

You Can't Hide

Karen Rose

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KAREN ROSE

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Prologue

Chicago, Saturday, March 11, 11:45 P.M.

‘Cynthia.’ It was the barest of whispers, but still she heard.

No. Cynthia Adams clenched her eyes shut, pressed the back of her head into her pillow, its softness a mockery to the rigidity of her tensed body. Her fingers dug into the sheets, twisting until she grimaced in pain. *Not again.* A sob rose in her throat, wild and desperate. *Please. I can’t do this again.* ‘Go away,’ she whispered harshly. ‘Please, just go away and leave me alone.’

But she knew she was talking to no one. If she opened her eyes she’d see nothing but the darkness of her own bedroom. No one was there. But still the hideous whisper taunted, as it had for weeks. Every night she lay in bed . . . waiting. Waiting for the voice that was her worst nightmare. Some nights it spoke. Some nights she merely lay tensed, waiting. It was wind, it was shadows. It was nothing at all.

But it was real. She knew it was real.

‘Cynthia? Help me.’ It was the voice of a child calling

for comfort in the night. A scared little girl. Who was dead.

She's dead. I know she's dead. She placed the lilies on Melanie's grave herself every Sunday. Melanie was dead.

But she was here. *She's come for me.* Blindly she grabbed the bottle from her bedside table and dry swallowed two pills. *Go away. Please, just go away.*

'Cynthia?' It was real. So real. *God, help me, please. I'm losing my mind.* 'Why did you do it?' The whisper drifted. 'I need to know why.'

Why? She didn't know why. Dammit, she didn't know why. She rolled over, burying her face in her pillow, drawing her body into the smallest possible space. She held her breath. And waited.

It was quiet. Melanie was gone. Cynthia let herself draw a breath, then sprang from the bed as the scent assaulted her senses. *Lilies.* 'No.' She backed away, unable to take her eyes from the pillow where just the tip of a single lily was visible.

'It should have been you, Cynthia.' The whisper was harsher now. 'I should be putting lilies on your grave.'

Cynthia drew a breath. She made herself repeat what her psychiatrist had told her to say when she was afraid. 'This isn't real. This is not real.'

'It's real, Cynthia. I'm real.' Melanie was no longer a child, her voice now that of an angry adult. Cynthia shuddered at the sound. Melanie deserved to be angry. *I was a coward.* 'You ran away once, Cyn. You hid. You won't hide again. You'll never, ever leave me alone again.'

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Cynthia backed away slowly until she came up hard against her bedroom door. She closed her eyes tight as she gripped the hard, reassuringly real doorknob. 'You aren't real. You are not real.'

'It should have been you. Why did you leave me? Why did you leave me with him? How could you? You said you loved me. But you left me alone. With him. You never loved me.' A sob shook Melanie's voice and tears burned Cynthia's eyes.

'It's not true. I loved you,' she whispered, desperately. 'So much.'

'You never loved me.' Melanie was a child again. An innocent child. 'He hurt me, Cyn. You let him. You let him hurt me . . . again and again. Why?'

Cynthia yanked the doorknob and tumbled backward into the hall where a single light burned. And stopped short. More lilies. Everywhere. She turned slowly and could only stare. They mocked her. Mocked her sanity.

'Come to me, Cyn.' Melanie coaxed now. 'Come. It's not so bad. We'll be together. You can take care of me. Like you promised you would.'

'No.' She covered her ears and ran for the door. 'No.'

'You can't hide, Cyn. Come to me. You know you want to.' She was sweet now, so sweet. Melanie had been so sweet. Then. Now she was dead. *It's my fault.*

Cynthia jerked open the front door. And stifled a scream. Then slowly leaned over and picked up the picture at her feet. She stared in horror at the lifeless figure hanging from the rope, and remembered the day

she'd found her. Melanie had just been . . . dangling there. Swinging . . .

'You made me do that,' Melanie said coldly. 'You don't deserve to live.'

Her hands shook as she stared. 'I don't,' she whispered.

'Then come to me, Cyn. Please.'

Cynthia backed up again, groped for the phone. 'Call Dr Chick. Call,' she muttered. *She'll tell me I'm not crazy.* But the phone rang and startled, she dropped it. Stared at it as if it were alive. Waited for it to sprout fangs and hiss. But it just rang.

'Answer it, Cynthia,' Melanie said coldly. 'Now.'

Hands shaking, Cynthia bent over and picked up the phone. 'H-hel-hello?'

'Cynthia, it's Dr Ciccotelli.'

Gasping in relief at the solid, familiar, *live* voice, Cynthia's shoulders sagged. 'I hear her, Dr Chick. Melanie. She's here. I hear her.'

'Of course you do. She's calling you, Cynthia. It's what you deserve. Go to her. End it. End it now.'

'But . . .' Tears welled, spilled. 'But . . .' she whispered.

'Do it, Cynthia. She's dead and it's your fault. Go to her. Do what you should have done years ago. Take care of her.'

'Come,' Melanie ordered, her voice again adult and full of authority. 'Come.'

Cynthia dropped the phone, backed away, wearily now. *I'm tired. So tired.* 'Let me sleep,' she whispered. 'Please let me sleep.'

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'Come to me,' Melanie whispered back. 'Then I'll let you sleep.'

Melanie had promised it so many times. So many nights. Cynthia turned and stared at the window. Dark night was outside the glass. But what else? Sleep. Peace.

Peace.

The living room was empty. Cynthia Adams was no longer in view of the camera. The feed to the laptop no longer showed the pacing, frantic woman. She was going to do it. The excitement was building with each moment. After four weeks, Cynthia Adams was finally going to do it. After four weeks of intense effort, she'd been driven to the brink of sanity. Just a little nudge would send her flying. Hopefully quite literally.

'She's at the window.' The woman seated in the passenger seat was pale as she murmured the words. Her hands trembled as she carefully set the microphone in her lap. 'I can't do this anymore.'

'You'll do it until I say otherwise.'

She flinched. 'She's going to jump. Let me tell her to stop.'

Stop? The girl was as crazy as Cynthia Adams. 'Tell her to come.' She did nothing. Temper bubbled. 'Tell her to come or your brother dies. You should know by now I'm not bluffing. Tell her to come. Tell her you need her, you miss her, she owes you. Tell her it will all be better when you're together. Tell her now. And do it with feeling.' Still she sat, unmoving. '*Now.*'

She picked up the microphone, her hands shaking.

'Cyn,' she whispered, 'I need you. I'm scared.' She was. Nothing like reality to fuel great drama. 'Please, come.' Her voice broke. 'It will be better this way. Please.' She ended on a pleading whisper.

The view of Adams's window from the driver's seat was superb. The plate-glass door slowly slid open and Cynthia Adams appeared, her sheer nightgown whipping in the cold March wind. She'd make an attractive corpse. Very Gloria Swanson. What a great movie that was, *Sunset Boulevard*. Hollywood just didn't make them like that anymore. It would be a great way to celebrate. Popcorn and an old movie. But the celebration would never happen if Adams just stood on her balcony. *Just jump, dammit.*

'Tell her to come. Make her jump. Show me your stuff, sweetheart.'

She swallowed hard at the sarcastic endearment, but nevertheless complied. 'Cynthia, just another step. One more. I'm waiting.'

'Do it like a child now. Like a little kid.'

'Please, Cynthia. I'm scared.' The girl's command of voices was good. She could go from adult to child, from dead Melanie to psychiatrist Ciccotelli in a blink. 'Please come.' She drew a deep breath, shuddered it out. 'I need you.'

And then . . . success. A horrified cry rasped from the girl's throat as Adams came plunging down. Twenty-two floors. They could hear the thud of her body striking pavement even through the closed car windows. Maybe her corpse wouldn't be so attractive

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after all. But beauty was in the eye of the beholder and the sight of Adams sprawled dead on the pavement was . . . breathtaking. The girl in the passenger seat was crying hysterically.

'Pull yourself together. You need to make another call.'

'Oh, God, oh God.' She turned her face away from the window as the car passed within feet of Adams's body. 'I can't believe . . . God, I'm going to be sick.'

'Not in my car you're not. Take the phone. Take it.'

Shuddering, she took the phone. 'I can't.'

'You will. Hit speed dial number one. It's Ciccotelli's home phone. When she answers, tell her that you're a concerned neighbor of Cynthia Adams and she is standing on the ledge, threatening to jump. Do it.'

She dialed and waited. 'She's not answering. She's asleep.'

'Then call again. Keep it ringing until the princess answers her phone. And put it on speaker. I want to hear.'

The third try yielded results. 'Hello?'

She'd been asleep. Home alone on a Saturday night. It was satisfying, knowing that aspect of Ciccotelli's life was also well under control. A nudge to the girl had her stuttering her lines. 'Dr Ciccotelli? Dr Tess Ciccotelli?'

'Who is this?'

'A . . . a neighbor of one of your patients. Cynthia Adams. Something's wrong. She's on the ledge. She's threatening to jump.' With her eyes closed the girl

ended the call and let the cell phone drop to her lap.
'I'm finished.'

'For tonight.'

'But—' She jerked around, her mouth open. 'You said . . .'

'I said I'd keep your brother alive if you assisted me. I still need your assistance. Keep practicing Ciccotelli's voice. I'll need you to do her again in a few days. For tonight, we're done. Say one word and you and your brother die.'

Ciccotelli was coming. *Let the games commence.*

Chapter One

Sunday, March 12, 12:30 A.M.

Normally a suicide drew a bigger crowd, even in a high-priced neighborhood like this one, Detective Aidan Reagan thought grimly as he slammed his car door and flinched at the bite of the cold air blowing in from the lake. But most people with any sense were inside on a night like this. Aidan couldn't afford the luxury. Dispatch called and he and his partner were next in the barrel. For a damn suicide.

This was a distraction from the child homicide he'd spent the last two days working. He hated child homicides but he thought he might hate suicides just a little bit more. He could only hope he could get this jumper off his desk quickly so he could focus on finding who'd broken a six year old's neck like a dry twig.

The people who watched from the curb appeared to be twenty-somethings coming home from a night on the town. They waited silently, eyes fastened to the scene with a morbid mixture of horror, fascination, and

sympathy. The horror Aidan understood. No body was a pretty sight, but a plunge twenty-two stories was a step beyond generic gruesomeness. As for the sympathy . . . Aidan would save his for the real victims. Whoever said suicide was a victimless crime had obviously never notified a family.

He had.

He wished the morbid curiosity-seekers could see that part of it. They might not find such a scene so damn fascinating after all. But they were well behaved at least, standing silently behind the yellow tape strung between two light posts by the officers first on the scene. An occasional stamp of cold feet broke the unnatural silence. One of the two uniforms stood by the yellow tape at the curb, the other on the sidewalk, facing away from the body.

Aidan approached, his shield in his hand. After four months it still felt strange, approaching the uniform, not wearing one. 'Reagan, Homicide,' he said crisply, then stopped short, first at the stench, then at the sight. The stomach he'd have sworn was seasoned after twelve years on the force took a nasty lurch. 'My God.'

The uniform nodded, his jaw tight. 'That's what we said.'

Aidan's eyes took a quick trip up the wall of identical balconies and back down to focus on the iron spike protruding from what had been a woman's chest. Now her chest was ripped open, revealing shattered bone and . . . insides. For just a moment he stared,

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remembering the other time he'd seen such a sight. He steeled his spine. This was nothing like the other. That other victim had been an innocent. This woman lying here . . . she was dead by her own hand. *No sympathy*, he told himself.

This woman had thrown herself twenty-two stories to concrete – and onto a decorative wrought-iron fence. The fence was only about a foot high, mostly inverted 'u's, but every four feet or so a spike jutted upward. The force of her impact on the spike had literally split her wide open, geysering blood to splatter a dirty pile of snow three feet away. 'She hit it dead on,' he murmured.

The uniform winced. 'So to speak.'

Aidan dragged his gaze back to the cop's drawn face. 'You are?'

'I'm Forbes and that's my partner, DiBello, over there doing crowd control.' Forbes grimaced. 'I lost the toss.'

Aidan scanned the faces of the silent crowd that needed no control, but hell, a toss was a toss. He'd lost his fair share during his years in uniform. 'Anybody see anything?'

'Two seventeen year olds say she jumped from the twenty-second floor at about midnight.' Forbes pointed a black-gloved finger upward. 'It's that balcony up there, the one with the curtains blowing in the wind, third from the left.'

'Nobody pushed her?'

'Kids didn't see anybody. They said she kind of glided up to the railing.'

Aidan frowned. 'Glided up? Like a ghost?'

Forbes shrugged. 'That's what they said. Kept repeating it, again and again. I put 'em in the back of the squad car until you could talk to them. They're pretty shook up.'

'Poor kids.' They deserved the sympathy. This sight would haunt them for a long time. They were only seventeen, just a year older than his own sister. He shuddered at the thought of Rachel seeing such a grisly sight, then jerked a nod toward the crowd. 'Any of them know her?'

'DiBello asked, but nobody did.'

Aidan looked at the woman's face, her features now loose and spongy. Blood seeped from her ears, nose, and her open mouth. The iron fence had taken the brunt of the force of her fall, but any fall from that height smashed the skull, the scalp basically containing the mess. The features kind of liquefied, giving the face a macabre, melted-wax look. 'Nobody would recognize her now, even if they did know her. We'll need to get into the apartment she jumped from. Is the super around?'

'I knocked but he's not home. A neighbor says he's at a Bulls game.'

'The game was over two hours ago. Where is he now?'

'I paged him once. I'll see if I can find out where he hangs.'

'Thanks, man. Also, can we move this crowd to the other side of the street? And make sure nobody in

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the crowd takes any pictures. Have your partner keep his eyes open for camera cell phones.' Aidan pulled out his own cell and called in for a warrant and a medical examiner, then crouched down to take a closer look at the body. She was wrapped in black lace and silk and he wondered if she'd dressed especially for the occasion. If she had, the effect was ruined by the spike. And the guts oozing onto the concrete. He swallowed hard. It was a hell of a mess for someone to clean up. That was the problem with suicides, he thought bitterly. They wanted to go out with dramatic flair but they never thought about the consequences to anybody else. To the people they left behind. To the people who had to clean up.

Selfish. So damn avoidable. *Goddammit.*

He realized he'd clenched his fists and deliberately loosened them. *Get a grip, Reagan.* The deep breath he drew filled his senses with the metallic scent of warm blood and foul stench of busted bowel, but underneath he caught a hint of cinnamon as footsteps crunched the snow behind him. His partner was here.

'Hell of a way to go,' Murphy stated in his quiet way.

Aidan shot a harsh glance over his shoulder. 'Hell of a thing to do to her family. Can't wait to make that visit.'

'One thing at a time, Aidan,' Murphy said evenly, but his eyes were kind and understanding and made Aidan feel small. 'So what do we know?'

'Only that she jumped from the twenty-second floor. Two witnesses say she "glided" up, whatever the hell

that means. I haven't talked to them yet. As for her, she was young. Her arms look well toned.' He focused in on her limbs, the only body parts that remained reasonably unscathed. 'Maybe in her late twenties or early thirties.' He pointed at one hand that draped over the inverted 'u's of the decorative fence. 'Big rock on her right hand, no sign of any rings on her left, so she's probably unmarried. Somebody has some money. That ring costs a hell of a lot of green. Her arms and hands don't appear to have any defensive wounds.'

Murphy crouched down next to him. 'Snazzy colors.'

Her two-inch-long nails were painted bright bloodred. 'I noticed. The red against the black lace does make a real statement.'

Murphy shrugged. 'It wouldn't be the first time a jumper wanted to leave a lasting impression. Nobody knows her?'

Aidan pushed to his feet. 'No. I'm hoping the apartment she jumped from was hers. I called in for a warrant and the ME's on his way. Let's go talk to the kids who—'

'Let me pass.' The voice cut through the night – soft, yet ringing with authority.

'Ma'am, you can't go through here. Please stay behind the tape.'

Aidan looked up in time to see Officer DiBello's arm come up to block a woman in a tan wool coat, her dark hair whipping in the wind, covering her face.

Again she spoke, her voice calm and quiet but

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commanding. 'I'm her doctor. Let me pass, Officer.'

'Let her through,' Murphy echoed and DiBello did, but Aidan stepped into the woman's path, blocking her once again before she could contaminate his scene. She lifted on her toes, but still wasn't quite tall enough to see over his shoulder. Aidan put his hand on her shoulder and gently pushed her back down. She stiffened, but cooperated.

'Ma'am, we're waiting for the ME. There's nothing you can do now.'

She took a step back, going very still. 'She jumped?'

Aidan nodded. 'I'm sorry, ma'am. Maybe you can tell us . . .'

But the words just trailed away as she pushed her hair from her face and instant recognition sent a new wave of anger to boil his blood. 'You're Ciccotelli.' Dr Tess Ciccotelli. This woman was no doctor. She was a shrink. That alone would have been bad enough, but *Miz Chick* had made quite a name for herself.

She wasn't just a garden variety do-you-hate-your-mother shrink. She was a bleeding-heart shrink who'd thrown weeks of solid police work in the chipper-shredder when she'd sat on the stand and calmly testified that a known, *confessed* killer of three children and one cop was unfit to stand trial. Four grieving families were denied justice because a 'doctor' said a killer was insane.

Of course the bastard was insane. He'd confessed to brutally murdering three little girls. Babies. With his bare hands he'd strangled a seasoned cop that was trying to

take him down. That he was crazy didn't make him an iota less guilty. Now the bastard was sitting pretty in a Chicago psychiatric hospital making pot holders all day instead of in a six-by-eight waiting for a needle in his arm. It wasn't fair. It wasn't right. But it had happened. And this woman had allowed it to happen.

Aidan had been there, sitting in the courtroom with the other cops, hoping against hope that Ciccotelli would change her mind, hoping she'd do the right thing. He remembered how the girls' parents had wept quietly in the courtroom, knowing they'd find no justice that day. How the cop's wife had sat front and center, surrounded by a sea of supportive uniforms. Ciccotelli hadn't blinked, just continued looking straight ahead with cool brown eyes.

Just like she was looking at him now. 'And you are?' she asked.

'Detective Aidan Reagan. This is my partner Detective Todd Murphy.'

Her eyes narrowed slightly as she studied his face and it was all he could do to maintain his glare. From his seat in the courtroom she'd been sleek, sophisticated. Unapproachable. Up close there was a wild beauty to her features, yet she was still unapproachable. His own eyes narrowed as she turned to Murphy. 'Todd, please ask your partner to step aside. I can at least give you a positive ID.'

Murphy grasped her arm gently. 'Tess, you don't want to do that. She's . . . She's really messed up.'

Aidan stepped aside, holding out his arm in mock

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gallantry. 'If she wants to see, by all means let the good doctor look.'

Murphy shot him a warning glare. 'Aidan.'

'It's all right, Todd,' she murmured and stepped forward without a flinch. She stood looking down at the body for a good minute before turning back to them, her face perfectly composed, her eyes still cool. 'Her name was Cynthia Adams. She has no next of kin.' From her coat pocket she pulled a business card and handed it to Murphy without a tremor. 'Call me if you have questions,' she said. 'I'll answer what I can.'

And with that she turned away and started walking toward a gray Mercedes parked behind Murphy's plain Ford. Aidan's annoyance bubbled over.

'And that's it?'

'Aidan,' Murphy cautioned. 'Not now.'

'If not now, when?' He controlled his voice, conscious of the crowd camped nearby. 'She waltzes in here and IDs the victim, cool as a damn cucumber. And then she just walks away? How about what made her jump twenty-two stories, *Doctor*? You should know, shouldn't you?' *And you should care, dammit*, he thought viciously. *You should care about something*. 'What the hell kind of doctor are you?' he finished on a hiss and watched her pause, her hands deep in her pockets.

She pulled a glove from her pocket and tugged it over her fingers, her back to them. 'Call me if you need me, Todd,' was all she said before walking away.