

BIRTH
OF A
ginner



A DE BELLIS
CRIME FAMILY
PREQUEL

KYLIE KENT

Birth of a Sinner

A De Bellis Crime Family Prologue

Kylie Kent

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Contents

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

Chapter One



I watch my four brothers relax and let loose. It's the night before Santo's wedding. The whole monogamous, *vowing to one single person for life* thing isn't for me, but it sure as fuck is for Santo.

If love really did exist in this cruel world, it would be what Santo has with his fiancée and soon-to-be wife. They've been together since they were teenagers. Shelli has always been around.

Out of my four brothers, Santo is the most empathetic. How he manages to remain positive and uplifting is beyond me. But he does. I assume a lot of it has to do with Shelli. She loves him unconditionally. Honestly, if I could pick a sister-in-law, she'd be it. The two are perfect for each other, right down

to the annoying-as-fuck habit they have of finishing each other's sentences.

"You know, I always thought you'd be the first," Gabe says. He's only a few years younger than me, though you wouldn't think it with the way he acts sometimes.

"Fuck off. What have I ever done to give you the idea I'd want a relationship, let alone full-on marriage?" I grunt at him before swallowing the contents of my glass. It's no Cinque whiskey, our family-owned business. But it burns on the way down, a feeling I welcome like an old friend.

"Nothing, but I thought for sure the old man would have married you off as part of some deal by now." Gabe shrugs.

I fucking pity the day my father tries to marry any of us off for a fucking business deal. I've seen it done. It's not unheard of. But I'd kill the old bastard before I'd let any of my brothers or myself enter into a marriage like that. It was how my parents got together. And guess how that ended for my mum? With her body in a casket, six feet under at just thirty-five, months after our youngest brother was born.

After birthing my father five sons—yes, five—my old man killed her. Of course I have no proof of that, which is why he's still breathing. But I know in my fucking soul that he did it.

My four younger brothers, Santo, Gabrielle, Marcello, and Vincenzo were all upstairs with the nanny that day. I remember walking past my father's office and hearing the gunshot. And I remember the *thud* as a body hit the floor.

Later that night, my father sat all five of us down, even Vin, who was only a few months old and couldn't understand a single thing that was going on. The cold bastard lined us up on

the sofa, looked us dead in the eye, and said, “*Your mother is dead. Don’t cry for her, never cry for a fucking woman. Ever.*”

Then he got up and walked away, letting the nanny deal with the aftermath. Thankfully, Santo and I are the only ones who were old enough to remember that day. I was eight, Santo was seven. Gabe was five, Marcello two, and Vin—well, like I said, he was just a fucking baby.

To this day, I haven’t shed a single fucking tear over a woman and never fucking will. It’s the one lesson the old bastard drilled into me that I can’t let go of.

I look to Santo. “I’d kill the fucker if he even tried that arranged marriage shit,” I say.

“I’d help,” Santo agrees.

“You ever wonder how much better it’s gonna be when you’re boss, Gio?” Gabe asks.

All the fucking time, I think to myself.

The De Bellis organisation. While a lot of the businesses are legit, on the up and up as you would say, most of the money we make comes from our underground dealings. We’re well known in Melbourne. Ask anyone who the De Bellis family is, and if the fuckers are smart, they won’t open their mouths to utter a word.

Those who do have something to say? Well, I’d tell you to go ask them what happens to a rat, but you can’t. It’s hard to reply when you’re nothing more than some bones and dust in a shallow grave.

My father has built a name for himself, ruthless, cruel, unforgiving. He is absolutely all of those things, and that’s how he got to be the Don of the De Bellis Crime family, exactly how he stays on top. At least that’s how he tells it.

Being the eldest son, that title, throne, curse... whatever the fuck you want to call it, it's getting passed down to me. As soon as the old cunt either dies or retires, but we all know the latter ain't ever gonna happen. I'll have to wait until he takes his last breath to run things the way they should be run.

Our organisation has been crumbling over the last few years. My old man is too fucking stubborn to see or acknowledge it. But, brick by brick, the foundation is falling. Fuck, at this rate, there probably won't be anything left for me to take over.

“What I wonder is how boring Santo's life is about to get once he has a ring on it.” I laugh.

“Fuck off. Boring and Shelli do not belong in the same sentence. That girl is fucking amazing. I dare any of you assholes to say otherwise.” Santo points a finger at each of us. “You haven't so much as glanced at the tits and ass that's on the stage right now. If this expensive wedding bullshit has made you too broke to afford a lap dance, bro, I got you. My shout. Fuck, take one to the back room for a happy ending,” Marcello says, pulling out his wallet and throwing four one-hundred-dollar bills onto the table.

“Put your cash away. Unlike you fuckers, I don't need to pay for pussy. And why would I want *this*, when I have Shelli waiting for me back at the hotel?” Santo asks.

“Ah, because it's your last night as a free man. And what the fuck do you mean she's waiting for you at the hotel? It's bad luck to see the bride the night before the wedding, bro,” Vin reminds him.

“She sent me a text and said she had something important to talk about. Told her I'd stop by her room when we got back.” Santo shrugs.

A waitress approaches the table with a new bottle of whiskey before refilling each of our glasses. “Sweetheart, my brother here is getting hitched tomorrow. Help me convince him he should have one last hurrah,” Marcello says to the girl, who’s only slightly more dressed than the chicks on stage.

“Married, huh? Well, if I knew that, I would have brought out the good stuff. But he’s right. You definitely need to have a little fun before you tie the knot.” She moves over to Santo. Leaning forward, she presses her bare tits into his face as she whispers something in his ear.

Santos shakes his head, keeping his hands firmly planted on the table as he squirms away from the woman. She’s fucking hot. Long legs, long dark hair, even darker eyes, and full, natural breasts. Sometimes I think Shelli broke my brother’s dick when she took his virginity all those years ago.

“You know, I’m getting married too,” Gabe chimes in, and we all look at him. “What? I am. One day, when I find a girl worthy of keeping my balls in her purse.” He smirks and pushes to his feet. “Come on, babe. You can show me all the filthy things you just offered to do to him. The difference is... *I’ll* actually enjoy them.”

She grins, and Gabe disappears into the crowd with the waitress.

“He totally just took your last hurrah for you,” I tell Santo.

“He can have it. I don’t need it,” he replies.

I have to give it to my brother. He really does take this whole monogamy thing seriously. Never once have I seen Santo show even the slightest interest in another woman. I would assume there was a problem with his dick or something.

But put Shelli in a room with him, and he's all fucking over her like a dog in heat.

Chapter Two



You know that feeling you get when you wake up and just know the day is going to be fucking shit? Yeah, I got that right now.

It could be attributed to the jackhammering little cunt in my head at the moment, the twirling nausea rolling through my guts like a goddamn tornado. Or it could just be the De Bellis curse coming to bite us in the ass again.

None of my brothers believe me when I tell them that we're cursed. They think I just say shit for the sake of saying shit. But when every family get-together, celebration, whatever the fuck you wanna call it goes wrong and ends in us covered in either our blood or someone else's, then it's a fucking curse.

Even a family like ours should be able to celebrate a birthday without all hell breaking loose. Today, though, I fucking hope I'm wrong. I want Santo and Shelli to have the day they've spent years planning. I want my brother to get his happiness.

One of us should at least, right?

I roll over, and my arm lands on a body on the other side of the bed. Shit. I look to my left and find a naked blonde passed out next to me. I nudge at her shoulder, and she stirs. I'd like to say I know her name, but I don't.

"Get up. You gotta go," I tell her.

"Huh?" she grumbles, slowly blinking her eyes open.

"Your time here has expired. I got shit to do, and you're not it. Sorry, sweetheart, but you have to leave." I finish my usual spiel with a smirk, one that typically has girls falling at my feet. Not this time, though.

"You're a fucking asshole," the blonde hisses.

Oh, this one has claws. Maybe I *should* have added her to my to-do list.

"And you fuck like a preteen getting pussy for the first time," she adds before pushing up from the bed and snatching her clothes off the floor.

My eyes travel up and down her body, and memories of last night slowly creep back into my consciousness. She was... fucking fun? Fun to fuck? Fuckably fun? Point is we had a good time. And I know I made her come at least twice.

I can feel the scratches down my back when I move to sit up on the bed. "That's not what you were saying last night when you were screaming my name."

The blonde looks at me. “Don’t flatter yourself. I was just giving you what you wanted to hear. I’m a people pleaser.” She smiles, then turns and walks into the adjoining bathroom. The door slams before I hear the water start running.

Is she taking a fucking shower? What the hell is wrong with this girl? Most chicks would have been out the door already, not helping themselves to my shampoo bottle in the bathroom.

I get up and find a pair of sweats in my overnight bag. I could just leave the room, go hang out with one of my brothers until this girl is gone. I don’t do that, though. Nope. Instead, I sit back on the bed, scroll through social media, and wait for her to finish.

Twenty minutes later, a billow of steam flows through the door as she walks out of the bathroom fully dressed. Her hair hangs wet over one of her shoulders. Her face is completely bare of any makeup and, fuck me, she’s even more gorgeous than she was last night when she was all painted up with those pouty fucking red lips.

I swallow past the lump in my throat. “The water pressure’s good, by the way,” she tells me, bending down to pick up her discarded bag. Then she slips her feet into her heels and turns to leave.

“Wait,” I call after her. Jumping out of bed, I chase the girl through the living room to the door.

With a hand on the knob, she glances over her shoulder and looks at me. “What?”

“I, uh, I didn’t catch your name,” I say, raking a hand through my hair.

“No, you didn’t.” She smirks. “See you around, Marcello. Or not,” she adds before opening the door.

“Zoe, what the fuck?” a voice I know says from where a familiar figure is standing at the threshold of my room.

“Dom? What the fuck are you doing here?” I ask the last person I expected to be knocking on my door at this hour in the morning.

Dominic McKinley and I met when we both started school. Now I’m in my last year, about to finally fucking graduate. Why the fuck my old man insisted that we all graduate with business degrees beats me. I mean, they don’t teach you the kind of skills our family deals in, in a classroom at university.

“Marcello, really? Fuck, it was nice knowing you, bro.” Dom laughs while shaking his head at me.

“You didn’t see me here. You don’t know me. I’m out.” The woman—whose name I now know is *Zoe*—says to Dominic before skirting around him and hightailing it down the hall.

“What are you doing here and how the fuck do you know her?” I ask him.

“Your brother is looking for you. He thought he’d call my ass to hunt you down, because none of them could get a hold of you.”

“How’d you know where I was?” I lift a brow in question, and Dominic mimics the gesture. Yeah, he’s not going to answer that. “Then, how do you know her?”

“You heard her. I don’t.” He grins.

“You’re an asshole,” I grunt, letting the door close on his face.

Dominic reaches out and catches it before it slams shut. “Call Gio. It sounded urgent. See you at the wedding,” Dom says and then leaves as quickly as he appeared.

I walk back into the bedroom, and the name repeats in my head over and over again.

Zoe. Her name... and the words *you fuck like a preteen*. I want nothing more than to drag her ass into my bed and make her take 'em back. My ego can't fucking handle hearing a woman claim to be disappointed in my performance.

Picking up my phone from the nightstand, I switch it back on. I have ten missed calls from Gio, five from Santo, and six from Vin. That feeling from earlier, the one where I just know this day is going to be shit, comes back. Full force.

I dial Gio first. “Where the fuck have you been?” he asks me.

“In a hotel room. Why? What's going on?”

“We can't find Santo. He's MIA, and so is Shelli. No one has seen or heard from either of them.”

“They're probably off fucking their prewedding jitters out of their systems,” I say.

“Yeah, maybe...” He sighs.

“Where are *you*?”

“We're at the Four Seasons. Santo booked a room here last night and never came back.”

“I'll be right there.” I hang up.

As much as I want to think Santo and Shelli are just off fooling around like usual, I don't think they are. It's the fucking De Bellis curse again. That's what it is.

Chapter Three



“**W**here the fuck are they? I’d get it if one of them had cold feet, but both?” I run a hand through my hair. “Actually, no, I wouldn’t fucking get it. It’s Santo and Shelli. Neither of them would have cold feet. So, where the fuck are they?” I ask my brothers for the millionth time as I check the clock on my watch.

“It’s the curse,” Marcello says.

“Marcel, for the last fucking time, there is no goddamn curse on the De Bellis name,” Gio grunts in reply.

My younger brother has had it in his head that we’re all cursed and shouldn’t even consider having relationships, because it’s never going to end well anyway. Personally, I think he watches too many fucking movies.

“Fine, don’t believe me. But it won’t change the fact that we’re all doomed. You’ll find out eventually when the curse hits you.” Marcello sighs.

“It’s not going to hit me because I’m not ever going to fall in love. That shit is for people like Santo, not people like me.” Gio points a finger at his chest.

“Okay, this is not helping find him or Shelli.” I dig into my pocket and pull out my flask. It’s early in the day but is it ever too early for a healthy dose of Cinque? I’d say not. Taking a swig, I close my eyes as the smooth flavour explodes on my tongue.

Cinque De Bellis whiskey is the only legitimate business my brothers and I own independent of our father. As much as he tried to take over the idea when we were developing it, we all stood firm on the fact we didn’t want his filthy hands touching what was ours.

Our old man might be a great businessman. After all, no one gets to the position he’s at without having some smarts about him. But he has this uncanny ability to turn everything dirty. And I’m certain he would have found a way to use our whiskey to benefit him and his other business dealings. The ones that happen under the radar.

Don’t get me wrong, we’re just as involved in that side of the family empire as our father is. But it’s not like any of us had much of a choice. The day we turned thirteen, we were all handed a gun, put in front of a man, and told that it was him or us.

Father of the goddamn year right there.

Gio and Santo did everything in their power to try to keep us younger kids out of it. Tried to convince our father that he

didn't need all of us to work for him, but my older brothers were young themselves at the time. Even now, I don't think the old man would ever listen to them. It's always his way or the grave. You either fall in line or earn your spot at the morgue.

All of our phones sound out through the otherwise silent room at the same time. I pick mine up off the table.

VIN:

Dad's acting stranger than usual.

I look up at Gio and Marcel. "What has he done?" I ask, knowing in my gut that the disappearance of our brother has to have something to do with our father.

Gio shoots off a text, and I wait for Vin's reply.

GIO:

Define strange? What's he doing?

VIN:

He's pacing around, asking where Santo is and mumbling about how he better not be late to the ceremony.

"What the fuck? He didn't even want this wedding to go ahead to begin with. Why would he be worried about where Santo is now?" I ask Gio. The wedding is supposed to start in two hours. Although, at this point, I doubt there's going to be a ceremony at all.

"We have to find Santo. He wouldn't just up and leave or run off without telling one of us," Gio says.

“Which means he’s still in the city,” Marcel adds. “Has anyone tried Shelli’s sister?”

Then it’s like a light bulb goes off in my head. Why didn’t I think to call Shelli’s sister?

Probably because they’re estranged, and the woman wasn’t invited to the wedding. But, still, if Santo’s bride has ran off, maybe someone in her family would know where she went.

I find the old contact in my phone and dial the number. “Gabe, what can I do for you?” the familiar voice asks through the phone.

“Have you heard from Shelli?” I question her.

“No, I think I’m the last person she’d reach out to,” Kristen says.

“Any idea where she’d go if she were to say... get cold feet or something?”

At this, Kristen laughs. “Shelli would not have cold feet, and there is no way she’d ever run off on Santo. Why? What’s going on, Gabe?”

“They’re both MIA. Shelli and Santo. No one has seen or heard from either of them since last night, and we’re about two hours away from the whole *I do* part of the day,” I say. “Look, Kristen, if you have any idea at all where she’d be, or where they’d go, I need to know.”

“There’s a cabin. It’s about an hour’s drive from the venue. It was our father’s. He left it to me and Shelli. I don’t go there but I know Shelli and Santo used to visit heaps when we were younger. I’m sending you the address now.” Kristen pauses. “When you find her, let me know, please.”

“I will.” I disconnect the call, then quickly turn to my brothers. “Let’s go. It’s a long shot, but they could be at Shelli’s dad’s old cabin. Did anyone know she had a holiday cabin?” I ask them, and they both shake their heads at me.

Chapter Four



Cold. Everything is cold. I let the chill freeze me from the inside out. Basking in the numbness it leaves behind. I need it. The numbness. I need it to not feel anything else. Because feeling this is too much.

I look down at my fiancée's lifeless body as I hold her close to my chest. Today was supposed to be the start of our forever, the rest of our lives. The beginning to our end.

Now, it's just our end.

My fingers brush the matted strands of hair away from her face. I know it's Shelli even if her face is unrecognisable. The name—my name—tattooed on her wrist tells me I'm not wrong. I thought if I just sat here, holding her, I'd eventually wake up and realise this isn't real. I'm still waiting to wake up,

though. She said she had something to tell me, something about the baby. My hand hovers over her stomach. Our child was probably the size of a bean, but it was *ours*. Hers and mine.

Now, it's gone.

She's gone. The baby is gone. My reason for living it's all gone.

The door to the cabin bursts open, and I look up to see three of my brothers walking through the door before they all stop in their tracks. The shock evident on their faces as they take in the scene in front of them. I don't say anything.

What can I say?

"What...?" Gio starts to ask, then hesitates. He walks up and squats down in front of me. He eyes Shelli's body, taking in her beaten face, the dried blood all over her torso, arms, legs, everywhere. "Fuck. Santo, what happened?"

I blink at him. "She said she wanted to talk, told me to meet her here instead of at the hotel." My voice is hoarse, probably thanks to the fact I spent the entire night screaming at my fiancée to wake up.

"Santo... I..." Gio puts a hand on my shoulder and leaves the rest of his words hanging in the air.

"I found her like this. On the bed. She was... she had no clothes on," I say.

I wrapped the blanket around her, scooped her body up, and sat on the floor with her head in my lap. That's where I've been the whole night. In this spot.

"Gio?" Gabe bends down and picks something up off the floor. I don't see what it is. I don't care. Nothing matters

anymore.

“He didn’t,” Gio curses under his breath. “I’m going to fucking kill him.”

This has me looking up again. “Who?” I ask.

“Our father,” Gio says, pinching a cufflink between his fingertips. One with the letters *DB* embossed on the front. The same one that my father has worn every day for as long as I can remember. I blink. Then I let the coldness take over again.

If I’m frozen, I can’t feel. Not the betrayal, not the loss, nothing but the numbness.

Chapter Five



I watch my father pace up and down the entryway of our childhood home. He doesn't know I'm observing him. I've always been good at staying out of sight. It was the key to my survival growing up in this house.

Right now, something is really fucking off with the old man. I've seen him nervous, and I've seen him angry, but this? Whatever it is, it's nothing I've ever witnessed before. It's like he knows something or someone is coming for him. And he's waiting for it.

My phone vibrates in my hand. I look down and see Gio's name flash across the screen. "Yeah?" I breathe out.

"You still with Dad?" he asks me.

“Yeah. Something is really off, Gio,” I tell him.

“Who else is at the house?”

“There’re a few soldiers outside. Maybe five.”

“Get rid of ’em. Tell them to head to the church or something.”

“Why? What’s going on?” I question him.

“Just get rid of them, and make sure the old man doesn’t leave. I’ll be there in thirty,” he says.

I walk out the side door and find two of my father’s soldiers standing guard. “Hey, man, I need you all to head over to the church.”

“Now?” one of them asks.

I raise an eyebrow. I might be the youngest De Bellis brother, but a De Bellis I am. Gio has tried his best to keep me out of my father’s world. Little does he know I’ve stepped farther into the darkness than any of my brothers realise.

My father took it upon himself to turn me into a monster. In his image. I’m just a hell of a lot better at hiding it than he is. But these soldiers. They know. They’ve seen me at work. When my old man needs to pry information out of people, it’s me he puts into a room with them.

The quiet ones are always the most lethal.

It’s what he says every time I’m sent into a room to extract information, through whatever means necessary.

At first, I tried to say no. Told him to do it himself. That didn’t go over so well. Nobody says no to a De Bellis. And let’s just say, when it becomes a case of it’s you or them, fight-

or-flight instincts always have you throwing your morals out the window and choosing self-preservation instead.

“Sorry, Vin, sure. I’ll get everyone over there,” the soldier says when I don’t respond to his question. Then I turn back around and walk inside the house, finding a spot in the shadows to continue to watch my father and wait.

Chapter Six



I always knew I'd be the one to end my father's life. It was a matter of when, not *if*. I don't know how I managed to make a one-hour drive take thirty minutes, but I'm glad I did. I park the car and ensure my gun is fully loaded before jumping out.

He doesn't deserve a quick death. I know that, but that's what he's gonna get purely because I can't be assed to put it off any longer. The horror on my brother's face haunts me as I make my way up the stairs.

As soon as I open the front door, I find my father in the foyer. He takes one look at me and starts backing up. "Gio, what are you doing here?"

I glance at the pistol in his hand. "Why'd you do it?" I ask him.

“Do what?”

“Don’t play dumb, Pop. I know you did it. What I don’t know is why?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about. It’s time for us to head over to the church,” he says.

“*Church?* It’s funny. I always thought a man like you would burn the second he stepped foot in a church.”

“A man like me? You mean a man like *you*? You are a younger version of me, Giovanni. I made you,” he spits out.

“And now I’m ending you,” I say, then raise my gun and pull the trigger. The bullet lands right between his eyes before he can even think about aiming his own weapon my way.

I stand, rooted to the spot, watching as his body slumps to the floor.

Vin steps out from behind a pillar. He looks at our father and then at me. “About fucking time,” he grunts.

I still don’t move. I’ve dreamt of this moment for as long as I can remember—no, I actually remember vividly. Because I’ve dreamt of it since I was eight. And now that I’m in it, it’s very anti-climactic. I thought I’d feel something. Anything, relief, remorse. But I feel nothing. Nothing but grief and worry for my brother.

How the fuck am I going to get him through this? Santo has lived for that girl for so long. How is he supposed to live without her?

Whatever it takes, I’ll do it though. There isn’t any other option. I refuse to let this bastard take my brother from me too.

“Gio, you okay?” Vin asks me.

I smile at him. “Never been better,” I say. “Let’s torch this fucking place. I think it’s time for a change of scenery.”

“Couldn’t agree more,” he says, slapping a hand on my shoulder.

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