

Chapter One

She wanted to kill.

She *needed* to kill.

With a sob, Cate Hartmann rolled off the narrow bed and onto her knees. More than *anything* she wanted the ecstasy of taking a life.

A flicker of the old Cate swam through the ugly, hammering craving. She didn't want to be a killer. She didn't want to be the monster Gabriel Leven had made her. She pounded the carpet with her fists.

She didn't want to be a soul stealer.

It was all in her head. She'd been through the detox, knew her physical cravings were gone. But the psychological ones, they were the ones that haunted her in the middle of the night.

She looked up at the door of her room. The shiny lock below the handle mocked her. Who was she kidding? It might be decorated like a guest room with crisp sheets, a cheery vase of yellow flowers and a comfy armchair but it was just another prison.

It had been a month since she'd arrived at the island enclave the residents called Haven. But when she closed her eyes, she was back *there*.

Leaping to her feet, she paced the small space. Her chest was so tight she could barely breathe. When she closed her eyes, she was back in a small tiled room, chained up and forced to

kill.

Cate pressed both palms to her chest, fighting for air. She strained to hear footsteps out in the hall, the sign of the one person who could help her breathe again. But the medical center was silent.

With a sob, she dropped to the floor beside the door and dreamed of being outside, of breathing in the warm night air. She backed up against the door, curled her knees to her chest and closed her eyes.

She deserved to be locked away. She was a killer. She'd sucked the souls of so many people from their bodies—painfully, horribly—and it had felt so good.

Another sob ripped from her throat. She wanted her old life back. She wanted her cozy Melbourne apartment, her jazzy little car, her parents, the loud and energetic kids in her fifth grade class. She wanted all the things that seemed a lifetime away.

Footsteps echoed in the hall. Cate's chest hitched.

They stopped by her door.

“Cate? You okay?” A deep masculine voice.

The air rushed out of her lungs. And there he was.

Dr. Gage Walker.

She brushed at her short hair then scrubbed a hand down her wet cheek. Now that he was here, she didn't want him to see her like this. “Just go away.”

She closed her eyes. What the hell did it matter? He'd seen her screaming and puking her guts up when she'd first arrived here. Thank God he hadn't been directly overseeing her recovery. The island's other doctor, Dr. Akita, had been the one to see Cate through the worst of it.

Gage had been silent support from the sidelines. A steady presence she'd secretly come to depend on.

There was a click of the lock. She scrambled to her feet and watched the door swing open.

He stood in the doorway in his usual tan cargo shorts and a rumpled white shirt. His raw-boned face was dark with stubble and a pair of silver wire-rimmed glasses balanced on his nose. His brown hair was a shaggy mop in need of a cut. Patience and sympathy shone in eyes that made her think of glossy oak.

No, she didn't want or need sympathy. She turned away, wrapping her arms around her waist.

"Rough night?"

"You're a genius, Doc." She winced at her tart voice. Once she'd been a normal, kind woman. Now she was...not. At least Gage didn't look at her like she was evil.

He made her want to believe she wasn't.

But he also reminded her of other things that were far out of her reach.

He sighed. "I can give you something to help you sleep."

"No." She spun, shaking her head. She'd been out of control before. She didn't want to go back to that mindless animal she'd been.

He pushed his glasses farther up on his nose. The move was boyish and...cute. She blinked, shocked that she'd noticed.

"How about some company then? We could play cards."

Her laugh was harsh. "I don't want to play games." The dark part of her, the part that had been suffering since she'd been locked in here, pushed forward. She took a step closer. "I want to press my hands to your chest and rip your soul from your body. They say it's the worst way to

die, the most painful. It forces you to relive all the terrible things you've done in your life."

It was why Leven wanted her. The crime boss used her as a weapon to threaten and annihilate his enemies.

Gage just stared at her. His gaze direct, steady. It inflamed her more.

"Have you done terrible things, Doc?" She narrowed her eyes, studying him. She shook her head. "You probably have nothing to fear. I'd guess you've been a boy scout all your life. Helping people, being a do-gooder."

A moment's silence. "You'd be surprised."

She stared at the blankness of his face. Was that pain she heard in his voice?

"Cate?"

When he reached out a hand, she jumped back a step. "Don't touch me!"

He stopped, holding his palm upright. "Okay."

Clutching her hands together, she stalked to the other side of the room. She hadn't touched anyone since she'd arrived. Was deathly afraid that the feel of warm skin would be a temptation too hard to resist.

"You aren't in this alone," he said. "Let me help you."

She turned, a hysterical laugh trapped in her throat. She'd just told him she wanted to kill him and he wanted to help her? "Why aren't you afraid of me?"

"You don't scare me."

Her hands trembled and she shoved them in the pockets of her baggy pants. "Why trust me?" Her words were a whisper. "You know what I've done."

"You survived Leven. You've fought your addiction every day for the last four weeks. I know the person you want to be."

She bit down on her lip. "I want to feel human again."

"I'll help you."

She pressed her lips together. "Can you give me my life back? Make it so I never killed?"

A short silence. "Going back is rarely an option." He scrubbed a hand through his hair. "You need to accept the past and forge a new future."

There was no way she could ever accept her past. Being a psychotic killer was hardly a good foundation for building a future.

She turned to the window. She couldn't see anything but the murky shadows of the night. "Then you can't help me. So leave."

At first she didn't think he was going to go, but then she heard him sigh.

"I brought you something. I'll just leave it here." His footsteps were quiet as he left. The snick of the lock sounded overly loud.

Cate had never felt so alone. Tears pricked her eyes. She pressed her hands against her thighs, digging in hard to control the urge to drop to the floor and sob.

She turned and looked at the splash of yellow he'd left on her chair. Drawn to it, she fingered the fabric then picked it up. A yellow T-shirt. Nothing flashy, but the color was sunny and yellow was her favorite.

With a quick glance at the door, she whipped off the plain white shirt she wore and tugged the yellow one on. She smoothed her hands over the cotton. Silly that something so simple could give her such pleasure.

When she heard footsteps again, she straightened her shoulders. She'd act like a normal human being and be nice this time. She kept her gaze on the window as the door opened.

But beefy arms yanked her backward. Her bare feet slipped on the carpet. The scent of salt

water and male sweat washed over her. Not Gage.

She tried to scream but a hand clamped over her mouth. She twisted and kicked.

The first time she'd been kidnapped, she hadn't fought. She'd never fought with anyone before.

This time she'd fight until her hands bled. This time she'd fight to the depths of her being.

Because now she knew she was fighting for her body, her soul and her sanity.

Gage slammed open the door to his office off the main lab.

He flicked on the light. The place was its usual messy disaster. Lab reports, scans and printed articles covered every surface. As head doctor and researcher on Haven, he was always busy. But even a hectic schedule couldn't keep his thoughts away from Cate.

Frustration made him antsy. He had a genius IQ, so why the hell couldn't he help one small woman?

Releasing a breath, he sank into his office chair, hands hanging between his knees. Cate was improving, but she still had a long way to go. God, he felt useless.

She reminded him of Theo.

Gage stared out at his darkened lab. It was nothing like the lab he'd run for the CIA where he'd had a massive budget to study the anomaly mutation and the powers that came with it. Nothing like the lab where he'd caused pain and suffering and watched his own brother self-destruct.

Gage ran a hand through hair he'd forgotten to cut again. Cate kept so much bottled up and it would spill over before too long. Just like Theo and the other CIA agents who'd volunteered for the Anomaly Program.

Cate was tough. She didn't look it with her slim frame, delicate features and enormous blue eyes. Hair of the palest shade of blonde he'd ever seen completed the picture. It had been long when she'd first arrived but two days later, she managed to snatch a pair of scissors during a medical checkup and she'd hacked it off. Now with her short cap of hair, Gage thought she looked even more like a lost pixie.

But there was iron beneath the elfin exterior.

And he was attracted to her.

Hissing out a breath, he stood and paced his office. She was a patient. Not his directly, she was under the care of Dr. Ellie Akita, but he was in charge here and Ellie was busy with the traumatized young time thief they'd brought in the week before. He sighed. Cate was a healing patient, vulnerable.

He'd never really worried about doctor-patient issues before Haven. He'd always been too busy with his experiments and their results to concern himself with people.

Probably why he'd missed the signs that he'd overstepped the bounds of what was right and crossed far, far into the wrong.

Gage wouldn't repeat the same mistake with Cate. He'd do what he could to help her heal and get back to her own life.

A muffled noise deeper in the building distracted him. Lifting his head, he strained to hear any more sound. It was close to eleven at night, so all his staff members were at their homes scattered around the island. Cate was the only resident in the center.

He didn't hear anything else. Had to be imagining things.

He shuffled a few papers on his desk, trying to decide if he should head back to his small cottage behind the center or fire up his computer and do some work.

What he really wanted to do was spend some time with Cate.

He sighed. She was crying out for contact. That bastard Leven had treated her like a wild dog that was his to command.

She needed to know she was a person.

Gage knew he had to fight the urge. He shouldn't be spending time with her in the middle of the night. And no more taking flowers and gifts for her.

She was a patient. Maybe he'd get that tattooed on his arm so he wouldn't forget. The CIA had let him bend many rules. It had become a bad habit.

A door slammed somewhere in the medical center. Gage leaped to his feet and skirted the desk. A dark shadow appeared in the doorway.

Gage froze. "Cal? What are you doing here this late?"

The leader of Haven stood in the doorway. As always, the mind raider was a dark, dangerous presence.

"We've had a security breach."

His friend's tone made Gage's heart stop. Without words, he knew. "Cate."

He ran, leaving Cal to follow.

The door to her room was open. The small desk had been tipped over and the yellow daisies he'd brought her were spilled across the carpet, trampled.

"What the hell happened?" They'd promised her sanctuary. "Where is she?" He'd promised to help her.

"The infrared sensors picked up someone heading this way. Came up from the beach." Cal headed back into the hall. "Come on."

The men ran side by side, bursting out of the medical center and heading into the palm trees.

“Is it Leven?” Gage said.

Cal was quiet for a moment. Never a good sign. “I didn’t tell you, but Leven’s been using a lot of influence and money to pinpoint Cate’s location.”

“What?” The thought of that man getting his hands on Cate again had Gage’s vision flashing red.

They’d promised her she’d be safe. He’d failed her.

“I didn’t want to worry you,” Cal said.

“Damn it, Cal! We could have been prepared for this.” Gage wasn’t a soldier or a security expert, but they could have done something. He’d always believed Haven was impregnable. Cal was always updating the security system, installing new technology. “How the hell did they get onto the island?”

“They had help.” A grim tone. “From someone in our security. He’s being dealt with.”

God, even their own were turning on them. All because Gabriel Leven wanted Cate back. *Why?* What was so special about her?

But now wasn’t the time to think about that. First they had to get her back.

He willed her to hold on. *I’m coming for you.*