



Speak No Evil (No Evil Trilogy Book 1)

By Allison Brennan

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Silence is deadly.

The murder of eighteen-year-old Angie Vance was exceptionally vile—her mouth was sealed with glue, an obscenity scrawled was across her skin, and she was suffocated in a garbage bag. The killing seems personal, so police detective Carina Kincaid focuses her efforts on the victim's much older ex-boyfriend, Steve Thomas. But without physical evidence, Carina can't make a collar or a case. She also can't stop Sheriff Nick Thomas, the prime suspect's brother, from conducting his own unwelcome investigation.

Though Nick is still scarred and unsteady from a recent confrontation with a serial killer, he's determined to prove his brother's innocence. But his confidence is shaken when he learns of Steve's dark side, and when a friend of the murdered girl meets a similarly gruesome fate. With no time to lose, Carina and Nick work together to trap a psychopath, before another unlucky woman faces an unspeakable end.

Evil has spoken. Now see what it can do.

From the Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Allison Brennan is the author of *The Prey*, *The Hunt*, *The Kill*, *See No Evil*, and *Fear No Evil*. For thirteen years she worked as a consultant in the California State Legislature before leaving to devote herself fully to her family and writing. She is a member of Romance Writers of America, Mystery Writers of America, and International Thriller Writers. She lives in Northern California with her husband Dan, and their five children.

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One

Her death had not been easy.

Homicide detective Carina Kincaid stared at the dead, naked corpse of the young woman, avoiding the wide-eyed terror etched on her face. Her mouth was gagged, but what drew Carina's eye was the word *slut* scrawled in thick black marker across her chest. A small red rose was tattooed on her left breast.

The victim lay in a disjointed fetal position, dried blood on her legs and vicious red welts on her breasts, indicating that her murder had followed a sexual assault. In California, that made the killer eligible for the death penalty. One small step toward justice, but it didn't satisfy Carina. This Jane Doe would still be dead.

She glanced away from the body, just for a moment, and watched the waves roll up the beach. Back and forth, calming. Her cheeks stung from the early-morning salt air, but in just a few hours she'd be tugging off her windbreaker as the sun peaked over San Diego.

When she first arrived on the scene with Jim Gage, supervisor of the Forensic Field Services Unit of the San Diego Police Department, they immediately documented that the evidence had been contaminated. Three layers of heavy-duty green garbage bags had been cut away from the body. The park ranger hadn't been able to lift what he thought was trash, so he sliced it open. What had he been thinking?

"I didn't think there was a body inside," he'd said when Carina questioned him.

By the tension in Jim's jaw, it was obvious that he was pissed. But true to form he didn't say anything. He never said anything, which had been the primary reason Carina had broken up with him last year. She could handle his moodiness—she had four brothers, she could put up with almost anything—but his refusal to talk about what bugged him, on the job and off, was a relationship breaker.

Or maybe they hadn't loved each other enough to make it work.

Carina glanced behind them when she heard a car approach. The coroner's van pulled into the empty parking lot and a short, trim, well-dressed Asian man exited the vehicle. Assistant Coroner Ted Chen, the perfectionist. Carina liked it when he pulled one of her cases, even if he made her a bit self-conscious. She triple-checked her reports when he was the responding coroner, afraid to appear the novice despite her nearly eleven years on the job.

"Doctor Chen is here," she told Jim.

“Hmm.” Jim finished photographing the body and surrounding area, glancing up as Doctor Chen crossed the sand to where the body lay. “Hello, Ted.”

“Gage. Detective.” Chen nodded toward the victim. “Was the body found in this condition?”

“The bag had been intact. The park ranger opened it.”

“Why on earth would he do that?”

Jim removed his wire-rim glasses and rubbed his eyes with his forearm. “Thought it was filled with garbage and planned on taking multiple trips to dispose of the contents.”

Chen shook his head in disgust, his thin lips a tight line. He knelt in the sand, careful to prevent further granules from rolling into the plastic. “She suffocated,” he said quietly.

“You mean she was put into the bag alive?” Carina asked for clarification.

“It would appear so, but the crime lab will need to go over the bag to confirm it,” Chen said. “See her discoloration?” The victim appeared bluish, almost purple. “No oxygen. No sign of strangulation, and no blood in her eyes or ears to indicate it, either. I can give you a better answer at the autopsy.” He glanced at his watch. “I have three autopsies scheduled this morning, but I’ll postpone the afternoon schedule to fit her in.”

“Thanks, Doctor Chen. I appreciate it.”

“I’ll have her on the table at two.”

Carina nodded, caught Jim staring at her, his face unreadable. “You going to join us?” she asked.

“We’ll see how far my team can get with the bag. We’re backlogged as it is.”

No surprise. Contrary to popular television, most evidence wasn’t processed until a suspect was apprehended and a court date set. The wheels of justice also turned the cogs of the laboratory.

Carina forced herself to stare at the victim’s face while Chen and Jim prepared her for transportation to the morgue. She looked so young. Eighteen, maybe. Was she a college student? There were two universities within spitting distance of the beach. Maybe she was still in high school.

She thought about her baby sister. Well, Lucy wasn’t a baby anymore. She was a high school senior and smart enough to go to just about any college she wanted. Their parents wanted her to stay close to home; Lucy desperately wanted to move away. But college campuses were dangerous, and Carina found herself siding with her parents on this one.

Fourteen years ago she wanted the exact same thing as Lucy—to get out from under her parents’ thumb. But that was before she’d decided to become a cop. Before she realized how truly dangerous the city could be. Before she realized that justice wasn’t always swift, and that the system didn’t always work.

That some murders would never be solved.

She turned away from the death scene and stared again at the Pacific Ocean, unconsciously wrapping her arms around her waist. It would be temperate today, as virtually every day was in San Diego. Here on the coast, the cool morning breeze loosed a few strands of dark hair from the French braid Carina wore when on the job. The tide was receding, the waves small and playful, pulling back. The shells and rocks reflected the sunrise behind her, the ocean still dark and mysterious. A pair of early-morning joggers, a man and woman, ran on the packed sand.

Had the girl been murdered here on this quiet, clean beach? Or had Jane Doe been dumped?

Carina voted for dumped, but asked the experts.

“Dumped is my guess,” Jim said. “There’s no sign of struggle, but of course the scene’s been contaminated.” He visually scanned the area to confirm his hypothesis.

Carina followed his gaze to the parking lot adjacent to this stretch of beach. The highway on the other side was beginning to bustle with morning commuter traffic. Dozens of small, outrageously expensive homes lined the opposite side of the road. A few hundred yards north was a beachside shopping area with several popular restaurants and a bar that catered to the college crowd, which, even on a Sunday night, wouldn’t have closed down until the state-mandated two a.m.

That didn’t mean the body hadn’t been dumped before two, but from Carina’s college days as well as her years on patrol, she knew this beach saw heavy traffic until the wee hours of the morning. Before two a.m. it was more than likely someone would have seen a body-size bag being tossed onto the beach.

Usually, body dumps were done when no one was around, to minimize the killer’s chances of being caught.

Though Carina couldn’t absolutely rule out the possibility that the girl had been left earlier, logic suggested that she’d been dumped between three and five in the morning. Commuters hit the road early, and by five-thirty traffic steadily passed only a hundred feet away. Sunrise had hit about thirty minutes ago.

“Do you know when she died?” she asked Chen.

He glanced up at Carina from his position next to the body. “Lividity isn’t fixed, and it’s obvious she’s been moved. Her body temperature is 86.3 degrees. But I’m not sure how being wrapped in the garbage bags would affect the loss of heat.” He glanced at Jim.

“I’ll do some research on that,” Jim said. “I’m thinking it would slow it down, but not by much.”

Chen nodded. “That would mean she died four to twelve hours ago, but I’d put it closer to four to eight hours because rigor mortis hasn’t completely set in. There’s still some movement in her larger muscles.”

Carina made notes. Ten p.m. to two a.m. Sunday night. He killed the girl somewhere else—in a car? The woods? Someone’s house? A secluded stretch of beach? She dismissed the last idea: there were no secluded areas on this part of the coastline, and the police routinely patrolled the area because of the nearby college.

Someone kills her, puts her in their vehicle, and transports her here, to a public beach, where her body would most certainly be found sooner rather than later.

“Arrogant,” she muttered.

“Excuse me?” Jim asked.

“The killer. Arrogant. Dumped her body where we’d quickly find it. Convinced he won’t be caught, thinks he’s smart.”

“Dusting off your psych degree, Carina?” Jim teased.

She rolled her eyes and smiled. Jim knew she’d taken all of one psychology class and had never graduated from college.

She walked over to the uniformed officers and instructed them to canvas the area. “Start with the houses across the street. See if someone noticed anything unusual after ten last night up until five this morning. A suspicious car, strange noise. People on the beach. Then hit the shops up the street when they open, focusing on those open past eight p.m., clubs and bars in particular.”

As she walked back to Jim and Chen she heard a car turn into the gravel parking lot. Her partner, Will Hooper, jumped out and strode across the sand toward them.

Jim shook his head. “Asshole,” he muttered.

“Give it a rest, Jim,” she said.

“Sorry, Kincaid.” Will approached with a guilty grin. “I didn’t hear my beeper go off.”

“What’s her name?”

“Come on, you woke me at five-thirty this morning. Just because you rise before the sun doesn’t mean the rest of us like to suffer.” Forty and divorced, Hooper enjoyed playing the field. He was also a good cop, a veteran, and Carina trusted him with her life. He’d taught her how to play hardball in a male-dominated profession, and never once hit on her. Next to her brothers, he was her best friend.

“And? You live ten minutes from here. Did your precious car throw a gasket?”

“Okay, okay. Her name is Monica. And she lives up in Carlsbad, so it took me time to get back down here.”

Carina filled her partner in on what they’d learned. She looked back at the dead girl and noticed something unusual around her mouth.

“Doctor Chen, what’s that?” She knelt beside Jim and gestured toward a thin, pale yellow substance around the edges of the gag.

“Lipstick?” Will said. “Not that you would know about that.” He tugged on her braid.

Carina ignored him. In the increasing sunlight, the gag—a black bandanna—almost shimmered. “I couldn’t say.” Chen frowned.

Jim took out a swab from his kit and wiped the area around Jane Doe’s gag, but nothing appeared to come off. He popped the swab into a sterile tube and closed it. Leaning close to the dead girl’s face, he breathed deeply, frowned. Taking prongs, he attempted to remove the gag. It was then that Carina noticed the

bandanna wasn't tied. The end was wrinkled, as if it had at one point been tied in a knot, but now it flapped free.

The gag would not budge.

"Glue."

"Glue?" Carina and Will repeated simultaneously. "He suffocated her, then glued the gag onto her mouth?" Carina asked.

Jim shook his head. "I don't think so. I think he glued her mouth shut, then suffocated her."

He had first killed twelve years ago.

That victim hadn't been human, wasn't even a mammal. But he remembered the day with vivid nostalgia as the day he gained a mature self-awareness and an inkling of the darkness inside.

He'd been sitting on the front steps of his house waiting for his mother's friend to leave so he could go inside and watch cartoons. He hated sitting here by himself doing nothing. His mom wouldn't let him leave the yard, but she wouldn't let him inside when one of her special friends visited, even when it was really cold or hot.

He heard shouts down the street. "Get back here, you motherfucker!" an older boy—a bully, Tommy Jefferson—screamed at Jason Porter, the little black kid who lived on the corner in the only two-story house on the block.

Jason looked scared and was running fast, but Tommy and another kid caught up to him and tackled him right there on the sidewalk. His head hit with a dull whack on the cement and left a smear of blood. Red dripped down Jason's face as one of the boys pulled him up and shook him back and forth so his head flopped.

The big kids shouted bad words at Jason and pushed him down again, but Jason managed to jump up and run quickly back up the street. The bullies were surprised and raced after him, but Jason got inside his house before they caught up.

He watched the bullies throw rocks at the door until Jason's mother came out, a steak knife in hand, Jason at her side. She used some of the same bad words they'd used on her son.

"Tommy, you touch my son one more time and I'll cut off every one of your fingers, don't you forget it!"

The kids ran off, laughing.

Jason's mother slammed the door shut and the neighborhood became quiet. He was alone on the porch again. He wondered if his mother would protect him from bullies like Jason's mom. He doubted it.

A butterfly fluttered into the yard. It flew from one dying flower to another, searching for something it couldn't find, its black-and-orange wings pumping up and down. When it finally landed on a wilted petunia

near him, he leaned forward and captured the creature in his fist. It trembled against his closed hand, the insect's little body moving frantically.

The screen door slammed behind him and he jumped.

"You can go back in now, kid," the man said as he walked down the stairs.

"When my daddy comes home he's going to kill you."

The man laughed as he got into his truck and drove away.

He pouted and thought about what Jason's mom said. Maybe next time that man came over he could cut off all his fingers.

Something caught his eye on the sidewalk where Jason had fallen. Curious, he crossed the dry lawn and squatted. On the rough surface of the cement a layer of skin and some blood dried in the summer sun. He pictured Jason's bleeding face and the large scrape on the side of his head.

Cool.

Something moved in his hand. He looked at his closed fist, then opened it just a bit, a bug curled in his sweaty palm. He picked it up by a wing and it tried to fly away. Grabbing both the butterfly's wings, one in each hand, he watched the legs and antennae frantically reaching out, trying to get away.

He was fascinated by the struggle. So much movement, but it wasn't getting anywhere.

Slowly, he pulled the wings from the body of the bug. One came off clean, but the other tore. The dying bug fell to the sidewalk, its body jumping, squirming.

He stared, fascinated and detached at the same time, until what remained of the butterfly stopped moving. It took several minutes. Peering closely, he realized it wasn't dead. He pushed it with his finger; it jumped once, twice, then stopped.

He brought the pieces of the butterfly into the kitchen to find an old jar to keep them in.

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