

Deadly Sins: Sloth

Eve Vaughn

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The Agrippa Legend

The great spell books of Hell...

No one knows how many there were in Hell, but each dealt with a particular type of spell-casting, all of it fiendish, of course. Some legends use any combination of magical numbers: Three? Seven? Eleven? Stolen from Hell in antiquity, many were lost to time. Others became the property of ordinary men, the curse of their family, for an Agrippa attaches itself to a family bloodline, and only the complete death of that bloodline allows the Agrippa to find a new "host" family. Agrippas have been known to suddenly appear to some poor soul who never knew that somewhere in their bloodline there was an illegitimate member of an Agrippa family. It cannot be given away, or sold. It will always return, and be very, very angry with you.

Each Agrippa is six feet tall, and nearly as broad. It is bound with leather straps and many iron locks, as well as magical enchantments of great complexity that are deadly to any but a family member. The thing stinks of the sulphurous fumes of Hell, and many other things best left un-described. To keep an Agrippa in your home from literally tearing the place apart, it must be hung from a twisted beam by iron chains, for any intruder within its awareness, even a welcomed guest in the home, is fodder for its deadly appetites. You can imagine a frightened bride, led up the stairs to be introduced, so she won't be eaten or destroyed later.

The temptation of family members to use the Agrippa is huge. To even open the book brings instantaneous wealth and power, but at a huge cost. Your beloved great aunt will die, leaving you her huge fortune (at the expense of angry legitimate heirs, who will know you opened the book), a crooked election will leave you mayor even if you haven't the skills or inclination to enter politics, and other "good fortune" that carries a heavy cost. Opening the book is also opening your soul and mind to evil. It etches well-worn paths in your brain, and whispers insidious evil plans to gain you more, more, more.

Only the most pure and the strongest dare to be guardians of a book, without falling into the temptations of using the book. This task was assigned in ancient times to only those individuals deemed by the family as most worthy and least likely to succumb to the evil within and its temptations. Not only is the family honor at stake, but the very souls of those living in the same house with it. Often the guardians deliberately doom themselves to a life of isolation and loneliness rather than risk anyone else. The family provides for their every need, as long as they stay in their "prison" home. (Somewhere in time, invariably, someone opened the damned book and made the family wealthy and powerful.)

Only when the incumbent guardian is near death does the family gather to choose the new guardian, rather than let the Agrippa choose. It would choose the one most likely to use it, of course. Most Agrippa families are desperate to cover up their ancestors' sins and evil that led to their wealth and power. They, more than most, know the whole family is in mortal peril if that book is used, for human courts can be merciless with those who break human laws. Many would prefer to pretend the Agrippa never existed, but once in their lifetime, they know they must choose the guardian and pray it is not them or their children. One family member must be sacrificed, so that all the rest may live in peace.

Could you make that ugly choice, dooming the most good, kind, and strong member of your family to isolation and loneliness? What if you were chosen? Or worse, what would you do if you were the last of the family? Could you give up everything for an inheritance from Hell itself?

Chapter One

There had been many times when Billie Cartwright wanted to strangle her sister, Felicity, but never more so than now. "Felicity, for the last time, would you just shut up about this damn inheritance? You've done nothing but talk about it since we received that letter, and frankly I'm tired of hearing about it," she hissed.

Felicity flipped a lock of her freshly pressed hair with a pout. "You don't have to get nasty about it. I was simply wondering how much money we'll be getting."

"Yeah, a question you seem to keep asking. For all you know, we won't get any money. Maybe this relative is leaving us some personal effects or something."

Felicity gasped in apparent horror. "That would really suck. It would be a wasted trip then, and I turned down a date with Devonte to ride up with you to this God forsaken place. You know how generous he is with his money. Who'd want to live in the middle of nowhere anyway?"

Billie bit her lip to prevent herself from saying what was really on her mind. Her little sister was the absolute limit, who apparently suffered from selective memory. It was she who'd begged Billie to make an appointment with their Aunt Wilhelmina's lawyer and insisted that they find out what they'd been left, against their grandmother's wishes.

Ever since they'd received that letter over a month ago, her sister had done nothing but harp about it. When nagging didn't work, she'd resorted to tears and whining, which was annoying enough in a child, but in a twenty-three-year-old woman it was downright aggravating.

When Felicity resorted to emotional blackmail, Billie finally caved. "You're my big sister, and you're supposed to be looking out for me. That's what Mom and Dad

would have wanted.” Those magic words always produced the right amount of guilt within Billie and her sister knew it, the little shit.

“Apparently Aunt Wilhelmina did,” she finally answered her sister once her temper was under control again. “And I thought you’d finished with Devonte a while back.”

“Well, he did just get a new ride and I look real good in it. He even got the spinning rims on it. It’s hot.”

Billie rolled her eyes. God save her from her idiot sister. “Isn’t this the same guy who lives in a rundown apartment and has three children? It seems to me he needs to get his priorities straight.”

“I don’t need another lecture. Besides he does what he can for his kids.”

“What he can do should be a lot if he can afford an expensive car with rims.”

“Just because you’re stingy with your money doesn’t mean everyone else has to be,” Felicity shot back.

“Not spending my money on frivolous stuff doesn’t make me stingy. Besides, do you want to spend the rest of your life constantly running out of money when you should have been saving some of it?”

“What does it matter if I spend a lot of money? Gran has loads of it, which she’ll probably end up leaving to us. I don’t know why she has to be mean about giving me now what will eventually come to me anyway.”

“Maybe because you’re not responsible enough and you’d run through it within a year. Remember when you just had to buy ten different designer handbags and matching outfits? You spent several thousand dollars and only wore a few of the clothes once, and I have yet to see you with any of those handbags. You’ve run up all your credit cards and expect someone to help you out. You can’t hold down a job, but you always have your hand out as if someone owes you something.”

“You love lording that over my head, don’t you? Why should I work so hard when I don’t have to? Gran is really old. It won’t be long before I have some ready cash.

And who knows, maybe Aunt Wilhelmina was just as rich," Felicity mused, rubbing her chin.

Billie wanted to pull the car over and slap some sense into her shiftless sister. If they didn't look so much alike, with their café au lait complexions and hazel eyes, she would have sworn they weren't related. As exasperating as Felicity was, Billie still adored her sister who, despite her slovenly ways, wasn't a bad person, only spoiled.

"You really don't mean what you just said because if anything were to happen to Gran you'd feel really bad."

Felicity sighed. "I guess you're right, but she treats me like I'm a little girl. Why should I have to account for every single penny she gives me? Once it's given it's mine, isn't it? She never does that to you, but of course you've always been her favorite."

"First of all, you know that's not true. Second, I have a job and earn my own money so that's a moot point." Billie noticed the sign for where she needed to turn. "I think we're getting closer."

Once she maneuvered the car down the road, it didn't take long to find the house they sought. An expensive looking silver sedan was parked in the front. It had to belong to the lawyer they were supposed to meet.

"Oh, look at that car!" Felicity squealed.

"As if you've never seen one before. In case you haven't realized, you've been riding in one for the past hour," Billie said dryly, cutting off the engine.

"Duh. But not in a car like that. Oh, look at the guy getting out of it. James Bond hasn't got anything on Mr. Smooth. White guys aren't my thing, but a guy like that could make me change my mind. Think he's down with the swirl?"

"Felicity, he's the lawyer for Christ's sake. Would you stop thinking with your wallet for once and act like you have some damn sense?" Billie got out of the car with a huff.

She hadn't given the guy a good look, but as she got closer she stopped. Felicity hadn't been exaggerating. This man was definitely something else. He stood well over

six feet. His broad shoulders were encased in a well-tailored suit that couldn't hide the taut lines of his lean body. She bet he worked out.

When Billie allowed herself to look into his face, she lost her breath. Dark brown brows slashed angrily over cinnamon colored eyes that stared back at her as if they were looking through her very soul. His face was hard lines and angles, and his nose was a little too long. He had a square jaw and a cleft in his chin that would have made John Travolta jealous. There was something just a little off about his face. It wasn't quite symmetrical, but on him it worked. He wore his russet hair cut closely to his scalp. This man was a work of art.

"Are you Felicity and Wilhelmina Cartwright?" he asked, his voice panty-wettingly deep.

Felicity stepped forward, holding out her hand and showing off her best 'I'm available' smile. "Yes, we are. I'm Felicity and you must be Grant Jorgensen, but I hope we don't have to be so formal."

Grant shook her hand briefly and gave her a tight smile. "You can call me Grant if you'd like, Miss Cartwright."

"It's Felicity. So what did I -- we inherit? Is it just this house? It looks really old. How much do you think it's worth?"

Billie brought her hand to her face, wishing a hole in the ground would open up and swallow her. Leave it to her avaricious sister to get straight to the point. Grant gave Felicity a faint look of disdain before answering through almost closed lips. "I have all that information in my briefcase." He turned his intense brown eyes on Billie then. "I assume you're Wilhelmina?"

He held out a large muscular hand, which she reluctantly took. There was something about this man that made her hesitant. "Yes, but I detest that name. Please call me Billie."

The minute they shook hands, it felt as if an electric current shot through her body. She pulled her hand away almost as soon as they touched. Grant must have felt it too because he backed away. Then his mouth tightened to one thin line. She had the

distinct impression he didn't approve of her for some reason. Anyone would raise an eyebrow after Felicity's bold inquiry, but Billie felt his disapproval was specifically directed toward her.

"Wilhelmina isn't a very common name. I can only assume that you were named after the woman who was kind enough to remember you in her will," he observed.

She didn't miss his subtle dig. Her back was instantly up. Billie didn't care how fine this man was, he didn't know her and had no right to judge her within two seconds of their meeting. "For your information, Mr. Jorgensen, I didn't even know of her existence before I received the letter in the mail from you."

He lifted one dark brow, a smirk on his sensual lips. "But it didn't stop you from coming out here to check out the inventory."

Her nostrils flared. It was on the tip of her tongue to tell him to go straight to hell, but Felicity interrupted. "Can we go inside? I'd like to take a look around. Maybe there are antiques we could send for valuation."

Grant's eyes cut to Felicity with a look of pure exasperation. Now Billie was pissed. She knew her sister was single-minded, but she didn't like how this arrogant attorney thought he could set himself up as judge and jury.

"Yes, let's take a look inside and you ladies can tell me what you think. I was hoping to talk to you about everything left to you, but since you both seem to be anxious to check out the goods, I'll leave that until after the tour."

Billie bit down on the inside of her lip so hard she drew blood, wishing it was Grant's lip she was biting. She wondered what he'd taste like...

Wait a minute, where did that thought come from? Get it together, girl. He's a jerk and you want no part of him.

Grant stepped back, allowing them to walk ahead of him. Billie took a good look at the house for the first time. It was an old Victorian which was desperately in need of a paint job. With some fixing up it could be really pretty, but something didn't feel quite right. The moment she stepped over the threshold, a chill ran down her spine.

There was something about this house that made her blood run cold. She couldn't put her finger on it, but there was a presence she just couldn't shake and it didn't feel like a good one. Felicity, on the other hand, didn't seem to have the same qualms, inspecting each item with greedy eyes, valuating them down to the penny.

Billie stayed rooted to the spot, trying to banish her feeling of unease. The house was in nice order and looked very well kept, but she couldn't drum up any enthusiasm about it. Goosebumps popped up on her arms.

"Not to your liking?" Grant asked, his mouth mere inches from her ear.

His warm breath sent a jolt of sensation up her spine. Billie put some distance between the two of them, turning around to glare. "The house is lovely," she said tightly.

"Yet that frown hasn't left your face since you stepped foot inside. What's the matter? Don't see enough antiques you can hock?"

That was it. She didn't come here for this shit and especially not to put up with his comments, which were way out of line. "I don't really know what your problem is, but you have a lot of damn nerve. I've done nothing to warrant your nastiness. It really isn't required or desired."

He looked taken aback by her words, but the derision never quite left his face. "My apologies. Let me show you the rest of the house, then we can get down to business. The sooner that's done the faster we can get out of each other's hair."

Her eyes narrowed. That apology was as sincere as a snake oil salesman. "Agreed, although why you feel the need to provide a narrative is beyond me." Out of the corner of her eye Billie noticed her sister had moved on to the next room, touching and picking up every little knickknack on display.

"As I said, you have my apology. Should I get on my knees and beg for your forgiveness?" he asked, sarcasm dripping from his devilishly sexy voice.

Damn, why were her knees shaking and pulse racing when she looked at him? It wasn't fair that the first man she'd found attractive in months had to be Grant Jorgensen.

She glared at him before turning on her heel. Billie kept her lips tightly pressed together as he showed them the rest of the house. She imagined it had been a grand showcase back in the day. It could be that way again with a little refurbishing, but she still hated the feeling of dread she felt in the pit of her stomach as she walked through it.

Billie.

She turned to Felicity who was engrossed in conversation with Grant. Billie could have sworn someone had just called her name. What the hell?

Billie.

Was she going nuts? *Please tell me I didn't step into the Amityville Horror house. I'm imagining things. I have to be.*

When they climbed up the stairs, the voice in her head grew louder. *Billie, come to me. Open me.*

Just great. On top of everything else, now I have to worry about schizophrenia.

Grant must have noticed her hesitance because he frowned. "Are you okay?" His frown deepened as he sniffed the air.

"Uh, something smells like rotten eggs," Felicity groaned, her hands flying to cover her nose.

The smell hit Billie like a ton of bricks. It was just too much. She couldn't stay in this house another minute. Rushing down the stairs, she didn't stop until she was outside again. She threw up her lunch. When her stomach was empty, Billie dry heaved, unable to get that smell and the sound of the voice from her mind. It had to be one of the most horrible feelings she'd ever experienced.

"Are you all right? Should I get you something?" Grant's voice jolted her out of her thoughts.

Billie wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. "No, I'm okay."

Grant dug into his breast pocket and handed her a handkerchief. "Here, you need this more than I do."

She took it gratefully. "Thank you."

"Are you sure you're okay?" he asked, concern etched on his sexy face as he held out a pack of peppermint chewing gum.

Billie took a piece thankfully with a nod, then unwrapped the silver foil before putting its contents in her mouth. She smirked. "You're not going to try to be nice to me now, are you?"

He flushed. "Look, I'm sorry for letting my mouth get ahead of my thoughts in there. Whatever my personal feelings, I should have kept them to myself. It was unprofessional and uncalled for."

Billie shrugged. "No big deal."

When she moved to walk past him, he took her arm and halted her. "No, wait. It is a big deal. It wasn't my place to say what was on my mind. But I guess my strong reaction had to do partly with this situation, the way your sister acted, and how I felt when we touched."

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Cut the bull. There's something happening here between us."

"The only thing happening between us is in your imagination."

Brown eyes narrowed to disbelieving slits. "You don't think so? There's one way to disprove that theory."

Before Billie knew what Grant was up to, he pulled her into his arms and his mouth covered hers. She clutched his shoulders, intending to push him away, but heat coursed through her and her nipples tightened. Instead of trying to put space between them, Billie found herself holding him closer.

Grant's tongue pressed against her lips, demanding entrance. His fingers dug through her hair, tilting her head back. "Open your mouth, Billie."

She couldn't deny him even if she'd wanted to. Billie sighed as he explored the deep recesses of her mouth, tasting her.

A tingling sensation in her pussy made her squirm. Grant was an expert kisser, taking his time and making her weak at the knees. It had been so long since she'd felt this way. Not even her ex made her feel like she'd burst in a million splinters of flame.

Now she realized that the tension and the animosity between the two of them had been a cover for this festering lust.

Felicity coughed, trying to get their attention. "Uh, do you two need a room?"

Billie tried to pull out of Grant's arms as soon as she heard her sister's voice, but Grant took his time letting her go. "This isn't over," he whispered against her ear.

"If I have any say in the matter, it is," she hissed back.

To her annoyance the arrogant bastard chuckled.

Felicity cleared her throat again.

Billie had had enough. "You know what? You can discuss whatever you have to with Felicity. I'll wait in the car. Anything you have to say to me can be done through the mail. I'd wish you a good day, but I wouldn't mean it." And with that, Billie stormed off to her car with the sound of Grant's laugh ringing in her ears.

Chapter Two

No matter how hard Grant tried, he couldn't get Billie Cartwright off his mind. A month had passed since he'd laid eyes on the caramel cutie, and not a night had gone by when he didn't go to sleep without her in his thoughts. She was also the first thing he thought of when he woke up.

There were mornings when he'd be so horny from dreams about Billie that no amount of masturbation would do. She'd kept her word about staying away from him, and it bothered him to no end. He told himself to forget about her. There were plenty of fish in the sea, and better looking ones at that.

He wasn't sure what it was about her that drew him to her. She wasn't exactly his type. If the truth were known, he preferred petite blondes with curves that didn't quit, but with one look at the tall, statuesque goddess with the clear hazel eyes, his cock grew instantly hard. Standing a quarter of an inch below six foot five himself, Grant knew Billie had to be at least six feet because their eyes were almost level. With high cheekbones, luscious gloss covered lips, smooth creamy skin and a willowy figure, she was definitely attractive.

Grant itched to run his fingers through her dark hair that she wore in its natural form. It had looked so soft and inviting. He still remembered how she'd tasted, so sweet and fiery at the same time. One taste wasn't enough. He had to have more!

Now here he was, driving to her house on the pretext of getting some papers signed that he could have easily sent by courier. When he pulled up to the large Victorian manor, Grant paused. It wasn't too late to drive away, but he just couldn't.

Glancing at his watch, he took a deep breath. Someone should be home now.

He felt like a fool for showing up with such a paper thin excuse, but his need to smell the scent of her perfume again drove Grant up the walkway and onto the porch. After ringing the doorbell, he waited impatiently for someone to answer.

What was taking so long? There was a car in front. He pushed the button one last time and was about to give up when the door was wrenched open. Felicity stood in the doorway with her nightgown on. Grant glanced at his watch, second guessing himself. It was six o'clock at night. Felicity Cartwright didn't strike him as the type to go to bed this early.

She yawned, opening her mouth wide, not bothering to cover it. "Grant, what are you doing here?"

She looked like a miniature version of her sister, with the same golden brown complexion and hazel gaze, but there was something about the younger woman that was off-putting. From his interaction with her, Grant already figured Felicity was the type to want something for nothing.

"Uh, I apologize if you were about to go to bed. I came to see your sister about something. Is she here?" he asked, trying not to project how anxious he felt.

"Don't worry about that, come on in. Actually, I'm just getting up. I was going to order a pizza. Billie took Gran to Bible study, but she should be back shortly. Gran usually gets a ride back from one of her friends because they often visit the sick and shut-ins afterwards. Come on in."

Grant shrugged. He'd come this far. There was no point in turning back. Besides, the thought of seeing Billie again gave him the incentive to wait as long as it took. Stepping into the house, he noticed clothes and old newspapers flung everywhere. This didn't seem like the kind of place Billie would live. For some reason he figured she was a pretty together person, but this mess said otherwise.

Felicity must have noticed how he eyed the mess and giggled. "Oh, don't worry about this stuff. Billie was in one of her rages again. She threw all my stuff on the floor in hopes that I'd pick it up. Why should I when she'll end up doing it for me anyway? I don't know why Gran doesn't hire a housekeeper. It's not like she can't afford it."

“Ah, I see,” Grant murmured, wondering if the funky smell filtering to his nostrils was from the clothes lying on the floor or if Felicity ate something that didn’t agree with her.

“Come on in and have a seat, Grant. I’m really surprised to see you here. I thought everything with the will had been settled. I’ve even been to Aunt Wilhelmina’s house a couple times. What a sweetheart for leaving us that old house. I think I could live off the little nest egg Aunt Wilhelmina left along with it.”

The words ‘lazy bitch’ came to mind, but he decided to keep it to himself. “Don’t you want to work?”

“I’m only twenty-three. I can’t be tied down with a tedious nine to five. I was in school for a little while but it’s so boring, you know?”

“But isn’t it boring just sitting around the house?”

“I don’t sit around the house. There’s plenty of things I do to keep myself occupied and, you know, I don’t think working is for everyone. If more people realized that instead of killing themselves for minimum wage, they’d be a lot happier.”

Was she for real? Could she honestly be that slovenly? Grant had the sudden urge to take this girl by the shoulders and shake her silly. “Maybe some people have no choice but to work. Not everyone grew up in these trappings.” He made a sweep of the house with his hand as he remembered his own humble beginnings.

Raised by a single father who worked three jobs to make ends meet, Grant had worked very hard to get where he was. The only thing he regretted about his success was that his father didn’t live long enough to see it. Hearing Felicity talk so casually about something she obviously didn’t have a clue about annoyed him.

He was considering turning around and leaving when the front door opened. Billie walked in, looking just as sexy as he remembered. His cock stirred, and he barely managed to temper the fire raging within him.

Her eyes widened when she spotted him. “What are you doing here?” she squeaked.

A smile tugged at the corner of his lips. God she was beautiful, even if her hazel eyes did blaze at the moment. He allowed his gaze to slide over her slender body. The yellow sundress Billie wore lovingly hugged her subtle curves. When his eyes met hers again, she didn't look happy. "Hello, Billie."

"You didn't answer my question. What are you doing here?"

"Grant said he had some papers for you to sign," Felicity answered her sister.

She sidled up to Grant, giving him a huge grin, lightly touching his arm. He was sure it was a move she'd practiced on many an unsuspecting man, but it left him cold. God, what was that smell?

Billie turned to her sister, looking slightly annoyed. "Felicity, I asked you to pick up your things before I left. It was bad enough that you slept in all day, but not lifting a finger to clean this mess up is beyond lazy."

Felicity yawned with a total look of unconcern. "So what? You'll end up picking it up like you always do. Why make such a big deal about it? It'll get done, one way or another. Now, I'll leave the two of you alone. I think I'm going to take a nice long soak. I've just been so tired lately."

The younger woman turned to leave them, shooting Grant a seductive smile before sauntering up the stairs.

He shook his head. How could two sisters be so different? Now that Felicity was gone, so was the smell.

Billie released a long sigh. "I'm sorry the house is in a mess. It's my fault really," she said, bending down to pick up the clothes lying haphazardly on the floor.

"Uh, no problem. I'm sorry if this is an inconvenient time. I actually came over to drop some paperwork off for you."

She raised one perfectly arched brow. "Oh? I thought everything was finished up. Wasn't the last time we met enough?"

"Let's not go down that path again. We got off on the wrong foot. Can't we start over?"

Billie didn't look like she wanted to call a truce, but to his surprise she gave him a faint smile, then held out her hand. "Okay. I guess I said a few things I shouldn't have myself. It wasn't a very good day for me."

"If you don't mind my saying so, you look stressed."

"I am stressed. Gran has been agitated recently, talking about family curses and secrets that are better left buried. Now that we've gotten the lump sum from Aunt Wilhelmina's will, Felicity has taken it into her head that she doesn't have to work. My job is slowly driving me insane with all the turnover lately."

"I can imagine that would stress anyone out. Look, I know this is a spur of the moment thing, but how about I take you out for a drink? We can go over that paperwork, see if you have any questions."

She shook her head. "I don't think that would be a good idea. As you can see, I have a lot to do around here."

"Billie, I know we've only met one other time, but just from my brief observation, I think you already do plenty. How about throwing caution to the wind and living a little?"

"Billie, did you bring my clothes from the dry cleaners?" Felicity called from the top of the stairs.

"I forgot. I'll pick it up tomorrow!" Billie yelled back, and then tossed the clothes she held in her arms back down before turning to Grant. "You know what? That drink sounds nice. No funny stuff, okay?"

Grant smiled. "I won't try anything... unless you want me to."

She rolled her eyes. "Try it, Romeo, and you'll be coughing up your nuts."

"Did I tell you I like feisty women?"

For a second, he thought she'd smack him, but instead she laughed. "Give me a couple minutes to change, and I'll be ready to go."

He licked his lips as she walked past him. He watched her round backside as she made her way up the stairs. If he played his cards right, maybe he could convince her to stick around for more than just a drink.

* * *

Billie wasn't sure why she'd allowed herself to be talked into this, but now that she was out of the house she was glad. Grant made good company. He wasn't the arrogant ass she'd originally thought he was.

She giggled, taking a sip of her Long Island Iced Tea. "You've got to be kidding me. There's no way that really happened."

"I swear it happened." He grinned, his sherry brown eyes sparkling with humor.

"But is that legal?"

"It's not exactly illegal."

"Spoken like a true lawyer. And then what happened? Was the family pissed?"

"Beyond reason. You see a lot of that stuff in my line of business. Families are splintered apart when it comes to estate matters. It almost makes me glad to be an orphan."

"You don't have any family? That's kind of sad."

"It was me and my dad for as long as I can remember. My mom passed away from breast cancer when I was two. I didn't have any siblings and Dad never remarried."

"What happened to him?"

"He passed away a couple years ago from MS."

"Oh, how sad. That must have been really tough."

"Well, I didn't know my mother that well, and Dad... I miss him, but I think he's in a better place now, free from pain. Tell me about your parents."

"They both died in a car accident when I was a teenager. They were coming home from a party when they were blindsided by a teenager who'd only gotten her license that week. Apparently she ran a stop sign. It was tough, but I also feel sorry for that girl as well. It's something she'll have to live with for the rest of her life."

"You have a good heart to think about that girl. Most people would be quick to point the finger."

“Oh, believe me I did. When I turned eighteen I confronted her. She’s a mess. She hasn’t gotten behind the wheel of a car since. I couldn’t hate her after that. Besides, that’s not how Mom and Dad would have wanted me to live my life. Anyway, I haven’t had it so bad. Gran has been everything to Felicity and I. I couldn’t have asked for a better guardian than her.”

He took a sip of his beer and frowned, looking at her with a brooding expression.

Her hand immediately touched her face. “Do I have something on my nose?”

“No. Why do you ask?”

“Because you’re giving me a funny look.”

“You’re gorgeous. I can’t help looking at you.”

Billie felt shy all of a sudden. An entanglement with Grant was the last thing she needed. She was wildly attracted to him, but she couldn’t afford to have any more complications in her life. “Flattery will get you nowhere, buddy.”

“Is it so very hard for you to take a compliment? You are a beautiful woman, you know.”

“Thank you, but I’d rather you didn’t say stuff like that to me.”

“Why not?”

“Because I can’t afford to get involved with anyone right now.”

Grant chuckled. “How about waiting until you’re asked, sweetheart?”

Heat surfaced to her face. “I suppose I had that coming.” She wished the floor would swallow her up right then and there.

“Relax, Billie. I’d be lying if I said I wouldn’t like to take this acquaintance further. You’re a beautiful woman and you fascinate me. That kiss we shared tells me you wouldn’t be adverse to a relationship with me either.”

It all came back to that kiss. Her body tingled just reliving it. Her nipples tightened, pressing painfully against her T-shirt. Billie hunched over so he wouldn’t notice. “That was a fluke. It never should have happened.”

“It was meant to happen the moment we laid eyes on each other.”

"Grant, I'm not interested in being your ebony fantasy. I've done the white guy thing once before, and I'd much rather stick to men from my own race."

"Pardon me, but I thought we were both from the human race. You didn't strike me as one of those militant black chicks."

"I'm not a militant black chick just because I choose not to be someone's experience."

"Is that what happened when you dated a white man? Did he use you?"

She snorted. "*Use* isn't quite the word. He thought I'd be some kind of hellcat in bed because he heard that all black women were."

"That guy sounds like an idiot. Don't tar us all with the same brush. I was mugged by a black man a few years back. Does that mean I should look suspiciously at every black man who crosses my path?"

She pursed her lips and crossed her arms. "Not all black people are thieves."

"And not all white men are idiots."

She shook her head with a sigh. "I can't argue with a lawyer, can I?"

He gave her one of those one thousand watt smiles of his. "Not this one. I'm good at what I do, babe. So how about it? One date is all I ask."

"Have you ever dated a black woman before?"

"Once."

"What happened?"

"We were just at different points in our lives. The split was amicable, and she's still a good friend."

"How nice for you," she murmured, taking another sip of her drink.

"Can the sarcasm, Billie. Is it a yes or no?" he asked, obviously not willing to let up.

More than anything she wanted to say yes but knew inviting him into her hectic life just wouldn't be fair. "Grant, I... I just can't."

"Why the hell not?"

"I have way too many responsibilities right now. It's a really busy time for me at work. My grandmother hasn't been in the best of health lately, and my sister, well, you've seen what she's like."

"That brings me to another topic, your sister. I get the impression that she's... well, she's..."

"Lazy as hell? Yes, I know." Billie sighed with exasperation when she thought about her sister. She still hoped that one day Felicity would turn her life around.

"I wouldn't have put it so bluntly, but you seem to have it together. You work when you two obviously live comfortably, but your sister, it seems, takes a lot for granted."

"Please don't judge her too harshly. I blame myself for the way she is."

"How do you figure that? Aren't we all responsible for our actions?"

"To some extent, yes, but Felicity was a sickly baby. She was born four months premature, and frankly the doctors didn't think she'd make it. You should have seen her. She was so tiny and helpless. She lived in the hospital for the first year of her life. Because of that, we've all been guilty of coddling and doing things for her. It wasn't such a big deal when she was younger, but when our parents died I didn't help matters by basically taking over where they left off. Whenever Felicity needed something, I was always there doing for her. I should have listened to Gran and made her do some things for herself, but she's my kid sister and I love her."

"I'd say you've created a monster," Grant observed, taking another swig of beer with a shake of his head.

"Guilty as charged. I'm just so worried about her. She quit school and hasn't been able to hold down a job. She thinks she'll end up marrying a rich guy to take care of her so she can live in the style she's 'grown accustomed to.' Her last boyfriend was a guy who I'm sure is a drug dealer."

"That sounds dangerous."

"It is. The only reason why they're not dating now is because he had to go away for a while."

"You mean he's in jail?"

"Actually, he left the country. I think he's running from the law."

"I think the only thing you can do is let her start doing things for herself."

"You don't know my sister. She could charm honey from the bees. All she has to do is bat those long eyelashes of hers, and people literally fall over themselves to do her bidding. This inheritance from Aunt Wilhelmina hasn't helped matters. She's been going up to that creepy house lately, and there's something different about her. I can't quite put my finger on it. At first she was all for selling the house to get a quick buck, now she won't even hear of it. If you ask me, there's something really unsettling about that place."

Grant smacked his forehead. "Damn, I forgot. I was going through some papers and found some stuff that got lost in the shuffle."

Billie took the papers handed to her. "Like you couldn't have sent this to me in the mail."

"I could have, but then I wouldn't have been able to see you."

"Grant --"

"You need to live a little. Just think about it."

She sighed. It was so hard to say no to him when her body was screaming yes. She fumbled with the papers, and then came across what looked like a small journal. "What's this?"

"It was among your aunt's belongings. That's another thing that made me wonder. Your aunt left you and your sister well taken care of, yet you claim to have never met her."

"I haven't. Apparently she was Gran's sister. I don't know why no one has mentioned her. When I've asked Gran about her, she clams up. I don't know if there was some kind of rift, but it's so weird considering how close my family is. I have a few aunts and uncles scattered around the country, but no one has ever mentioned her. Why she chose me and Felicity as beneficiaries of her will is beyond me."

"I wondered about that myself, but it's really not my job to question these things."

Grant placed his bottle on the table and gave her a smoldering look that sent a wave of sensation up her spine. "How about we blow this joint and go for a drive?"

"I only agreed to a drink."

"So now I'm asking for more."

"I don't think that's a good idea, Grant. Actually, you should probably take me home." There was no way she was letting this go further than a couple of drinks. She'd be crazy to take him up on his offer.

Chapter Three

She was crazy. How had she let him talk her into going back to his place for another drink after they went dancing? It had to be the alcohol working, but whenever he'd looked at her with those bedroom eyes, her resistance wore down.

Billie wrapped her arms protectively around her body, looking at his tastefully furnished Northeast Philly home. She was engrossed in one of the paintings when he walked back in the room with a glass of wine in hand. "Do you like the painting?"

"It's interesting. Who's the artist?"

"Yours truly."

"Get out of here! You painted this?"

"It's a little something I do in my spare time."

"It's beautiful. I like the way you've used the dark and light colors to complement each other. You're a regular jack of all trades."

"And master of none?" he smirked.

"That's not what I meant."

"It was just a joke. Here's your wine."

She took the glass gratefully and took a sip. "It's probably not a good idea for me to be drinking like this. I have to go into the office tomorrow morning."

"On a Saturday?"

"Yes, I'm a little behind. We've had three people quit in the past couple months and their replacements have yet to be hired. As you can imagine, someone has to pick up the slack."

"And that person is you?"

"You're very perceptive, Mr. Jorgensen."

"I am, aren't I? You know what else I noticed? Whenever I take a step forward, you take two steps back. Do I make you nervous?"

Very, she wanted to say but wouldn't give him the satisfaction of verbalizing it. "Not at all, why do you say that?"

"Because you're trembling. Are you scared that I'll touch you... or that I won't?"

She laughed nervously. It sounded phony even to her ears. "You're just being ridiculous, and if you're trying to be cute, stop it. Your Prince Charming act isn't working right now."

"It isn't? Shall we put it to the test then?" he asked, taking the wine glass from her hand and putting it on the nearest table before turning to her. His cinnamon colored eyes narrowed like he was moving in for the kill.

Billie shivered, knowing she should protest, but the words wouldn't come. Instead, she stood mesmerized as he stalked toward her like a hungry jungle cat. She backed up until she was against the wall. Grant planted his hands on either side of her head.

"No," she whispered, shaking her head.

"Yes."

Just one little kiss, Billie told herself, but when his lips touched hers, she was lost. Grant pressed his body into hers, and Billie was drowning in a tidal wave of passion. Her pussy clenched with need for him. This was what she'd been dreaming about for the past month.

"God, I want you. I've thought of nothing but this since the last time we saw each other. I wondered if you'd taste as good as you did the first time, and if your body was soft like I remembered it being. You're so beautiful, Billie. Open your mouth and let me taste you properly." Grant dug his fingers in her hair, his tongue probing against the seam of her lips.

Billie sighed as a wave of delight shot up her spine and swam through every part of her body. Her breasts were so painfully tight, and more than anything she wanted him to open her blouse and set them free.

Other than that one kiss they'd shared a month ago, it had been so long since she'd reacted to a man in such a wanton fashion. In the back of her mind, she knew she should push him away, but she couldn't. Why not throw caution to the wind and give in to her carnal desires, if only for this one time? After all, she'd never see him again. Billie wrapped her arms around Grant's neck pulling him closer. The sweeping motion of his tongue in her mouth wreaked havoc on her equilibrium.

"Touch me, please." Was that her voice? Why did it sound so impassioned and needy?

"Where?" he muttered against her mouth.

"Everywhere," she groaned.

"Show me." He held out his hands, and she gripped them tightly in hers. Billie guided him to her breasts, holding them against her. "Squeeze them."

She groaned when he did as she asked. Looking up at him expectantly, she waited for the descent of his mouth. This time she was ready for him, her tongue shooting out to meet, twine, and circle his in a primitive dance as old as time itself. Her body felt like it would burst into flames any second.

Grant molded and shaped her breasts in his palms, taking her to the heights of unadulterated passion. She dug her fingers in his russet hair, holding his head, wanting to be closer to him. He tasted so good, so male, so hot. She couldn't remember anyone making her feel this way with just one kiss, not even her ex.

She arched her back as Grant lifted her T-shirt, taking his time, his eyes alight with desire at each inch of skin he revealed. "You have no idea how long I've wanted to do this. I've dreamed of running my fingers over your skin, to touch and taste you." He buried his face in her neck, kissing and nibbling her heated flesh.

Her knees trembled, threatening to give out at any second. Grant undid the front clasp of her bra and pinched her nipples between his fingers and thumbs. "Yes, Grant, just like that," she moaned, reveling in his touch.

"Say that again," he demanded roughly, a feral look in his cinnamon eyes.

"Say what?" she asked dumbly, not wanting him to let her go.

"Say my name again, Billie. I love the way it rolls off your tongue."

"Grant."

He pinched her nipples harder. "Louder."

"Grant!"

"You have lovely breasts, big, beautiful and made just for my hands and mouth. Tell me what you want me to do."

"I can't," she whispered, feeling shy all of a sudden.

"You had no problem telling me earlier." He ground his erection against her thigh. "Tell me, baby. Do you want me to take your nipples in my mouth?"

"Yes," she groaned.

"Lick them?"

"Oh, God, yes," Billie sighed, not sure if she could take any more of his sensual persuasion. "Suck my breasts, Grant. I want to feel your mouth all over me."

"Oh, you will, sweetheart." His hand grazed her tender peaks making her shiver. "After I finish sucking and nibbling on these tasty peaks, I'm going to spread these delectable caramel thighs, bury my face between them. Then I'm going to suck that cunt like it gives me life."

Vulgar though his words were, she'd never been more turned on in her life. She wanted those things too. "Why don't you stop talking about it and do it?" Billie challenged.

Without warning, Grant bent down and lifted her in his arms. She yelped, wrapping her arms around him to keep her balance. He walked the short distance to the couch and practically threw her onto its cushions. His hard body covered hers as Grant placed hot hungry kisses along her jaw line and neck, methodically moving down the length of her body.

Billie squirmed against him, her pussy on fire for more. She couldn't believe they were actually here like this, especially when she'd vowed at their last meeting that she would have nothing to do with him. What was it about this man that made her throw all reservations out the window? Never in a million years would she have dreamed of

fucking a guy on the first date. And this technically wasn't a date. Her grandmother would be horrified. Billie was too, but the feel of Grant's hot insistent mouth was too much to resist.

When he rubbed his face in the valley of her breasts, she cried out, "Stop teasing me, goddammit!"

A deep chuckle erupted from his throat. "Since you asked nicely." Lowering his head, he nipped at one tight peak.

Billie nearly swooned. "Oh, yes, just like that."

He laved the hard tip, flicking it with his tongue. "You taste delicious," he moaned, his hand squeezing and rubbing her other breast.

She bucked her hips against him, Grant's hard shaft straining against his slacks. Billie didn't have a string of past lovers to compare but, Lord, he felt thick. She bit her lip, closing her eyes as she thought of how delectable it would be to have him plow into her. Already her panties were soaking wet.

He sucked on her breast voraciously. Billie writhed and moaned beneath him, her hands raking up and down his broad back. She pulled at his shirt, wanting to feel his bare skin beneath her palms.

Grant lifted his head, eyes closed. "Oh, yes," he whispered in obvious pleasure.

It pleased Billie to know that she turned him on as much as he did her. When he turned his attention to her other breast, the sensation was so intense that she dug her nails into his back.

"Ah, you little wildcat. So you like things rough do you?" He smirked.

"Can't handle it?" she teased.

"Let's see who can handle what." He made short order of undoing and discarding her pants with Billie's assistance. Grant hooked a finger in the crotch of her panties. "Mmm, you're already wet I see. I bet I can make you wetter, baby."

Billie smiled. "That's a lot of talk for someone who isn't showing a lot of action."

"I'll show you action," he growled, yanking her lace panties down her hips. She shivered in anticipation, waiting for what was to come. Billie didn't know why, but she had no doubt in her mind that Grant would deliver.

He parted her thighs and slid his middle finger into her damp sheath. "Grant!" she called, desire coursing through her being.

She lifted her leg to rest a foot on his shoulder, granting him the access he desired. Billie nearly lost her mind when he pressed a deep kiss against her clit. She pushed her pussy toward his face, impatient for more.

"Easy, baby," he whispered against her pussy. The feel of his breath on her sensitive area sent shivers up her spine.

His lips captured her clit as he slid another finger inside her moist channel. Molten waves of hot passion sent frissons of heat to every single nerve ending of her body. He attacked her cunt as if he couldn't get enough of the taste of her. He finger fucked her, pumping in and out.

Billie's head lolled from side to side. He'd rendered her speechless. His teeth grazed her hot button. The combination of his hands and mouth were enough to take her to an explosive peak. She found herself screaming his name. "Grant! Oh God, Grant!"

Instead of lifting his head, he continued to lick and suck her pussy. She whimpered when his fingers slid out of her wet hole. "Relax, baby," he said.

She stiffened when his dew slicked fingers rubbed the tight bud of her ass. "Grant, no." Billie had never been touched there before, and she wasn't sure if she liked it.

"Relax," he reassured her.

"That's my exit only hole," she protested, trying to wiggle away from him.

"Maybe you believe that because no one ever showed you it could be so much more. Let me show you, baby."

"Okay, but --" Before she could get another word out, Grant eased a finger into her ass. She gasped, more from surprise than pain. "Grant!"

“Just let it happen, baby.” He placed another kiss against her pussy and let his tongue slide along the damp folds of her labia. The scintillating heat that washed over her was enough to make Billie relax as he pulled his finger out of her ass to the fingertip then slid it back inside.

“You see, that’s not so bad, is it?”

Actually it wasn’t, but a finger was one thing, a cock was another. “I’ve never done this before.”

“I just want to acquaint myself with every inch of your delectable body. Besides, after I’ve tasted pussy as sweet as this, I’m not going to let you get away from me so easily next time.”

Her eyes narrowed. “You sound so sure that there’ll be another time.”

He lifted one thick brow. “Oh, there’ll be another time.” Grant slid his finger out of her ass and then stood up, leaving her quivering helplessly on the couch.

Her eyes watched him hungrily as he slowly undressed, revealing a well toned chest, and a washboard stomach. She licked her lips. He was so yummy that her heart began to beat erratically. Billie reached out to touch him, but he backed up. “Oh, no you don’t.”

“Why not? Let me touch you.”

“If I allow that, then we’ll be finished before we start.” He slid his pants down to reveal boxers with smiley faces on them.

Billie giggled. “Cute.”

A smile tugged at the corner of his lips. “Not half as cute as you.”

Her heart flipped. Damn this man for making her feel things she had no business feeling. This was just supposed to be sex. She bit her bottom lip to keep herself from saying what she really wanted to.

When he slid the boxers down over lean hips, her jaw dropped. From what she’d felt, Billie already knew he’d be thick, but he was long as well. Oh, dear Lord, it was a monster.

He bent down to pick up his pants, extracting his wallet. He dug inside of it and pulled out a foil wrapped condom. Billie watched in fascination as he unrolled the lubed piece of latex over his hard throbbing member. She never knew that watching a man don protection could be so sensual. Once that task was accomplished, he walked over to her with purposeful strides, his cock bobbing with each step he took.

Grant slowly lowered his body over hers, smashing her breasts against the hard planes of his chest. He nudged her thighs apart with his knee. She pulled him closer still, shutting her eyes tight when she felt his cock against her pussy demanding entrance.

With one swift movement, he rammed into her. She moaned at the sensation of being deliciously filled by his hard thick cock. He pushed until his balls rested on the seat of her ass. When Billie's lips parted in a gasp, Grant covered her mouth, thrusting his tongue inside.

As their tongues circled and caressed each other, she wrapped her legs around his waist, loving the way he stretched her vaginal walls so wonderfully. She moved with him as his cock slowly slid in and out of her channel.

"Damn, this is tight pussy," he grunted. "Once isn't enough."

"Mmm," she moaned in response, holding him tighter as she clenched her Kegel muscles around his cock.

"You're trying to make me go insane, aren't you, woman?"

Batting her eyelashes innocently at him, Billie grinned. "Whatever do you mean, Grant?"

He threw back his head and laughed that wonderful laugh of his. "You're going to be the death of me, do you know that?"

"You make it sound like a bad thing. Grant, could you do me a favor?" she asked, softly.

"Anything."

"Shut up and fuck me."

His grin widened. "Anything for you." He grasped her hips and began to thrust into her with long powerful strokes. Grant took things slowly at first. Then, each time he withdrew he shoved into her pussy more forcefully until their flesh slapped against each other.

His cock hit just the right spot over and over again, leaving Billie breathless. Her nails raked down his arms, tearing at his flesh, but Grant was so caught up in the heat of the moment that he didn't seem to take notice.

Their bodies glistened with sweat. The fire burning within threatened to consume them both. Nothing she'd ever experienced compared to what she was feeling right now. The buildup began slowly in the pit of her stomach, then seared to every single limb. Her climax was no mere explosion; instead it was a nuclear eruption.

"Grant!" she screamed, clinging to him, tears coursing down her face.

"Billie," he groaned, tensing up, signaling his own peak. When he looked down at her, concern replaced the passion that had been etched so clearly on his face. "What's wrong, sweetheart?" he asked, kissing the corners of her eyes.

"I... I didn't know it could be like that," she whispered, her voice full of wonder.

He kissed her forehead and stroked her hair. "Neither did I. You know there's no going back now, don't you?"

Billie shook her head. "Grant, I don't want you to think I'm the type of girl who does this all the time. This was just a one off thing."

"Like hell it is! Do you mean to tell me that you'll deny yourself what we shared?"

"It's just sex."

"This wasn't *just sex* and you know it. There's been something brewing between us since we first met. Why don't you give us a chance to find out what that something is?"

"You don't know what you're saying."

"I know what's in my own mind, so don't insult me by telling me how *I* feel."

Billie tried to wiggle out from beneath him, but Grant's rock hard body kept her pinned down. "Let me up."

"Not until we resolve this," he said stubbornly.

"What's there to resolve? You wanted me and I wanted you. We fucked, and now that's it. I must have been crazy to do this with you. Let me up. I need to get back home."

"What are you so scared of, Billie?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. You're making a bigger deal out of this than it has to be."

Grant released her and sat up. "Is it so wrong that I want more from you than a piece of ass? Whether you believe it or not, I don't go for one-night stands either."

She snorted. "You certainly could have fooled me." Billie sidled off the couch and started gathering her clothes, stealing one brief glance in Grant's direction. Her breath caught in her throat. The hurt on his face spoke volumes. She sighed. This wasn't turning out the way she'd planned. "Grant, surely you know that anything further than this isn't possible. You have your life and I have mine. I have way too many responsibilities, like my sister for instance."

"What does your adult sister have to do with us?"

"I can't get involved with someone knowing I can't give my one hundred percent. Besides, Felicity needs me."

"So you're willing to sacrifice what we have because your sister is too lazy to do for herself?"

"Grant, all we have between us is good sex. Well, great sex, but that's beside the point. Like I said, this never should have happened. I'm sorry I led you on, but I'd rather not have this conversation again. I would like it if you'd get dressed and take me home."

Grant stood in front of her, looking down with angry eyes. "You may be willing to deny what we shared was special but I won't, nor will I let you forget." He gripped

her by the forearms and gave her a bruising kiss. Billie whimpered under the pressure of his taut mouth.

When he finally let her go she was breathless, her body hot with desire. A knowing smirk rested on Grant's lips. "Run away if you'd like, Billie, but if you let other things get in the way of your heart, you're going to be a very lonely and bitter old woman."

Chapter Four

It had been a particularly grueling day at the office. Three people had called out sick, increasing Billie's already heavy workload. Maybe it was time to start looking for another job because she was underpaid and underappreciated.

All she really wanted to do was take a nice long hot bath. Billie prayed that Felicity had gone on that job interview like she'd promised. Her sister was another source of worries. Things had increasingly gotten worse. Surprisingly, her sister was no longer loafing around the house, but she'd disappear for days at a time and return with expensive items that there was no way she could afford on her own.

Not only that, Billie had come home from work one day to find her sister passed out on the front lawn face down. When she'd confronted Felicity, accusing her of being drunk, the younger woman had simply laughed it off, but there'd been a slight twinge of fear in those normally carefree eyes. As strange as it might be, Billie couldn't shake the feeling that this had something to do with Aunt Wilhelmina's will.

Stepping into the living room, Billie noticed her grandmother on her knees as though in prayer. What the hell was going on? Her grandmother wasn't a terribly religious woman. She only went to church to keep up with the latest goings on in the community. This was the first time Billie had found Gran this way.

"Gran?" she asked tentatively, walking farther into the living room.

Gran lifted her iron gray head, her dark eyes gleaming fervently. "Come here, child, join me in prayer. Together, we may be able to drive away the demons from this house."

"Gran, what are you talking about? What demons?"

"Don't argue with me. Come here now!"

The sound of desperation touched Billie's ears and fear gripped her. She walked over to her grandmother and knelt down.

"Bow your head, child," Gran whispered, her wrinkled face now tight with anxiety.

Billie did what she was told, but she couldn't help wondering if her grandmother hadn't finally lost it. Harriet Cartwright, though eighty-five years old, was sharp as a tack and could get around better than people half her age, so to see her like this broke Billie's heart.

Her grandmother grasped her hand tightly and began to pray. "Oh, Heavenly Father, please cleanse this house from the evil that lurks within. Please touch Felicity and give her the strength to resist evil. Please guide her, Lord, because she knows not what she does. Rescind the evil bestowed on this family and grant us the will to stand strong against the dark one. Forgive Wilhelmina for her carelessness, and may her soul be in peace. In your name we pray, amen."

Billie's jaw dropped. What in the world was going on here? Evil? The dark one? She felt like she was in the middle of a horror movie rather than in her living room.

Gran looked at her with glazed eyes. "You have to stop her, Billie."

"Stop who?"

"That lazy sister of yours. For such a pretty girl, she's so stupid. She's always looking for a quick fix and never thinks about anyone but herself, but now she's done it. She messed with things better left alone."

"What did Felicity do? Gran, you're scaring me," Billie whispered, growing more panicked with each passing second.

"I shouldn't have let you go meet that lawyer. I should have been more adamant about the two of you staying away from that house. I know I shouldn't have done what I did fifty years ago, but I didn't think this would happen."

Billie grabbed her grandmother and gently shook her. "You're not making sense."

Her grandmother sighed. "Help me up, child."

Pulling Gran up by the arm, Billie led her to the couch. "Can I get you something to drink? Do you need to put your feet up?"

Gran swatted Billie's hands away when she tried to adjust the pillows. "Stop fussing over me. I'm not an invalid, and I know what you're thinking. I'm not crazy either."

Billie flopped down on the couch next to her grandmother. "Then tell me what that was all about. Make me understand what's going on. You really scared me."

Gran snorted, the wrinkles rippling on her dark face. "You haven't seen anything yet. I suppose most of this is my fault. I shouldn't have kept this from your father or from you girls. Then you'd understand the legacy of our family."

"What legacy?" Billie wished her grandmother would start making sense.

"Don't interrupt, child. Give an old lady a chance to speak." Gran paused and looked as though she were contemplating what to say next. Billie fidgeted, waiting impatiently. "You do know about our heritage, don't you? We're descended from kings and queens, you know."

Billie rolled her eyes. "Gran, you can't be serious about us being related to Chaka from the Zulu nation, are you? Daddy used to talk about it, but I thought he was just trying to be funny."

"You should have listened to him, child, because we are indeed his descendants. As I figure it, he's our great uncle several times over. He was called the black Napoleon, you know, and made the Zulu tribe one of the fiercest nations in the world. Everyone feared and revered him. But as they say, absolute power corrupts absolutely and he made many enemies."

"But what does that have to do with demons and evil? Are you saying he was an evil man?"

"Not evil, just ambitious. Now where was I? Oh yes, like I said he made lots of enemies, mainly his jealous siblings. One fateful day an Agrippa book fell into the hands of his brother and --"

"An Agrippa book? Come on, Gran, that's just a legend."

“It’s not just a legend, child. Now let me finish. You wanted to hear this story, so be quiet. If you’re familiar with the legend of the Agrippa, then you know that to open it will bring great fortune to your family but at a deadly cost. Chaka’s siblings were able to eventually defeat him with the help of the Dutch colonists, but then they were betrayed by the very people they’d turned to for help.”

“Are you saying that all happened because of a book that may or may not exist? And even if that’s true, what does that have to do with our family?” Gran glared and Billie realized that she’d interrupted again. “Sorry.”

“One of our ancestors had the good sense to realize the evil of that book and took it with them far away so it wouldn’t do any harm. From that point on it was determined that one family member should be the Guardian of the book, never to open it and make sure that it wouldn’t be opened, otherwise it could cause great harm to the bearer even if it brought great luck in the beginning.” Gran paused again to clear her throat. “Go get me a glass of water, child. My throat is dry.”

Billie wanted to protest, but knew better than to argue with her grandmother. She might be eighty-five years old, but she was still quick with the backhand. She hurried to the kitchen, fixed the glass of water the way her grandmother liked it, and hurried back. When she sat on the couch again, Gran was humming an old hymn.

Gran took the glass with a withered hand, and took a deep, long sip. “Ah, that was refreshing.”

Billie bit her lip to keep from shouting in frustration. It was so like her grandmother to take her sweet time in everything. She waited until the glass of water was empty before gently prompting her grandmother to continue. “Are you going to finish telling me the story?”

“The story? Oh, yes. I think I was telling you about the book bringing great wealth and luck to those who opened it, but also causing great harm as well. For instance, your great-great-uncle Clinton opened the book when he shouldn’t have, and his corner store became prosperous when a store on the other side of town burned down. The thing was, it happened in the Deep South and the whites resented the fact

that a black man was getting rich off of them. You know how things were back then. Rumors started to spread that Clinton caused the fire, and one night a bunch of men dragged him out of his house, beat, and then lynched him.”

Billie gasped in horror. “That’s awful.”

“It was awful, child. Racism is an ugly thing. He didn’t deserve to die like that, no one does, but... he was the cause of that fire.”

“No,” Billie croaked with a surprised whisper.

“He didn’t cause the fire directly. You see, attached to each book is a demon. A demon that makes things happen, evil things. The one who opens that book may get their heart’s desire, but at great cost. Clinton certainly got more than he bargained for. It was then decided amongst our relatives that the one least likely to open the book must be its keeper and make sure the demon never breaks free.”

Suddenly it dawned on Billie what her grandmother was getting at. “Aunt Wilhelmina? She was a Guardian?”

“Yes. When you went into that house, didn’t you feel the evil resonating in it?”

Billie clutched her throat remembering how she’d felt the minute she’d stepped over the threshold, the smell, and how someone or something had whispered her name. “Yes,” she whispered.

“I was supposed to be a Guardian, but I selfishly volunteered my sister. You see, when I was younger I opened that book. Because of what I did, our parents were killed in a freak fishing accident. They left us very well off, but it was a terrible price to pay. The thing is, I opened it on purpose because I knew that a Guardian needed to be picked. It was between me and Wilhelmina because my brothers were irresponsible and lazy. I wasn’t much better, but I hid it well.”

“So you opened the book knowing that if you did, your family would collectively decide to choose Wilhelmina as the Guardian? Oh, Gran, you didn’t.”

“I did, and I regret it to this very day. I condemned her to that life, in that house. There’s not a day that goes by I don’t think about it. It made me change my life around. You see, I was once a lot like Felicity, carefree and lazy beyond measure, but the guilt of

what I did to my sister ate away at me. When your parents were killed... I think it was because of what I did."

Billie's eyes widened in shock. "Gran..."

"Please don't look at me like that, child. How do you think it feels knowing that I'm responsible for so much death? It seemed like everyone around me who I cared about came to a bad end, and then there were these spells I had."

"Spells? What kind of spells are you talking about?"

"It doesn't matter. But what does is that Wilhelmina died without a Guardian being chosen and when that happens, the demon picks. Your sister is his choice. I've seen the furs and jewelry she claims she's getting from her boyfriend, but I know otherwise. You have to stop her. She listens to you."

Billie tried to take this all in. She wanted to dispute the fact that there was such a thing as demons and hell-spawned books, but remembering the chill that had cut through her by being in that house made it hard to deny. "Gran, why didn't you tell us about this before? Surely you must have known that Aunt Wilhelmina would eventually die and a new Guardian would be chosen."

"In my foolishness, I hoped that it would just go away. I didn't want you girls to deal with this, but now I know what I must do."

Billie didn't like the way that statement sounded. Her grandmother was up to something. "What do you plan on doing?"

"Don't you worry your pretty little head, child. I did my best to raise you to be independent and not reliant on the trappings that surround us. Unfortunately, I failed your sister, but I plan on doing right by you."

She took her grandmother's hand in hers. "Please don't do something crazy, Gran. This sounds dangerous. Maybe we could contact a priest to get rid of it."

"If that happened, the demon would tear him apart. No, it's something I should have done a long time ago. Now why don't you go get freshened up? I'll go fix you something to eat."

"Gran --"

"I don't want to talk about this anymore."

"But --"

Her grandmother held up a wrinkled hand. "I said enough."

Billie bit her bottom lip. Gran might not want to talk about it anymore but there was no way that Billie was going to let this go. If it was the last thing she did, she'd get to the bottom of this.

* * *

Felicity looked over her shoulders before unlocking the door to the house. The lights were out, and she hoped Billie and Gran were in bed. When she walked into the living room, she was relieved to see it was empty because there'd been many nights when she'd come home to find her sister waiting.

She loved Billie to death but sometimes she could be a little too overprotective, and that got annoying. Why did she have to listen to her sister anyway? Felicity felt that she was old enough to make her own decisions, and she was doing fine.

Billie's problem was that she worried way more than she should have. Why did she work so hard when she didn't have to? Gran had enough money to take care of them both. Felicity was too young and pretty to work a nine to five.

Now she just had to figure out a way to break it to Billie and Gran. She wondered how much she could tell them about the good fortune that had come her way. Maybe it was something she should keep to herself because she knew they wouldn't approve of her going to a race track to gamble, but was it really gambling when she couldn't lose?

She fingered the diamond necklace around her neck and sighed. Maybe she would hold off saying anything until she had a place of her own. Then there'd be no more waiting for her monthly allowance or Billie's nagging. Felicity had been disappointed that the money Aunt Wilhelmina had left hadn't been enough to last her more than a few months, but the other gift left behind more than made up for it.

She hummed as she took the stairs two at a time, stopping when she saw a figure sitting at the top. "Billie," she squeaked. "What are you doing up? It's three in the morning. Don't you have to go to work in the morning?"

"It *is* the morning, and I should be asking you why you are just getting home now."

Felicity rolled her eyes. *Here we go again.* "I'm not a child, Billie, and I'd appreciate it if you didn't treat me like one."

"Then stop acting like one. I'm really worried about you, Felicity, and so is Gran."

Felicity raised her chin in defiance. "You have nothing to worry about. As a matter of fact, you won't have to worry about me much longer."

Billie's eyes narrowed to hazel slits. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means that I'll be out of your hair soon. I've decided to move out."

"And just where would you go? You don't work, so how do you propose to support yourself? The allowance Gran gives you would barely cover your rent, and the way you've been spending lately I wouldn't be surprised if you have already blown the money Aunt Wilhelmina left you."

"I have my ways."

"Are they legal?"

"You must have a really low opinion of me if you think otherwise."

"That's not true, but you have to admit you're not the most responsible person. You've never worked at a job for more than a month at a time."

Felicity shrugged with a yawn. She suddenly felt very tired. "I'm not sure what that has to do with anything. If I didn't think I could handle it, I wouldn't consider it. You need to start having a little faith in me. Besides, I don't need your permission. I was only telling you as a courtesy."

She made her way up the stairs, but when she made a move to pass her sister, Billie grabbed her arm. Annoyed, Felicity looked down. "Let go of me. I'm tired and would like to go to bed."

"Where are you getting the money to make all the extravagant purchases you have been?"

"None of your damn business. You're always sticking your nose where it doesn't belong and I'm tired of it." Yanking her wrist away she maneuvered around Billie and made for her room. Her sister, however, wasn't ready to let up.

"You are my business. I made a promise to Mom and Dad to watch over you, and I don't take my responsibilities lightly."

Felicity turned on her sister, anger taking over. "I'm a grown woman, and I don't need you to watch over me anymore. That's your damn problem. If you had a life of your own, you wouldn't be so worried about what's going on in mine."

Billie stepped back as if she'd been smacked, and Felicity was instantly contrite. Deep down, she knew her sister meant well, but if she didn't assert herself now, she'd never get any peace.

"Regardless of what you think and how you feel, I'm not going to stop caring just because it would make things easier for you. As crazy as this sounds, Gran seems to think you've gotten involved in some kind of hocus pocus mumbo jumbo."

It was Felicity's turn to be surprised. Did they know about the book? No. It wasn't possible. The guide had told her not to tell anyone, so how would they know? She'd have to play this cool. Laughing, she flipped a stray strand of hair over her shoulder. "I think you should probably be more concerned about Gran if she's telling you that."

"You've never been a good liar, Felicity. I know about the book. I felt something when I went into that house and I heard the voice. Please be honest with me."

"If you knew about it, then why the hell did you ask? I'm not hurting anyone."

"You could end up hurting yourself. That book is dangerous! People have died from it being opened, and I won't let that happen to you. Tell me how you're getting that money." Billie gripped her shoulder and began to shake her, a crazed look within the depths of her hazel eyes.

"Billie, stop it. You're scaring me."

“You stupid girl! You should be scared. You have no idea what you’re dealing with. If you keep it up, something bad is going to happen. Gran told me whenever that book is opened it can call all kinds of death and destruction. You shouldn’t even step into that house anymore.”

Rage shot through Felicity’s core and her face grew hot. All her life, her holier than thou sister made Felicity feel small and insignificant. Now she was doing something she wanted to do and wouldn’t let anyone, let alone Miss Perfect, tell her she couldn’t. A jolt of power shot out of her body and sent Billie flying across the hallway.

Felicity’s hands flew to her mouth in horror at what she’d just done. “Oh my God, Billie.”

Billie, who’d been slammed against the wall, was slow to get up, a look of awe and confusion all over her face. “Felicity...”

Unable to take another lecture, she turned on her heel with a sob and ran to her room. Once the door was shut and locked, she flung herself on the bed.

What just happened? It didn’t have anything to do with the book... did it?

* * *

Billie’s back hurt like a son of a bitch. She’d only half believed her grandmother before, but now there was no doubt in her mind that Felicity was messing with forces she shouldn’t be. There had to be something she could do. Maybe if she sold the house somehow the book would be someone else’s problem, but then how could she sell it without Felicity’s permission?

A hand grasped her shoulder, and Billie yelped in surprise. Whirling around, she was relieved to see her grandmother standing there, but the relief immediately turned to worry at the strained look on Gran’s face.

“I saw, child.”

“I failed, Gran. She won’t listen to me.”

She enfolded Billie into her arms, and stroked her hair. “It’s okay. You did what you could. Don’t blame yourself. The demon has her twisted.”

“What are we going to do?” Billie asked, never feeling more helpless in her life.

“Leave it to me, child. Leave it to me.”

A sudden feeling of unease washed through Billie. Whatever her grandmother had up her sleeve, she didn't feel reassured at all.

Chapter Five

Billie stood in the doorway wearing nothing but a smile. Her lean dark gold body was a silhouette in the dark. "Grant, I couldn't stay away. I'm sorry for leaving like I did the last time I was here, but I want to make it up to you."

Grant sprang from the bed, his cock rock hard. Licking his lips, he met her in the middle of the room. "How did you get in here?"

"Does it really matter?"

"That's considered breaking and entering you know."

She raised one perfectly arched brow, a slight smile tilting her lips. "Are you going to fuck me or recite the law? I drove all the way here for some cock, and I don't intend to leave until I get some." She ran a finger along the length of his hard shaft.

He shivered in response, a tumult of sensation blazing through his body. Grant pulled her into his arms, covering her mouth hungrily with his. He devoured her, savoring the sweet taste unique to her. She clung to him, pressing her body against his.

Since they'd parted, he'd thought of nothing but her, how she looked, sounded and felt. If she hadn't shown up tonight, he would have sought her out because there was no way he could let a passion like theirs die out. The handful of women he'd slept with in his thirty-five years didn't hold a candle to Billie Cartwright. No one had ever excited him with just the mere fluttering of their eyes.

"God, I missed you," he muttered against her lips.

She buried her fingers in his hair with a smile. "I missed you too, but you knew I wouldn't be able to stay away from this delicious cock."

"I was hoping," he growled, covering her plump lips once more, this time going slow. He didn't want to rush the moment. If Grant had his way, this would never end.

He ground his dick against the juncture of her thighs, and then wedged one knee between hers, increasing the intimacy of their embrace. His body was on fire for her. Half dragging and half carrying her, Grant took her to the bed and covered her body with his.

Her nipples pressed lovingly against his cheek. He stroked her hair, reveling in the soft texture of it. Billie looked at him with lust filled eyes, her lips slightly parted. "Don't keep me waiting this long again."

"I won't," she whispered, pulling his head down to hers.

Her tongue darted between his lips, sweeping and exploring. It was a heady sensation to be on the receiving end of such a fervent kiss. He allowed her to take charge, enjoying the feel of her being beneath him.

When she finally tore her mouth away from his, they both panted for breath. "Mmm, I must have been crazy to think I could go without making love with you."

He chuckled. "I was thinking the same thing."

"You sounded pretty sure that I'd come back."

"Like I said, if you didn't I'd have come for you. There'd be no way you could stop me from having you."

"And what if I wouldn't have been willing?"

"Oh, you would have been willing," he said confidently, nuzzling her neck.

Billie wiggled her eyebrows playfully. "Yeah? And what would you have done to ensure my willingness?"

"First, I would have done this." Grant outlined the shell of her ear with his tongue before taking the lobe into his mouth. Damn, even her ears were tasty. Again he couldn't help but think that no one came close to making him feel what Billie did. He nipped the sensitive cartilage until she moaned and trembled. Grant lifted his head with a satisfied smile touching his lips.

Billie smiled back. "I liked that. What else would you have done to get me in the mood?"

"So you mean that wasn't enough?"

"It was a nice start."

"Then I would have done this." His teeth grazed her neck as he slid down her body and settled between her thighs. Cupping her luscious golden globes in his palms, he sucked one ardent tip into his mouth.

Her fingers tightened in his hair, holding him against her breast. "Oh God, that feels so good. Grant, I love what you do to me."

He laved and licked the tight peak as she arched her back, pressing herself deeper into his mouth. She was so beautifully responsive. Each whimper, sigh and moan only made his cock that much harder. He gave her other breast the same treatment. Billie writhed beneath him as if she couldn't control herself, and he loved it.

She bucked her pelvis against him. Grant lifted his head, running his hand down the side of her body to rest on her hip. "I definitely would have done this." He lifted himself up just enough to slip his hand between her legs. Then inserting two fingers inside her damp channel, he watched her reaction.

Billie gasped, her eyes widening. "Grant!"

He pulled his fingers out to the tip then pushed them back into her. He smiled as she lifted her hips. "That's it, baby. Go with it."

"I don't think I can take much more of this. I need that cock right now."

"I want to play with you first, my sweet. Your pussy is so responsive, so fucking wet. It was made just for me, and I want to hear you say it."

"This pussy belongs to you and only you, Grant."

"You're damn right it does." He finger fucked her and covered her mouth again, his tongue mimicking the motion of his hands.

She groaned and sighed. "Please, fuck me," she begged passionately.

How could he resist that? He slowly removed his fingers from her sopping cunt, and rolled off of her. When he made a move to get off the bed, she grabbed his wrist.

"Where are you going?"

"I need to get a condom."

"No, I want it raw."

"Billie, are you sure?"

She sat up and cupped his face before giving him a lingering kiss. "Yes, I'm sure. I want to feel your skin against mine. I wanted it the first time but wasn't sure how to ask you."

"But --"

"Don't try to overanalyze it. Just give me some of that yummy unsheathed cock."

There was no arguing with that. "What the lady wants, the lady gets." He gently parted her thighs and settled himself between them.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang. What the hell?

"Ignore it, Grant. Just fuck me."

The doorbell rang again.

More than anything he wanted to ignore it as she asked, but the person doing the ringing didn't seem like they'd go away. Dammit!

He looked down to see that Billie had disappeared. "Billie?"

The doorbell rang yet again. Shit.

The next thing he knew, Grant found himself entangled in his sheets, his body drenched with sweat. "No! No! No!"

It had all been a dream, but the ringing of his doorbell certainly wasn't.

Who the fuck was that at this hour of the night? He had half a mind to ignore it but realized it could be an emergency. Reluctantly he slid out of bed and grabbed a robe to cover his nudity.

The bell wouldn't stop ringing. "Hold on!" he yelled. Whoever the culprit was, they were going to get an earful.

He disabled his security alarm and opened the door, anger driving his action. "You've a lot of goddamn ner -- Billie? What are you doing here?"

He pinched himself to make sure it was really her standing there. Then he noticed the mascara running down her face. Her hair, which was always a riot of soft waves and curls, seemed flat and lifeless. She looked a mess.

"I'm sorry to disturb you so late in the night, but I... I didn't know where to turn, who to turn to. And even if I did, they wouldn't believe me." To his surprise, she broke down.

Grant wasn't good at dealing with crying women, but this wasn't just any woman, it was Billie. He stepped forward and took her into his arms. Stroking her hair, he rocked her while she sobbed as though her heart was breaking. "Shh, whatever it is, we'll work it out."

She sniffed, trying to catch her breath. "I don't know if this *can* be worked out. Oh, God, I knew she was getting in over her head, but I didn't think anything like this would happen. It's that goddamn will. Grant, I don't know how to save her."

"You're not making any sense, Billie. Come inside and we'll talk about this." He led her into the house and took her to the living room. It was hard not to think about what they'd done on this very couch the last time they'd been together, but he pushed the carnal thoughts to the back of his mind.

"Let me go get you some brandy to calm your nerves."

"I don't want anything to drink."

"Don't argue, Billie. You're obviously distressed and you need something to take the edge off." She looked like she wanted to protest, but he raised his hand to halt her words. "I insist."

She must have realized that she was fighting a losing battle so she simply nodded.

He went to his bar and poured her a drink. When Grant walked back to her, she was clutching a small leather book that looked like a journal to her breast. It looked suspiciously like the book that had been among her aunt's effects. He'd find out soon enough, but first he needed to calm her down.

Handing her the drink, Grant sat next to her. "You don't have to finish it, but I'd like you to at least take a couple sips."

"You're such a bully," she muttered.

"I'm a bully who cares, now drink." He watched her as she followed his orders. When she'd imbibed an amount that he was satisfied with, he took the glass from Billie's trembling hand and set it down on the table.

"Thank you. I feel better already."

Grant waited until he felt Billie was sufficiently calm before prompting her to speak. "Do you want to tell me your story? What's upset you, honey?"

"Gran was murdered last week."

"I'm very sorry to hear that. How awful for you."

"That's not the worst part. After the funeral today, the police came to arrest Felicity. They say she did it, but I know that isn't true. The problem is that Felicity was the only one in the house when Gran was murdered, or so they're saying. I have to prove her innocence somehow, and you're her only hope."

Grant's jaw dropped. He didn't know what to expect, but it certainly hadn't been this. From his meetings with Felicity he knew she was incredibly lazy, thinking the world owed her something, but murder? She just didn't seem the type. It was no wonder Billie was in such a state of distress.

"Honey, I'll do everything I can to help you, but I'm an estate attorney. I could recommend some very good criminal attorneys if you need numbers."

"No. I don't want another attorney, I need you. If I told anyone else my story, they'd laugh me out of their office."

"If your story is so out there, what makes you think I'd be any different?"

"Because... I believe I can trust you."

That admission warmed his heart. That she'd come to him in her time of crisis meant she wasn't as adverse to him as he'd originally thought. He'd mull all this over later, but first he had to figure things out. "Tell me everything from the beginning."

"You promise you'll listen without judgment? What I have to tell you will test your limits of belief. I know it did mine in the beginning. If I hadn't witnessed it firsthand, I would still doubt it."

"Okay."

She gripped his arm, a look of desperation in her hazel eyes. "Promise me."

"I promise," he said firmly, responding to her need.

She searched his face for something, and then nodded with seeming satisfaction. Billie spun a tale that had him dropping his jaw in disbelief. What she told him couldn't possibly be real, but what reason did she have to lie about it? Wilhelmina's statements came to mind, and it made him wonder. No. It couldn't be, but things were suddenly starting to make sense.

"We were about to get in the car after Gran's casket was lowered into the ground, and two detectives came and arrested Felicity," she finished.

He tried to digest everything she'd told him.

"Say something, Grant."

"I'm not sure what you want me to say. You were right, that story is definitely beyond the realm of belief. You're talking about ancient family curses and demons. The Agrippa books are supposed to be stuff of legend."

"Don't you think I know that? I've struggled with this issue since Gran first told me about it, but I can't dispute the evil I felt when I was in that house. It was awful... and that smell. It was like hellfire."

Grant frowned. He'd smelled it too.

"Grant, is there something you aren't telling me? You know something, don't you?"

"When I was preparing your aunt's will, she was saying a lot of stuff about payback and how Harriet would have to deal with the book now. She mentioned demons, but I thought it was just the ramblings of a lonely old woman. I don't want to believe this, but I always got the creeps when I was in that house too."

"Apparently Felicity started visiting the house several weeks ago and the demon talked her into opening the book, promising her great wealth and freedom to do what she wanted. The temptation to not ever have to work was probably too great for her to resist."

"I was under the impression that your grandmother was a wealthy woman."

“She is, but she didn’t believe that anyone should have a free ride. She gave us both allowances, but once I started working I told her to keep the money because I didn’t need it. I was earning a good salary, and Gran didn’t charge for room and board. I’d paid off my car. Honestly, the only reason I never moved out was because I didn’t want to leave Gran alone to deal with Felicity. This is such an awful mess.”

Grant threw his arms around her shoulders and kissed her head. His heart truly went out to her, but he had a hard time grasping the concept of a demon attached to a book that gave good fortune at first and then caused great harm.

Not knowing where to begin, he started at the most logical part. “Tell me exactly what happened.”

“Gran wasn’t supposed to drive, but she took my car while we were in bed and went to Aunt Wilhelmina’s house to get rid of the book.”

“How did she propose to do that if a dangerous demon was attached to it?”

“She intended to burn the house down, but not before she confronted it. Felicity said the demon called out to her, and she drove to the house to stop Gran.”

“Was it accidental? Was there a struggle?”

“That’s just it. Felicity said the last thing she remembered was walking through the door, and then nothing. She woke up in the middle of the living room floor. When she made her way upstairs, she found Gran’s dead body. She’d been stabbed several times.”

“Stabbed by the demon?”

“It’s really hard to say because the demon is chained up, according to Felicity.”

“I guess it makes sense that the police arrested her as a suspect. What do you plan on doing?”

“I’ll have to post bail for her, of course. The hearing is tomorrow morning and I’m so scared.”

“Did they find fingerprints or the weapon?”

"I don't know what they found. The police wouldn't tell me anything. I have to prove her innocence. Felicity is many things, but a murderer isn't one of them. It's not like I can tell the police about the book because I'd be laughed out of the precinct."

"Yes, you probably would," he mused.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," she shot back, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

"I'm being realistic and you know it. What's that you're holding, by the way?"

She looked down at her lap. "Oh, this is what you gave me the last time we saw each other. It's a journal from Aunt Wilhelmina. She's quite explicit about certain things. It almost reads like a book of fiction, but I found something pretty interesting in it."

She flipped open a few pages and scrolled through a few paragraphs. "Here it is, listen to this.

" 'Earl, that's what I've named him, is a Mbwiri, an African sleep demon. Now I understand why Harriet started having those spells once she opened the book. She'd pass out whenever and wherever. There's a medical term for it, I'm sure, but I just can't think of what it is. Earl has been relentless lately in trying to get me to open that damn book. He won't let me get a good night's sleep without sending thoughts into my head. I fear I'll go crazy if the good Lord doesn't come and take me home soon'."

Grant's hand flew to his mouth. Wilhelmina had mentioned someone named Earl, but never in a million years would he have imagined that she'd been referring to a demon. "Is there something else in there that might give some kind of clue?"

"Yes, there are a couple passages that may be pertinent." She flipped through the pages again and stopped at a highlighted passage.

" 'I forgive Harriet for what she did. In part, I'm just as responsible for her behavior as she is. I shouldn't have coddled and took up for her all the time. She never really learned responsibility, but now she'll have to face what she's done. I plan on leaving this legacy to her descendants so that she'll have to confront the past and come to terms with it'."

Billie paused.

“What’s wrong?”

“Aunt Wilhelmina... she sounds a lot like me. The first time I read this, I was just skimming through, now I get it.”

He reached out and squeezed her hand. “I’m sure big sisters looking out for their younger siblings is as old as time.”

She nodded. “Yes, I suppose so, but her words touch me on so many levels. It’s funny, but Gran doesn’t strike me as the kind of person described here. For as long as I can remember, she’d tried to instill in us a strong work ethic. If I hadn’t heard her tell me how things were from her own mouth, I might not have believed this.”

“Maybe the guilt she felt at betraying her sister the way she did changed her. Sometimes life altering events will do that to you.”

“Maybe.” Looking back down on the page, Billie continued reading the journal.

“ ‘Little does Harriet know, I’ve been keeping tabs on her. It seems she’s turned her life around. Although she married a prosperous man, she does a lot of volunteer work, and it warms my heart to see that she seems to care about someone other than herself. It’s obvious that she adores her two granddaughters. I wish I could meet them, but the life I’ve been resigned to won’t allow that. Besides, when I’m gone they’ll know who I am soon enough. Harriet may not like it, but out of all the family we have left, Felicity and my namesake (I’m sure Harriet was behind that naming) are the only two who seem strong enough to handle this awesome responsibility. I’m worried about the younger one, but if she’s anything like her grandmother, she’ll eventually come through’.”

“That wasn’t very helpful.”

“Not really, but it gives a little bit of background at least. How about this? I found this bit in the back of the journal interesting. It seems like Aunt Wilhelmina had made a few discoveries before she passed away. Check this out.

“ ‘I may have found a way to stabilize Earl. It won’t get rid of him, but it would neutralize his powers and in essence put him in a very deep sleep for a long time.

Through further investigation, I found out that some of the damage done by opening the book can possibly be reversed, like the sleeping spell (narcolepsy). It's a dangerous thing to do because it involves touching him and that could be instant death in itself, but if I don't try, I could be dooming the Cartwright family for all eternity'."

"Does she mention this spell and what it involves?"

"I'm not sure, but there are strange markings in the back. Now that I look at them, it could be another language. It doesn't look like anything I've ever seen before. Can you make this out, Grant?"

He took the book she handed him and gazed at the writing Billie had pointed to. It looked like chicken scratches to him. "I don't know what to tell you. Maybe we can visit a friend of mine and determine whether or not this is a language she's familiar with."

Billie cocked one brow, looking at him questioningly. "She?"

"Yes, my friend is a linguist. She's fluent in five languages and speaks a little of just about everything. If anyone would know about this, she would."

It suddenly dawned on him that he'd heard a hint of pique in her voice. He liked knowing she was a bit jealous. Though he would rather have met up with her again in better circumstances, now that she was here with him he'd do whatever it took to help her through this, and whatever it took to keep her by his side.

Chapter Six

"Billie, you have to get me out of this hellhole. I don't belong here," Felicity cried, distress oozing from her every pore.

Seeing her sister like this broke Billie's heart. The usually impeccable Felicity was a mess. Her face hadn't been washed properly so she still wore caked on make-up. Her clothes looked dirty and rumpled, and her hair looked matted and tangled.

Billie reached over the table and took her sister's trembling hands in hers. "I'm working on it now. They've set your bail pretty high. I'm trying to get enough liquid capital to make that happen, hang in there."

"How can you calmly tell me to hang in there when the baboon in the cell next to me wants me to be her bitch? I don't want to be anyone's bitch. I'll die in here."

"Felicity, I'm trying hard. I should have the money for the bail bondsman by the end of the day." She left out the fact that she'd have to wipe out her entire savings and borrow some more money to do so.

"What about our inheritance? Surely Gran has left us enough money to take care of this."

"I wouldn't know. Estate issues are never settled this quickly. Maybe in the movies it happens, but this is real life. You're going to have to be patient because I'm doing the best I can."

Tears streamed from Felicity's eyes. "I know I sound like an ungrateful brat, but spending the night here has been a nightmare. Why would they think I'd kill Gran? I loved her. I couldn't even kill a fly. Besides, I wouldn't want to get all that blood on me. Gross." She shivered distastefully.

Trust her sister to get all princess-like, even when the situation was serious. "I know you didn't do it. Everything the detectives have collected against you has been

circumstantial. I just can't figure out why they'd arrest you on such flimsy evidence." Billie was careful not to mention the book, knowing how sensitive Felicity was about it.

Her sister, however, was more perceptive than Billie gave her credit for. "This is because of the book, isn't it? You tried to warn me, and Gran did as well, but I didn't want to listen." Felicity sniffed.

"There's really no point in playing the blame game now. What's done is done. What we have to work on is getting you out of here and proving your innocence. First, you're going to need to be completely honest with me. Are you willing to do that?"

Felicity nodded vigorously.

"Tell me where you were getting the money to make all those extravagant purchases."

The younger woman pursed her lips mutinously, folding her arms over her chest. "I don't know what that has to do with anything."

Billie sighed, exasperation shooting through her. Lord help her pea-brained sister. "Felicity, I'm not asking you this to be in your business, but every little bit of information helps. If you want my help, I need your complete cooperation. This isn't fun and games. This is real life, and you're facing a very serious charge," she said bluntly.

Felicity's face crumpled and she burst into tears. "You'll think less of me."

"Stop being silly and tell me. I could never think less of you. You're my sister, girl, and I love you. Please help me to help you."

"Okay, but you won't like it."

"I'm sure I won't, but I seriously doubt that will change things."

"I was gambling on racehorses. The guide told me to go to the race track."

"The one in Bensalem?"

"Yes, that's the one. He told me to pick Fancy Pants. No one expected him to win because the favorite, Strictly Business, was in the running to take the Triple Crown this year. Anyway, I placed everything I had on Fancy Pants. Strictly Business was actually in the race the entire time until something, it looked like a black dog, sped out in front

and tripped him up. The poor thing collided with several of the other horses, but Fancy Pants continued on to victory. I won a bundle.”

“Oh my God. I’d read in the papers that Strictly Business had broken his legs and would never race again. Oh my God. Oh my God. You were behind that? A lot of people lost a lot of money on that horse, and I’m not talking about the gamblers. I mean the owners and the trainers who invested their time in what they thought was a winner. Oh, Felicity. The paper said nothing about a dog running out on the track.”

With eyes downcast, Felicity mumbled, “I... I was the only one to see the dog, besides the horse obviously. At first I didn’t think anything of it, but as I was collecting my winnings someone told me that I had the devil’s own luck. I said I probably wouldn’t have won if it weren’t for that dog running in the horse’s path. He looked at me as if I had two heads. I knew right then and there that my guide was somehow involved but I ignored it, convincing myself that it was just a stupid horse.”

Billie bit her lip to keep herself from saying something scathing. After all, she’d promised Felicity that she wouldn’t judge. Knowing her sister, there was still something she was holding back. “Is that it?”

“No... well, I was on a winning streak and it kind of drew attention from some undesirables.”

“Undesirables?”

“Connected men.”

“Now isn’t the time to talk in riddles,” Billie sighed, growing impatient.

“The mob, dammit. Is that what you wanted to hear? I got attention from the mob. Okay, so now you know.”

“And?”

“And they thought I was some kind of psychic or something. They wanted me to work for them. I was so scared, but I asked the guide to help me pick names. So I gave them to Big Chuck, the leader. The thing is, all the horses I picked for them came out losers.”

"That makes no sense. If you were picking winners before, why would you suddenly come up with a bunch of losers?"

"The only thing I can think of is maybe the guide only works when it's for the person who opened the book. Needless to say, Big Chuck and the boys weren't happy. As a matter of fact, they were furious. They threatened to stab me in all my orifices if I didn't pay them back every penny they'd lost. I didn't want to be stabbed in the coochie, let alone anywhere else, so I didn't go back to the track. I figured out of sight, out of mind."

"Oh my God, Felicity, those kind of men don't let up. I wouldn't be surprised if they had something to do with Gran's murder. Did you tell the police?"

"Are you friggin' kidding me? Haven't you seen any mob movies? You don't snitch on the mob unless you want to go swimming with the fishes. I'm not crazy."

As far off base as Felicity was, Billie had to agree with her. Maybe it wouldn't be as dramatic as swimming with the fishes, maybe nothing would happen at all, but she wouldn't risk her sister's life.

She took a deep breath trying to digest this all. "Are you sure these guys are in the mob? They could just be pretending."

"Well, they said they worked for some big crime family in the city. It's not like I was going to question their credentials. They were big and mean. There were three of them."

"Maybe it would be best if you stayed here in jail, if only to keep you safe."

"No way. I need to blow this place. Did you know they have communal showers here? I'm too beautiful to go to prison. All the bull dykes would pass me around like a joint. Didn't I already tell you about Big Bertha who's been eyeing me like she wants me with a side of fries? Eww. I'm strictly dickly."

"Can we get back on track here, hon? And for the record, this is county jail. Real prison is much worse, so you're going to need to drop the princess act if you want to get out of here without stepping on any toes."

"But didn't you say you'd have me out tonight?"

"I'm going to certainly try. Grant's working on it for me."

Felicity wrinkled her nose. "Grant? Isn't he Aunt Willie's estate lawyer? I didn't know he was a criminal attorney."

"He isn't, but he has connections. Can you hold tight, and keep your thoughts and opinions to yourself? I know how you can be. Sometimes you come off as a bit of a snob to other people."

"Okay, I'll try, but could you answer me a question?"

"Sure?"

"What's up with you and Grant? You said his name all dreamy like. He is rather scrumptious."

"Felicity! This is a serious matter here."

"I know. Most definitely. Isn't getting laid by a hunky lawyer serious?"

Billie didn't know whether to strangle her sister or get up and leave. First of all, Felicity was facing several years in prison, and second, how in the world could she talk about Grant when she didn't know what was going on between them herself?

* * *

Billie looked up at him with her beautiful hazel eyes. "I can't thank you enough for helping me get Felicity out of jail, Grant. You've been wonderful through this entire ordeal." To his surprise, she stood on her tip toes and brushed her lips against his.

It took every ounce of willpower for him not to pull her against his body and fuck her senseless. He'd missed her like mad, and feeling her fragrant breath against his face was more than he or his cock could handle.

He grasped her chin in his hand. "You're welcome. I don't want you to think that I did this with some ulterior motive, but I could never say no. I've tried to analyze my feelings --"

Billie frowned, her eyebrows furrowing together. "Grant, we shouldn't be talking about this. It's not a good time."

"When will it be a good time? If you had your way it would be never. I'm not going to pretend that I don't care about you because I do, very much. And what's more,

you feel more for me than you're letting on. I'm the one you came to when things fell apart in your world. I'm the one who made you cry out in passion. It was my name you screamed over and over again."

Grant clutched her forearms. "Don't deny it, Billie. This can't be wrong. I've dreamed about you. There have been so many nights when I'd wake up so damn hard I ached."

"I... I dreamed about you too, but we can't do this, Grant. You have your life and I have mine. I have too many responsibilities."

"You can't be your sister's keeper for the rest of your life, Billie. Give us a chance."

"Grant --"

"Don't say anything. Just feel." His lips grazed the side of her neck. Billie's skin was so soft. Her scent drove him wild.

"Grant, we shouldn't be doing this. Felicity is upstairs sleeping. She could come down here at anytime."

He licked her lips. "Mmm. You said the operative words -- she's sleeping. Let me just have this."

As if she were fighting an internal battle, Billie looked uncertain, but he took the choice from her, capturing her plump lips with his. She tasted delicious. He cupped her face as he slid his tongue into the deep recesses of her mouth.

With a groan, Billie threw her arms around him in surrender and he knew then that he could never let her go after this. She could protest all she wanted, but he'd fight for her. They belonged together. This wasn't just sex. There was nothing about her that didn't turn him on, her laugh, her smile, or the way she moved her body against his.

Grant pulled his mouth away just enough to look down at her. He drank in her beauty, committing it to memory. This time it was no dream. The scent of her flowery perfume was intoxicating. "You're so lovely. I can't get enough of you." Bending down, he lifted her into his arms and carried her the short distance to the couch.

He sat down, situating her on his lap. Burying his face in her neck, he rubbed his hand up and down her ridged spine. "So warm, so soft. You turn me on, lady."

"I've fought this for too long, Grant. Touch me please."

"You don't have to ask me twice," he said in a rough whisper.

With deft fingers he unbuttoned her blouse, pressing kisses against each inch of skin he exposed. An explosive heat seared through him like wildfire to feel her softness beneath his slow caress.

He loved the way her deep caramel skin looked against his pale hand. It made quite an erotic sight. Grant never knew that something so simple could be so sensual. Pushing her top off her delicately curved shoulders, he traced her collarbone with his tongue.

Billie's fingers threaded through his hair. "Oh, Grant, that feels so good."

"Tell me what you want to do next," he commanded gently.

"I want you to take my nipples in your mouth."

He laughed. "You must have read my mind because that's exactly what I wanted to do." Grant unclasped her bra. "Thank you."

She frowned with apparent confusion. "For what?"

"For having such beautiful breasts for me to do this to." He nuzzled each golden mound, unable to get enough of her silky smooth skin against his face. He tweaked the pert tips between his fingers and thumb, applying enough pressure to make her gasp.

Her fingers tightened in his hair. "Mmm, don't stop," Billie moaned, wiggling in his lap. Her rounded backside rubbed against his erection making it damn near uncomfortable to stay like this without throwing her onto the floor and fucking her senseless.

He opened his mouth over one full breast and gently sucked. Billie pressed herself against him, but he kept one hand firmly on a shapely thigh to still her movements. As appealing as the idea of a fast fuck was, Grant wanted to take his time. He'd waited too long to rush this.

"Oh, Grant, I must have been crazy to think I could go without your touch," she moaned softly, saying almost the exact same words from his dream.

He raised his hand and cupped her free breast, squeezing and molding it.

While he wanted to take things slow, Billie obviously had other ideas. She grasped his shirt in two hands and pulled it apart. Buttons flew everywhere, but he didn't care about anything other than the touch of her hands against him.

Pressing her palms against his chest, Billie lowered her head and began to nibble and suck on his ear. Her hot, moist tongue danced along the sensitive lobe, sending shivers of delight through his loins. He couldn't remember a time when his cock had been so hard.

His need for her was a blazing inferno, threatening to consume them both. Grant tried to concentrate on teasing and sucking her lovely breasts, but Billie was making it difficult.

"This time, I'm going to taste you," she whispered. She pulled away from him, and slid off the couch before settling her body between his thighs.

"Billie, what are you doing?"

Her smile widened, and a seductive gleam twinkled in her beautiful eyes. "Something I've been dying to do since I first laid eyes on you." She pressed a kiss against his chest. She ran her fingertips along the flat disk of each nipple, making him shiver.

"You don't know what you're starting." Even as he said the words, Grant realized that his statement wasn't true. She knew exactly what she was doing.

"I love your big hard chest with all this sexy hair covering it. Did I mention that you have a sexy body?"

Grant chuckled. "Isn't that my line?"

"We'll worry about who says what later."

"Is this the same woman who didn't want to do anything because she didn't want to wake her sister?" he teased.

Billie pressed a finger against his lips. "Hasn't anyone ever told you not to look a gift horse in the mouth?" She helped him out of his shirt before fumbling with the buttons on his pants.

Grant grasped her shoulders to stop her. "You don't have to do this."

"I know, but I want to. Now raise your hips."

He did as he was told, allowing her to slide his boxers down as well. Grant thought he'd lose his mind when she wrapped her slender fingers around his cock. An involuntary spasm shook his body.

"You're so big, Grant. Your cock feels good inside of my pussy. I'm eager to find out what it tastes like." Billie pressed her lips to the mushroom shaped tip.

She'd barely done anything to him and already Grant found himself perilously close to coming right then and there. The raw desire to have her lips around his dick was strong enough to make him pant. "Suck it. I don't think I can take any more of your teasing, sweetheart."

"Ah, so now you know how it feels when the shoe is on the other foot. Ask me nicely."

"Bitch."

She giggled. "Maybe so, but I want you to beg for it and know how it feels to be sexually tortured, to want something so much you think you'll die."

Grant's will was weak when it came to Billie. "Please, do it." He lifted his hips in desperation.

"Well, since you asked so nicely." She opened her mouth and slowly slid her lips over his stiff member a little bit at a time.

He grasped her head on both sides. "That's it, baby. Just like that," he groaned, loving the feeling of her mouth on the most sensitized part of his body.

She gently cupped his balls, fondling and giving them a gentle squeeze. Grant's eyes rolled toward the back of his head. If he died in this very moment, it would be from pleasure.

Her head bobbed up and down over his cock, slowly at first, then faster. The wonderful feel of her lips clinging so tightly around his dick was like hot wet velvet. He bucked his hips, careful not to thrust too hard.

Letting out a deep sigh of pleasure, he stroked her hair. He loved the way she wore it and preferred this to a long slinky do. This was much sexier and exotic.

Smoldering waves of heat beat at the base of his balls, slowly inching up until his entire body shook. "Oh God, Billie, that's it. Suck it just like that, sweetheart. Your mouth feels wonderful," he groaned.

Billie moaned around his cock, the humming sensation sending another jolt of sensation through him. It felt like the room temperature had been turned up several degrees. He was getting closer and closer to an explosion. Grant's breath came out in halting gasps. "Billie, Billie, Billie."

He knew if she continued he'd finish in her mouth. Pushing at her shoulders, he tried to dislodge her, but she was having none of that. Her grip tightened on his cock, and her mouth moved up and down his member even faster.

"Billie, if you keep this up, I'm going to come in your mouth."

She looked up at him, still firmly latched on, and then he knew that it was exactly what she wanted to happen. Her unselfish quest to pleasure him gave him a warm feeling. Leaning back on the couch, he closed his eyes and let her take over as he enjoyed the way she worked his dick like a skilled courtesan.

Tumultuous ripples of lust shot through every single nerve ending, culminating into a volcanic eruption of passion. "Billie," Grant cried out as he shot his seed into her mouth.

She slurped his essence in greedy, sucking motions. When she finally lifted her head, Grant watched as her tongue slid seductively over full juicy lips. A satisfied smile tugged at the corners of her mouth. "Did you like that?"

"Do you even have to ask? Come here," he growled, pulling her against him to give her a hungry kiss. The bittersweet taste of his come mingled with her own still lay

on her tongue. She returned his kiss with a savage need, pressing her bare breasts against his naked chest. The skin on skin friction made his cock hard all over again.

Grant cupped the curve of her cheek, trying to catch his breath. "Do you know what I want now?"

"Does it start with a P and end with a Y?"

"You got it in one. So how about sliding off those panties and sitting on my cock? It's been missing you like crazy."

"I think I can arrange a reunion." Billie stood up before him, hiking her mini jean skirt over curvy hips. Then she began to slide down her lacy pink panties.

"No, take it slowly, baby. I want to enjoy this beautiful picture. There's nothing sexier than watching a woman slowly undress."

She raised a dark brow as she finished undressing. "Any woman or just me?"

"Just you." He leaned forward and slid his finger along her damp slit.

She shivered and moaned. "Grant."

"You're already wet and ready for me. Did it turn you on sucking my cock?"

She nodded vigorously. "Oh, yeah."

Grant slipped his middle finger into her tight cunt. He slowly eased it out, then slid it into his mouth. "Delicious." Billie watched as though mesmerized as he repeated the motion, but this time he ran his dew-drenched finger across her bottom lip. "Lick it."

Her pink tongue shot out and slid along her naked bottom lip. Grant could wait no longer. He had to be inside of her now. Crooking his finger at her, he growled, "Get over here and sit on my cock."

Without hesitation she straddled his lap, fitting herself over him until his dick rested at her entrance. He parted the slick folds of her labia, making it easier as her cunt slowly swallowed him inch by burning inch.

"Oh," she gasped. "It's so deep inside of me."

When she was seated firmly on him, he held her waist to keep her still, savoring the decadent feel of her hot wet pussy.

“Lean back a little, sweetheart. I want to suck on your luscious breasts as you ride me.”

Billie seemed to be of the same mind before she shut her eyes tightly and moaned as she ground herself over him. Gripping him by the shoulders, she slowly moved up and down his shaft. A tantalizing frisson of sensation made him groan against the hollow of her neck.

She clenched her pussy muscles around his cock, gripping and sucking it inside of her cunt like a vacuum. His body responded to her in mounting, pulsating waves of fire. Grant cupped her breasts and pushed them together. He took turns laving and licking each turgid tip.

Billie threw back her head to reveal the golden curve of her neck. “Grant!” His name tore from her throat.

He loved the way she breathlessly said his name. “Say my name again, Billie.”

She looked at him with passion-laden eyes. “Grant. Grant. Grant,” Billie chanted as she bounced up and down on his cock faster, her ass slapping against his thighs.

He gripped her hips, digging his fingers into soft flesh, so close to another explosive peak, but waiting for her. When he went to heaven this time, he wanted Billie to come along for the ride.

Their bodies rubbed, ground and slid against each other until Billie screamed her release. “Oh God, I’m coming!”

Swiftly he covered her mouth, capturing that scream, as he reached his own tumultuous peak. He shot his seed into her thirsty cunt as she clung to him. Her head fell against his shoulder like a tired rag doll, and it suddenly occurred to him that he hadn’t used a condom.

“Shit!” he muttered. Although there was nothing like the delicious stimulation of raw condomless sex, the last thing he wanted to do was put Billie at risk for an unwanted pregnancy.

Billie raised her head, worry replacing the passion in her hazel eyes. “What’s wrong?”

"We didn't use protection."

"Oh my goodness. That's the first time I've done it without protection. I guess I got so caught up in what we were doing. Should I be worried? Do you have any STDs I should know about?"

"No. I last had myself tested a few months back. I take my health very seriously."

"I do too. With having to worry about Felicity all the time, getting sick is the last thing I need."

"What about pregnancy?" As he asked the question, Grant realized the thought of Billie carrying his child was not unwelcome. He quickly pushed that image out of his mind.

"What about it? I've been on the pill since I was sixteen. This is a risk we shouldn't have taken, but I don't regret it. Do you?"

"Hell no." He paused, studying her lovely face. "Where do we go from here?"

"What do you mean? We'll clear my sister's name, of course."

Grant felt like he'd been slapped in the face. Again, how could she be so callous about what they'd shared? "Billie, stop playing games. You know what I'm talking about."

She sighed, wrapping her arms around his neck and resting her forehead against his. "Grant, I think we both needed what happened tonight, and while what we had was... well, words just can't describe it. But until things are resolved with Felicity, I can't begin to even think about you and me. Besides, for all we know, this could be just really good sex --"

"Don't say it, Billie. Don't you dare say it."

"Can't we enjoy what we have now and leave it at that?" she pleaded.

He would have protested, but Billie covered his mouth with hers. There would come a time when she'd no longer be able to fob him off.

Chapter Seven

"Are you sure this is going to work? I mean, Big Chuck and his boys have some very powerful allies. There could be retaliation," Felicity said, sounding like a nervous wreck. She nibbled her thumbnail, her eyes darting from side to side as if she expected someone to jump out at them at any minute.

"Relax, Felicity. Grant's done his research. We're more connected to a crime family than Big Chuck."

"But how can he be so sure? If this goes wrong, someone could come looking for me -- I mean us. I can't swim!"

"What's your fascination with swimming with the fishes? Sheesh, woman. As I said, he did some asking around, pulled a few strings, and found out Chuck DeFranco used to run numbers for the Farinella family, but he was a low man on the totem pole. Chuck started thinking he was bigger than what he was and pissed off one of the head guys. From what Grant has told me, he's lucky to even be alive. Now that the head of that family has died, his son has taken over. Chuck believes he can wiggle his way back in through the son."

"Has it worked?" Felicity asked.

"As far as Grant's sources have confirmed, they've been seen talking but nothing more. The only connections DeFranco has are in his mind, so when he comes here and our plan succeeds, then no one will miss him."

"You sound so sure that it'll work."

Billie sighed. She wasn't sure, but failure wasn't an option. She had to ensure her sister's safety. What she didn't tell Felicity was that even though Big Chuck didn't have mafia connections like he claimed, it still didn't make him less dangerous. He had a reputation for kicking ass and asking questions later. He was a suspect in four different

murders. Since there'd been no evidence to link him, nothing had been done. Well, that was about to change.

Billie lifted Felicity's hand and squeezed it in hers. "You're going to have to have a little faith. If you do everything as planned, we'll get them."

"Don't you feel a little bad about leading these guys to certain doom? I mean, our guide, he doesn't like outsiders. They could get seriously hurt."

"Better them than you. Now, are you going to go along with the plan or will you chicken out? If that happens, then we might as well just sell everything we own to give them what they want."

"I can't afford to give them two million dollars!"

"Exactly. Not only that, you'd still be a suspect for Gran's murder. I went to the house earlier and the equipment is set up."

"You seem so sure that he'll confess."

"His type usually likes to brag about their handiwork."

Felicity giggled. "Now who's the one who's been watching too many movies?"

A smile tugged at the corner of Billie's lips. "I suppose I have. Are you ready? They should be here any minute."

Taking a deep breath, Felicity slid out of the car. "I'm as ready as I'll ever be. I can't believe we're going to do this."

Nor can I, Billie thought as she got out of her car and followed her sister into the sinister old Victorian house. This place would always give her the heebie jeebies, and nothing would change that.

She gulped as she stepped over the threshold. "Felicity, you stay down here and wait for Big Chuck and his boys to show up. I'll go upstairs to... you know."

Her sister nodded, fidgeting nervously.

Billie silently prayed for the strength to go through with this. If all went according to plan, Grant would be there within an hour to take care of the clean up. Her thoughts drifted to him as she mounted the stairs. She couldn't have done this without him.

She could no longer fight what she'd known from the very minute they'd set eyes on each other. She was falling for him big time, and it scared the hell out of her.

Billie had been hurt by her last boyfriend who decided he wanted someone who would devote more attention to him and not try to mother her sister all the time. Grant had already made it clear to her that he wasn't happy about the way she was constantly running to Felicity's rescue, so maybe a relationship wouldn't be possible.

Perhaps it was for the best anyway, because once this ordeal was over someone would have to be the Guardian of the book. Felicity had already proven she didn't have the will to do it. Billie had thought it over and becoming the Guardian would probably be the right thing to do.

As Billie continued to trudge up the stairs, a sense of doom swept through her. The sulfurous fumes wafted to her nostrils, threatening to choke her. It was nearly unbearable. How was Felicity able to come up here so many times without passing out?

She took a deep breath when she reached the big oak door of the attic and then opened it. This was the first time Billie had stepped foot in this room and she hoped it would be the last. Her eyes widened in horror at the sight before her.

Hanging from the ceiling was a large brown leather book about the size of a tombstone. Chains lay at its bottom. It almost seemed to be watching her, beckoning her to read what lay within it. It was menacing, as though it were alive. The text on the cover looked like it had been written in blood.

She cringed, then a chill raced up her spine as she felt a malevolent pair of eyes staring at her.

Lifting her head, Billie clutched the gold cross she wore around her neck. When she met a pair of glowing yellow eyes, she pushed her fist against her mouth to keep herself from screaming. The thing was a monster that had to be at least six feet tall with broad shoulders and an arm span that stretched across the ceiling like a crucified prophet.

The demon was suspended by chains and leather straps from the ceiling, a grim smile on its brown lipless face. An essence she couldn't explain seemed to surround

him. Long horns curled at the tips protruded from the top of his head. He had a triangular shaped face. Its dark body was long and slender with scaly skin. His smile widened to reveal rows of pointed yellow teeth, like a shark's. He flexed incredibly long fingers tipped with fingernails that looked as though they could slice through steel.

Billie's eyes slid over the rest of the creature. Bile rose to her throat as she saw an erection the size of her forearm. Seeing the demon in an aroused state made her wonder what Felicity had been up to with it.

"Listen here, Earl. When I let you down, you'd better behave. I have a knife in my pocket and I'm not afraid to use it." She knew it probably wouldn't do any good against this creature, but she wanted him to know that she was no pushover.

Open the book. Let me reveal the wondrous power of earth to you. I can give you anything your heart desires... anything, Wilhelmina Cartwright.

She clutched her head against his telepathic communication. "Cut it out, Earl. I'm not going to open the book. I only want one thing from you."

You'll never have to worry about your selfish sister again. Grant can be yours.

How the hell did he know about all this?

Duh, he was a demon. Of course he'd know about this.

If she didn't have her sister around, maybe she could have more of a life, more time to herself and more time with Grant. Hell, she could probably have been married with kids of her own without her useless sister.

She pushed the wicked thoughts out of her mind. This was exactly what he wanted her to think. There was no way she'd stray from her course. "Nice try, Earl, but it's not going to work."

Billie produced a skeleton key that had been left in Aunt Wilhelmina's effects. Saying a silent prayer, she undid the lock on his wrist and ducked as he took a swipe at her. She then unlocked his ankles and then his other wrist. She stood completely still as he pounced at her. If her Aunt Wilhelmina's journal was to be believed, then the demon wouldn't harm her as long as she remained calm and showed no fear. The latter was easier said than done.

She felt like Ripley in *Alien* when the alien was only inches from her face. When Earl's long forked tongue snaked forward and licked her cheek, it took every ounce of willpower within her not to pass out. The rancid smell of his hot breath made it feel like her face would melt. She stood as still as possible while he touched her. When he grew tired of his game, Earl sniffed the air. The slit in his face turned down. Was it possible for something without lips to frown?

Suddenly a scream filled the air.

Felicity.

It had to be Big Chuck, right on schedule. Without hesitation, Billie turned on her heels, dashed out the door and bounded down the stairs two at a time. To her horror, she was in time to see two large men in black leather jackets each holding one of Felicity's arms while a little guy who couldn't be more than five feet tall stood in front of her sister with a knife against her throat.

That couldn't be Big Chuck. If Felicity wasn't in grave danger, Billie would have laughed at the irony of this shrimpy little fuck with a name bigger than him. What the hell?

"I'm going to fucking cut your tits off, you black cunt, if you don't come up with my fucking money. You made me look like a fool in front of my associates. It could have been my way back in. Now what's it going to be, Brown Sugar? You gonna give me back my money, or do I have to gut you like I did your dear old grandma?" He rammed a fist into Felicity's stomach with his free hand.

Billie gasped at how easily the confession fell from his lips. So her suspicions were correct. Somehow they'd figured out the location the old house, probably by following Felicity. When they'd actually gone to collect, it was the day that Gran decided to burn the house down. Gran must have fought them, and they'd killed her to deliver a message to Felicity. Gran was probably dead when Felicity showed up. Then her sister most likely conked out from one of her episodes. It all made sense now.

Billie ran into the room and knocked the little man off balance. "Leave her alone, you big bully!" she screamed, feeling like a protective mother lion.

“What the fuck?” Big Chuck cried out as he hit the floor.

The two goons let go of Felicity and came charging at Billie who turned to run up the stairs. She'd nearly made it to the top when a hand reached out and grabbed her ankle. Billie went crashing down on her face, the impact sending all the wind from her lungs.

Oh my God, I might not make it, she thought as the goon pulled her down the stairs.

No, she had to make it. She couldn't fail.

She kicked out with her other foot and connected with something solid.

“Oof,” a deep voice cried out.

When he released her ankle, Billie scrambled up the rest of the stairs and crawled to the second flight where Earl stood with those menacingly glowing eyes of his. His mouth had pulled back in a snarl. The minute he caught sight of the goon behind her, like an agile athlete he soared over Billie's head and flew at the thug.

Billie watched as Earl slashed him with sharp claws. Holding his arms up to protect his face, the man screamed in agony. Blood flew everywhere.

“What the fuck is going on?” Big Chuck stormed up the stairs and his eyes widened in horror at what he saw.

Earl released a primal scream, sounding banshee-like. Big Chuck pulled out a gun from the waist of his pants and aimed at the demon. Shots rang out but Earl's tough hide repelled the bullets. Chuck continued to shoot, and this seemed to make Earl angry. Lifting his horned head, the demon stood up to his full height of nearly seven feet. Billie couldn't have moved if she wanted to. The little man backed down.

“Easy. Be a good creature. I don't want any trouble.” Chuck turned around, making a mad dash down the stairs, but the demon pushed his victim aside and went after the little goon.

Big Chuck screamed as Earl hit him like a pile-driver. The sickening sound of bones cracking filled the air. Felicity screamed. The demon picked up Chuck's body and

slammed him on the floor repeatedly like a rag doll. By now the little man was long dead.

Billie fought to not throw up. Seeming to realize that the same fate awaited him if he stuck around, the third thug ran out of the house so fast it was as if he'd channeled Carl Lewis. The first goon on the stairs was surprisingly still alive. He crawled to the door while Earl was distracted with using Chuck's body like a throw pillow. Billie had to look away from the gruesome sight.

At that moment Grant walked into the room, a big metal pentagram in his hand. Earl froze and lifted his head. The demon rubbed his claws together and eyed the newcomer with a gleam of expectation in his eyes.

Grant held up the pentagram and yelled, "Now, Billie. Say it now."

When Earl would have flown at him, Billie rushed toward him and grasped the demon's arm, and began to chant the spell she'd learned in an ancient language older than Latin itself. "Beelzebub, touch your son so that he may sleep for thousands of years to come. I invoke thee. *Uhweod skidhe soides wewsod doiem. Uhweod skidhe soides wewsod doiem. Uhweod skidhe soides wewsod doiem. Uhweod skidhe soides wewsod doiem.*"

Earl tried to pull out of her grip, but the spell must have weakened him. Billie closed her eyes tight and chanted the words over and over again. A scream erupted, shaking the entire house. She knew Earl was fighting it, but there was no turning back now. She let go of him then and backed away. The demonic howlings were loud at first, then slowly subsided with a loud thud.

When the room was silent once more, she opened her eyes. Grant, who was white as a sheet, fell to his knees and Felicity broke into sobs. Earl lay sprawled out on the floor, motionless. She knew he wasn't dead, but in a deep sleep. He'd only wake once the spell was over or if someone opened the book.

Relief soared through her entire being, then she passed out.

Chapter Eight

Grant saw Felicity's cherry red convertible parked out in front of her house and was relieved that she was home. This would be the only chance he'd get to talk to her without Billie around. He knocked on the door and waited nearly five minutes before she answered.

How anyone could still be in bed at noon on a weekday was beyond him. "Grant! What are you doing here? Billie won't be home until five thirty." Felicity yawned, pulling her terry cloth robe together.

He thought that she would have learned something after the ordeal she'd gone through, but he should have known better. Maybe Billie was willing to sacrifice the rest of her life for the young woman, who he frankly thought could take care of herself, but he'd be damned if she would. He loved her and wasn't about to let anything get in the way of that.

"That's good because I wanted to speak with you."

The young woman frowned. "Me? What do you want to talk to me about?"

He forced a smile onto his face. "May I come in?"

"Oh yeah, sure." She stood back, allowing him admittance.

The place was certainly cleaner than the last time he'd found Felicity here on her own, and he couldn't help commenting. "The place looks nice."

"Billie's hired a cleaning service to come in a couple times a week. She knows I'm hopeless with domestic work and as she's... well you know. I'm going to need all the help I can get. It's going to be weird living in this big old house by myself. We may sell it and buy me a smaller place, but this house has sentimental value, you know."

"I can imagine. Actually that's kind of what I wanted to talk about," he said, taking a seat on the couch she'd gestured to.

“About selling this house?”

“No. I think you know what I’ve come over here to talk to you about, Felicity.”

She looked down at her bare feet. “It was Billie’s decision. You two have been seeing each other for a bit now. I’m sure you’ve already figured out that once she makes up her mind to do something she’ll do it.”

“Which is rather convenient for you, isn’t it?”

Hazel eyes darted his way, resentment evident within their depths. “You never did like me, did you?”

“I wouldn’t say that. You’re a nice enough girl, but I certainly don’t like some of your characteristics.”

Her full lips twitched. If anyone would have seen Billie and Felicity side by side, most people would say that Felicity was the prettier of the two, but in Grant’s mind the younger woman couldn’t hold a candle to her sister. Billie was beautiful both inside and out. In the time Grant got to know her, he’d discovered the warm-hearted unselfish person Billie truly was. A woman like her didn’t come along every day.

Once they’d gotten the confession tape, minus the brutal killing, to the police, Felicity was cleared. The police did wonder where Big Chuck had disappeared to, but as neither one of his thugs was talking, they had to assume he’d left the country.

Grant was relieved it was all over, but according to Billie it was just beginning. When she told him that she was appointing herself as the book’s Guardian, at first he was okay with it until he found out that meant she’d isolate herself from everyone, including him. He couldn’t let that happen.

He knew she cared for him too, saw it in her eyes, yet again she was doing something so her sister wouldn’t have to. Now he was about to find out if he could appeal to Felicity’s unselfish side, if she even had one.

Felicity pouted. “But what business is it of yours anyway?”

“Think. You know I have a vested interest in this matter. Billie means a lot to me. I... I love your sister.” It was the first time he’d actually voiced the words and they felt so right. “All your life hasn’t she watched out for you, taken care of you, gotten you out

of scrapes? Had it not been for Billie, you'd still be in jail with a big lesbian girlfriend giving you a tattoo on your ass of her name."

Felicity shivered as though the imagery were too vivid. "Contrary to what you think of me, I am appreciative of Billie. I'm not just laying around the house now, if that's what you're thinking. I have a disability."

"Yes, I know about your narcolepsy diagnosis. You can't use that as a crutch. It's time to start taking some responsibility for yourself and stop depending on your sister so much."

"What you really want me to do is become Guardian of that book. I won't have much of a life," she whined.

Grant wanted to choke her but held himself in check. "Yet you're willing to condemn your sister to that life when she has an opportunity for happiness?"

Felicity crossed her arms and rolled her eyes. "With you I suppose?" she asked dryly.

"Yes, with me, damn it. I love her and I'm willing to fight for her. If you were to become the Guardian, you wouldn't have to worry about working. And although you couldn't have strange visitors constantly coming to the house, we'd visit you and take you out places."

"So basically, I'd be dependent on her no matter what? The only time I'd have human contact is when you two are able to visit? That sounds like an awful lonely existence."

"You're narcoleptic. How many places could you go without the fear of passing out? You're no longer allowed to drive, so you'd have to depend on others for transportation anyway." Grant sighed. This conversation was frustrating the hell out of him.

"Yes, but Billie is so much more responsible than me. What if I'm tempted to open the book again? I don't think I'd make a good Guardian at all. Besides, dealing with my condition is a trial enough. I never know when I'll pass out, and the doctor says this could be something I'll need to deal with for the rest of my life."

Grant stood up abruptly. He knew if he didn't get out of there, he would throttle her. "Felicity, do you hear yourself? It's you, you, you. What about Billie? Hasn't she already given you so much? Are you going to continue sucking her dry for the rest of your life? You claim to care about her but you certainly don't show it. I came here hoping I could appeal to your better nature, but it's become apparent to me that you don't have one. Don't bother seeing me out."

When he turned to leave, she grabbed his arm. "Grant, wait!"

He shrugged her slender hand off of him impatiently, but turned to see what she wanted. "What?"

"I... I did think about it, but I'm so scared. I don't know if I can handle it."

In that moment Felicity looked like a lost little girl, and it was hard for Grant to hate her. He sighed. "I know you are, but sometimes fear propels people to do great things. I doubt I'll be seeing you again, so good luck."

A tear escaped from her eye and she sniffed. "You sound like you actually mean that."

Grant leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. "I really do." She might be twenty-three years old, but she was still very much a spoiled child.

As he walked out of the house, Grant found it hard not to break down. He'd gone in there all piss and vinegar, with the arrogance of someone who wanted his way and his way alone.

How could he continue to fight for Billie's love when she wouldn't fight with him?

* * *

Billie couldn't take it anymore. She had to say something to Felicity. For once she had a chance at happiness with Grant. She couldn't just throw it away. But how would she approach her sister? Felicity would whine and cry.

Billie toughened her resolve. That was too damn bad because it was time for her to pay the piper. She pulled her car into the garage and steeled herself for a battle. She'd been a fool to turn Grant away when her heart screamed out her love for him. She'd

never met a more compassionate and wonderful man, not to mention the delicious passion he'd given her. There was no guarantee that they'd live happily ever after, but Billie didn't want to live the rest of her life in regret.

When she walked into the house the smell of home cooking wafted to her nostrils. Felicity didn't cook and there were no cars in the driveway so what was going on? "Felicity?" she called out.

To her surprise, Felicity came out of the kitchen with an apron on. "Hi, sis, how was work? I'm sure you're tired so why don't you go upstairs and freshen up? I'll have dinner ready."

Billie's jaw dropped. "Felicity, you don't cook."

"Just because I never wanted to cook doesn't mean I don't know how. I do know how to read, you know, and Gran had a great number of recipes lying around. Remember we used to help her cook when we were little girls. It was kind of fun getting dinner ready tonight. I think I'll have to do it more often."

Billie walked over to Felicity and touched her forehead to check for a fever. "Okay, who are you and what have you done with my sister?"

Felicity laughed. "It's me all right. Actually, there's something I wanted to talk to you about."

"Good, because there's something I wanted to talk to you about as well."

Her sister nodded. "Okay. Go wash your hands. Dinner's almost ready. I have a roast that's just about to come out."

Billie was too amazed to argue. Maybe it wouldn't be so difficult to convince Felicity to take on the responsibility of the book.

Whoa, don't get ahead of yourself, girl. Just because she's cooked one meal, it doesn't mean she's turned over a new leaf.

She washed up and changed out of her work clothes. True to her word, Felicity had dinner waiting for her when Billie came downstairs.

"What's the special occasion?" she asked as she took a seat.

Felicity took the seat opposite her. "Well, I figured since I'd be cooking for myself from now on, I'd better start getting used to it."

"That's what Melissa is for. When she comes to clean, she'll make you a couple casseroles to freeze. When you're ready to eat one, all you have to do is pop it in the oven."

With downcast eyes, Felicity shook her head. "No, I won't be needing Melissa's services."

"Why not?"

"Because I won't be here to appreciate it. I'll... I'll be at Aunt Wilhelmina's house, taking over Guardian duties."

Billie's jaw dropped. Was this the same Felicity who didn't like to get up before noon? The very one who would die before she was caught doing anything that resembled work?

"Okay, what's up? Have you come down with something? Did you find out you're dying?"

"No. Stop it. I'm being serious, Billie. I've decided to take on this responsibility because, frankly, I'm the logical choice. Now that I know the dangers of the book, I have no plans on opening it, and furthermore I owe this to you."

"You owe this to me?" Billie asked dumbly. The wind was taken out of her sails to hear Felicity say this.

"Yes. You've done so much for me. I've... I've been selfish and I'm not sure how you managed to put up with me. If I were you, I would have given up on me a long time ago."

"Felicity, you do know what you're saying, don't you?"

"Yes. I think for the first time in my life, I'm doing the right thing. I love you very much, and you deserve a life that doesn't revolve around me. Besides, Grant's a really decent guy. You should give him a shot."

Billie wasn't about to tell her that it was exactly what she intended to do. She'd always loved her sister, but now words couldn't express what she was feeling.

Overwhelmed with emotion, she got up, walked over to Felicity, and hugged her. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Very sure. I know you'll visit me, and the money left by Gran will sustain me comfortably. I never had any plans or goals in my life, but now I realize that this was my calling all along. I just needed a kick in the rear to make me see that."

"Won't you be scared?"

Felicity nodded. "A very wise person once told me that sometimes fear can propel people to do great things."

"That sounds like a very wise person indeed. Do I know him or her?"

A secretive smile crossed Felicity's face. "Oh yeah."

Epilogue

Billie knocked on Grant's door and waited for him to answer. No response. His car was out front so why didn't he come to the door?

She rang the doorbell again. Still nothing.

She walked around the house, looking through windows for movement. Billie saw him through the living room window, lying on the couch with one arm thrown over his eyes and the other stretched out, holding what looked like a bottle of pills.

Panic took over. She looked on the ground for something heavy and found a rock. With all her might, Billie threw the rock at the window, shattering it, and setting off the security alarm. Pushing the shards of glass out of the way, she climbed over the ledge and landed in the living room, only to see Grant standing over her with a stormy expression in his brown eyes.

"Billie? What the hell are you doing?"

"You're alive!" she squeaked, throwing her arms around him.

"Of course I'm alive. Why wouldn't I be?"

"I saw you lying on the couch with a bottle of pills in your hands. I thought... I thought..."

"You thought I tried to kill myself? I had a headache and was trying to sleep it off. What you saw in my hand was a bottle of over-the-counter aspirins."

"Oh." She felt like such a fool. "Well, I... uh, I wanted to see you."

"I'll say. What did you come over for? One last roll in the hay before you take on your Guardian duties?"

Billie shook her head. "No, actually I wanted to tell you that Felicity has decided to take on guardianship of the book. We can be together."

"I see. So now that she's decided to do this, you're willing for us to be together. I'm the consolation prize?" he asked with a bitter twist of his lips.

"No. It's not like that at all. I was going to tell her that she had to take over guardianship because I... I love you and I wasn't willing to throw away what we had. She just beat me to the punch. Grant, I've been so pigheaded. In my quest to look after Felicity, I almost threw away something special. Please tell me you haven't changed your mind."

He studied her for a long time, and then pulled her into his embrace. His mouth captured hers in a hungry kiss that took her breath away. When Grant finally lifted his head, Billie leaned weakly into him.

"What took you so long?" he asked, his gaze raking over her face as though he were committing it to memory.

"Just stupid I guess. I'm sorry about your window."

"Don't worry about it. It at least shows me that you care."

"Oh, I more than care. How's the head?"

He bent down to kiss her on the tip of her nose. "It's much better."

"Good. Now, about that roll in the hay..."

Billie felt safe and secure within the warmth of his arms. She didn't know what the future held, but she was ready to start living life on her own terms and with Grant by her side, nothing was impossible.

**Read about the other books in the
Deadly Sins Series from Changeling Press!**

Deadly Sins: Avarice by Reneé George

“...when thy strength is broken, beware of greed.” -- *Confucius*

Xiao Sun is the newest Guardian for the Agrippa of the Xia Dynasty -- a living heir of Emperor Yu the Great. His only task is to keep the malevolent book from ever being opened. His life is one of solitude, with the exception of his teacher, Chu, and the constant whispering of the Agrippa.

His problems of loneliness and unquenched desire appear to have a solution in the form of an American man, Hogan Ryan, an antiquities dealer, who, by accident, has appeared at Sun's home. Hogan is tall, blond, and blue-eyed, with a gorgeous body, and so much more. Despite Chu's warnings, Sun welcomes Hogan to his house, but the American isn't alone in his arrival.

Is Hogan who he really claims to be? Will Sun keep to his duty or fail his family by falling to greed? Between the Agrippa, the demon, and Hogan, the seduction of Sun has begun. And will the cost of that seduction be too high?

Deadly Sins: Envy by Kira Stone

Oliver St. John is following a dangerous path which he hopes will lead him to one of the demonic Agrippa books. His investigation has brought him as far as Brazil, but no one will speak of the man rumored to guard the deadly tome.

Raphael Georges Pedro Martinez is investigating a rival, someone who could wrest the ancient, possessed Agrippa known as Envy from his control. Instead of an enemy, he finds an educated man who makes him feel as though love was created just for the two of them to share.

Both men have secrets they hide from the other. Will their love be strong enough to survive the lies, or will the Agrippa's power drive them mad with ENVY?

Deadly Sins: Lust by Lacey Savage

Welcome to the Di Maldo castle, where lust drives even the sanest person wild with desire...

Molly Di Maldo lives in a world shrouded in darkness, shadows and constant, throbbing need. As the Guardian of the Agrippa, an ancient demon bent on possession and destruction, her purpose is simple: ensure the book is never opened. It should be an easy task for anyone pure of heart and able to withstand the constant temptation permeating the halls of the ancient Di Maldo castle.

But Molly's not pure. Her soul cries out for pleasure, answers every deliberate attempt the Agrippa makes to draw her toward the ultimate seduction. Lately, no amount of erotic books, toys or movies are able to quench the constant longing pouring through her body.

That is, until Jared Roberts leaps over a windowsill and into her castle. What's Molly to do when confronted with a real, flesh and blood man who can satisfy her every burning desire?

But the Agrippa is always watching, constantly aware of the Guardian's needs. When it sends an incubus to sweeten the deal, will Molly be able to resist the masculine temptation surrounding her from all sides?

Deadly Sins: Anger by Lexxie Couper

Ira McKenzie is a troubled man. He has spent his life struggling with the undeniable anger that scorches through his veins. And the irrational feeling he is someone else, someone more than an Australian graphic artist.

Someone rich. Someone powerful.

Someone to fear.

But in the arms of Beatrice 'Ricki' Sullivan, Ira finally feels like he has found his place in the world. At last he is at peace.

Ricki Sullivan is every man's fantasy. Twenty-five years old. A swimsuit model. Beautiful in every aspect. Drop dead gorgeous, she exudes a sensuality none can deny. Or ignore. But Ricki is more than just a stunning face and body. She's intelligent, kind and gentle. And madly in love with Ira. Life just can't get any better.

Until Shahla enters Ira's world. Who is the mysterious redhead only he can see? What does she have to do with the strange book suddenly appearing in his attic? A book that radiates death and sin? How can she make him hornier than he's ever been in his life with just a look, and at the same time turn his anger into bloody, murderous rage?

And, more frighteningly, why can't he resist her?

Deadly Sins: Gluttony by Belinda Richmond and Elizabeth Jewell

With the inheritance of an Agrippa from his uncle, Alec Roth discovers an incredible zeal for the best that life has to offer. Under its influence, he became a well-known gourmet chef, living a life of indulgence and gluttony of every imaginable kind.

But after a near-fatal heart attack, Alec has held firm against the book and its attendant demon, Beelzebub, determined to rebuild his life on his own terms.

Then he meets Lillian. Beautiful and intelligent, her very presence sets him on fire, makes him want. But Lillian is more than she seems, and the power of the book, and Alec's own desires, may be more than he can resist.

Deadly Sins: Pride by Lena Austin

"Pride, Envy, Avarice -- these are the sparks have set on fire the hearts of all men." -- *Dante Alighieri*

Who guards the Guardian of the demonic book, The Agrippa of Pride?

Ex-con man Ian Hershey thought he was in the art dealer business for the money, the fame, and especially the glamour of the New York art world. That is, until Ian's connection to his most mysterious client and cyber-buddy Dan Roman lands Ian in the hospital, beaten and tortured for Dan's whereabouts. Ian runs to Dan's home in the Rockies, hoping to save his friend.

As Guardian of the Agrippa of Pride, Dan has resigned himself to the life of a recluse. The Internet provides him with all the human contact he needs. That is, until Ian shows up on his doorstep just ahead of the Russian Mafia. They know who Dan is and what he guards, and they want to use both for the power inherent in the demonic book.

The demon housed in the book, Grip, has manipulated the situation, and the Russians are just one step in his plan for world chaos. Just the kind of thing Grip loves. Ian has a plan to stop Grip, but only if he can get the demon to cooperate, and get Dan to swallow his pride. Everybody loves a sinner. Especially a demon.

Eve Vaughn

Eve Vaughn has enjoyed creating characters and making up stories from an early age. As a child she was always getting into mischief, so when she lost her television privileges (which was often), writing was her outlet. Her stories have gotten quite a bit spicier since then! Eve likes to read, bake, make crafts, travel, and spend time with her family. She lives in the Philadelphia area with her husband and pet turtle. She loves to hear from her fans, so feel free to contact her at EveVaughn10@aol.com, join her yahoo group at www.evevaughnsbooks-subscribe@yahoogroups.com and visit her website at <http://www.evevaughn.com>.