

THE DNA RESULTS ARE BACK.
AND THERE'S A **SERIAL KILLER** IN

THE
FAMILY
TREE

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NICOLE MABRY

THE FAMILY TREE

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avon.

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Dedication

From Steph:

For my parents, Ann and Dave
And my husband, Danny

From Nicole:

For Mom and Dad

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PROLOGUE

THE DAILY GAZETTE

Monday, April 2nd, 2012

THE TRI-STATE KILLER STRIKES AGAIN

The bodies of two Syracuse University women were found on Saturday, March 31st. They were discovered by bartender, Louis Castille, as he was disposing of the trash at the end of his shift. Castille noticed two large plastic storage containers that were sealed with duct tape, sitting next to the garbage bins in the secluded alley behind his bar. Castille called the police after opening one container and finding a body inside, which was later identified as Elizabeth Benton.

‘It was terrible,’ said Castille, still visibly shaken by his discovery. ‘She was folded over at the waist like she was kneeling in the bin, her hair was hanging forward and blocking her face, but the smell hit me as soon as the lid was removed.’

The second container held the body of Kelly Davidson, Benton’s roommate. The women were reported missing a little over nine months ago after they failed to show up for classes and work. After a thorough search of the small two-bedroom home the women were renting near campus, police found evidence indicating the perpetrator had broken in through a window at the back of the house, entering through the kitchen. What the police didn’t find, however, were signs of a struggle, suggesting the women may have been asleep or otherwise taken by surprise during the attack.

The two deaths are believed to be the twenty-second and twenty-third victims attributed to The Tri-State Killer. To date, eleven pairs of bodies have been discovered in sealed containers across the Tri-State area. Benton and Davidson’s bodies were in the early stages of decomposition, suggesting they had been killed not long before their bodies were discarded in the alley.

The Tri-State Killer is known for abducting and murdering young women in pairs, however the first killing attributed to him back in 1974, was a single victim. The body of Linda Lavelle, found dumped in the woods on a pile of assembled rocks, was connected to the subsequent double murders by the numbers penned on to each victim’s forehead, including Lavelle. A statement from law enforcement noted, ‘Most likely, the first murder was an unplanned victim of opportunity. This sloppiness is why our only evidence, a partial DNA sample, is from the first victim. He’s been honing his craft, his method of kidnapping and murdering for almost forty years, which makes him extremely dangerous.’

A pair of victims has been found every two years since 1992, marking a distinct cyclical pattern to the killings. Other than the single DNA sample, law enforcement also has grainy CCTV camera footage from 1992 of the killer leaving a set of bins behind a restaurant, as well as a rough sketch from a botched kidnapping attempt in 1999. Both give nothing more than a

general description of the killer, as he was skilled at keeping his face hidden during both sightings.

Police are cautioning women in the Tri-State Area to be on the look-out for suspicious behavior and only travel in groups of three or more, as well as to be cautious of opening their doors to strangers in the evening, and to keep doors and windows properly locked.

His fingers gripped the edge of the newspaper so tightly that it wrinkled, causing creases to ripple through the text. At the bottom of the article was the pathetic excuse for a police sketch that really didn't look anything like him except for the baseball cap. The guy in the dark, grainy image from the video footage could be anyone at all – it was almost comical, really. He laid the paper down on the scarred wooden table and sat back. They had missed several details. A sharp smile stretched across his face, lingering as he reflected on how he had outsmarted the police for so many years. While it was a mistake that he hadn't been aware of the security camera in the alley where he'd discarded numbers two and three, and he'd miscalculated the time the second roommate was arriving home that one fateful night in 1999, causing him to scramble out the back door, the fallout from both had been minimal. After forty years of carrying out his mission, they only had his approximate height and eye and hair color. He'd been savvy enough to adjust his process after that girl, Sara, had changed her routine. The solution was ingenious. It lured these women into unknowingly allowing him full access into their lives. And the police were still no closer to finding him, the imbeciles. He was not worried.

The sunlight filtered through the window above the sink, lighting up the small kitchen with its outdated appliances and broken cabinet knobs. The ancient refrigerator hummed loudly, most likely needing a new evaporator fan. He really should put some effort into fixing up the cabin, but he was getting older and even though he kept himself in good shape, the arthritis in his joints sometimes made home repairs a struggle. He preferred to save his strength for the girls. The cabin had been outfitted well for hunting and fishing, and the tiled cleaning and gutting room had certainly come in handy. But for his purposes, he'd needed other things added and adjusted. All the work he'd done in the beginning had been for function, not vanity. The appliances still worked fine, and he'd already replaced the roof when it'd been damaged by a storm a few years back. He felt lucky that in all these years the only repairs needed were the roof and the occasional broken floorboard, things he could manage on his own. If the plumbing had failed