

Prologue

Wednesday, December 11

Oak Pointe, Louisiana

The killer hummed the melody of a popular children's Christmas song as he placed the sprig of mistletoe on the woman's body. A parasite for a parasite. Only this one's helping the parasites. Same difference. Laughing softly, he leaned closer and whispered, "You didn't watch out and you cried after I warned you not to."

He chided himself for the frivolity of his words. This was serious business. His gaze moved down her body. He shook his head in disgust. Maybe she wears clothes that cover her butt, but she's no different from the others. They can't be saved...none of them. Not even the misguided ones like her who tried to aid them.

Recalling the fear in her eyes and the look of terror on her face, exhilaration rose inside him. She knew she would die. A thrill came over him as he remembered her panic when he held her at gunpoint in his studio. He definitely had to take a photograph of this one.

You always remember the first kill more than the others, so they say. But she was his fourth. He would remember this one as well as the next. Like her, the following kill would be one of the ring leaders trying to save those dirty women.

He chuckled softly. In reality number five would be number seven. The first two were inconsequential, but necessary to proceed with his plan for Oak Pointe.

Rustling in the bushes nearby drew his attention away from the body. His heart thumped. He exhaled in relief, his warm breath creating a puff of fog in the cold air. Only the wind shifting the carpet of dry leaves.

Staying too long admiring his handiwork wasn't a good idea. He'd lost track of time. Looking at the sky, he searched for any sign of dawn. Still early yet. The sun wouldn't be up for at least another hour.

Even in this cold, serious joggers would be out as soon as first light. Time to go home before someone caught him.

Wind off the bayou tugged at him. A whiff of wood smoke floated toward him. People around here used their fireplaces as soon as the temperature reached forty degrees.

He pulled his fleece jacket closer, adjusted the hood to cloak his face, and walked through the trees, planning his next kill.