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HEATHER  
GRAHAM

GHOST  
MEMORIES



***Rediscover the history behind the Bone Island trilogy in this prequel to the thrilling series by New York Times bestselling author Heather Graham.***

In the early nineteenth century, pirates and privateers still wreaked havoc in the Caribbean. Bartholomew Miller had been one of them. After years of plying the seas for England as a privateer, he finally found a home and love on Bone Island off the Florida coast. But Bartholomew also made enemies in his time—enemies that would take everything Bartholomew loved and create a curse to haunt Bone Island for centuries...

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# **Ghost Memories**

*Heather Graham*





# ***CONTENTS***

[Part I: Life](#)

[Part II: Death](#)



# *PART I*

## *LIFE*

“Surrender, y’ scurvy bastard!” Bartholomew Miller cried harshly.

There was no hope for the wounded *Hellion*, a ship captained by Pie-Eyed Wallace, one of the pirates who had been plaguing ships bound for Key West, Florida. Bartholomew, captain of the eight-gun sloop *Bessie Blue*, was working per request of Craig Beckett, one of the most respected civilians in Key West who had cast his lot with David Porter, commander of the Mosquito Squadron, a naval assignment group sworn to rid the south Florida waters of the dreaded scourge of piracy.

Bartholomew knew the waters, the depths and shallows and reefs, as few men did. He had chased the *Hellion* to a reef, and there pounded her with his guns. The *Hellion* was sinking. Half her crew floated dead in the water, and others moaned on a deck that was flooding with the sea.

Just as he knew the reefs, Bartholomew knew sea battles, and he knew pirates. He had never been a pirate, he had been a privateer. He had taken ships by license of the Crown, until he had become a citizen of the United States. Then, he had fought the Crown of England, as he would fight anyone now who brought death, danger and mayhem to his new country.

“No surrender!” Pie-Eyed Wallace called, looking him in the eye across the expanse of water that separated them. Bartholomew had carefully maintained his shallow-drafted sloop in the deeper waters off the reef. His men would prepare the longboats to collect survivors—those who wished to be taken to town for trial—when the inevitable happened and the *Hellion* went down to her watery grave.



“There’s a chance for life!” Bartholomew shouted. “What of your men?”

“Me men will swing from the hanging tree ’neath the merciless order of the tyrant Porter. Trial! ’Tis a travesty—there is no hope for justice. We will die at sea! Ye’ll grant me that!” Wallace cried.

“Nay, Cap’n, there’s hope!” one of his men shouted from the deck. “We could find mercy!”

Wallace turned to eye the wounded man on deck. He pulled one of several pistols from the long holster across his chest—and shot him.

“There, there is the only mercy to be found!” Wallace said.

Wallace was right; David Porter was merciless when it came to pirates—despite all the good he had done, it was true that the man was a tyrant, keeping Key West under stringent military rule.

Those who were esteemed in Key West lived well and nicely. And in certain fine homes, hastily furnished by trade or through salvage, one could pretend to be in one of the finest drawing rooms in Richmond, New York or even New Orleans.

Those who broke the law discovered that Porter’s justice was harsh.

Wallace stared at Bartholomew. “Will you have mercy, sir?” he asked as he drew out another gun that was long enough to cover the many yards of distance between them. He took aim at Bartholomew.

No choice. Bartholomew quickly drew his own rifle, Bess, and fired in return. The sound of the bullets from both of their guns was explosive; the air filled with black powder again where it had just begun to settle.

Wallace’s bullet crashed into the mast; Bartholomew’s aim was true, and the pirate Pie-Eyed Wallace dropped dead where he stood.

Mercy.

A pirate's mercy. A quick bullet, rather than the slow death of the hangman's noose and a slow strangulation with the body flailing, kicking and writhing—and finally, failing.

Bartholomew turned away and spoke to his first mate, Jim Torn. "We must collect the survivors and bring them to the law."

He was weary as he gave the order and returned to his cabin, anxious to return to port.

He had seen many a hanging, and he had to wonder if they should leave the men to drown. But he had discovered that he admired Craig Beckett, the man who had befriended him in New Orleans and who had encouraged him to bring his ship to Key West. The Island was raw and young, but it was a place where a young man, once a Brit, once a privateer, once a rover of the world, might find a future. He would still find his fortune at sea, but as a merchant. He would be able to build himself a fine house soon enough and lead the life of a gentleman.

He had but one dream. And a fine house would be part of that dream.

They returned to port where Jim Torn and his men saw to the three half-dead prisoners they had taken from the sea. One, Scurvy Pete, had a horror of drowning; he would take the noose. Two others had simply not managed to die.

Mariah's Bar, a popular place for seamen, stood near the deep water docks, and Bartholomew headed in for a pint. He was especially weary though, and after the pint, he left, intending to seek a long night's rest in his rental rooms. But, as he left the bar, he saw her.

His dream.

He saw that she had come to the docks to collect a purchase, and it appeared that the purchase was heavy or awkward as she seemed to have some trouble gathering the long package.

“Mistress, I implore you, do allow me to help you with that!” Bartholomew said, hurrying to her where she stood by the merchant’s carts.

Victoria Wyeth looked up at him with blue eyes—no, violet eyes, like huge pools of wonder. They were set in a face of absolute and stunning perfection, perfectly sculpted cheekbones, a fine chin, small nose and a high forehead. Her hair was like the proverbial raven’s wing, sleek and coifed. A large straw hat shadowed her features to save her porcelain skin from the merciless heat of the sun; her day gown was sewn from the most delicately fashioned cotton, cool despite its cumbersome skirts and form-hugging bodice.

In the midst of the rough town that was Key West, she was a breath of freshness, cool air and society, all that was right and structured and noble in the world. When she moved, it was with grace, and when she spoke it was a fluid melody.

They had met briefly upon many an occasion, though he had not been invited into her home—nor was such an event likely to come about.

Not until he had proven himself a good and responsible citizen, worthy of such a prize. Not until he had managed a real income at trade, and had built a fine house. Not until he had earned the respect of her father, who wanted far more for her than an ex-privateer, a man without family—or prospects of any great inheritance.

“Captain Miller!” she said. And the melody of her voice touched him as the seductive hand of many another had never done. In his time he had known many a tavern wench, and many a whore. He’d slept with fine ladies as well—divorced or widowed and, because the poor woman had been so mistreated by her husband that it had seemed a mercy to show her tender love, one who was married. He had felt desire, and he had known amusement and laughter, but in his life he had not known this feeling, this deep ache inside, to have and to hold and protect against all odds.

She smiled, and he, who had survived many a sea battle, fought the Spanish and the British on land and sea, felt as if all strength deserted him, as if knees became the very substance of salt water.

He helped her with the parcel she had acquired from the ship that had just docked, the *Langley*, out of Norfolk, Virginia. The well-wrapped package read “Timmons of London,” and he knew that it must contain some of the finest crafted fabric to be had. She never appeared to be overly interested in clothing or decoration; she just had the ability to make simple elegant. Despite her high role in the social strata of a country where “every man was born equal,” she was kind and gentle, never affected. He had seen her handing out coins to the little children of Caribbean fishermen, and tossing a ball to them in play.

“My deepest thanks,” she said, flushing.

He gathered the parcel. Her fine house was down on Duval Street—named after the territorial governor—almost a mile from his own lodgings, closer to the water. He found that he was suddenly wide awake, that he could walk on air.

“Sir, I saw men arrested,” she said. “Were you responsible?”

“Pie-Eyed Wallace’s ship was racing south, and we came upon him,” Bartholomew explained. “Craig Beckett, though a civilian, helps attend to matters for David Porter, and he ordered that Pie-Eyed Wallace be taken if seen, and I follow his lead in all things.”

“You’re very brave,” she told him.

He shrugged, aware that a blush was forming on his cheeks. Brave? No, just hardened, and aware from his penniless youth on the streets of Liverpool that he must find his own place in the world. He’d been a hungry child, not just for food, but for knowledge, and he had used every opportunity to learn, being like a sponge around well-educated men.

“Not so brave, Mistress Wyeth. I’m just a man doing as he must. Captain Beckett is someone I admire greatly, and he is my friend, helping me to gain a solid foothold that I might become a man of means about this town.”

“And that’s important to you?”

He looked at her, and the words slipped from his mouth. “You are important to me, Miss Wyeth.”

She sucked in her breath, staring at him.

“I beg your pardon. I most heartily beg your pardon!” he said hastily.

“But you have not offended me,” she told him. “You need beg no pardon.”

He was horrified to find himself speechless.

He was customarily the one who teased and flirted. He had confidence and ease, and he loved to make the young girls giggle and speculate.

Bartholomew Miller cut a fine figure. His shoes were buckled and bore heels, his hose didn’t display a single knot, and his breeches were impeccable. He wore a ruffled shirt, red vest and black jacket. His hair was jet-black and neatly queued beneath his tricornered hat. His eyes were light and bright and bore a sparkle of mischief that women usually found to be as captivating as his grin and his dimples. Women had always liked him, and he was grateful that he’d always managed to keep the friendship of his fellows, as well. He enjoyed life, and was fascinated by events and people.

He’d been lucky in living a life that had brought him around the globe, and he was grateful for the hard training he’d received at the hands of the British Navy. It had prepared him to captain a ship, and though he had been born and bred in Liverpool—admittedly in an area that was the cesspool of the city, he’d discovered a passion for a wild new country in the western hemisphere—the United States of America.

But this feeling was new to him. This pining, this sense of wonder just to be near a woman.

“Oh,” he managed at last.

She laughed softly, and again, just the sound of it was like music.

“My good fellow, this is America!” she said.

“Meaning every man might have his chance?” Bartholomew asked.

“Of course,” she said.

“I don’t think your father would agree,” he said.

“I’m not a child,” she told him, a flash of indignity in her eyes.

He was touched and amazed that she had so noticed him, that she might be attracted to him, as well.

But he had been around the world.

And he knew many a man like her father.

“Let me walk you home with this parcel,” he said.

They walked, and she asked him questions about sailing, about the exotic ports he had known, and the men with whom he had fought. When they reached the house—a huge clapboard with a grand porch and beautiful veranda—she laughed and insisted that he come in. He was uneasy, but her enthusiasm was such that he agreed, and he carried in the parcel, depositing it in the foyer where she directed, and then following her into the parlor. She rang a little bell, a maid came, and she ordered tea service.

The maid brought their repast, and they sat together on the sofa, still talking. She and her father had come down from New York City, where her father had been a successful banker, allowing him the freedom to come south to fulfill his dream of creating a vast shipping empire. Bartholomew was familiar with New York, but not as she knew it, and she talked about life south and north of Wall Street, and the sadness in the Five

Points area, where immigrants fought and starved, and gangs often ruled the street.

Their fingers touched, their voices were quick and hurried, and they were close, so close he knew that he wanted her more than ever, and he said, in the midst of a sentence about London, “I will do anything. I have loved you so from afar, I can no longer imagine life without you. I cannot believe that you would even consider a man so humble in station as I.”

She held his hand between her own. “I believe in the dream of our country,” she said. She smiled. “I have met many of my father’s business friends and acquaintances, and most are snobbish fops. But you, Bartholomew, are not taken with your own grandeur, you don’t talk of choice and honor, you have lived in search of it. You are the man with whom I can find what I seek in life—dreams of our own creation, a world in which we make our lives what we wish them to be and are heedless of a friend’s position or his money.”

She smiled, and turned away, and pointed to a small framed likeness on the mantel. “My mother,” she said. The woman in the painting was lovely, and her daughter was in her image. “I lost her five years ago. She believed in dreams. She believed that an Irish washerwoman could earn her way and make a life. She did so. She had her own business, tailoring with several seamstresses, when she met my father. She was strong and wonderful. I loved her so much.”

“I’m sorry she is gone,” Bartholomew said. He didn’t remember his own mother. He had never known his father. His surname had come from the man in Liverpool who had taken him in, and taught him the sea, out of kindness. He had died the first year that Bartholomew had been with the British Navy.

Before either could say more, the front door opened and closed. Victor Wyeth, Victoria’s father, had come home.

“Victoria!” he called.

“In here, Father! Captain Miller and I are having tea,” Victoria returned.

Victor Wyeth, a large, robust man, strode into the room. His gaze instantly fell upon Bartholomew. That gaze created a chill that raced along his spine.

But Wyeth was polite. “Why, Captain, what a surprise,” he said, shaking hands as Bartholomew stood to greet him.

“I was struggling with a large parcel and Captain Miller came to my rescue,” Victoria said.

“That was most kind,” Wyeth said. “Whatever charge you might like to make upon me will be most gratefully paid.”

“Sir, it was a pleasure to help,” Bartholomew said.

“Father! He does not wish to be paid. He is a friend, and friends help friends,” she said.

“Of course,” Wyeth said. He looked at his watch. “But tea time is over, and I have pressing business with which I will need your assistance, Victoria.”

“Father, honestly—” Victoria began.

Bartholomew did not take his seat again. “I must be going,” he told Victoria. He smiled, telling her he understood.

And in his eyes, and in his touch as he delicately kissed her fingers in farewell, he was certain that she knew he would wait for her, a lifetime, if need be.

“I shall see you out,” Wyeth told him.

“Thank you, sir,” Bartholomew said.

The pretense ended when Victor Wyeth led Bartholomew outside. “Sir, you will not come near my daughter again, do you understand? She is a lady, and far above the reach of a pirate such as yourself.”

“I am not a pirate, Mr. Wyeth,” Bartholomew said.

Wyeth waved a hand in the air. “I know your past. You will stay away from my daughter.”



Bartholomew meant to do all the right things, but he couldn't accept such a statement. "What if your daughter is not of the same mind?" he demanded.

"My daughter will do as I say. And I am best of friends with Commodore Porter—I can see to it that you regret any trouble you cause me," Wyeth said.

Bartholomew stared at him. "I don't bow down to threats, Mr. Wyeth. If Victoria tells me to stay away, then that is what I will do. Good day, sir."

He turned and left before they could get into a screaming match, or, God forbid, a brawl. He walked down the street with his head high, his stride long and strong.

Bartholomew had expected Wyeth's reaction; he had not known that he would shake so badly once he was away from him, or how bitter the rejection would feel when it was voiced out loud. He was glad, however, that he had not backed down, and he was equally glad that he had not allowed himself to be drawn into an altercation.

He returned to his rooms. He was exhausted. There was a bottle of rum by his bedside, and he drank deeply from it, staring at the ceiling. He reminded himself that the day had been filled with enchantment—no matter what Victor Wyeth said, Victoria had spoken her mind. Love, he determined, would have its way. He wasn't a fool; he knew the world, and he had seen many an affair go sadly as daughters or sons obeyed their parents. His Victoria, however, would not do so. They would be together. He had to believe in the dream, because the most important aspect of the dream had proven real—Victoria herself.

He drank himself to sleep.

In the morning, he ordered a bath from the mistress of his lodgings, and once bathed and shaven, he felt like a new man. He had just completed his toilet when the landlady brought him a note.

It was from Victoria. She was visiting a friend, Siobhan O'Hara, at a public house with a lady's tea room. There was also a lovely outside patio.

And Siobhan's personal apartments were atop the lower level public house.

She would be delighted if he might pass by.

Discreetly.

Immediately, he felt overcome by emotion. And he realized, sadly, that Victoria had understood the extent of her father's temper and determination. That would not deter him. If she wished it, he would be discreet.

And so he donned his hat and set out on the street until he reached O'Hara's. There, he paused, uncertain, but a young lady came from the house, Miss Siobhan O'Hara, as pretty as a picture with her blazing red hair and snapping green eyes. "Why, Captain Miller! How lovely to see you. I have a box that needs lifting around back, if you'd be so good as to assist me?"

"Aye, with pleasure," he assured her, and so he walked around with her to the rear of the establishment and the delivery entrance. "I really do have a box of Cuban rum," she told him, her green eyes afire with laughter. "If you would?"

"As I said, dear Miss O'Hara, with pleasure!"

He lifted the box, and set it where she directed just inside the storage room, then she brought a finger to her lips, winked, and led him to a stairway.

"You'll not be disturbed!" she promised, and disappeared outside.

He walked up the stairs. When he reached the door at the top of the stairs and was about to knock, the door flew open.

Victoria was there.

She drew him in.

She did not speak.

She slid into his arms, as if they had been betrothed for years, as if they were known lovers, and she was greeting him as was only proper.

They kissed, and her lips were pure sweetness, her breath was mint, and what she might have lacked in experience, she quickly made up for in ardor. Holding her, he felt his limbs inflame, his desire ignite into fever. He tried so hard to hold back, but she would have none of it.

“Please!” she commanded. “I watched you on the streets forever! We would meet, and you would ask about my welfare and mention the weather. And now we have talked, and we know our hearts and minds.”

“But you are a proper lady,” he whispered against her lips, aching. And yet, he loved her—he would never force anything upon her. He would wait. He would fight. He would die for her.

She laughed. Ah, that melody of sound. Her eyes were wicked as they touched upon his. “I am a proper woman as well, my dearest Captain! One who has dreamed of you... longed for you so many lonely nights!”

Everything within him seemed to explode with a thousand rockets, and his need for her was urgent and desperate, and still...

She would not wait. They tangled in a passionate kiss. She was a determined tease, touching his sex, stroking him through clothing, until they both struggled to rid one another of the cumbersome costume that was only proper on the streets, yet so impractical in such a climate! They were both steaming as they struggled with stays and laces and ties, and he laughed, asking her how he was ever going to put her all back together again.

“You’ve never disrobed a woman before, Captain?” she teased. “Why do I doubt that?”

“Well, I have disrobed one, but I’ve yet to re-robe one,” he told her. “And seldom were the woman quite so dressed!”

She never took offense at honesty, and for that, he loved her all the more. And as they talked and laughed, their clothing was at last cast away, and he looked at the beauty of her nakedness, and he was as breathless and in awe as a school boy. But he drew her to him, and their bodies seemed so attuned and so perfect. The feel of her flesh against his was the most wondrous thing that might be imagined, until her lips fell upon his shoulder and his chest, and he could bear no more, lifting her up and carrying to their hostess's bed, where he laid her tenderly down and loved her once again with his eyes.

“Come, come, Captain!” she taunted.

Enough. He loved her then with his kisses, his caress; he adored her from head to toe and back again, until she was crying out for him, and he rose above her at last, sinking slowly into her.

He was her first lover. He had expected as much. And he made love with all the aching tender care a man could summon, until her needs matched his, and they fulfilled the frantic need of their desire in a glorious rush of silver and gold—it seemed that the world turned colors for them, celebrating their sheer ecstasy of belonging, consummating all that had filled their dreams.

Nor was she then shy, decrying her moment of madness or asking if he loved her still. She was tender and thoughtful for long moments as they both learned to breathe again, and then she rolled to him and said, “My father has indeed threatened me. I loathe him! No, he is my father, and I love him, but I detest his snobbery! He has forgotten his own love, forgotten my dear mother. He has it in his head that I must marry a filthy rich banker named Townsend—or that lying little thief of a man, Eli Smith, who is a pirate in truth, but is such a suave and smooth liar that they believe he is merchant when the bastard is none. I know he has taken ships, I just know it. I've seen goods that such a man could not afford among his offerings, but he has thus far escaped the law. I swear that I will not have either man! He will have to understand that I love you.”

“He lost your mother,” Bartholomew reminded her. “He lost your mother, and he forgot about love and dreams. Maybe he had to bury them to salve his grief. I’m glad you do not hate him—a daughter should not hate her father.”

She looked at him in such a way that he felt he could melt like candle wax in her arms. She stroked his cheek. “I love you for all good reason!” she said.

“We will be together,” he assured her.

She nodded grimly. “Aye, we will be together. You mustn’t come around—give me time to talk to him. I will make him see life my way. Siobhan is my dearest friend, and her brothers are hardworking men, and her mother is a saint. They will keep our secret. Meet here, not tomorrow but Friday, say, and it will appear that I abide my father’s rule. If I cannot sway him to my way of thinking...”

“Then I have a fine ship, and we will sail away to another port,” he assured her.

“Aye. We will sail away to another port,” she agreed.

The hour was growing late, but they were new lovers so enamored of one another that they were careless of time.

They made love again.

Then he knew that she must get home, and he fumbled ridiculously trying to help her back into her corset and stays and all else, but she laughed and guided him and at last, she was dressed. He left first, going into the public house for a beer and a fish pie, and she emerged later, joining Siobhan in the tea room for sandwiches and tea.

He lived for Friday.

On his way back to his rooms, he ran into one of the men who had been seeking Victoria’s hand.

Eli Smith.

He greeted the man pleasantly enough; he did not know him well. He didn’t like Smith, though. There was something

shifty about his eyes—something oily in his speech.

“So, you’re not at sea, Bartholomew Miller!” Smith boomed. “I thought you were seeking a life as a merchant?”

“Indeed. I’m heading out to sea soon.” Bartholomew said, trying to be pleasant.

Smith was pleasant enough in return. “Aye, I must take to the sea soon again myself. But first I must press my suit. I believe that Mr. Wyeth is entertaining my request for his daughter’s hand in marriage. The lady is not ready to wed, but I will lay roses at her feet and await her love!”

Bartholomew fought to keep his smile.

“Good luck to you, Mr. Smith,” he said, touched his hat and went on.

He loathed Eli Smith.

He was certain Eli Smith loathed him, as well.

Finally Friday arrived and Bartholomew made his way to meet Victoria.

As he moved through the streets, he noted that one of the town’s most fascinating women, Dona Isabella, was busy with a bevy of servants.

She was shopping. He’d heard it said that her husband, living in Spain, had tired of his wife’s idle days at their island property. He was demanding that she return to Spain.

Perhaps she was preparing for the journey. He stepped out of the way as she and her entourage passed; her eyes touched his. She didn’t smile or acknowledge him—he was beneath her. She should take care, he thought—there were still pirates aplenty in the water.

He passed some of the less scrupulous bars in the town, bars where it was said that pirates came, pretending to be good citizens of the town.

He knew of one pirate, Mad Miller, who often liked to come to Key West, to drink with the navy men. Despite his

name, Mad Miller was not known for being a killer, just a thief. He was friendly with a bar wench, and it was said as well that he would come for her, and they would sail away together. He smiled, thinking that love knew no bounds.

He knew that so well himself.

He forgot the wretched Smith, the haughty Dona Isabella and the crazy pirate Mad Miller. He met Victoria, and, if possible, they made love more passionately.

“I leave with my mentor, Captain Beckett, on a fishing expedition with friends,” Bartholomew said. “I will be gone but overnight—or possibly for two nights. We are going out to catch majestic marlins, for he has friends who enjoy the fight of the fish. Perhaps, I can cancel—“

“No!” she said with horror, “you must not. People will notice that we are not about, doing as we would normally do.” She was quiet for a minute. “Bartholomew, I know how you love this place, how your dreams were here, but I believe we must run away.”

“My dreams are where you are. But we will not run away. Not unless forced in time. I love you, and I care not about any place, but I know that you love your father, and so I will try through my friend, Captain Beckett, to reach your father. Only if we are forced will we go. Let’s give it a few months. I would never have you resent me in time, hate me that you lost the love of your father.”

She cradled his face. “That you can care, when he has treated you so shabbily, makes me love you all the more.”

“Ah, well!” He caught her hand and kissed it. “I will not wait forever.” he teased. “There are places we can go. We can go to Jamaica, Bermuda or even New Orleans. I have friends there still,” he assured her.

“We will wait three months after your fishing trip,” she told him. “Not a day longer. And if we are forced to flee, then later when we have our own precious little daughter, he will

make peace with us. He is, at the bottom of his heart, a loving man.”

He agreed; they kissed.

And they knew they must part.





## *PART II*

### *DEATH*

“Ah, what a beauty!” Captain Craig Beckett applauded, watching as Andrew Morton, a businessman from Key West and a good friend, reeled in a giant blue marlin, a magnificent fish in truth. “What a fine beauty! You’ve done yourself proud, Andrew!”

“Couldn’t have done it with the expertise of your young friend there!” Morton said, acknowledging Bartholomew.

“It was my pleasure, sir,” Bartholomew said.

“A round of rum, a mighty toast!” Beckett said, grinning. He looked at Bartholomew—a look that assured him that he was a good man, and a good man making the right connections.

“Rum, yes! Or grog, rather, I believe—we’ve sugared her down mightily and added a bit of water,” said Peter Yearling, another friend of Beckett’s, who worked as an architect.

“Grog, it is! Peter, soon enough Bartholomew is going to need your services, you know. You had best plan to cut him a fine deal. He’ll be running merchandise up and down the coast, and bringing back the finest goods from all over the world,” Beckett said, accepting the mug handed to him by the architect.

“A home!” Peter boomed. “Indeed, when you are ready, I will build you a fine home, my friend. And as it is done, I will keep the cost down for you—and expect the best in tea, silk, and so on in return!”

Bartholomew laughed with the men.

The conversation went on, and he was pleased, and he thought that he might have a chance of creating a home here,

with Victoria. He was befriending men who were respected in the community; he would make the living he must—an honest living—to be a good husband and provider for Victoria.

“What say you, Bartholomew? Onward to the islands?” Beckett asked.

“Pardon?” He had been thinking about Victoria.

“We’ve decided to lengthen the trip. Head for the southern Bahamas,” Beckett said.

His own ship was anchored nearby with Jim Torn awaiting his command.

He smiled. “Sir, if you’ll forgive me, I will return to Key West. I have many books you have given me, regarding money matters and record keeping. I’d study them before we head to Richmond, sir.”

“There’s my man! Stalwart in battle, earnest in peace!” Beckett applauded.

Bartholomew thanked him for his support, said his goodbyes to the others and headed for the ship’s ladder down to his small boat. He rowed to the *Bessie Blue*, where his men awaited him, and he assured them all that the expedition had gone well.

Pleased with the day, he was heedless of the wind or the weather. He had been away from his love for only days, but it felt like eons.

It was late, however, when they returned to port. He wouldn’t try to see Victoria or contact her that night; he would wait until morning, and head straight for O’Hara’s public house. The family was warm and wonderful, coming and going from Ireland, some embracing America and some returning to the Old Country.

They knew of his love. And they all seemed to be in love with love, and certain that all would end right.

Anxious, and dreaming of the morrow, he headed home through dark and empty streets.

His lodging house was quiet as well, not a man about, and certainly not the mistress of the house, his landlady. He did not expect many to be up at this hour, but he hadn't even seen the usual drunks in the street. No matter; he gave it little thought.

He fell back upon his bed, exhausted, yet not quite ready for sleep. He took a small measure of rum, swallowed it down and stared at the ceiling, dreaming. He loved Victoria. He truly loved her. She was goodness and purity with spirit and vivacity—and she loved him, as well. They would make it work.

He closed his eyes, content and anxious, dreaming of Victoria and their future.

He felt a soft touch upon his cheek, and his eyes flew open. He smiled. He'd dreamed her touch, just as he dreamed her there.

“My love,” Victoria said, and a kiss fell upon his lips, as gentle as the air. She seemed to float above him.

“I am all right—I am better where I am, for I chose the ending. I could not live with the memory of you, and the touch of another man,” she said. “But now, you must rise. You must not lie here. You are accused. They will be coming for you. They will want you dead.”

“Victoria, don't fret! No one will come for me. All is well. I am here now. My trip was a great success. We will have many powerful friends. I will convince your father that we can marry, that I can be the husband you deserve and a provider who is strong and resilient and good.”

He heard something outside, some major commotion.

“Run, you must run!” she told him.

“No, my love, I have nothing to run from,” he said.

The commotion grew louder.

He was looking at Victoria, and then he wasn't.

She wasn't there; she had been nothing but a dream. A confusing dream, for he couldn't understand what she had been trying to tell him.

Had he been sleeping?

Then his door burst open. He jumped at the sound, and reached for his sword. He wanted to be a man of business, but he had long been a seaman. He had seen much of war, and he had roamed the seas as a privateer—awakened suddenly, he would always reach for his sword.

He was stunned when men began pouring into the room—David Porter's men, and a few citizens of Key West.

“Bartholomew Miller! You are under arrest for murder!” cried out a lieutenant.

Aghast, stunned, he faced them all with his sword.

“I have committed no murder!” he cried.

“Foul bastard!” shouted another man, a citizen. “You raided the ship *Annabelle Lee*, causing her to sink. You butchered her crew.”

“I did no such thing!”

“You even murdered the young and innocent Victoria Wyeth and her maid!”

“What?” The single word didn't explode from his mouth—it was a whisper of disbelief.

They were lying. What words had come out of the man's mouth were so abominable they couldn't be true.

“No!” he cried, an eruption of horrified protest. “What are you talking about? Victoria Wyeth was on no ship. She is home, certainly—she is home in bed, sleeping.”

“Victoria Wyeth was on the *Annabelle Lee*, heading north to Virginia at her father's command—to escape the likes of you,” the lieutenant informed him.

“And you did draw her out and murder her, in cold blood,” another cried.

He shook his head. “This is not true. Victoria is not dead. She cannot be dead.”

“You were seen,” said the lieutenant. “Your ship was seen, blasting cannon at the merchantman. You lured the ship to the reef, and proceeded to pummel her with deadly powder, and then went aboard the dying vessel to cut down and kill all aboard.”

“No! Never, never! I love Victoria!” he said.

“You loved her, you scurvy bastard, and you couldn’t have her, so you killed her,” the lieutenant said scathingly.

Bartholomew still couldn’t understand the words that were being said. He couldn’t comprehend them. Because it couldn’t be true.

And if she was dead...

Nothing else mattered.

But she couldn’t be dead. Not Victoria, with her laughter, with her spirit, with her joy and kindness, and absolute beauty in person and in soul.

“You were witnessed, and all know that you are a pirate, Bartholomew Miller,” the lieutenant said. “And according to our law, you will now be hanged by the neck until dead.”

He didn’t care. He didn’t care what happened to him.

But, Victoria...

And the accusation that he had killed her? *Killed his love?*

“Back away!” he warned, swinging his sword. “If what you say is true, if Victoria Wyeth is dead, then gladly will I lay down my life, for it is worthless if she is no longer in this world. But it is a lie, a foul lie. I killed no one, and damn you all and the liar who said it. I was never a murderous pirate. I served king and country, and then the ideal of this country, and I fought the enemies of my state at all times. To murder any

woman would be abhorrent to me—to injure a hair on the head of Victoria Wyeth would be anathema, and I am innocent of such a charge.”

“Seize him!” the lieutenant ordered.

There were many after him—a good two dozen. But there was something in him that night. He fought like a caged beast, which, in truth, was what he was. Men fell back before him. He caught the tip of one fellow’s nose with so smooth a slice that the man bled like a pig before crying out that he had been injured.

Many another bore a slice, but he had no desire to kill.

No desire to live.

He had a chance to make a clean strike and kill the lieutenant. He watched the man step back in fear.

He lowered his sword.

“Tell me—is it true? Is Victoria Wyeth dead?” he asked quietly.

“Indeed,” the lieutenant said quietly. “Your ship was seen. A witness cries against you, one who fled in terror for his own life.”

“The witness lies,” Bartholomew said.

“You are condemned,” the lieutenant told him.

“Then I will go to my death,” Bartholomew said.

None of them dared go near him.

He shook his head, his heart dead already. He dropped his sword and offered his hands to be bound behind his back.

Finally a man stepped forward, nervously trying to tie the rope. He did the job badly. It didn’t matter. Bartholomew intended to make no fight.

He left his room without a backward glance. He was led down the stairs and out to the street, and now, despite the late hour, there were people everywhere, all crying out against

him, hurling bad tomatoes and whatever else lay in the road. He felt nothing.

They walked, in the pale glimmer of the moon to the hanging tree. And there he was prodded up on a box, and the lieutenant was taxed with the job of offering him a hood and setting the rope around his neck.

He declined the hood.

“Have you last words?” the lieutenant asked, his voice shaking.

“Indeed! I am innocent of this charge. I was nowhere near the reef, rather on a fishing expedition with Captain Craig Beckett, and when he returns, you will know the truth of my words. I have always shown mercy to my enemies, I have served all well with passion. I loved Victoria Wyeth with every breath in my body. I have but one question. Who accused me?”

Nervous silence greeted his words.

“I have the right to know before I die! Who accused me of this foul crime?”

“Eli Smith,” the lieutenant said.

“Then I hope that he meets his just end—I hope that the truth comes out. I hope that he comes to this hanging tree himself, but that, when he dies, he finds no reward, but rather that he rots in hell for eternity. For myself, all that I loved in life is gone, and therefore I go willingly to meet her. I still stand before you an honest man who loved deeply, but did no ill to anyone in that love!”

He was startled to hear a woman’s tears from the crowd.

There was a murmur of protest.

“As per the law and the task with which I am charged!” the lieutenant cried out, and he kicked the box away.

Dying was quite bizarre, and as he had felt nothing since learning Victoria was dead, he was only vaguely aware of the



pain.

His neck did not break.

He was suffocated slowly. He tried hard to die with dignity, but he was aware that his body betrayed him, that his limbs twitched and jerked.

Slowly, too slowly, the blackness began to overwhelm him.

*This was death...*

Suddenly, he was no longer the man swinging from the tree. He was above it all, watching.

Watching as his limbs ceased to twitch.

Watching as he hung limp in death.

Someone walked up to him and stood on the block, and placed their fingers against his throat. "Is there a physician?" he cried.

There was a doctor in the crowd. He came forward and placed his ear to Bartholomew's chest, and waited.

Someone brought a mirror; it was set before his parted lips.

"He is dead—it is done. So die all pirates!" the lieutenant. He tried to cry out the words with conviction and assurance. His voice squeaked.

Bartholomew felt as if he was standing behind the crowd, watching.

As he watched, he felt a hand slip into his.

He turned.

Victoria was there. Her beautiful eyes were filled with sadness. She touched his cheek. They were together but invisible to the others. "My love. My poor, dear love," she whispered. "I tried...I tried to warn you."

He stroked her cheek in return. "But you are here. I prefer death with you to any life without you." he said.

"We are here, together," she said.

“Who did this to you?” he asked her.

“Smith,” she said, as if even the saying of the name was loathsome. “Smith! He wanted to take me. He meant to kill everyone on the ship and take me with him. I refused to go with him. I could not! My skin crawled at the thought of it. He said that I could die or have him, and I said that I preferred death. And he said that I was hypnotized by evil—you. He said that we would both pay. And he put his hands around my neck, and strangled me...and I died, and yet I stayed. I was on his ship when it returned, and I heard him shouting that my ship had gone down and that...you had done it.” She began to weep with no tears. “My father heard the words and went mad. He took his pistol, set it in his mouth, fired it and died on the spot.”

“I am so sorry, my poor, dear love.”

“Smith must be made to pay for his crime,” she whispered.

“Yes, Smith must pay. And he will do so,” Bartholomew said.

And so they remained, hand in hand, as the days passed by.

Then Craig Beckett and his crew returned. Eli Smith must not have known that Bartholomew had sailed with Beckett that day, because he was in the bar, boasting of his prowess at sea and saying as how he’d have taken on the pirate Bartholomew Miller himself had he but had a few guns on his own sloop, when Craig Beckett strode into the room.

Beckett was incensed.

“Liar! You are the worst, most sniveling bastard of a bloody liar,” Beckett said. “Bartholomew Miller could not have committed the crime as you say, and I know it well, for Bartholomew Miller was with me when the crime took place.”

“No, that’s not true,” Eli Smith cried out, but he was so taken by surprise that his words tumbled out oddly. Then he found his voice. “No, no, this is not true. You—defend him falsely. And it is too late—he is dead. Hanged by the neck, and dead as a pirate should be dead.”

Craig Beckett stood straight and slowly smiled a smile that was not a smile at all.

“There were others with me, Smith. Other good men of this town. Honest men, who know that you killed the people aboard the *Annabelle Lee*, you killed Victoria Wyeth because *you* could not have her—she truly loved another. And you brought about the execution of a good man who caused no ill to any other in a heinous manner. You, sir, deserve to die! But it will be just and right—you will be condemned by a jury of your peers.”

Eli Smith fought. He fought wildly. He screamed, he cried out, and he was finally subdued and caught between the two burly men who had taken him. He was dragged down the street—dragged, for he fell limp between his attackers—and continued to scream and cry and protest.

Bartholomew, with Victoria’s hand in his, followed.

Eli Smith was actually given a trial. But he had no witnesses in his defense—his crew were rounded up by the squadron and brought in for trial, as well. Desperate to save their own lives, his own men spoke against him. Bartholomew was glad to see that even the justice of Commodore David Porter was not so harsh as to have the young cook’s helper charged with murder, but most of the other men, no matter how they maligned their captain, would not be spared the rope.

The trial came to a conclusion, with Beckett and many another good man speaking in defense of Bartholomew.

The time and date for the execution were set, and it came about.

Eli Smith was dragged to the hanging tree.

The man did not want to die.

As all others, he was given his chance to speak.

Craig Beckett was there, and Eli Smith pointed at him. “I curse you, Beckett! I curse you, and all your heirs! Time will come and time will tell, and by all that is holy and unholy, I

swear that you will know the pain I suffer now! I curse you. I curse you. I curse you! May all the demons of hell curse you and all your issue, and their issue, until time is no more!”

Beckett stood watching him. “It is you who are cursed, man. It is you who murdered an innocent young woman, and all aboard her ship. You brought about the death of an innocent man. The death of Victor Wyatt also weighs on your soul, for he died of the pain you caused. You, sir, will rot in hell.”

“I punished those who sinned! I did no more!” Eli Smith called out. “You are cursed, sir! Whatever time it may take, I will see that you and yours rot in hell! Cursed—”

The hangman had tired of the tirade.

He kicked out the platform upon which the condemned man stood, and Eli Smith’s words were cut off cleanly.

Bartholomew listened to the sound of the rope scraping against the tree, and he heard the sound of the dead man swinging to and fro, to and fro.

Then, they saw Eli Smith drop, in spectral form, from the swaying body. He stared at himself. And he began to curse again, damning Beckett—and damning him.

He turned, and he saw Bartholomew, and Victoria holding his hand.

He pointed at Bartholomew. “Bastard, you both deserved to die!” he shouted out.

Bartholomew just stared at him, praying that he was not about to spend eternity roaming the streets of Key West with this man.

But then, there seemed to be an eruption from the ground. None of the living saw it, but Victoria did, as did Eli Smith. He frowned, staring.

Bartholomew grasped Victoria’s hand, and pulled her back, and they saw a dark, oozing blackness arise out of the ground. It was like a sea of swirling, spiraling tar, thick and viscous. It rose as if it sought to find a form to take, as if it had eyes, as if

it searched for something—or someone—and found what it sought.

It started toward Eli Smith.

“No!” he raged in terror. “No!”

He tried to run from the oily, stygian ooze, but the thing formed fingers and arms and reached out for him.

“No!” he cried again. He began to scream and gurgle as the stuff surrounded his spectral being. He cried out horribly, as if the black ooze were a burning tar, and it seemed long agonizing minutes before it all ended with the ooze receding into the floor, along with the ghost of Eli Smith.

And all was silent. Except for the living, who went about the business of cutting down the body, unaware of the drama that had taken place in another sphere of existence.

“It’s not good,” someone muttered. “Not good, being cursed by the dead.”

Craig Beckett was not disturbed. “I don’t believe in curses, man. I believe in the good and evil in a man’s soul, and a curse from one evil man can only be a curse when another comes along. Let’s put an end to this business.”

Victoria looked at Bartholomew, her eyes wide. “There is justice. We don’t always see it, but there is justice.”

He nodded. He had no real body, and yet he felt that he swallowed hard, for he wanted to be strong and sure, but he didn’t know what any of it meant.

The body was cut down; the spectators meandered away, and soon, they were alone. Bartholomew held both Victoria’s hands, looked down at her, and tried to smile.

“I have you,” he began to say. He had been about to tell her that he could face heaven or hell with her by his side.

But then the light came.

Like the ooze that came from the ground, the light seemed powerful and living. It burst out around them, filling the air.

He lifted a hand to shield his eyes against it. There were people walking from it. Some hovered in the distance, but two, hand in hand came closer.

He saw who had come. Victor Wyeth, and his beautiful wife—so like Victoria, just Victoria in another twenty years. Still lovely, tall, sweet and proud.

At his side, Victoria cried out.

“My daughter!” her mother said.

“Victoria!” her father cried, and there was a sob in his voice.

Bartholomew felt her hand slip away from his; she raced to her mother, who enveloped her in a gentle hug. Victor Wyeth set his arms around his wife and his daughter, and the threesome held together for many long minutes.

Victor Wyeth looked over at Bartholomew then. “I was wrong—my apologies come too late.”

“Not too late, sir. I am...I am...I am so sorry for us all.”

Victor nodded, looking at him. Then he turned to his daughter. “It’s time—your murder is avenged, and I must seek forgiveness for all my actions. It’s time.”

*Time? Time for what?* Bartholomew wondered.

He saw that the light streamed from a path.

“We must go,” Victor said.

Victoria reached out for Bartholomew.

Victor caught her hand. “No,” he said gently. “It’s not time for Bartholomew,” he said.

Victoria frowned. “Father, Bartholomew must come. You know that he was guilty of no evil, that his heart was pure, his intentions good.”

Victor shook his head sadly. “It is not for me to say.” He looked at Bartholomew. “You are charged to remain.”

Victoria ran to him. He took her into his arms. But then she pulled away, troubled as she looked at him. “I must go. I feel the light, and I must go. I am avenged, and with those who love me, and I know that there is a greater love...forgive me.”

*She was to go, and he was to stay.*

But he saw the radiance in her face, and he knew, yes, she must go.

For a moment, his arms tightened around her. He held her close, and he wondered if he would know only loss, and he wondered why the light was coming for Victoria, and not for him.

But he loved her.

And he let her go.

He kissed her spectral lips one last time. She stepped backward, until she reached her parents. She looked at him, and he smiled.

*Know only pure happiness and the great warmth and light of love that surrounds you,* he thought. And she heard his thoughts.

They turned, and walked into the light.

And then the light was gone, and he remained.

\* \* \*

Bartholomew mourned for a decade, but it seemed that he was to remain, though for what reason, he did not know.

Eli Smith had been duly hanged. His death had been avenged.

He followed Craig Beckett around at times, but Beckett never noted him, though now and then he would pause and look around, puzzled.

He watched as David Porter brought down the pirates—not an easy task, and there was many a tragedy at sea. As he had feared, Dona Isabella was beset at sea and murdered by the

love of Mad Miller's life, his bar wench, finally his consort.  
Ah, jealousy!

The Mosquito Squadron moved north, and the salvage trade made Key West one of the richest cities in the country, and the world.

War broke out. Civil War—terrible in the extreme. Florida seceded from the Union, but the Union held the fort, and the streets were filled with tension and sadness.

There were good years, and there were bad years.

Boring times and intriguing times.

He was saddened when war came again, when the bodies of sailors who died on the *Maine* came to Key West and were buried.

He met other ghosts now and then, and some were bitter, and some were lost. Some stayed in the cemetery—now in the center of the island, after a horrible storm sent bodies floating down Duval Street. He haunted those who read, and learned to keep pace with them, since it was awkward and difficult to turn pages.

He saw fine people throughout the years, but none of them seemed to notice him. They would pause and sometimes shiver, but they didn't notice him.

Time came, and time went.

He was fascinated by the grouchy old bearded writer—Ernest Hemingway—and he enjoyed hanging out at the bars with him, and laughing over his foibles with his wife.

Key West, infuriated by a blockade, seceded from the Union and became the Conch Republic—only for a few hours, though the title would remain forever. The blockade—strangling the islands and ruining Key West's business, the tourist trade—was lifted. Their point was made.

And still, he haunted the island. He had loved life, and he had loved Victoria, but she was long gone. He found himself pining after another ghost, a beautiful young woman in white



who was often in the cemetery. But she was shy, and they had yet to formally meet. He knew that Victoria was long gone, and that she was happy, loved, and at peace.

And he was lonely.

He was still intrigued, however, with the people and places around him. It was Key West. The bizarre happened. As in the case of that Carl Tanzler fellow—who fell in love with a young Cuban girl, tried to cure her tuberculosis, then dug her up and repaired her body constantly so that he could marry her—and sleep with her corpse for years and years.

It could be entertaining. At least he was in Key West.

But still wondering why he remained.

Then came the day that he was hanging around O'Hara's.

The day he met Katie O'Hara.

He was absolutely astounded. She didn't pause and shiver and feel as if a goose had walked over her grave. She saw him—she really saw him. And she spoke to him.

Katie was gifted. He loved to tease her—she had been told, of course, never to let on that she saw ghosts.

People would think that she was crazy.

So he loved to tease her. Say things in public that would demand a response.

But it was amazing. He had gone so many years, being lonely.

And now...

Of course, he had gone so many years wondering why he remained, as well.

But then, Katie was trying to buy the old Beckett museum, so...

And David Beckett, who had left town years ago, accused of the bizarre murder of his fiancée, was returning.

Things might just start to get interesting.

He might have finally found the reason why he remained on earth....

Ever waiting for the light.



# ***THE BONE ISLAND TRILOGY***

*New York Times* bestselling author Heather Graham brings readers a tantalizing tale of dark deeds and mysterious omens, set amid the fascinating history of the Florida Keys.

There are those who walk among us who are no longer alive, but not yet crossed over. They seek retribution...vengeance...to warn. Among the living, few intuit their presence.

Read more about Bartholomew, the Becketts, and the O'Haras in the Bone Island Trilogy by Heather Graham:

*Ghost Shadow*

(July 2010)

*Ghost Night*

(August 2010)

*Ghost Moon*

(September 2010)

Read on for an excerpt from *Ghost Shadow*....



# ***GHOST SHADOW***

*There are those who walk among us who are no longer alive, but not yet crossed over. They seek retribution...vengeance...to warn. Among the living, few intuit their presence.*

*Katie O'Hara is one who can.*

*As she's drawn deeper and deeper into a gruesome years-old murder, whispered warnings from a spectral friend become more and more insistent. But Katie must uncover the truth: could David Beckett really be guilty of his fiancée's murder?*

*Worse—the body count's rising on the Island of Bones, and the dead seem to be reenacting some macabre tableaux from history. The danger is increasing by the moment—especially as Katie finds herself irresistibly drawn to David, who may be responsible for more than just one killing....*

At 3:00 a.m., Duval Street was far from closed down. She wondered with a quirk of humor what DuVal—the first governor of territorial Florida—would have thought of the street named in his honor.

Certainly, it kept the name from being forgotten.

Key West was filled with history that shouldn't be forgotten. The name itself was a bastardization of Cayo Hueso, Island of Bones, and came from the fact that *hueso* had sounded like *west* to the English-speaking British who had claimed the state from the Spaniards. The name fit because it was the most western of the Islands of the Martyrs, which was what the chain of Florida “keys” had been known as to the Spanish. Actually, the Islands of the Dry Tortugas were farther west, but the name had been given, and it had stuck. Street names came from the early Americans—Simonton and his friends, colleagues and their families. Simonton had purchased Key West from a Spaniard named Salas when Florida had become an American territory. Salas had received the island as a gift—or back payment for a debt—from the Spanish

governor who had ruled before the American governor. The island had seen British rule as well, and often, no matter who ruled, it wasn't ruled much at all.

The place was colorful, throughout history, and now.

"You do love this place," Bartholomew noted as he walked alongside her.

She shrugged. "It's home. If you're used to the beautiful fall colors in Massachusetts, that's home. Down here, it's the water, and the craziness. Yes, I do love it."

She stopped walking and stared across Simonton, frowning.

"What?" Bartholomew asked her. "I see nothing. Not even the beauty in white who frets so night after night."

"Lights."

"Lights? They're everywhere, and trust me, I can remember when they weren't," Bartholomew told her.

"No! There are lights on in the entry at the old Beckett museum. *My* museum."

"You don't officially own it until Saturday, or so you said."

"Right, I have a meeting at the bank on Saturday—Liam is going to come and help me—and I sign the final papers, but..."

There shouldn't have been anyone in the museum. Craig Beckett had passed away at eighty-eight almost a year ago, a dear man, one who might have lived forever. His health had been excellent. But his life had existed around a true love affair. When Leandra, his wife of sixty-plus years had passed away, he had never quite recovered. He hadn't taken a pistol to his head or an overdose of prescription medication, he had simply lost his love for life. Liam Beckett, a friend of Katie's since she had come back—they hadn't been friends before, since Liam had graduated high school before she had started—had been the assumed executor of the estate, and he'd planned to tear the museum down rather than invest in repairing it. The

place hadn't been open in years; Katie had loved it as a child, and she had long dreamed of reopening it. She had talked Liam into agreeing. David Beckett, Liam's cousin and co-executor of the estate, hadn't actually corresponded about the matter yet. He'd been working in Africa, Asia, Australia or somewhere far away for the past few years, and Liam was convinced that David wouldn't care one way or another what happened to the place. It was unlikely he would remain in the Keys if he actually returned at all. Since David had left, almost ten years ago, he had never wanted to come home.

His former fiancée, the great love of his life at the time, even though she had left him, had been murdered. Strangled. She was left there, in the family museum, posed in position as the legendary Elena Milagro de Hoyos.

He'd been under suspicion. He'd had an alibi—his grandparents. That alibi had made some people suspicious. After all, what would his grandparents say? But he hadn't run; he had waited through the beginning of the investigation, he had stayed in town until the case had gone cold and then he had left, never to return.

Katie knew that some people thought that he should have been further investigated. She remembered him, but just vaguely. He'd been a big high-school sports star down here. Sean, her brother, had also loved sports. He was older and knew David Beckett better.

Curious, Katie crossed the street. It was quiet; streetlamps illuminated the road itself, but here on Simonton the revelry taking place still on Duval was muted and seemed far away. She stared up at the building that housed the Beckett family museum.

Originally, she knew, it hadn't been chosen for any historical reason. The house was built in the late eighties by Perry Shane. Shane had deserted it to fight for the Federals back in his native New Jersey. For years afterward, the house had just been one of many old places that needed work. The Beckett family had purchased it in the twenties



because it had been cheap, a seventy-year-old fixer-upper. Now it was one of the grand dames of the street, mid-Victorian, boasting wraparound porches on both the first and second floors, and around the attic garret, a widow's walk. Kate didn't think anyone had ever really been able to see the water and incoming ships from the walk, but it had been a fashionable addition to the house at the time it had been built.

Once, it had offered six bedrooms on the second floor and two in the attic. Downstairs had been the parlor, library, dining room, office and pantry. The kitchen had been out back about twenty feet away. There was also a carriage house. Now, when you entered through the front door, the gate and turnstiles were positioned there. The tour began on the second floor and wound around through the rooms, brought visitors down the servants' stairway to the first floor and then around once again, back to the front.

"What are you doing?" Bartholomew demanded, following her.

"I want to know why there's a light on," Katie said.

"Because someone is in there. And you don't own it yet. It could be someone dangerous."

"It could be frat boys on a lark, and I'm getting them out of there before they do damage to the place. Craig Beckett might have closed it down a few years ago, but it still has all of the exhibits in place," Katie said.

"What if it's not a frat boy?" Bartholomew protested.

"Katie, don't go in there."

"You're with me. I'll be fine."

"Katie! Awake and see the sunrise, lass! Me—ghost. I love to remember the days when I was strong and tough and could defend a girl with certainty and vigor. If you get into real trouble because the place is being pilfered or plundered by a criminal—"

“Bartholomew, what thief turns on the lights?” Katie demanded.

Bartholomew groaned. “A drunk one? Katie—!”

Bartholomew groaned. Katie had jumped the low white-picket gate that surrounded the place.

“Katie!”

“What?”

“Murder, murder most foul!” Bartholomew cried.

He’d always been fond of quoting and paraphrasing Shakespeare.

“Murderers do not turn the lights on!” she tossed over her shoulder in return.

“How do you know?” he demanded

She ignored him and walked up the limestone path that led to broad steps to the porch and the door.

She felt him close behind her.

*Was she crazy? No! This was about to be her place, and she could speed-dial the police in two seconds. She wasn’t going in with lights blazing; she would see what was going on by lurking in the darkness. She knew the place.*

At the door she paused. She reached for the knob and as she did so, the door opened, creaking a bit, as if it had been pushed by a sudden wind.

“I did not do that!” Bartholomew whispered.

She shook her head impatiently and stepped in.

The once beautiful hardwood floors did need work, she noticed. Workmen had been in and out through the years, and their boots had done some damage. The gate area still boasted an old-fashioned cash register, but the mahogany desk, where an attendant sold tickets, was beautiful. It had been bought from an auctioneer and had once been the captain’s desk in an old sailing ship. The swivel chair behind it was equally old,

handsome and still comfortable. Katie was familiar with everything; she had walked through with Liam Beckett just a few days earlier.

The light that she had seen from the street had come from the entry. It was the muted light of the foyer's chandelier, and it cast a gentle glow over the place.

Katie opened her mouth, about to call out, but she didn't. She chose not to twist the turnstile—the noise here would be like an explosion. She sat atop the old mahogany desk and swung her legs around, then stepped to the other side.

Looking up was eerie. Figures of Papa Hemingway and his second wife, Pauline, were posed coming down the stairway. They had always been a big hit at the museum, with eighty percent of those going through the place having their pictures taken with the pair.

“Don't you dare go up those stairs,” Bartholomew commanded sternly.

Katie almost smiled, grinning at him. “Bartholomew, you're scared. A ghost can't be scared. My God, Bartholomew. You were a pirate.”

“Privateer. My boat was authorized by the government,” Bartholomew corrected irritably. “And don't be ridiculous, I'm not frightened. Yes, wait, I am frightened for you, foolish girl. What is the matter with you? I know your family taught you better. Innocent young ladies do not wander into dark alleys.”

“This isn't a dark alley.”

“No, it's worse. You can get trapped in here.”

“I'm not going upstairs,” she assured him.

She walked to the side, realizing that she was going in the wrong historical order. She wasn't going up the stairs; she just wanted to see what was going on.

“Katie,” Bartholomew warned, following her.

She turned and stared at him. “What? I’m going to be scared silly? I’m going to see ghosts?”

“Ghosts will seldom hurt you. Living people, bad people, criminals, rapists, murderers and thieves—they will hurt you,” Bartholomew said sternly.

“Just one more minute... We’ll check out the downstairs, and I’ll call the cops. Or Liam. Liam is a cop. All right? I just don’t want to cry wolf.”

“What?”

“I don’t want to create an alarm when there’s no need. Maybe Liam was here earlier and left the light on.”

“And the door open?” Bartholomew said doubtfully.

Katie shrugged.

She walked to the left, where the tour began once visitors reached the first floor. The first room offered one of Key West’s most dramatic tales—the doll story. As a little boy, Robert Eugene Otto had been given a very creepy doll, supposedly cursed by an angry family servant who knew something about voodoo. Robert Eugene Otto became obsessed with the doll, even naming it Robert, after himself. Robert the Doll moved about the house and played pranks. In later years he drove the real Robert’s wife quite crazy.

From the somewhat psychotic, the history in the museum became sad and grimly real with a memorial to the sailors who had died aboard the battleship *Maine* when it had exploded in Havana Harbor in 1898. The museum’s exhibit showed sailors working on the ship. From there, curtains segued into an area where dancers moved about at the Silver Slipper. World War I came and went. Prohibition arrived, and bootleg alcohol made its way in an easy flow from Havana to Key West.

A pathway through the pantry in back led around to the other side of the house. It was dark, with little light from the glow in the foyer seeping through. Papa Hemingway made another appearance as 1931 rolled in and Pauline’s uncle

bought them the house on Whitehead Street as a wedding present.

Katie knew what she was coming up to—the exhibit on Count von Cosel and Elena de Hoyos. Just a small piece of the museum, really, in a curtained sector through an archway. It had always been a popular exhibit. Until, of course, the re-created figure of poor Elena had been replaced by the strangled body of a young Conch woman. The beginning of the end.

People liked the bizarre, the romance and even the tragedy of history, but with this event fear had suddenly come too close. It was one thing to be eccentric in the Keys.

Real violence was not welcome.

There was more, she thought, so much more, to the museum. It was sad, really, that the story got so much attention.

There was fun history. Sloppy Joe moving his entire bar across the street in the middle of the night, angry over a hike in his rent. Tennessee Williams, working away at La Concha Hotel, penning the words of his play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Another war, soldiers and sailors, the roadblocks that caused Key West to secede and become, if only for hours, the Conch Republic.

The rest of history paled beside the story of von Cosel and Elena. So it had always been.

Morbid curiosity. Had he really slept with the corpse? Ooh, Lord, disgusting! How?

Katie knew the story, of course. She'd heard it all her life. She'd retold it at college a dozen times, with friends denying the truth of it until they looked it up on the Internet. It was tragic, it was sad, it was sick, but it always drew people.

As it had tonight. She put her hand out to draw back the curtain leading to the exhibit.

“Don't, Katie, don't!” Bartholomew whispered.

She closed her eyes for a moment.

She was suddenly terrified that she would draw back the curtain—and stumble upon a corpse herself.

And yet...

She had to draw back the curtain.

She did so, and screamed.

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# CHAPTER 1

“Kieran? Kieran Finnegan, right?” the woman asked.

She was wrapped in a black trench coat, wore a black scarf that nearly engulfed her face, and held a dark blanketed bundle against her chest as if it were the greatest treasure in the world.

Kieran wasn't sure when the woman had come in; the offices of psychologists Fuller and Miro were closed for the day, the doctors were gone, and Kieran had just about left herself. The receptionist, Jake, usually locked the office door on his way out, but apparently tonight he had neglected to do so. Then again, Jake might have already left when Kieran's last patient had exited a little while ago. Whether Jake had been gone or he had forgotten to lock up, the door had been left open.

And so this woman accosted Kieran in the reception area of the office just as she was on her way out.

“I am Kieran, but I'm so sorry, I'm the therapist, not one of the doctors. Actually we are closed for the day. You'll need to come back. Both the doctors are wonderful, and I'm sure they'll be happy to see you another time.”

And this woman certainly looked like she needed help. Her eyes were huge and as dark as the clothing she was wearing as she stared at Kieran with a look of despair.

“All right, let me see what I can do. You seem distraught,” Kieran said, and winced—wow. Stating the obvious. “I can get you to a hospital. I can call for help—”

“No! No!” The woman suddenly thrust the bundle she'd held so closely into Kieran's arms. “Here!”

Kieran instinctively accepted it. Reflex? She wasn't sure why.

It began to cry. And writhe. *Of course*. The bundle was a baby.



“M’am, please—hey!” Kieran protested.

The woman had turned and was fleeing out the door. “Wait! Hey!” Kieran cried. She reached immediately for the phone, hoping that she’d be in time to reach the building’s security desk.

Ralph Miller answered the phone at the lobby desk. “Hey, pretty girl, what are you still doing at work? I’ve got a few hours to go, and then I am out of here. I hear that the Danny Boys are playing at Finnegan’s tonight. Can’t believe your brother snagged them. I would have thought that you’d have gotten out early—”

“Ralph, listen, please! There’s a woman who was just up here, she ran out. Can you stop her from leaving the building?”

The baby wailed in earnest.

“What?”

“There’s a woman in black—”

“In black, yeah. She just left.”

“Stop her—catch her! Now.”

“I can’t hear you, Kieran. I hear a baby crying. A baby! Whose baby is it?”

“Ralph! Get out in the street and get that woman!”

“What?”

“Go catch that woman!”

“Oh! Gotcha! I’m gone.”

She hung up, then quickly dialed 9-1-1.

Emergency services probably couldn’t move quickly enough to help, since no matter how quickly they arrived, the woman was already on the run.

She was running on the busy streets of New York City where rush hour was a swarm of humanity in which to get completely lost. But Kieran still explained her situation, where

she was. The operator was efficient; cops would quickly be out. Child Services would arrive.

But no matter. The woman would get away.

Kieran tried to hold and rock and soothe the baby while dialing Craig Frasier.

If you were living with an FBI agent, it made sense to call him under such circumstances, especially since he—like Ralph—would want to know why she was working so late when the Danny Boys were playing at Finnegan’s. To Craig, it was still a normal night—and a Friday night! A nice, normal Friday night—something that would be very nice to enjoy, given their chosen professions.

“Hey, Kieran,” Craig said. “Are you already at the pub?”

She apparently wasn’t good at rocking and soothing and trying to talk on the phone. The baby was still crying. Loudly.

“No, I—”

“Whose kid is that? I can’t hear a word you’re saying!”

“I’m still at work. Can you come over here, now, please?”

“Uh—yeah, sure.”

Kieran hung up the phone. She didn’t know what Ralph was doing; she didn’t know where the police were. She glanced down at the baby as she hurried from the office, ready to hit the streets herself. How old was the tiny creature? It was so small!

Yet—nice lungs!

*Was the woman in black the mother?*

She had looked older. Perhaps fifty. Too old for an infant.

Ralph wasn’t at the desk; Kieran heard sirens, but as yet no police had arrived.

Bursting out on the New York City rush hour street, she looked right and left. There, far down the block, she thought she saw the woman.

“Hey!” Kieran shouted.

Despite the pulsing throng of humanity between them, the woman heard her. She turned.

There was something different about her now.

The way she moved. The way she looked, and the expression on her face.

She didn't try to run. She just stared at Kieran, and then seemed to stagger toward her.

Kieran clutched the screaming infant close to her breast and thrust her way through the people; luckily, she was a New Yorker, and she knew how to push through a rush hour crowd when necessary.

The woman was still staggering forward. Kieran was closing the gap.

“Listen, I'll help you, I'll help the baby! It's all right...”

It wasn't in any way all right.

The woman lurched forward, as if she would fall into Kieran's arms, if Kieran had just been close enough.

She wasn't.

The woman fell face forward flat down on the sidewalk.

That's when Kieran saw the knife protruding from the woman's back and the rivulets of blood suddenly forming all around her and joining together to create a crimson pool.

\* \* \*

Babies tended to be adorable—and this baby was especially so. In fact, Kieran wasn't sure she'd ever seen an ugly baby, but she had been assured by friends that they did exist.

This little girl, though, had a headful of auburn ringlets and huge blue eyes. Kieran had heard that all babies had blue eyes, but she didn't know if that was true or not. Sadly, she just didn't know a lot about babies; she was one in a family of four children herself, yes, but she and her twin brother, Kevin, were

only a couple of years behind their older brother and one year older than their younger brother.

Actually, this beautiful baby looked as if she could fit right in with their family. Each one of the Finnegan siblings had a form of red hair and blue or green or blue-green eyes.

“They say it’s the Irish,” she said softly to the little one in her arms. “But I don’t think that you’re Irish!”

Talking to the baby made sense at the moment; FBI Special Agent Craig Frasier, the love of her life and often partner in crime—solving crime, not committing it!—had arrived shortly after the police. The medical examiner had come for the body of the murdered woman. While waiting for child services,—Kieran was holding the baby, back up in the office.

Drs. Fuller and Miro worked with the police or other law enforcement. While not with the FBI, they were regular profilers and consultants for the NYC office. The Bureau’s behavioral science teams were down in D.C., and while they could be called in, the city police and FBI often used local help in trying to get a step ahead of a criminal, or in working with criminals and witnesses when psychological assessments were needed, or, sometimes, when a child or a distressed person just needed to be able to speak to someone to ask the right questions and put them at ease. Kieran did a number of those assessments before reporting to the doctors, and she worked with victims of domestic abuse and both parents and children when they wound up within the child welfare system—such as a teenager who had been assaulted by her own father; or a senior who was—recovering from gunshot wounds inflicted by his wife. Or Kieran’s last patient today, Besa Goga. Besa was a sad case, abused for years when she’d first immigrated to the country, and now quick to strike out. Besa Goga was in court-ordered therapy because she’d bitten a man from her cable company. Kieran had only been seeing her a few weeks.

But the office didn't always work through the police department, FBI, or other such agencies. They also handled other cases that fell their way through happenstance or other circumstances—as in the recovering alcoholic who was also a politician and doing very well with Dr. Fuller.

Kieran had called her bosses to let them know what had happened. Both had said they'd come in immediately.

She had assured them that they must not; the police were dealing with the murder, and child services was coming for the baby.

Dr. Fuller—who had looks as dreamy as any TV physician—was at an event with his equally beautiful wife and their six-year old. Dr. Miro was giving a keynote speech at a conference in Southern Jersey.

Kieran had convinced them both that she was fine, that it was just strange and scary.

The poor murdered woman hadn't been scary; she had touched Kieran's heart. She had needed help so badly. But she had called Kieran by name. And that made Kieran wonder.

She sat out in the waiting area of the offices—right where the woman had come up to her, right where the baby had been thrust into her arms. She thought that the baby was bound to cry again soon. That's what babies did. They were hungry or wet or had gas or...who knew? She just really didn't have much experience. And she had no clue as to the child's age. But with little else to do—and probably in a bit of shock herself, despite the fact that she'd now thrown herself into the crime-fighting ring for a few years and had seen some shocking things—she talked to the baby. She made soothing noises, discussed her own uncertainty with a cheerful voice, and made a few faces here and there.

She could swear that the baby smiled.

Did babies smile this young?

She knew that those who knew—experienced parents, grand-parents, and so on—claimed babies did not smile until a

certain age.

This one, she was certain, smiled. She waved her little fists in the air, she grinned toothlessly. She even cooed.

“Hey!” Craig had come back up to the offices after checking out the scene on the street.

He nodded to the policeman at the door. Since Kieran had no idea what was going on, and since a woman who had been looking for her had just been stabbed to death, having a policeman standing guard was a very reassuring, and Kieran was grateful.

She looked up at Craig, hopeful. Though, of course, she doubted that he or the police or anyone—other than the killer—knew who had stabbed the woman, or why.

“You okay?” He asked her.

“I’m fine. I was handed the baby. I don’t think anyone was after me for any reason at all, but...oh, Lord! Craig, you don’t think it is my fault, do you? I mean, if I hadn’t chased after her —”

“Kieran,” he said, hunkering down by her. “No.” His voice was firm and—as usual—filled with confidence and authority. Craig had been a special agent with the FBI for a good decade. He always seemed to exude a comfortable assurance and strength—things she had to admit she loved about him. Well, along with rock-hard abs, a solid six-three frame, and the fact that the term “tall, dark, and handsome,” might have been conceived just for him. He had hazel eyes that were like marble, seemed to see far too much, and still...well, in her mind, they were just beautiful.

“It was all so fast,” Kieran murmured.

Craig adjusted the blanket around the baby. Kieran thought she cooed and smiled for him, too, but it was hard to tell.

Smile—gas. Who knew?

“Kieran, that woman was trying to save this child. She brought her to you. You aren’t to blame in any way. I have a

feeling that she was very heroic—and that she gave her life for the child. She might have stolen the baby from some kind of terrible situation. I don't know—none of us can even begin to figure out what might have gone down yet. But I believe the minute she took the baby away from whoever had it before, her hours were numbered.” He was quiet for a moment and looked up at her. “This isn't going to be an FBI case, you know. Whoever your visitor was, she was murdered on the streets of New York. It's an NYPD matter.”

“Did you talk to Ralph downstairs?” she asked anxiously. “He should have been on the desk—and you're supposed to sign in to enter this building.” So it was with most large office buildings in the city. It had been ever since 9/11.

“Yes, I spoke with him, the police spoke with him. He was a mess. He thinks it's all his fault. UPS was here with a large shipment for the computer tech firm on the eighteenth floor. He thinks she slipped by him when he ran over to help the courier with the elevator,” Craig said.

“I can imagine he's upset. Did he ever get out of here? He was planning on seeing the Danny Boys play tonight, too.”

“I don't think he went to see the band,” Craig said. “The cops let him go about an hour or so ago now.”

“Ah,” Kieran murmured.

What an end to the week. Ralph Miller was a Monday to Friday, regular hours kind of guy. He looked forward to his Friday nights; he loved music, especially Irish rock bands. He must have been really upset to realize a murder had taken place somewhere just down the street from his front door.

The murder of a woman who had slipped by him.

A woman who had left a baby in Kieran's arms.

*A baby. Alone, in her arms.*

“Craig, I just... I wish I understood. And I'm not sure about the officer handling the case—”

“Kieran, no matter how long we all work in this, murder is hard to understand. That officer needed everything you could give him.”

“I know that. I’ve spoken with him. He wants me to figure out why the woman singled me out. He’s more worried about that than the baby!” Kieran said indignantly.

“He’s a detective, Kieran. Asking you questions is what he’s supposed to do—you know that. *Can* you think of anything?” Craig asked her.

Kieran shook her head. “She probably knew about this office. And it’s easy enough to find out all our names.”

“Maybe, and then...”

“And then what?”

Craig smiled at her. During the diamond heist case—when they had first met—she had saved a girl from falling onto the subway tracks when a train was coming. When a reporter had caught up with Kieran, she had impatiently said, “Anyone would lend a helping hand.”

For quite some time after, she’d been a city heroine.

So she had a feeling she knew what he was going to say.

“Maybe they saw you on TV.”

“That was a long time ago.”

“Some people have long memories.”

There was a tap at the door; the officer who had been standing guard held it open for a stocky woman with a round face and gentle, angelic smile. She was in uniform, and Kieran quickly realized that she was from child services.

“Hi, I’m Sandy Cleveland,” the woman told her. “Child—”

“Services, yes, of course!” Kieran said.

Kieran realized that she didn’t want to hand over the baby. She didn’t have a “thing” for babies—her primary goal in life had never been to get married and have children. She did want



them—somewhere along the line. But not now. She knew that, eventually, yes, she wanted to marry Craig. She was truly, deeply, kind-of-even-madly in love with him.

But not immediately. Maybe in a year. They hadn't even really discussed it, yet.

She didn't go insane over babies at family picnics, and she was happy for her friends who were pregnant or parents, and she got along fine with kids—little ones and big ones.

But she wasn't in any way *obsessed*.

Here, now, in the office, holding the precious little bundle—who had so recently been tenderly held by a woman who was now *dead* with a knife in her back—Kieran was suddenly loathe to give her up. And it wasn't that the woman from child services didn't appear to be just about perfect for her job. No one could fake a face that held that much empathy.

“It's okay,” Sandy Cleveland said very softly. “I swear she'll be okay with me. We take great care of little ones at my office. I won't just dump her in a crib and let her cry. It's my job—I'm very good at it,” she added, as if completely aware of every bit of mixed emotion that was racing through Kieran's heart and mind. She smiled and added, “Miss Finnegan, the street below is thronging with police officers—and reporters. The chief of police is already involved in this situation. This little one will not just have the watchdogs of child services looking over her, but a guardian from the police force as well. She's going to be fine. I personally promise you.”

“I'm sure—I'm sure you're good,” Kieran said. She smiled at Sandy Cleveland.

“That means you have to give her the baby,” Craig said, but she thought he understood, too, somehow.

“Yes, yes, of course,” Kieran murmured.

She managed to make herself move, and she handed over the baby.

*It was so damned hard to do!*

“Miss Cleveland, can you tell me about how old she is?” Kieran asked.

“I think about six weeks...by her motor function. And, please, just call me Sandy,” the woman told her. “Her eyes are following you—and when you speak, that’s a real smile. It’s usually between about six weeks and three months when they really smile, and I think this is a lovely, smart girl. Don’t worry! I’ll get a smile from her, too, I promise.”

The baby did seem to be settling down in Sandy Cleveland’s arms.

Craig set an arm around Kieran’s shoulders.

“Sandy, I’m with the FBI. Craig Frasier. You won’t mind if we check in on this little one?”

“Of course not!” Sandy assured them. She shook her head sadly. “I hear that the woman who handed her to you was murdered. There’s no I.D. on her. I’m just hoping we can find out who this little one is. She’s in good shape, though. Someone has been caring for her. Yes! You’re so sweet!” She said the last to the baby, wrinkling her nose and making a face—and drawing a sound that wasn’t quite laughter, but darned close to it. “Hopefully, she has a mom or other relatives somewhere. And if not...” She hesitated, studying Kieran and Craig. “Well, if not—a precious little infant like this? People will be jockeying to adopt her. Anyway, let me get her out of here and away from...from what happened.” She held the baby adeptly while using her left hand to dig into her pocket and produce her business card. “Call me anytime,” she told them. “I may not answer, but I will get back to you if you leave me a message.”

Then she was gone. The cop who had been watching over Kieran went outside.

She and Craig were alone.

Kieran still felt shell-shocked.

“Kieran, hey!” Craig hunkered down by her again as she sank down into one of the comfortably upholstered chairs in the waiting room. He looked at her worriedly. “The cops are good—you know that.”

“Craig, you have to be in on this. That detective—”

“Lance. Lance Kendall. Kieran, really, he’s all right. He’s doing all the right things.”

“Yeah! All the right things—grilling me!”

“All right, I will speak with Egan about it tomorrow, how’s that?”

She nodded. “Thank you. Get one of your joint task forces going—at least maybe you can participate?”

“Sure.” He hesitated. “I guess...um, well.”

There was a tap at the door. They both looked up. Craig stood.

A man walked in. It wasn’t the first officer who had arrived at the scene—it was the detective who had arrived while others were setting up crime scene tape, handling the rush hour crowd around the body, and urging her to get the baby back up to her offices and—out of the street.

Detective Kendall was a well-built, African American man. About six feet even, short brown hair, light brown eyes, and features put together correctly. He was around forty-five, she thought. He wasn’t warm and cuddly, but neither was he rude.

“Detective,” Craig said. “Have you wrapped up at the scene for the evening?”

“Yes—a few techs are still down there, but there’s nothing more I can accomplish here. Unless you can help. Miss Frasier? You can’t think of anything?”

“I have no idea why this lady chose me,” Kieran said. “None.”

“And you’ve never seen the woman before?” Kendall asked.

“Never.”

“Nor the baby?”

*What? Did he think that the infant paid social calls on people, hung out at the pub, or requested help from psychiatrists or a psychologist?*

“No,” she managed evenly. “I’ve never seen the infant before. I’ve never seen the woman before.”

“All right, then.” He suddenly softened a little. “You must be really shaken. I understand that, and I’m sorry. For now... I don’t have anything else. But I’m sure you know we may need to question you again.”

“I’m not leaving town,” she said drily.

He wasn’t amused.

Kieran continued with, “I’ve spoken with Dr. Fuller and Dr. Miro. I’ve told them all that I could, and they will be trying to ascertain if they can think of any reason—other than who they are and what they do—that the woman might have come here.”

“I’ve spoken with the doctors, too,” Detective Kendall told her grimly. “And I’m sure we’ll speak again.”

“I’m sure,” Kieran murmured.

“Goodnight, Special Agent Frasier—Miss Finnegan,” the detective said. “You’re both—uh, free to go.”

He left them. Craig pulled Kieran around and into his arms, looking down into her eyes. “We are free. There’s nothing else to do tonight. You want to go home?”

“I know that we both really wanted to see the band play tonight,” she told him. “I’m sorry.”

“Kieran, it’s not your fault—I’m sure you didn’t plan for a woman to abandon a baby in your arms and then run

downstairs and find herself stabbed to death.”

“It’s driving me crazy, Craig! We don’t know who she was...we don’t have a name for her, we don’t know about the baby. I think she was too old to be the mom, but I’m not really sure. And if not...she was trying to save the baby, not hurt it. But who would hurt a baby?”

“I don’t know. Let’s get going, shall we?”

“We can still go to the pub. Maybe catch the last of the Danny Boys?” she said.

“You know you don’t want to go anywhere.”

Kieran hesitated. “Not true. I do want to go somewhere. I’m starving—and I’m not sure what we’ve got to eat at the apartment.”

“Yep. We’ve been staying at yours—if there is food at mine, I’m certain we don’t want to eat it.”

“Then we’ll go to the pub,” she said quietly.

Kieran hadn’t realized just how late it had grown until she and Craig walked out of the building. New York City policemen were still busy on the street, many of them just managing the crowd. The body was gone, but crime scene workers were still putting the pieces together of what might and might not be a clue on the busy street.

It was Midtown, and giant conglomerates mixed with smaller boutiques and shops. Most of the shops were closed and the hour too late for business, but people still walked quickly along the sidewalks, slowing down to watch the police and curious to see what had happened.

Kieran looked up while Craig spoke with a young policewoman for a moment. Her brother had once warned her that she looked up too often—that she looked like a tourist. But she loved the rooftops, the skyline. Old skyscrapers with ornate moldings at the roof sat alongside new giants that towered above them in glass, chrome, and steel. And then again, right in the midst of the twentieth and twenty-first

century buildings, there would be a charming throwback to the eighteen-hundreds.

From a nearby Chinese restaurant, a tempting aroma laced the air.

Even over murder.

The cops generally knew Craig; he was polite to all of them. They nodded an acknowledgement to Kieran. She'd worked with the police often enough herself.

"Is Detective McBride going to be on the case?" Kieran asked hopefully. They'd worked with Larry McBride before, not even a year ago, and he had been an amazing ally.

Drs. Fuller and Miro worked with city detectives regularly, and—nine out of ten—they were great. Every once in a while, as in any job, there was a total jerk in the mix. Mainly they were professionals, and good at their work, and Kieran knew it. Some were more personable than others. Homicide detectives could be very cut and dried. McBride had told her once that homicide, while horrible, was also easier than dealing with other crimes. The victims couldn't complain about the way he was working. Of course, the victims had relatives. That was hard.

She had come to really like McBride.

In this case, a baby was involved. A woman had died trying to save that baby, Kieran was certain. So she felt they needed the best.

Craig looked at her quizzically. "You know that that there are thousands of detectives in the city, a decent percentage of that in homicide—and even a decent percentage in Major Case."

"Actually, when you break it all down..."

"I don't know who will be working the case—probably more than one detective. For right now, it is Lance Kendall. And he's all right, Kieran. He's good. He was doing all the

right things,” he added quietly. He looked as if he was going to say something more. He didn’t.

He took her hand in his. She held on, letting the warmth of his touch comfort her as they walked down the street.

“Hey, remember, I’m an agent, and you work with psychiatrists who spend most of their time on criminal files. It’s the life we’ve chosen, and we’ve talked about it. This will be just another case—whatever level of involvement we have with it. You can’t let it take over—or neither one of us will be sane.”

She nodded. He was right. There were other cases where they found themselves on the fringe; and, frankly, every day of Craig’s life had to do with criminal activity in the City of New York. They’d already worked on cases of cruel and brutal murders. This was another. And there was always something that seemed to make it better—at least for the survivors—when a killer was brought to justice.

She couldn’t obsess. She knew it.

*But this one felt personal!*

“Yep.” She spoke blithely and smiled.

“You’re cool?” He didn’t believe her, she could tell; it seemed he didn’t know whether to push it or not.

But he was right about one thing. There was nothing for them to do right now except try to get their minds around what had happened—and let it go enough to get on with life.

Even figure out how to step back in order to step forward again.

“Yep. I’m fine. Let’s get food,” Kieran said.

“Sounds good. Thankfully, we always know where to go!”

*Follow Kieran Finnegan and Special Agent Craig Frasier as they investigate.*

*Who was the woman? Where did the baby come from?*

*Can Kieran stay out of trouble when a lead surfaces through  
the family pub?*

*A DANGEROUS GAME*

*by Heather Graham*

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Ghost Memories

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