very table. Only then did the rumors become more than a whisper in the dark.

Jason placed his hand on my shoulder, but in this room that reeked with the stench of all the terrible things I'd never asked to see, where a desk lamp provided the only source of light and the steel walls seemed to close in on me more each day, I struggled to feel any hint of comfort. It didn't help I couldn't shake the way his deep, authoritative tone had thickened the air when he'd told me Capano was notorious for shooting his victims in the center of their foreheads. As Deputy Director of the FBI, Jason always briefed me on what to expect during each interrogation, but rarely did my palms sweat at just the thought of what waited for me in a criminal's head.

"We just need this one secret out of him, Rayne," Jason whispered in my ear. "Just one. That's it."

Of course. To Jason it was always *just one*.

At the naive age of ten I'd believed him. But then I'd blinked, and *just one* criminal and *just one* secret and *just one* month had become many more. After seven years of interrogations, the unspoken truth was as inevitable as death—as long as I was chained to my ability, the FBI would never let me go.

Every click of Jason's oxfords off the smooth tile grated against my nerves as he walked toward Capano. I drummed my fingers on my lap, glanced at Agent Lee standing in the back corner, his hulk-like arms crossed as he waited for his cue.

"I'm a busy guy, Capano, so I'll make this simple," Jason finally said. His voice was steady, his expression firm as stone—always so hard to read. "You can either willingly answer the question I'm about to ask you. Or..." His eyes flicked to me. "She'll find out more than even I want to know."

Capano grimaced, summarizing how he felt about me. I stifled the growl building in response. *Knowledge is power*, Jason had told me after my first particularly difficult interrogation. *You are in control. Don't make them believe otherwise.*

"I only have one question for you," Jason continued, "and personally, I think it's an easy one. But I'll let you decide how this plays out."

His words were familiar, though still they ignited a flicker of rage inside me.

Even the murderer was given a choice.