

IRIS JOHANSEN

LOOK

BEHIND

YOU

A NOVEL



ROY JOHANSEN

**LOOK  
BEHIND YOU**

ALSO BY IRIS JOHANSEN  
AND ROY JOHANSEN

Night Watch  
The Naked Eye  
Sight Unseen  
Close Your Eyes  
Shadow Zone  
Storm Cycle  
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Deadly Visions  
Beyond Belief  
The Answer Man

# LOOK BEHIND YOU

IRIS JOHANSEN

AND

ROY JOHANSEN

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**LOOK  
BEHIND YOU**



# PROLOGUE

**"ANOTHER SODA AND LIME.** Easy on the lime this time."

The bartender pursed her lips and gave him a pitying look. She obviously thought he was a recovering alcoholic, desperately clinging to sobriety by his fingernails.

He was nothing of the sort. He just needed to keep his wits about him.

Zachary looked up at the bar's mirrored backdrop where he could see dozens of people shoehorned into this popular downtown watering hole. There was only one who interested him, though.

Pretty, strawberry-blond Amanda Robinson sat in a corner booth. Late twenties, medium height, and a smile that lit up the room. She was surrounded by friends, three women and two men, who obviously adored her. They were finishing their third round of drinks. As always, Amanda had an apple martini and gave her dark-haired friend the toothpick-impaled cherries.

Zachary checked the time; 9:45 P.M. The group, many of

whom worked at the same insurance company as Amanda, started making noises about it being a “school night.” Pretty Amanda picked up her phone and opened an app that bathed her face in a soft blue glow.

That was his cue. Zachary threw a twenty onto the bar and walked outside. The sidewalks on University Avenue were much less crowded than they’d been a couple of hours before. He rounded the corner and found his car on the lonely side street. He unlocked the trunk, pulled out a large magnetic Vroom ride-share sign, and slapped it onto the passenger-side door. He climbed inside, started the car, and circled around the block.

He smiled as he saw Pretty Amanda outside the bar. She and her friends were now talking on the sidewalk. He powered down the passenger-side window as he rolled up to the group.

“Amanda Robinson?” he shouted to the group.

“That’s me!” she shouted.

After a few good-byes and quick hugs, Pretty Amanda hopped into the back seat. She pulled the door closed behind her.

“So . . .” he said, pretending to study his phone. “We’re going to Rillington Drive?”

“Yes,” she said absently. She was already engrossed in her own phone, scrolling through emails.

Perfect.

“This won’t take long.” Zachary power-locked the car doors as a shiver of excitement tore through him. “I promise, Amanda. This won’t take long at all.”

# CHAPTER

## 1

**KENDRA MICHAELS STUDIED THE** nine-year-old boy in the wheelchair.

Just as his file had stated, Ryan Walker was unresponsive. Disengaged, borderline catatonic. He'd been that way since suffering head and spine injuries in the same boating accident that had killed his father.

It had been nine months, and although there was some hope that he might one day walk again, doctors were less sure about his cognitive ability. He hadn't spoken since the accident, and doctors disagreed whether the principal cause was psychological or physiological.

Kendra knew she was a port of last resort for Ryan's harried mother, Janice. The poor woman had been trying to find answers for her son at the same time she was grieving for her husband. She'd been advised to consult a music therapist after Ryan had supposedly shown a slight response to a few television

commercial jingles. It was a phenomenon Kendra had so far been unable to reproduce in her studio.

Janice Walker was watching from behind a one-way glass on the studio's far side, and Kendra could almost feel her despair.

Kendra studied the boy's unresponsive eyes. *Let me in, Ryan. You'll be safe here.*

She walked across the room to the keyboard. Her studio was a large carpeted room twenty-five by fifteen feet, filled with an assortment of musical instruments: a keyboard, a drum set, and an array of woodwinds. She'd played some recordings and live guitar pieces for Ryan, but those elicited no response.

Maybe the keyboard would work better.

She sat down and turned on the console. "Okay, Ryan. Here's something I think you'll like. Your mom tells me you like Kiss. You're a Paul Stanley fan, right?"

No response.

Kendra started playing "I Love It Loud" using her keyboard to emulate the band's hard-driving sound.

Still nothing.

But then, there was . . . something.

A slight frowning of the brow.

A pull on the right corner of his mouth.

But that was all.

Kendra finished the song without any further response from Ryan. "Did you like that one?"

No reaction.

She stood. "Well, that's enough for today. We'll listen to more music the next time you're here, okay?"

The door to the observation room opened, and Janice

Walker stood smiling with excitement in the doorway. “Did you see that?”

Kendra glanced down at Ryan. “Let’s talk in there.”

Kendra ushered Janice back into the observation room and closed the door behind them.

“That was progress, right?” Janice asked.

“Maybe. I’ve had clients make facial expressions like that when they pass gas. Or when they’re hungry. Or for a dozen other reasons.”

“I know my son. He was reacting to the music.”

Kendra thought so too, but it was always better to keep parents’ expectations in check. “I hope you’re right.”

“I am right. Where do we go from here?”

“We keep working at it. In some people, music is the crowbar that opens the outside world to them. It helps them make connections that no other kind of communication can. Those small connections can lead to bigger connections. That’s the goal anyway.”

“Can we come back tomorrow?”

Janice was anxious, like a starving person who had been tossed a bread crumb. Not that Kendra could blame her. Her response would have been the same if Ryan had been her son.

“We should wait a couple days. It helps to give the brain time to process between sessions.”

Janice nodded, but she couldn’t hide her disappointment. “I know. It’s just . . . This is the first time I’ve seen him respond to anything since . . .” Her voice trailed off. “I want it so *much*.”

Kendra reached out and squeezed Janice’s arm. “I know. If this is the crowbar that will work for Ryan, I promise I’ll find

the right way to use it. I'll call you every day, and we'll talk and search for that way. We just need to be patient. Okay?"

She nodded, still staring at her son on the other side of the one-way glass. "It's hard to be patient." She tried to smile. "But I believe you're doing everything you can for him. And I know you have other clients. A couple of them came in here while you were working with Ryan."

Kendra wrinkled her brow. "Really?"

"Yes. They came in through the other door, the one that leads out to the hallway."

"Ryan's my last appointment of the day. Are you sure . . . ?"

"Well, they said they were here to see you. I just assumed . . . It was a man and a woman, both well-dressed. They said they'd come back later."

Kendra wasn't sure she liked this. She had an idea who it might be, but she hoped she was wrong.

"Is everything all right?" Janice asked.

"Yes. Fine. Nothing to worry about. I'm sure they'll be back soon."

**"SOON" WAS ONLY FIVE** minutes after Ryan and Janice left, when FBI Special Agent Roland Metcalf entered her studio. He was a tall, good-looking man in his mid-twenties and he possessed a self-effacing sense of humor that she'd always found refreshing for a man in his profession. Kendra had known him for a couple of years and today he was with a young woman she had never met. The woman was tall, attractive, fit-looking, with sleek brown hair and a completely professional demeanor.

"Sorry to barge in on you at work, Kendra." He motioned

to the woman at his side. "This is Special Agent Gina Carson. She just transferred in from the Chicago office."

Kendra adjusted the stacks of sheet music she'd picked up. "Hello."

Gina nodded her greeting with obvious uneasiness. She clearly wasn't sure why they were there.

Metcalf was strolling around the studio. "You know, I've never seen this place. I've always wanted to see what you do."

"Well, it seems you did that today. I heard you let yourself in the observation room while I was working with my last client."

Metcalf nodded. "Sorry about that. The main entrance was locked."

"I didn't want to be disturbed."

Metcalf quickly caught the nuance in her tone. "We didn't want that either. That's why we left."

"But you came back," she said without expression.

"Come on, Kendra. You *have* to know why I'm here."

"I have a pretty good idea." She continued to tidy the sheet music. "Doesn't mean that I like it."

Metcalf frowned as he waited for her to finish.

She let him wait.

After another moment he said, "Three murders, Kendra. Three murders in the last eight days, all within a couple of miles of here."

She didn't look up. "Three? I thought it was just two."

"A third popped up this morning. We're on our way to the crime scene now. San Diego PD has been handling the cases, but the FBI has just joined the investigation. My boss wants you to join us."

“Fortunately, Special Agent in Charge Griffin isn’t *my* boss. Therefore I get to politely decline.”

Gina moved toward the exit. “Then thanks for your time.”

Metcalf held his ground. “Hold on, Carson.” He smiled at Kendra. “I need a few more minutes to appeal to Kendra’s sense of civic duty.”

Metcalf’s partner was clearly annoyed as she stepped back toward him. “You didn’t tell me she was a music therapist when you said you wanted to stop here.”

“It wasn’t relevant to our investigation.”

“I’m thinking *she’s* not relevant to our investigation.”

Kendra’s lips quirked. “You heard the lady, Metcalf. I’m not relevant.”

“We’re wasting time,” Gina said. “You asked and she answered. She said she’s not interested. Are we working this case or not?”

Kendra was getting more annoyed at this foul-tempered woman than she was at Metcalf. Her eyes narrowed on the agent’s tight mouth and annoyed expression. She found herself suddenly feeling protective of Metcalf, not that he needed anyone’s protection. She liked the guy and it irked her that this agent would speak to him with such a total lack of respect.

Metcalf, perhaps sensing Kendra’s reaction, suddenly snapped at Gina. “Cool your jets, Carson. Griffin wants an extra set of eyes on that crime scene. *Her* eyes.”

“I’m still missing something,” Gina said sourly. “On our way here, didn’t you tell me she used to be blind?”

“Yes,” Kendra answered for him. “For the first twenty years of my life. An experimental surgical procedure gave me my sight.”

Gina clicked her tongue. “So now you have super vision or something?”

“Not at all,” Kendra said. “I’m sure my eyesight is no better than yours.”

Gina turned back to Metcalf. “Then would you like to tell me why we’re here groveling to a music therapist to help us on a murder investigation?”

Metcalf was obviously losing patience. “I don’t grovel, Carson. I ask politely, because that’s what the Bureau does when they go hat in hand trying to get help keeping a serial killer from claiming other victims. You obviously haven’t spent much time reading our case files since you transferred down. If you had, you would have seen that Kendra has helped crack over a dozen cases in the past few years. Many of those would’ve gone unsolved if she hadn’t stepped in.”

Gina was slightly taken aback by the attack. “And how, exactly, has she been of—”

“I don’t take anything I see for granted,” Kendra interrupted. God, she got tired of going through explanations. Particularly to arrogant agents like Carson. “When I got my sight, I got into the habit of identifying and mentally cataloging everything that passed in front of my eyes, just to make my way in a world that was totally new to me.”

“I guess that makes sense,” Gina said skeptically.

“That isn’t the half of it,” Metcalf said. “Like most blind people, Kendra had already developed her other senses to help her get by. Hearing, smell, touch, taste . . . She’s held onto those skills, too.”

Gina still seemed unsure. “Huh. Interesting.”

Kendra shrugged. “Most investigators only go by what they see. They’re missing well over half the story.”

She could almost see Gina’s hackles rise at her words. “Have you had any law enforcement training?”

“No. It’s nothing I’ve ever had any interest in.”

“No, you’d rather play with your instruments or try to impress agents like Metcalf here. Believe it or not, we’re actually trained observers,” Gina said. “It’s a big part of our jobs. I appreciate that you’ve assisted my colleagues, Dr. Michaels, but I really don’t see how you could be of any help in a case that is shaping up to be—”

“You want to show her?” Metcalf was smiling at Kendra.

“Not really.”

Gina was frowning as she looked from one to the other of them. “Show me what?”

“Come on, Kendra,” Metcalf murmured, his eyes twinkling. “She annoyed the hell out of you, and you’re no angel. You know you want to do it.”

She *had* annoyed her, but she’d been trying to ignore it.

“I’d rather not.”

“Please. You’re not the only one who took flack.”

Kendra sighed. He was right, she was definitely no angel. It had been a rough day and Gina Carson had rubbed her the wrong way. “If I do this, will you leave?”

Metcalf laughed. “We’ll *think* about leaving.”

“Bastard.” She turned toward Gina and looked her up and down.

Gina shifted uneasily. “What the hell is going on?”

“You used to smoke,” Kendra said. “But then you quit for a while. Maybe a *long* while. But you recently started again.”

Gina cursed. “You can smell smoke on me?”

“No.” Kendra walked toward a cabinet with her sheet music. “But it’s only natural for someone who’s been under the kind of stress you have been under.”

“What stress?”

“Moving, for one. You’ve lived in Chicago for most, if not all, of your life. Your parents are from there and probably their parents before them. It’s also stressful getting out of a long-term relationship. You recently broke up with your boyfriend or girlfriend. Is that what prompted the move?”

Gina stared at her for a long moment. “Boyfriend. Matt. After seven years. But that wasn’t the only reason.”

“In any case, you’re still living out of a hotel while you get your own place. You’re looking to buy, not rent. For now, you’re staying at the Pacific. I hear it’s nice.”

Gina glanced at Metcalf accusingly. “Someone told her.”

“Don’t look at me,” he said. “And I’m sure she didn’t even know you existed until five minutes ago.”

“I didn’t,” Kendra said. “But I know you drove here from Chicago even though the FBI provides you with a company car. Maybe you did it because you wanted to bring a car of your own here, but I’m thinking it was because it was the best way to bring your pet. A parakeet?”

Gina’s expression was becoming more stunned by the moment. “Cockatiel.”

“A very loved and spoiled little bird,” Kendra said.

“Extremely,” Gina said weakly.

“You like seventies rock and Starbucks. You may cook, but you’re also partial to Papa John’s Pizza. And you’re a tennis fan, aren’t you?”

Gina appeared to be dazed. “Yes.”

Kendra turned to Metcalf. “Satisfied?”

His smile was still brimming with mischief. “Come on, you’re not gonna tell her who her first grade teacher was?”

“Mrs. McAlister. She had a mole on her left cheek.”

His jaw dropped. “What in . . .”

“I’m joking.” She turned back to Gina. “But it would’ve been awesome if I was right about that one, huh?”

She was silent and then said grudgingly, “It’s still pretty awesome. Who the hell told you all this stuff?”

Kendra shrugged. “You did, in the first thirty seconds you were here.”

“I seriously doubt that.”

“Doubt all you please. It’s true.”

Gina was suddenly looking uncomfortable. “Okay, what about the smoking? I’ve been trying to hide it from my new coworkers. It shows a lack of self-discipline.”

“For what it’s worth, I can’t smell smoke on you at all. But I can tell you’ve been chewing Nicorette gum. Cinnamon Surge flavor. It’s on your breath.”

Gina rolled her eyes. “I was trying to decide between that and Fruit Chill.”

“White Ice Mint may be their least distinctive flavor.”

“I’ll take your word for that,” Gina said grimly.

Kendra pointed to Gina’s right upper arm, left bare by her sleeveless top. “There’s also a slight tan line there in the exact dimensions of a nicotine patch.”

Gina looked at her arm. “I quit for four years, and I started up again after my boyfriend and I broke up.”

“. . . which brings me to another tan line,” Kendra pointed to Gina’s neck. “It looks like you’ve been wearing a heart-shaped pendant for quite some time. Every day for years but you recently stopped wearing it. Your skin is much lighter there. With no sign of an engagement or wedding ring, that suggests a breakup. Also, your left upper arm is much more tanned than your right. That’s where I got the long car trip. You drove here from Chicago.”

“But you knew my parents were there. And my grandparents.”

“Linguistics. You have a born-and-bred Chicago accent. Anyone who’s seen *The Blues Brothers* could spot it a mile away. It’s doubtful it would be quite so pronounced if your parents didn’t imprint it on you. And if *their* parents didn’t imprint it on *them*.”

She scowled. “Right on all counts. But how the hell did you know about my bird?”

Kendra took Gina’s hand and pointed to dozens of light scratches on the back of her hand and arm. “Too small and too light to be a cat or even a pet rodent. It’s clearly a small bird. Those light scratches run all the way up your arm and onto your shoulder. You take him out of his cage frequently. Obviously loved and spoiled.”

“But what about all those other things? Papa John’s? Tennis?”

Kendra smiled. “You were holding your phone when you walked in here. You’d probably just checked messages and your main screen was still lit up. Your app icons gave you away. Papa John’s Pizza, Starbucks, and The Tennis Channel. I could see that your most recent album played from your phone was The Who’s *Tommy*.”

Gina looked down at her phone. “Oh, man.”

“You can write a biography based on a person’s main Smartphone screen.”

“Pretty pathetic life story.” Gina’s lips twisted. “Pizza delivery and drive-through coffee.”

It did sound pathetic, Kendra thought, and suddenly all the vulnerable details she’d pulled together about Gina Carson were scrolling through her mind. Her antagonism toward the woman was abruptly gone. She smiled. “For the record, I have the same

apps on my phone. But I also saw you had the Pacific Guest Suites app, which lets you use your phone to unlock your room. It's a place I recommend to my colleagues and clients when they're in town for more than a few days. And you also gave the Zillow real estate app prime placement on your screen, which tells me that you're looking to buy instead of rent."

Gina nodded ruefully. "Well, I'll be more careful about who sees my phone, that's for damn sure."

Kendra turned to Metcalf. "The dog and pony show is over. Time for you to go."

"I said I'd *consider* leaving. I just did that and I've rejected the idea. At least not until you agree to come with us to the crime scene." He coaxed, "What would it hurt? Just a quick glance around."

Kendra shook her head. "I have real work to do. My work."

"Dr. Michaels." Gina Carson's voice was hesitant. "I know I probably came on too strong with you. It's a habit I have. Maybe it's a little worse right now, because I'm the new kid in town. Everything's pretty strange here for me right now. I just want you to know that, if you're not doing what Metcalf wants because you're pissed off at me, I'm not going to give you any trouble."

Shit. Those words had been hard for Gina. All she had was a tough façade and that damn cockatiel in her life right now. This was becoming more and more difficult for Kendra. "I'm not pissed off at you." She made a face. "Not any longer. I just don't want to get involved in another case right now."

"I know you don't," Metcalf said. "Griffin told me I'd have trouble convincing you. I was hoping that you'd think I was so charming and lovable I wouldn't have to pull out the wild card Griffin gave me."

“Wild card?” Kendra repeated warily.

“Griffin told me to tell you something.”

“I can hardly wait to hear what it is,” she said dryly.

“He said you owed him.”

Kendra cursed. “He’s playing *that* card?”

“He really wants your help on this.”

That was clear enough. Griffin had recently been helpful when a friend of hers was in deep trouble. He’d given her manpower and lab time when he had no official obligation to do so. She had known his help would not be without strings.

Now he was cashing in.

“Okay,” she finally said. “I’ll visit this one crime scene with you and take a look around. That’s it.”

Metcalf nodded. “That’s all I’m asking.”

But one thing could lead to another, and she would have to be the one to call the halt. Her last case had been both physically and emotionally draining, and she needed to step back and heal for a time. She didn’t *need* this.

But evidently she was going to get it.

Just one quick look around. That was going to be her limit.

“Let’s get this over with,” Kendra said. She turned to Gina. “And when we’re finished, you can use that Papa John’s app to order me a medium Meat Lovers pizza. I’m starving.”

**METCALF OFFERED HER A** lift to the crime scene, but Kendra turned him down flat. She preferred to follow in her own car. She didn’t want to be stuck there any longer than she needed to be.

Within minutes she turned onto Holt Street and immediately found herself at a police road block. She saw Metcalf waving

his badge at the officer, then pointing back to her. The cop waved them through.

It was a block taken up by Kimbrough Elementary School on one side and a two-story apartment building on the other. In the middle of the street was a large white tent, approximately ten by ten feet. Kendra counted no less than a dozen uniformed police officers on the scene plus several detectives and forensics personnel.

She parked behind Metcalf and walked toward the school with him and Gina. "I'm guessing the tent isn't a PTA bake sale," she said grimly.

"San Diego PD put it up to spare the kiddies from what promises to be a horrific sight."

"Great. Thanks again for the wonderful afternoon."

"Aw, come on. What would you rather be doing today?"

"Root canal. Colonoscopy. Having my fingernails removed with a pair of pliers." She stopped outside the tent. "I smell gasoline. Something's been cooking." The realization hit her. "Something . . . or someone."

"Exactly," Gina said. She grabbed the tent's door flap. "Ready for this?"

No, Kendra wanted to tell her. She wasn't like them. She could never get used to the sad, horrible stories that greeted her at these crime scenes.

She nodded. "I'm ready."

Kendra ducked through the flap and stopped cold. There in the center of the tent was a charred woman's body bound to a desk chair.

Her breath left her.

It was the work of a monster.

A police detective had entered behind them. "It happened

around 11:30. The principal saw her burning out here. He ran out with an extinguisher and put it out.”

Kendra still hadn't adjusted to the shock. There were wisps of strawberry blond hair and a face that was half gone.

Kendra looked away.

Detach.

Concentrate.

“Burned alive?” Gina asked.

Kendra shook her head. “No. She's been dead for a few days.”

“How can you tell?” Metcalf asked.

“The odor. It's not just charred flesh, there's been decomposition.”

The detective nodded. “The M.E. was just here. He backs that up. He says she's been dead a few days at least.”

Kendra made herself turn back toward the corpse. Corpse. That's right, think of her as an object, a puzzle. Not as a woman who'd had a life, friends, lovers. “Do we have an ID?”

“Not yet,” the detective replied. “We've just started running her against missing persons.”

Kendra studied the corpse, trying to pull anything from it she could. “If that doesn't pan out, you might canvas some of the high-end hair salons. She used a Japanese hair conditioner that isn't common around here. Tsubaki.”

Gina jotted this down into her notebook. “I'm not sure I'm spelling it right. I'm a Pantene girl myself.”

“I know.” Kendra knelt beside the corpse, which was still dripping with extinguisher foam. “Did anyone see her deposited here?”

“Not so far,” the detective replied. “We've done a preliminary canvas, but no one reports seeing her before the fire.”

“Probably a truck with a ramp. The chair could have been rolled out quickly, set on fire, and the truck took off before anyone noticed.” Kendra looked up. “It’s my guess her body was taped to the chair at a fairly active construction site. You should start there.”

“What makes you say that?” Metcalf asked.

She pointed to the casters, which were covered by a chalky powder. “That looks like silica dust, which you’ll find at many building sites. The body was already in this chair when it rolled across the dust and kicked some up.” She gently lifted the corpse’s left pant leg. “See? It’s not underneath the body.”

“Very good,” Metcalf said.

There was nothing good about anything connected to what had happened to this woman, Kendra thought. Certainly not the fact that Kendra was able to see what had happened to her. Why hadn’t someone been able to see it before it happened?

Three more investigators entered the tent as Kendra examined the corpse’s high-heeled shoes. “It’s obvious she’s been dragged. There’s more construction dust here, too, but it’s different.”

“Different how?” Jennings asked.

“It’s darker. Looks like residue from cut granite.”

One of the investigators shone his high-powered flashlight over the shoes. “Wait!” Kendra said. “Keep that light where it is.”

She squinted at the pool of extinguisher fluid beneath the chair. The mirror-like surface reflected the seat’s underside. There was something there . . .

“Someone give me evidence gloves.”

Four pairs were suddenly thrust in her direction. She took a pair of plastic gloves from Metcalf and slid them on. She

peered underneath the chair, which was relatively unscathed from the fire.

Affixed to the chair's underside was a shiny silver pouch.

Kendra peeled it off and stood up.

"What is it?" Gina asked.

"Maybe nothing," Kendra said as she loosened the pouch's drawstrings. "But this seems like it might be made from a fire-retardant material." She pulled two items from the pouch. "A set of keys and a pair of eyeglasses."

"Hers?" the detective asked.

"Maybe, but I doubt it." She opened the glasses. "These are men's spectacles, probably for a face larger than hers was. And the keys have a tag for a supermarket loyalty program. Meijer's."

"It's a Midwestern chain," Metcalf said. "If these things aren't hers, what are they doing here?"

"Your guess is as good as mine." Kendra put the items in Metcalf's hand. "The smell is getting to me. I have to get out of here."

Kendra lifted the tent flap and slid outside.

"Wait." Metcalf was following her. "That's it?"

"Yes. That's all I got." Her nostrils still burned from that horrible stench. She didn't break stride. "Catch the beast who did this, will you?"

"It would be easier if you helped us."

"I already have."

"You know what I mean."

"Not this time, Metcalf. Tell your boss that I consider my debt repaid."

Metcalf nodded. "I'll tell him. Between you and me, we're still in the position of owing you."

Kendra finally stopped. No use running away. She was far

enough away that she shouldn't be able to smell the terrible odor; it must be her imagination.

"You've never owed us a thing," Metcalf continued quietly. "Thanks for coming out here today."

"Sure. I'm certain you'll get him. Whoever it is, he's very concerned with calling attention to himself."

"You've given us a good start."

She nodded toward the tent. "Your partner's very attractive. I'm pretty sure she's interested in you."

Metcalf shook his head. "Your powers of observation have seriously let you down. She barely tolerates any of us."

"It's a defense mechanism. She's probably lonely, trying to start a new life for herself in a new town."

"You're cutting her way more slack than I am." He shook his head. "Anyway, she's really not my type."

"Don't tell me you're one of those guys who's threatened by strong women."

He smiled at her. "Not at all. It's a quality I find most attractive."

Kendra turned away slightly. Metcalf was smart, good-looking, and a nice guy. She liked him, but she couldn't return that romantic vibe she occasionally got from him.

"Then maybe you should give her a chance." Kendra cocked her head toward her car. "I'm outta here. Good luck with your case."

**HAD KENDRA MICHAELS MET** Pretty Amanda yet?

Hard to say.

Zachary sat on the park bench and unwrapped his sandwich. As much as he wanted to be watching the activity in front

of the elementary school, he knew better. Only amateurs lingered near their crime scenes. Profilers studied behavior traits in what they assumed were people like him. It was one sure way of getting caught.

He was no amateur.

And there was no one like him in all their books and charts.

Still, he would have been thrilled to see Kendra Michaels admiring his handiwork.

If, that is, she'd even been brought into the case. He had already been disappointed twice before, and there was no guarantee she was there this time either.

Patience.

It was a plan years in the making. He could wait a little while longer.

He took a bite of his tuna-and-peppers sandwich as he watched the collegiate soccer team on the practice field. The goalie, a strapping young man named Todd Wesley, was doing well today.

Zachary smiled. A good way for the young man's teammates to remember him.

Strapping Todd was a creature of habit. After practice, he'd grab a smoothie from the little shop on the corner before going to his apartment for a quick shower. He'd eat while watching television, then spend an hour on his sofa surfing the web until his girlfriend got off work at the campus library. She'd swing by, and the two of them would go out to dinner.

Zachary shook his head. Did Strapping Todd know how monotonous his life had become? He certainly would've done things differently if he'd known this would be his last day on earth.

No matter. Tonight would be different.

Very different.

Because this *might* be the one that would catch Kendra Michaels' notice.

And when she finally gave him the attention he deserved, the game would be on. . . .