

Chapter One

Assistant District Attorney Mary Polk was briefing Sergeant Arnold Petersen of the Utah State Police when there was a knock on her door. “Come in,” she said. Her secretary entered and handed her a report across her desk. She nodded her thanks and the secretary left. Mary lifted the front cover and read the summary. “Betty Burton’s psych report,” she told the officer. “She’s definitely a psychopath. We should be able to put her away, just on this information alone.”

“I thought you couldn’t try a case based on a physiological profile,” Petersen said.

“We can’t, which is why your testimony is so critical.”

Petersen had been assigned to clean up the mess and head up the investigation after the husband, fellow truckers, and biker group went rogue in their successful attempt to save Shelby Mathews. His superiors, who considered the rescue vigilantism, wanted the men charged with obstruction and endangerment of the public, but Petersen had convinced them the public would not take kindly to arresting true American heroes, especially in an election year.

“Are you sure we can’t tie this Burton woman to Ted Simon’s death? I’d much rather get her convicted for first degree murder than attempted murder.”

“I appreciate your suspicions. Betty and Ted were involved. There was nothing left of his truck but some charred embers. All we found of him was enough to match his dental records. From the truckers’ statements, Betty was riding everyone hard. Still, claiming his going over the side of the mountain was anything other than an accident is nearly impossible to prove.”

“Didn’t his wife discover the emails Betty wrote?”

“Yeah, but they only talk about wanting to get Shelby.”

“Well, let’s get through this trial. Hopefully there are other charges we can add later.”

Betty lay on the cold steel bunk and stared up at the ceiling.

“Ain’t you going to court today, Balls?” Darlene called from a neighboring cell.

Balls was the name Betty Burton had earned after numerous confrontations with fellow inmates. She liked it because not only did she think of herself as having a pair, she would bust the ones on any man who crossed her.

“Yeah. Once my lawyer springs me, I’m going to make that bitch pay for putting me in here,” Balls responded.

“You really think he’s gonna get you out of here?”

“He better. I have a score to settle and I can’t do it in here.”

“Hope you’re right. Doesn’t seem right what they done to you.”

Balls took a deep breath of the musty air and turned over. She slowly moved her fingers over the cinder block wall...over the numerous hash marks she’d made from her own blood, drawn from sinking her teeth deep into her wrists. “He’d better come through,” she whispered to herself, “Or, like Barbie, he’ll find himself in the morgue.”

Noisy chatter permeated the crowded courtroom. Shelby sat stiffly in a chair flanked by Eddy and Sandy on each side of her. *I never thought I'd be back in this town*, she thought from her seat directly behind the prosecutors' table.

Sandy leaned over and whispered, "This is some big shindig."

"I never expected this many people to show. Did you?" Shelby glanced around and recognized several people.

Sandy shrugged. "It's a little town. This is probably the biggest event of the year for them. Where's Jack, anyway?"

"Working." Before Sandy could question her clipped response, Shelby waved at two friends a few seats away. "Hey, look! There's Snowmobile Flyer and Richie Rich."

Sandy was not deterred. "Work? Must have been really important for him to let you come all this way by yourself. He's been so protective of you over the last few months I figured you would be surrounded by body guards."

Shelby just shrugged and looked down at her lap.

"I know you too well, Shelby. Something's up. You don't have to tell me right now, but we will talk later."

Shelby crossed her legs and arms. "Work, Sandy. It was just work."

"We'll talk later."

A hush came over the courtroom. The bailiff opened a side door and held it while Betty and a female jailer walked through. "Wow. She looks horrible," Shelby whispered.

The anklet chains shuffled across the floor as the gaunt Betty was escorted to the defense table. Shelby felt of pang of sympathy for the haggard woman. But the minute Betty mouthed the words, "You're mine, bitch," the disdain Shelby felt for her nemesis returned.

The spectators murmured amongst themselves as the jailer forcibly pushed Betty down into her chair.

Shelby leaned back in her chair in an attempt to avoid any further eye contact with Betty. Sandy patted Shelby's leg. "Don't worry about her, Shelby. That vicious attitude will be slapped out of her by the time this trial is over."

"I know. She's handcuffed and surrounded by cops, but she still intimidates me."

"Maybe it's the way she looks. Hell, that bony witch scares me."

Shelby laughed with Sandy, but as she turned back to look toward the front of the room, she saw Betty staring at her, her eyebrows furrowed. As their eyes met, Betty mouthed, "Laugh now. You'll be crying soon."

On the fourth day of the trial, Shelby learned she would be testifying. As a result, she was not allowed into the courtroom until the prosecution called her. She paced the hallway, chewed her manicured nails, and fiddled with her bleach blonde hair.

"Shelby, sit down. Everything is going to be fine," said Sandy, patting a space on the bench beside her. "That state trooper Petersen is almost finished testifying. Then all you have to do is tell the truth about what she did to you."

"I know, but I'm so nervous."

The courtroom doors opened, releasing a sea of angry voices. Shelby stood up but a guard approached her. "Best if you ladies stay seated over there until this mob clears out." The mob of spectators poured into the hallway.

"What's going on?" Sandy demanded.

The guard shrugged and stepped toward the mayhem. "Don't know." He announced to the crowd, "Okay, folks. Move

it along, this way.”

Before long, Eddy emerged and made his way to the two women on the bench.

“What the hell is going on, Eddy?” Sandy asked.

Eddy sighed. “Apparently, the trooper did not mirandize Betty properly. She was still under sedation in the hospital when they came to make the arrest, so she was unable to concur that she understood her rights. She also claims they sedated her without her consent.”

Sandy muttered a series of obscenities. Shelby was stunned. “Seriously, how does this happen?” she asked. “How do you get consent from a crazy person?”

“She’s claiming they took advantage of her emotional state after Ted took his dive over the mountain. Temporary insanity due to emotional trauma.”

“What does that mean for us?”

“I’m not sure. We have to wait and see what the judge decides. The attorneys are in his chambers right now.”

Sandy stood and crossed her arms in front of her chest. “This is crap. That psycho can do whatever she wants to do, to whomever she wants, and gets away with it because of a technicality? She gets to go free because she received medical attention rather than being left beside the road?”

Eddy reached for Shelby’s hand. “Let’s go inside the courtroom and see what the judge does before we jump to any conclusions. It’s going to be okay, even if she does get off here in Utah. There are still charges pending in Texas. She’ll definitely pay for her crimes there.”

Shelby didn’t say a word as she rose in a daze and walked back into the courtroom. The courtroom was chaotic as she and Sandy found their seats and sat in silence next to Eddy. Betty was sitting next to her attorney with a devious smirk on her face. *How can this be happening?* Shelby thought, as the judge returned to bench. Everyone left in the room stood up.

The judge used his gavel to quiet the courtroom. Shelby’s heart was beating so fast. *Is this ever going to end?*

“Ladies and gentleman, I find that it is my duty, no matter what my personal feelings might be, to always uphold the law in every case. I therefore have to rule in favor of the defendant and grant a mistrial. I suggest that the prosecution bring me new evidence against this defendant before presenting a new case. Make sure this time that her rights are not violated.”

There was a series of boos in the room as the prosecuting attorney stood. “Your Honor, I would like to request that Miss Burton remain in the custody of the State of Utah as we are currently waiting on extradition papers from the State of Texas for her charges there,” Polk said.

The defense attorney rose. “I object, Your Honor. The prosecution should have taken care of that before this trial.”

“Calm down, Mr. Fox. He’s correct, Mrs. Polk. It is not this court’s practice to hold defendants on so-called ‘paperwork.’ If you want Miss Burton to remain in the State’s custody, I suggest you come up with something better than that.”

“Your Honor, we are just waiting on the paperwork.”

“Not good enough. Miss Burton, you are hereby released from the custody of this district, but it is the court’s request that you remain here until your paperwork from Texas is completed.”

Betty conferred with her attorney and, with a smile of revenge, turned toward the courtroom, attempting to once again make eye contact with Shelby. The bailiff, however, had moved in behind Betty, trying to help her from her chair in order

to remove the cuffs and shackles. Betty pushed at the bailiff, determined to let Shelby know her intentions. Shelby saw everything as Betty flashed a huge grin and she was escorted out of the courtroom. She again mouthed the words: “You’re mine, bitch.”

“This court is adjourned and the jury is dismissed,” the judge announced. “The State of Utah thanks you for your time.”

Shelby sat numb in disbelief as the bailiff shut the door behind Betty.

“It’ll be alright, girl,” Sandy said, placing her hand on Shelby’s arm. “That bitch deserves a Texas trial anyway. The Lone Star State doesn’t take kindly to killers, even ones who don’t complete the attempt. She’ll get what’s coming to her down there.”

“I know. I just wish they’d keep her locked up until then. You know she’s not going to stick around and wait to get picked up again.”

Eddy offered his hand to Shelby, but she chose to remain seated for a while, trying to gather her thoughts. “Thanks, Eddy,” she said. “I’ll be there in a minute. I’ll meet you both at the cars.”

Shelby sat in silence, contemplating everything Betty had done to her over the last two years. The case should have been open and shut based on the emails Ted’s widow Annabel had given Jack. *How is it possible that after all the horrible things Betty has inflicted on me, she’s being let out of jail completely unpunished?* Shelby wondered. What petrified her were Betty’s own words, which proved she wasn’t done terrorizing Shelby. Shelby quickly wiped away the tears welling up in her eyes. *Crying isn’t going to help. The only way to beat Betty is to stay one step ahead of her,* she resolved.

“Hey, how ya doing, girl?” Sandy called as Shelby approached their car.

“I’m okay. I need to get to the motel and change my flight reservations. I want to go home today. In a perverted kind of way Jack will be glad I’m finished up here so soon. He’s been really upset with me for staying in the trucking business. Now he’ll have one more reason to use against me to quit.”

“Are you saying Jack wants you to stop driving a truck? Well, that’s not going to happen. Is it?”

Shelby wanted to stay with trucking, but Jack was making it harder for her with every passing day. It seemed the longer she continued to drive the more upset he got with her. She knew things were going to get even worse once he learned that Betty was out.

Eddy placed a comforting hand on her arm. “Do you really think that Jack wants you to stop driving? He’s probably just concerned with your safety, Shelby. I know I’d feel the same way if my wife had gone through all you have experienced at the hands of Betty. Don’t worry too much about it. I’m sure he’ll calm down about things, especially when Texas gets a hold of Betty.”

“Thanks, Eddy. I sure hope you’re right.”

“Well, he better not expect me to give up my gator without a fight,” Sandy muttered.

Betty’s lawyer interrupted their laughter to Sandy’s response “Are you Eddy?” he asked.

“Yes... why?”

The lawyer moved his briefcase from one hand to the other and took a folded piece of paper out from under his arm and handed it to Eddy. “Betty requested I give this to you. When she gets back to Texas, her new lawyer will be contacting you with a legal request. I told Betty that this letter isn’t going to work, but she insisted that I give it to you anyway.”

Eddy took the letter, opened it, and began reading it as the lawyer left the lobby.

“What does the bitch want now?” asked Sandy, leaning toward Eddy to try to see the letter. “She better not think she’s

getting her job back.”

Eddy rolled his eyes and handed her the letter. “That’s exactly what she wants.”

“Seriously?” Sandy grabbed the letter from Eddy and stared at it. “What is she—insane?” She read the letter and abruptly handed it back to Eddy. “Yeah, right. Not while I still work for ESCC. Can she really do this, Eddy?”

Eddy took the letter, folded it up, and then placed it in his shirt pocket. “I doubt it, but I’ll check with ESCC’s legal department when we get back to make sure. I’m pretty sure this is just a ploy on Betty’s part.”

“Yeah. She’s probably just trying to get a rise out of us.”

“Don’t forget, she still has charges pending in Texas,” said Eddy. “I really doubt she’ll head down there of her own free will or, for that matter, stay here as the judge requested. She’s just being her normal evil self, trying to show us she’s still controlling things. Or at least she *thinks* she is.”

Shelby knew underestimating Betty was a mistake, but she didn’t say anything. She was tired of talking about Betty, and especially of thinking about her. “I’ve got to go, guys. I need to change my flight and pack. Plus, that drive to Salt Lake Airport is several miles away. I hope I can still get a flight out today. Are you guys flying back today, too?”

“No, I think we’ll stay the night in Salt Lake and try to get out tomorrow. I’m pretty sure Speedy can handle things one more day.”

Back at the motel a few hours later, Shelby hugged Sandy and shook hands with Eddy. “I’ll see ya back in Texas.”

As Shelby got into her rental car and headed for the airport, Sandy called out, “See ya soon, Shelby. And don’t forget to tell Jack I’m not giving up my gator.”

Shelby waved back, not wanting to think about Jack’s response to the outcome of the trial.

Betty took a deep breath of fresh air and examined the little bit of money that she’d had when she was arrested. There wasn’t enough to make it very far. Her cellphone had been turned off because she couldn’t make her payments while she was in jail. With a sigh, she decided that her best option to get out of town was to find a trucker.

She looked around and decided to head in a westerly direction. She wanted to avoid the public as much as possible, especially since everyone would probably recognize her from photos that had been in the local paper. She did not want any kind of exposure right now. She walked briskly through the evening shadows of the trees along the streets. *I have to get out of this godforsaken town*, she thought.

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