

Chapter Two

Head Games

Homicide detectives deal in death.

It's our bread and butter.

Our grind.

For some, chasing murder is just a job. A paycheck. Bodies bagged, leads tracked down, bad guys booked. In essence, home for dinner. For me, though, chasing murder has become so much more.

My personal 24/7 mindfuck.

Truthfully, I've lost my shit over chasing murder.

Literally.

I'm actually sitting in the lobby of one of these fucking head doctors right now. Obviously, not by choice. More of an ultimatum, I'd say. Head doctor equals I get to keep my job. It's been an ongoing thing over the years.

Three weeks back, the chief used phrases like willfully rebellious and deliberately defiant and said I was a financial liability to every taxpayer in the county. With spit flyin' all over my personal space, the chief capped it all off with, "*And don't even dream of returning to work until you've had your head examined!*"

Therein lies the ultimatum.

Me being me, I made some cavalier observation about him seeming angry.

Him being him, he had me removed from the building by two deputies.

This is the thanks I get for catching one of these "stranger danger" creeps. This guy managed to get away with molesting your average-sized, first-grade class—that's 21.6 kids by today's stats—kill a couple of young adult females, and had a pre-adult babysitter tied up in his basement. *And I'm the one with hostility issues?* Not to mention, he eluded the Feds for almost two years.

Do you know who he didn't elude?

This guy.

So the motherfucker "fell" a few times during his confession. Big fuckin' deal. So what. I tried explaining my line of reasoning to the judge. He ruled in favor of the defense. Rattled on about due process rights. Blah. Blah. Blah. In the end, he slammed his gavel. "*The confession is inadmissible.*"

Naturally, the district attorney ripped the chief a new one. Turns out, shit does roll downhill, right to the top of my desk. I was suspended and ordered to undergo a psychiatric evaluation. On my dime.

Thanks, Chief.

So here I sit in the posh lobby of a group practice with seven or eight other crazies, also waiting to be formally diagnosed. Just my opinion, but as far as I'm concerned, there are only two types of people in the world. Crazy and not crazy.

I feel like I am the latter.

Not everyone agrees.

Full disclosure, this is not my first rodeo with the white coats. I know what I'm in for: *How are you sleeping? Do you want to hurt yourself or others? Tell me about your childhood. Do you need pills?* All the psycho-babble bullshit. Do these pricks actually care? I don't believe so. They sit back in their fancy chairs while you lay on their couch, boohooing your way through the hour. Then in walks the next sucker.

These pricks do this all day long, cha-chingin' all the way to the bank.

News flash: At two hundred dollars an hour, they're not going to call you a jerkoff and tell you to go kill yourself.

I should've been a doctor.

People spit and shoot at me.

And the city ain't payin' me two hundred dollars an hour to let it happen.

Hi. My name is Mason Storm, and I'm an alcoholic. Not really, but I've always wanted to say that. I am, or was, a homicide detective for the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office. Now I'm in limbo...detective, not a detective, detective.

Well, fuck, you get the point.

Finally, a door opens behind me. I'm called. I walk over.

A woman holds out her hand. "Hello, Mr. Storm. It's nice to meet you. I'm Dr. Ang. Please follow me to my office."

I let go of her hand. "It's either Mason or Storm. No mister."

"Great. Which do you prefer?"

"I just told ya."

"Mason it is then." She turns and walks up the hallway.

I mosey after her. I'm certainly not going to rush in, excited to be poked and prodded like some lab rat. I do have to be honest about something, though. Dr. Ang doesn't look like your typical tight-faced quack. For one, she's the tallest Asian I've ever seen. Nearly, if not, six feet. And she has shiny, jet-black hair down to her ass and walks like she's been on a runway.

At the end of the hall, she holds the door open for me. I step inside. The office is all earth tones, essential oils, and ambient lights. Everything Zen. There's even one of those water-running-over-rocks things on a credenza in the back.

She gives me time to look around.

There's a desk off to the side. A taupe-colored leather couch—*the couch*—in the middle of the room, with the doctor's chair pushed up cozy. I walk over to the examination area.

"I suppose I get the crazy couch."

"We don't like to use the word crazy here, Mason, but I'll play along. Do you think you're crazy?"

I take the cushion in the middle. “Let’s get something straight, Dr. Ang. This little ‘poke the detective’ is not my idea, and I’m not going to pretend I like it. The quicker you sign off on me so I can return to work, the happier we’ll both be.”

“Do you mind telling me who’s forcing you to be here?”

“Don’t ask me questions you know the answers to. Save your medical training bullshit for the next guy.”

She concedes the point and writes something on her notepad.

She moves into the scripted questions, the icebreakers. I answer with the least amount of words possible while she jots. I’m tempted to lean over and look at what she’s written. I could, too, because she’s sitting so weirdly close.

I glance down at my watch, willing the hour to pass.

She sees me. “Do you have somewhere to be, Mason?”

“As a matter of fact, I do.”

“Work?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“You know damn well why.”

“You’re right. I do. You were suspended. Do you want to tell me your side of the story?”

“Not especially.”

“Try.”

“Fine. The chief thinks I have an anger problem.”

“What about you? Do you feel you have an anger problem?”

“No,” I growl. “I pushed the envelope a little further than the suits were comfortable with. It is what it is.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“Not even a little.”

Surprisingly, she moves back into the safe areas. Asks if I have a significant other, what my hobbies are, where I grew up, and the like.

Finally, the time expires. I ask if I’m able to go back to work. She tells me it’s not her call and suggests we meet every week for the foreseeable future.

I can’t win.

I set another appointment for next week and leave.