





## Praise for the novels of *New York Times* bestselling author HEATHER GRAHAM

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“Captivating...a sinister tale sure to appeal to fans across multiple genre lines.”

—*Publishers Weekly* on *The Death Dealer*

“Mystery, sex, paranormal events. What’s not to love?”

—*Kirkus Reviews* on *The Death Dealer*

“An incredible storyteller.”

—*Los Angeles Daily News*

“Graham’s latest is nerve-racking in the extreme, solidly plotted and peppered with welcome hints of black humor. And the ending is all readers could hope for.”

—*Romantic Times BOOKreviews* on *The Last Noel*

“Graham peoples her novel with genuine, endearing characters.”

—*Publishers Weekly* on *The Séance*

“A writer of incredible talent.”

—*Affaire de Coeur*

“Graham’s rich, balanced thriller sizzles with equal parts suspense, romance and the paranormal—all of it nail-biting.”

—*Publishers Weekly* on *The Vision*

“There are good reasons for Graham’s steady standing as a best-selling author. Here her perfect pacing keeps readers riveted as they learn fascinating tidbits of New Orleans history.”

—*Booklist* on *Ghost Walk*

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*New York Times* and *USA TODAY* bestselling author Heather Graham has written more than a hundred novels, many of which have been featured by the Doubleday Book Club and the Literary Guild. An avid scuba diver, ballroom dancer and mother of five, she still enjoys her south Florida home, but loves to travel, as well, from locations such as Cairo, Egypt, to her own backyard, the Florida Keys. Reading, however, is the pastime she still loves best, and she is a member of many writing groups. She's the winner of a Romance Writers of America Lifetime Achievement Award and a Thriller Writers' Silver Bullet. She is an active member of International Thriller Writers and Mystery Writers of America, and also the founder of The Slush Pile Players, an author band and theatrical group. Heather hosts the annual Writers for New Orleans conference to benefit both the city, which is near and dear to her heart, and various other causes, and she hosts a ball each year at the RT Booklovers Convention to benefit pediatric AIDS foundations.

For more information, check out her website: [eHeatherGraham.com](http://eHeatherGraham.com). You can also find Heather on Facebook.

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## **Also By Heather Graham:**

THE NIGHT IS FOREVER

THE NIGHT IS ALIVE

THE NIGHT IS WATCHING

THE UNSEEN

THE UNHOLY

THE UNSPOKEN

THE UNINVITED

AN ANGEL FOR CHRISTMAS

THE EVIL INSIDE

SACRED EVIL

HEART OF EVIL

PHANTOM EVIL

NIGHT OF THE VAMPIRES

THE KEEPERS

GHOST MOON

GHOST NIGHT

GHOST SHADOW

THE KILLING EDGE

NIGHT OF THE WOLVES

HOME IN TIME FOR CHRISTMAS

UNHALLOWED GROUND

DUST TO DUST

NIGHTWALKER

DEADLY GIFT

DEADLY HARVEST

DEADLY NIGHT

THE DEATH DEALER

THE LAST NOEL

THE SÉANCE

THE DEAD ROOM

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KISS OF DARKNESS

THE VISION

THE ISLAND

GHOST WALK

KILLING KELLY

THE PRESENCE

DEAD ON THE DANCE FLOOR

PICTURE ME DEAD

HAUNTED

HURRICANE BAY

A SEASON OF MIRACLES

NIGHT OF THE BLACKBIRD

NEVER SLEEP WITH STRANGERS

EYES OF FIRE

SLOW BURN

NIGHT HEAT



**DEADLY HARVEST**







For Sharon Dale, with so many thanks, the  
wonderful folks at the Peabody Essex Museum,  
the House of the Seven Gables and the  
beautiful city of Salem, Massachusetts.

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It began when Mary and Brad Johnstone went to the psychic fair and happened upon the tent offering readings. Neither of them believed in such things. Still, as Brad said, with a wry grin, “When in Rome...And this looks like the place that guy at the museum was talking about.”

Of course, it was possible to get a reading just about anywhere in Salem, Massachusetts—especially now, on Halloween. They’d already been through several haunted houses, visited costume shops and met locals ranging from wiccans to historians. A guy they’d talked to at a museum dedicated to local history days had told them to get a few readings, because they would all be different, and given them a rundown of some of his favorite places to go.

Not long after that, Mary had gotten her first reading in a shop called the Magick Mercantile, run by a couple of real wiccans, Adam and Eve Llewellyn. She looked like a hippie, and he dressed all in black. He chewed gum nonstop, though, which made him look a little more normal. Brad doubted that Adam and Eve were their real names—everyone here seemed a little theatrical—but they had been nice. Eve had looked at Mary’s palm and assured her that her ability to dance would take her far. Talking about it afterward, they were both sure they hadn’t mentioned her profession. “Maybe they saw you on that local access show you did,” Brad suggested. In any case, it had been a nice look into the future.

This guy, though...He was pure Halloween creepy. He was wearing a cape and a turban. Tall, dark and lean, he had piercing eyes darkened by liner and shadow.

Inside his tent, he had a small table covered in dark fabric lightened only by a design of moons and stars, with a crystal ball on a stand in the middle of it. Everything was so carefully arranged that his tent could have passed for a permanent place of business. There were sculptures everywhere: Egyptian gods and goddesses, dragons, demons and more.

Mary immediately asked, “Are you a wiccan? A witch or a warlock?”

The reader offered her a wry smile. “There are no warlocks in the wiccan religion. Wiccans are just wiccans. And, no, I’m not a wiccan. Just a simple reader of signs, of the moon and the stars, and all that has come before.”

“I’m Mary Johnstone, and this is my husband, Brad,” Mary said. She almost tripped over the word *husband*. She remembered just how recently they had been headed for divorce.

“And I am Damien,” the reader told them.

“Can we stay together?” Mary asked him. “A double reading, I guess.”

She was actually feeling a little chilled, she realized, then told herself not to be silly. This was Halloween. Things were supposed to be scary. Like a horror movie. What good was a horror movie if you didn’t jump a little?

She still felt oddly uncomfortable. But she would be fine if Brad stayed in here with her.

“Of course,” Damien said with a smile. “What I see...will be what I see. Sit down. There are two chairs.”

They sat at the table. Brad squeezed Mary’s hand. She reminded herself that they were on vacation, far away from the Florida beaches of home and doing something entirely different. They were trying to heal old wounds and start over again. They were going to have fun.

“Now, look into the ball,” Damien told them with a flourish.

Mary looked, and decided the man was certainly a master of effects. The clear crystal ball began to swim with mist. As she continued to stare into it, she thought she saw fire. A fire leaning toward a

to swim with mist. As she continued to stare into it, she thought she saw the. As the leaping toward a unseen sky. Then the fire faded away, and she found herself looking at a desolate hillside. There were a few scrawny trees, with gnarled branches. And there were people. She couldn't hear them properly, but they seemed to be chanting. Suddenly a scream broke through the chanting. She almost jumped, but she realized Brad was at her side, grinning, having fun. She had too much imagination, he always told her that. And she was too timid.

She reminded herself they were repairing their relationship. That they both needed to work at it, even if he was the one who had strayed. He never would have wanted a lifetime with Brenda, she told herself. She had only appealed to him because she was brash, willing to take chances, and because she was...slutty. Mary couldn't help a moment's rancor.

Brad loved her, and she knew it. But she had been hurt. Still, she didn't want to ruin their future by dwelling on the past. She was going to make some changes, starting with becoming more adventurous.

Brad's hand was tight on hers. He was with her now. She believed that he loved her, and that they could make it.

"In the dark and in the mist, there lie the places of danger. Let not the hand that holds you slip, for when the wind blows and the trees dip, there you find death," Damien said. "Look to the ball, keep your eyes on the crystal."

She was *compelled* to look back. She heard screaming again, and sobbing full of deep agony. The branches of the trees were like skeletal hands. Snow began to fall, and then...

Suddenly she was staring at the corpse of a woman, dangling from a hangman's noose tied to one of the skeletal branches. A scream caught in her own throat as the body rotted right in front of her eyes.

"Indians," Brad said. He sounded almost bewitched. "Sorry, Native Americans."

She managed to tear her eyes from the deathly scene to stare at Brad. He was smiling, clearly seeing something entirely different.

"The first Thanksgiving dinner," he said, marveling.

She had to get out of there.

"You're really good," Brad told Damien.

Damien smiled at him, then turned to Mary, and she thought there was something nasty in his stare, something licentious and...evil.

"Touch the crystal," Damien commanded them.

No. She wasn't going to do it.

But she was compelled. It was a projector of some kind, she told herself. It was a holograph. Had to be.

Whatever it was, whatever the compulsion, Brad felt it, too. Their hands still joined, they touched the crystal ball.

Now, when she stared into its depths, she saw corn.

Rows and rows of corn.

Cornfields filled with scarecrows and an overwhelming sense of evil.

Was Brad seeing the same thing now? Whatever he saw, he was staring at the ball as if hypnotized.

"You are in danger," Damien told Brad. "You loved, but you betrayed, and now you're weak. And because you're weak—" he turned to Mary "—you are easy prey." Damien spoke as if the words gave him pleasure. "He lacks the faith in himself necessary to fight for you, so you will be lost in the mist of evil."

Brad stood abruptly and looked down at Damien, furious. "What the hell is this? You should be arrested. We didn't come here for this kind of crap."

arranged. We didn't come here for this kind of crap.

Damien rose, too. "I'm sorry you didn't like the reading, but the crystal tells the truth. It speaks not I."

Brad threw a twenty on the table, then grabbed Mary's hand firmly and pulled her out of the tent with him.

Back on the pedestrian mall, they were surrounded by people laughing, having fun. A group of kids burst out of one of the haunted houses, laughing. An old man, trying to avoid all the rush, slipped into a coffee shop. A woman walked by with two little girls dressed up as fairies. Even the dogs walking by were in costume.

"Leave it to me to pick the jerk," Brad said apologetically.

"Hey, don't worry. He felt he had to put on a show, that's all." She was careful to speak lightly. Brad had been really angry, maybe even shaken. It was strange, the way Damien had been able to sense the tension they were escaping and home right in on it.

But now, out here, surrounded by shrieks of delight, quiet conversations, silliness and games and laughter, the visions in the crystal ball seemed like fading images, nothing more.

"I'll tell you, though, that turkey dinner looked fabulous. I'm starving," Brad said. "I swear, I could almost smell turkey. Though now that I think about it, I'm not sure those In—Native Americans were sitting down to dinner. They had hatchets, and they looked angry."

Mary smiled. A breeze was blowing. It felt fresh and clean. She already felt like laughing, though it did trouble her that she hadn't seen any turkey dinner. A holograph should have been a holograph, right? Or maybe there were different projectors. The guy might be an asshole, but his act was a good one.

And she was *not* going to let herself be unnerved by it.

Still, over a late lunch she couldn't help asking him, "Brad, was that turkey dinner all you saw?"

"Well..."

He sounded reluctant, she thought, and wondered why.

Finally he went on. "At the end...I know this sounds crazy, but there was this cornfield, and this body that..." He looked at her and said, "Forget it. It was just some stupid illusion."

"Why were you so angry?" she asked.

"Because he pegged me for a jerk," he said, looking at her apologetically. "If Jeremy were here, he'd know how the guy pulled it off. In fact..." He laughed. "I can just see Jeremy staring at that stupid crystal ball, then getting up and figuring out where Damien—or whatever the jerk's real name is—keeps all his special-effects equipment."

Mary smiled. "He's in New Orleans almost all the time now, huh?"

Jeremy Flynn had been Brad's partner when they had both been forensic divers for the police department. He'd been Brad's best man at their wedding, and through everything, he had never lied to her, remaining her friend as well as Brad's. And Brad was right. Jeremy would have revealed Damien as the fraud he was.

After lunch, Mary announced that she was ready for some actual history, so they headed toward one of the town's famous cemeteries. It struck her as a poignant place, and she couldn't help the tears that filled her eyes.

"What's the matter?" Brad asked.

"Nothing. I was just thinking," she said.

"Well, let's get out of here," he told her. "It's this place that's making you sad."

No, it's not really the cemetery, she thought. It's that man, Damien, and the things he said.

"I love you, you know," he told her.

She looked into his eyes. "I know. And I love you."

She was shaking slightly. She knew he thought she was too easily frightened



She was shaking slightly, she knew he thought she was too easily frightened.

"I'm going to look at a few more of the graves, read some of the stones," she told him. She squared her shoulders and walked away from him with quick steps, pulling a small guidebook out of her purse and calling out to him, "I've been reading about this. The garland symbolizes victory in death, and the winged hourglass is for the swiftness of passing time. Skeletons and skulls are for mortality. These angels are for heaven, and these ones here are for little children."

Brad seemed to be getting into the spirit. He was standing by a stone several feet from her. "There's a hooped snake on this one. What's that for?" he asked.

"Eternity," she informed him.

He walked down the path, putting more distance between them, and found an aboveground tomb. He sat down on it, watching her. "Hey, my feet are starting to hurt. How about we find a nice happy hour?" he asked.

"I don't think you're supposed to sit on someone's grave," she warned him. A broken stone seemed to beckon her from its spot by one of the huge trees that punctuated the cemetery. The tree's expanding roots had broken through several of the nearby stones.

"Hey, don't go too far," Brad called to her, lying back on the stone tomb and staring up at the sky. "People are leaving. We don't want to wind up locked in here."

"We'll be fine," she assured him.

As she walked toward the stones, she felt the breeze pick up. And, she realized, darkness was coming. Fast. And with it, though she hadn't felt or seen any sign of fog before, a silvery dew thickening the air.

She walked more quickly, stepping past the tree to get a better look at the stone that had caught her attention, and stopped dead.

Someone had cleaned and re-etched the stone, which dated from the late sixteen hundreds. It looked almost exactly like dozens of others. There was a death's head at the top, and scythes and hourglasses along the borders.

And then she noticed the name.

*Mary Clare Johnstone.*

Her name.

Her name *exactly.*

She felt something clutch at her throat, and weakness swept through her. She went down on her knees and placed a hand on the stone, as her dizziness grew worse.

From somewhere, she could hear laughter. Children having fun. Mothers calling out to them. Husbands speaking to their wives.

She closed her eyes against the sight in front of her and saw the hill and the tree. The tree with the skeletal branches and the hangman's noose.

And the woman, dangling at the end of it.

The mist swirled around her in a fury, and she heard laughter again.

Damien's laughter...

His face rose before her.

He was there. He had her hand, and they were standing on a hill, with the wind sweeping around them.

His laughter was...evil.

He couldn't be real; the hill couldn't be real. But she could feel the wind against her legs, the earth beneath her feet and the chill of descending night.

"And now you're mine. Playtime, my love," Damien said.

His laughter came again, blending with the wind.



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**R**owenna saw scarecrows.

They stood above the cornfields, propped on their wooden crosses, and from a distance their faces were blank and terrifying.

The cornstalks grew high, marching toward the horizon in their neat rows seeming to stretch on forever.

And then, like sentinels, rising in a line and towering over the tall stalks that bent and waved in the cool breeze, stood the scarecrows.

She felt as if she were drifting through the corn, borne on the breeze, as the mist settled down over the cornfield, a dark blanket against the burst of beauty and light. She was looking down from above, almost as if she were a camera, coming into focus.

She dreamed, but she fought it and came so near to waking, struggling against the nightmare, against the threatening whisper in her mind.

Light...She needed light. Needed the spectacular beauty of the autumn colors to drive away the creeping darkness.

She was going home, so maybe it was natural to dream of the place where she had grown up, where the colors of fall were so beautiful that they belonged not in the real world of the unreal, but in a land of dreams.

Golds, oranges, crimsons, deeper reds, softer yellows, all dazzled from the trees stretching from the great granite rises to the windswept seas and calmer harbors, where the whitecaps of the waves warned that winter was on its way.

But before the ice and cold of a New England winter arrived, there was the fall. The glorious fall with its brilliant display. The gentle sweep of the breeze came first, a touch of sweet cool breath on the cheeks. And before that touch became the chilling grip of icicle fingers, there was the reaping, the bonfires of fall, the harvest brought home.

And so, in her dream, they stretched before her, rows and rows of cornfields, the stalks undulating mesmerizingly in the sweeping breeze. She had always loved the cornfields; she could remember racing through them as a child, her grandfather chasing her, her laughter filling the sky.

The crows were always there, too, their black wings shimmering, their wicked cawing carrying high in the air, but the farmers, with a wisdom carried down from generation to generation, knew how to manage the voracious thieves.

They fashioned scarecrows and set them above the fields, and those scarecrows had personalities of their own. Mrs. Abel's scarecrow wore a wild garden hat sporting stick pins to stab the feet of any unwary crow that tried to land. Ethan Morrison's wore a billowing cape and a hideous, toothed grin. Her grandfather's scarecrow was dressed in denim overalls and a plaid shirt, and carried a shotgun; its hat was straw, and it had a mop of white hair.

Eric Rolfe's creation was the most frightening—and the most remarkable. The most likely to come to life and speak, for he had created his scarecrow's face from a plastic skull and Halloween makeup. Huge eyes stared out from the bony face, eyes that moved on battery power, and it wore a black frock coat, arms outstretched, barbed wire protruding from its head like a razor-sharp fright wig.

Some of the older residents had a problem with Eric's creation—Puritanism was long gone from the area but never really dead. Regardless, Eric loved it, and so did the kids.

Sometimes, though, when she was running in the cornfields, her grandfather close behind her,

Sometimes, though, when she was running in the cornfields, her grandmother close behind, her laughter would die when she came to that scarecrow. The eyes would be looking at her from their sockets, and the wind would seem to rise, not howling, but breathing out a high-pitched whisper of mingled fear and seduction. She would stop and stare, the cornstalks rustling around her, and uneasiness would steal into her heart, a fear that if she opened her mind, she would see something ancient and terrible that had occurred here, would share the evil impulse of its creator and the horror of those it had touched.

She had grown up with the stories of the local witch trials, when men, in the service of their God tortured and condemned their fellow men, when children wept and accused, and evil was done in the name of righteousness.

In such a blood-drenched land, how could an impressionable child not feel something of the anguish of those times?

Despite that, the cornfields had always entranced her, along with the spectacular color palette of fall.

And now she was going home to see those fields in truth, so it was only natural, in that strange twilight stage between sleep and wakefulness, to see them in her mind's eye, to dream of running through them like the child she had once been. She heard her own laughter as she ran and knew she would soon come upon Eric's gothic monster of a scarecrow, but she didn't hesitate, for she was no longer a child but a woman grown, and the fears of the past could not haunt her now.

But she was wrong. The fear *was* there.

She saw it now, in the distance, and fingers of dread reached for her heart as she waited for it to see her, because she knew it would.

She didn't want to go closer.

But she had to.

Then the scarecrow raised its head, and a scream froze in her throat. The eye sockets were empty, the head a skull covered in rotting, blackened flesh, and somehow she knew it could see her, though nothing remained of what had once been its eyes.

What was left of the mouth was open, as if in a final scream. A ragged coat hung from the rotting body, the white gleam of bone showing through, dried blood staining fabric and bone alike. And as she stood there, her scream still trapped inside, the skull began to turn toward her, as if whatever evil consciousness still lived within it was drawn to her.

A crow landed on the gruesome figure's shoulder and plucked at the putrid flesh hanging from one cheek.

The skull began to laugh, as the wind rose and the sky was suddenly filled with the fluttering of brilliant fall leaves. And all the while, those eye sockets stared at her, and then red tears suddenly spilled from them, down the ravaged cheeks, as if the rotting corpse was locked in the field for all time, weeping blood.

Then the fingers of bone and rot began to twitch, reaching out for her, as a chant from her childhood echoed on the air.

“Don't fear the Reaper,

Just the Harvest Man.

When he steals a soul

It's a keeper, so

Don't fear the Reaper,

Fear the Harvest Man,

For when he steals a woman's soul

She'll go to hell or deeper....”

Rowenna Cavanaugh jerked up to a sitting position in bed, gasping, startled, and scared.

Rowenna Cavanaugh jerked up to a sitting position in bed, gasping, startled...and scared.

She took a deep breath and reached for calm. What a nightmare. She was surprisingly shaken by it, and she couldn't allow herself to be. She told herself that she had simply drifted off to sleep while thinking about home, even though she wasn't going back for a few days and Halloween would come and go with her here in New Orleans.

She missed home. Massachusetts was always so beautiful this time of year. And Salem...Salem was still just a small town in so many ways. She'd been elected harvest queen in her absence. At least that gave her something enjoyable to look forward to after the upcoming debate with Jeremy Flynn, scheduled to raise funds for Children's House, the charity he ran here. Besides, her appearance would help her to sell books. And she had been adrift since Jonathan, the man she'd planned to marry, had died—had it really been three years ago?—so she'd welcomed the chance to get away. Not that she really needed an excuse for coming to New Orleans, because she loved the city. But she was ready to go back home now, nightmare or not.

When she'd been a kid, they'd played games like harvest man. The Puritans had believed that the devil lived in the dark forests surrounding their settlements, just waiting to steal unwary souls. Superstition and fear had reigned supreme then, but she knew better, no matter what nonsense her subconscious had decided to dredge up.

Still, she had to wake up, had to get out of bed before she fell into another dream that was as bad or even worse.

She was living in the real world, the world of today. She had to pull herself together—and somehow manage another day in the company of Mr. Jeremy Flynn.

Ah, yes, Jeremy Flynn. Ex-police diver, now a partner in a private investigations firm with his two brothers, intelligent, articulate, charming, gorgeous...and not in any way shape or form attracted to her. In fact, he seemed to actively dislike her, but maybe it was just her opinions he didn't like. To be fair, he was never rude or actively hostile. Of course, he probably didn't dare, since his sister-in-law, Kendall Flynn, was one of her best friends and had been for years. Tonight there was going to be a Halloween party at the Flynn mansion, which Kendall and her husband had moved into a year ago, and where they now managed a community theater and hosted various charity events. It would be a great party, and Jeremy would politely greet her, then find a way to be on the other side of the room all night.

She got along just fine with Aidan, Kendall's husband, and the youngest brother, Zach, was unfailingly friendly.

Unfortunately, she was attracted to Jeremy and had been since they first met. She had been stunned, because she hadn't dated at all since Jonathan's death. Not that she believed in some archaic mourning period, she simply hadn't met anyone who attracted her enough to want to go out with him or even to wonder what it would be like to have sex again, to touch another person intimately. But with Jeremy, she all too often found herself watching his mouth when he spoke, or his strong hands, with long fingers, the tips calloused because he played guitar. And he was a phenomenal musician. She knew, because she had seen him play.

But he clearly wasn't interested, so she kept her dreams of wild, rampant, in-the-dark-at-first sex with Jeremy Flynn a complete secret. She wondered if her hidden fantasy meant she was being disloyal to Jonathan's memory or merely human.

She wondered how he could ignore all the heat and electricity whenever they met. It was as if sparks filled the space between them, as if all they needed to do was touch and the very air would burst into a beautiful sizzle of mutual desire.

Or did that feeling exist only in her own mind?

She knew she needed to get up and take a shower, but she couldn't stop thinking about him. It wasn't just the vision of sex either. It was like a yearning in her heart

wasn't just the vision of sex, either. It was like a yearning in her heart.

*I admire you. I love listening to the tone of your voice. I love the passion in your eyes when you talk about a cause. I would love to spend just an hour in real conversation with you, without being on a show, when your attention was all for me, when I could honestly know what was going on in your mind, what makes you tick...*

But it wasn't to be. It was ironic that she'd finally met someone she was interested in and he wasn't interested in her, but that was that. He'd made his opinion of her clear, and she wasn't about to make a complete fool of herself by throwing herself at him. She would keep on being polite, and she would never give up her friendship with his sister-in-law—or his brothers, for that matter.

She stretched, sighed and took hold of the sheets, ready to throw them back and get up to face the day.

She touched something in her bed and frowned then gasped, incredulous at what she found. A corn husk. A single brown corn husk caught in her sheets.



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“Jeremy?”

He looked up, and was quick to feel a surge of annoyance. Rowenna Cavanaugh. Author, speaker and historian—and advocate of the powers of the mind. Her books were popular, he knew. She wrote about places to go where strange events had been documented, abandoned prisons and mental hospitals, historic battlefield sites and the like. She never came right out and said that ghosts or anything else otherworldly existed, only that no one had proved they didn't. She had come to town to debate paranormal possibilities with him as a way to publicize last night's Halloween benefit for Children's House. Their regular radio debates had been popular, and ticket sales and donations had soared.

This would be their last on-air appearance, though.

He was proud of everything he'd done to establish the local branch of Children's House, a special home for displaced children, something he had given himself to wholeheartedly when he had left the Jacksonville police and his position as a forensic diver to work as a private investigator in partnership with his brothers. Their inheritance of the Flynn plantation, outside the city, had kept him around, along with his charity, but now the trust fund had reached a substantial amount and was being run by local agencies, and the plantation was thriving, with his older brother, Aidan, and his sister-in-law, Kendall, in residence. Zach, their youngest brother, had already headed home to man their Florida office, and as for himself...he was ready to take some time off. Head to the islands for diving that had nothing to do with work or death. Drink sweet concoctions filled with fruit while he sat on a beach.

He wanted to reply curtly to Rowenna, but he refrained. He didn't know why she'd instantly gotten his back up.

She was a stunning woman. Her hair was nearly pitch-black, her eyes strikingly amber. Not hazel. Not brown. Amber, like gold, and shaded by ridiculously thick lashes. She was both tall and slim, but curved in every place where a woman should have curves. Her voice had a husky quality that reeked of sensuality, perfect for public speaking.

Too bad they weren't on television. No, thank God they weren't on TV. No one would even notice *he* was there, nor would they give a damn what *she* was saying. They would nod at anything, drooling on the floor all the while.

*So what's your problem?* he mocked himself.

Their debates had been sponsored by various businesses; the sponsorship money went straight to the charity. They'd been going on for two weeks, and he felt that he knew her fairly well from a distance, if that made any sense. The distance was something he had imposed.

Maybe it all had to do with everything that had gone on out at the plantation a year ago.

Rumor said the property was haunted. At first, it had been part of the charm of the place. Now he was sick of it. He adored his sister-in-law, and no way was he going to get into a fight with her over her belief in ghosts or what she had been through out in the family burial ground. But as far as he was concerned, the bad things in this world were brought to light not because of voodoo, mysticism, ESP or any other hocus-pocus.

He believed in hard work, science, logic and intelligent investigative techniques. The work of forensic scientists combined with detectives going door to door, wretched hours in stakeouts and a mind trained to slip into the psyches of others. Those things solved crimes. A crime scene was simple. A killer always took something away with him and always left something behind. Not every case was



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