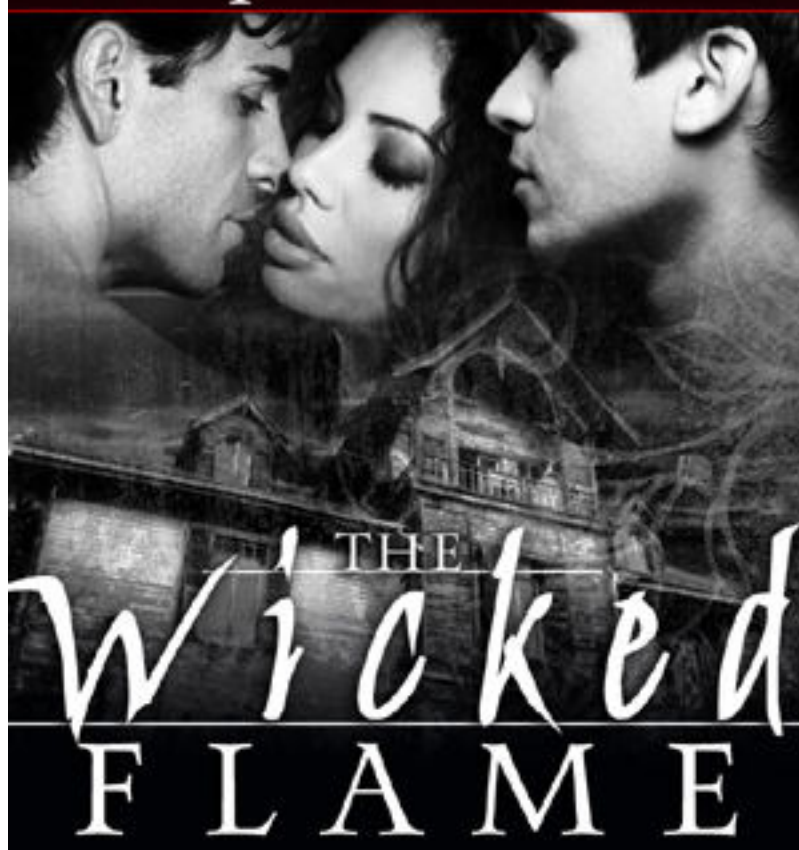


COBBLESTONE PRESS PRESENTS



WICKED

Stephanie Adkins



The Wicked Flame

By

Stephanie Adkins

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The Wicked Flame

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Chapter One

The view from Corey DeLayne's office couldn't have been better. If she positioned her chair at just the right angle, she could look directly across the hallway into Landon's office without appearing too suspicious. Peering over her computer screen, she watched as he approached a short row of filing cabinets and bent over to open a drawer close to the bottom.

It was pure heaven. That was the only way she could think of to describe it. Landon Montgomery had the perfect ass. Licking her lips, she focused intently on the chiseled definition of it against his slacks, and the way his thigh muscles flexed when he moved. He was perfection in every sense of the word, from his wavy, black hair straight down to his loafers. Not to mention, he was also a great fuck. Better than that, he was a great fuck with no strings attached.

Landon turned in her direction and caught her staring. She made no attempt to look away. Why bother? She *wanted* him to know she was admiring the view. Raising her eyebrows, she smiled mischievously at him and crooked her finger in a 'come hither' stance that sent him running. Rising from her chair, she met him at her door just as he closed it behind him and turned the lock.

"We've got to stop meeting like this before people start asking questions," he drawled.

Wrapping her fingers around the top button of his dress slacks, she popped it open and pushed him back against the door.

"I wish we hadn't been interrupted last night. I thought about you

while I was trying to drift off to sleep...*alone*," she murmured seductively, taking hold of the clasp on his zipper. "Do you know how hard it is to fall asleep when all you can think about is being fucked?"

Pulling the zipper down, she grabbed hold of his pants and briefs and slid them over his hips. Her eyes widened in excitement when his fully erect cock sprang free of its confines. Sinking to her knees, she wrapped a hand securely around it while he lifted his shirt out of the way.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'll make sure Keith stays away next time, even if I have to take his damn key away."

Extending her tongue, she placed it flat against the base of his cock and slid it upward leisurely. Oh, how she had missed this last night. Landon had invited her over for dinner after work, and things had heated up fairly quickly, as they always did. But no sooner had he gotten her naked and on his sofa when his cousin, Keith, came barreling through the doorway.

It was then when Corey remembered, regretfully, that the cousins shared an apartment. Keith had mumbled an apology and even attempted to leave again, but Corey told him to stay. He might as well. The mood was gone.

"We should have just asked him to join us," she purred. It's not like it would have been the first time.

Landon smirked and rested his head against the door. Apart from being a year younger and a couple of inches shorter than Landon, Keith could have easily passed for his twin instead of his cousin. It was an eerie resemblance, but also a huge turn-on.

"Maybe we should have," he replied, smiling.

A devilish grin spread across her face as she glided her tongue up and over the crown of his cock before opening her mouth wide to take him inside. He inhaled sharply and groaned again. My God, but he was perfect.

It had become an obsession to suck his cock almost as much as it was to be fucked by him. He was big. No matter where she took him inside, it was always mind-bending the way he would stretch her open. Holding onto his hips, she relaxed her throat and began the slow and easy

up and down motions that she had missed so much the night before.

Beyond her office door, she could vaguely hear the phones ringing and people talking as they walked along the corridor of the law firm. While they were tucked safely inside her office, no one was the wiser to what was going on. Not that she cared anyway.

“Oh fuck...that feels so good,” Landon remarked, huskily.

Digging her fingernails into his skin, she moved at a slightly faster pace. It was hard not to. Anytime she got near his cock, she wanted to devour it in every conceivable way, and Lord knows she had tried.

Releasing one of his hips, she spread her knees wide and slid a hand under her skirt and inside her panties. Her pussy was swollen and wet and almost too sensitive to touch. Pressing her fingers flat against her clit, she rubbed it slowly at first, wanting the intensity to build and not come too quickly.

“That’s it, baby. Play with that pussy for me,” he whispered, watching her.

His face was red from exertion, and his orgasm was steadily building. She could tell by the way his chest heaved and his muscles tightened beneath her fingers. When he tangled her hair in both of his hands and bucked inside her mouth, she held on fast to him.

He was gripping her hair almost to the point of it being painful, but even that was ecstasy. After several thrusts, she heard his muffled groan, and within seconds his cum shot deep inside her mouth. She hungrily swallowed it like a woman who hadn’t eaten in months.

Damn, he tasted good. Opening her mouth wide, she looked up at him as he rested his cock against her tongue and squeezed out what little cum remained. There was nothing better than the way it slid across her tongue and down her throat while he watched. His eyes were glazed over, and his lips trembled.

After consuming the last drop, she licked her lips and stretched out on the floor in front of him. Propping herself up on one elbow, she spread her legs and pulled her panties over to one side. She was even wetter now, and under the harsh fluorescent lights, she could see the juices as they glistened on her fingertips.

Landon absentmindedly tucked his shirt back into his pants and redressed while watching her writhing on the floor. When he finished, he got down on his knees between her legs and leaned over, placing his palms flat on the floor beside her. His mouth was so close to her ear she could feel his hot breath against it. Closing her eyes, she pressed her fingers against her clit and stroked it furiously.

“Corey...,” he whispered low in her ear. “Come for me, baby.”

Digging her heels in the carpet, she gasped when she felt his tongue against the side of her neck. *Oh...fuck!* Her hips rose off the floor. Biting down on her lower lip, she tried to keep from moaning too loudly. It wasn’t easy though. It felt so damn good.

Repeatedly, he murmured her name against her skin until finally she felt her release begin to take over. The force of it latched on quickly from the top of her head straight down to the tips of her toes.

“Landon...oh...”

Before she threatened to scream out loud, he captured her mouth with his own and muffled her cry. He kissed her hard and forcefully, while her body let go and shuddered beneath him for what seemed like an eternity. When the tremors subsided, he let her go and she crumbled underneath him, gasping for air.

“Damn. Why didn’t you call me in here earlier?” he teased.

Opening her eyes, she laughed when she looked up and caught him smiling at her like the kid who got his hand stuck in the cookie jar. Corey pulled her skirt back down and sighed contentedly. If only they could stay locked in here like this the rest of the day.

“We better get back to work before someone comes looking for us,” she said, resigned.

Standing, Landon reached out and took her hands to help her up. She smoothed her hands along the front of his shirt to try and make him look presentable again, while he played with the buttons on the front of her shirt and attempted to open them.

Swatting his hand away, she smiled up at him and leaned up on her toes so she could kiss him quickly one last time.

“Stop that. You’ll have to wait until later tonight. Then you can do

whatever you want to with me."

Grinning like a Cheshire cat, he unlocked the door and opened it slowly. Leaning forward, he scanned the corridor to make sure it was empty before turning to face her again.

"I'll hold you to that" he whispered low in her ear.

Admiring the view of his backside as he walked across the hallway to his office, Corey licked her lips in anticipation and started counting down the minutes.

* * * * *

"A haunted house?"

Corey glanced up at the dilapidated two-story home and winced. Surely, they must be joking. With every gust of wind, the fragile house threatened to crumble to the ground, and there were enough holes in the front porch to play connect-the-dots for days. There was no way they could bring people here, especially in the middle of the night, without the possibility of someone getting hurt.

Turning around to glance at her coworkers, she slumped her shoulders.

"Please tell me you're kidding," she said. "Everyone else will be doing this. We need something more original. This is just...cliché."

Placing a hand to her forehead, she tried to massage away the tension that had been steadily building throughout the day. The seven of them had brainstormed ideas for a solid week without any breakthroughs, and it was beginning to rattle her nerves.

Every Halloween, the Sinclair County Chamber Of Commerce held a competition with the city businesses to see who could come up with the most original and spookiest fundraiser for the townspeople. The winning business received a trophy, while all of the proceeds went to their charity of choice. Last year, the firm had come in second place, and everyone was anxious to rebound for first place this year.

"We're running out of time. Halloween is less than a week away. We can make this work. Even if other people are doing it, we can still

make ours better and scarier,” Megan Williams replied, a little bit too enthusiastically.

“Maybe we could do something else too. What about a haunted forest? The trees behind the house would be perfect,” Landon remarked. “We could lead them along a trail and end it with them going through the house or vice versa. I know my grandparents wouldn’t mind us setting something up back there too.”

Excitedly talking amongst themselves, they followed Landon around to the back of the house, while she stayed in the driveway. Leaning against her SUV for support, she crossed her arms over her chest and looked up at the house again.

After much prompting from Keith and Landon, she had given in and agreed to come check out the old home as a last resort. It hadn’t been occupied in many years, not since the cousins’ grandfather passed away and their grandmother had been moved to a nursing home in the city. According to Landon, most of the furnishings were locked away in a mini-storage facility somewhere across town, but she had yet to bring herself to go inside and see for herself.

Their grandmother had agreed to let them use it, but only after they swore with their hands upon their hearts that they would take good care of it and clean up afterwards. Still, she wondered how they would be able to pull off such a feat. The poor house looked like it could fall down if the wind blew on it just right.

“You know, Landon’s right. This would be the perfect place,” Keith called from behind her. “According to our grandparents, it really *is* haunted.”

Glancing over her shoulder at him, Corey laughed and shook her head. It wasn’t the first time she had heard such a thing. Given the fact that they lived on the outskirts of New Orleans, tales of ghosts and spirits were commonplace and expected. It was the one thing that kept tourism at an all-time high.

“You don’t really believe all that nonsense, do you?” she asked.

Keith stuck his hands in his jeans pockets and walked over to stand beside her.

"I'm surprised with you being born and raised here that you *don't* believe," he replied, smiling.

Corey shrugged her shoulders and looked toward the house again. The way the oak trees in the back yard towered over it, she had to admit it did give the house a spooky aura.

"I've heard some tales that are more believable than others throughout my lifetime," she admitted. "So what's the story behind this place?"

She didn't really care to know, but he obviously wanted to tell her. At least it would pass the time until the others came back. He leaned against the car and took a dramatic pause, inhaling deeply.

"Supposedly, another home stood here many years ago during the Civil War. It was a two-story home much like this one. The elderly owners died from pneumonia a few months into the war, and during Butler's regime on New Orleans, the Union army confiscated it. A Major Joseph Harland led the company that resided here. I've never seen pictures of him, but I've been told he was a handsome man in his late twenties. He was very charming too, from what I've been told. Even though he was one of our sworn enemies, the Southern belles that resided around here had a hard time resisting him."

Corey rolled her eyes and laughed. Leave it to a good-looking Yankee to charm the petticoats off some upstanding Southern women. They probably didn't know what hit them.

"The way the story goes, there were several women darkening his doors. They would sneak away late at night once their husbands fell asleep and make their way through the forest to the back door, where he would sneak them inside."

Corey looked toward the house again. She could almost picture that happening in this very place.

"Somehow he managed to keep all those different women from finding out about each other during that time. He was a smooth talker, so there's no telling what kind of lies he told them. But there was one woman named Madelyn LaMont who made the mistake of falling deeply in love with him. One night when she came to visit him unexpectedly, she spied

another woman leaving through the back door, and she flew into a rage."

Corey couldn't help but be drawn in as Keith told her the tale. His voice was deep and mesmerizing, much like Landon's.

"When she confronted him about it that night, he denied it, of course, which did nothing but fuel her anger even more. According to my grandmother, Madelyn took Joseph's saber and stabbed him with it. Then, afraid of being discovered, she poured kerosene through the house, lit a match and burned it to the ground with him inside. Did the blade or fire kill him? Well, that is something no one knows."

Surprised, Corey didn't know what to say at first. It was an interesting story, and one she was surprised she hadn't heard in the thirty-two years she'd lived there.

"Did they arrest her?"

Keith shook his head from side to side.

"One of the company soldiers saw her disappear through the woods that night, but she was never caught or heard from again. My great-grandparents, who bought the land, built this house many years later. My grandmother is convinced that Joseph's ghost resides here, forever wandering around looking for beautiful Southern women to seduce."

Corey snickered and rolled her eyes again.

"Has she ever seen him?" she asked.

"No, but she said that she felt his presence many times when she lived here. It didn't frighten her though. She must be fond of him because when they moved her to the nursing home she was *very* adamant about the house not being sold or anyone else living in it."

Keith looked down at the ground and shuffled his feet, as if embarrassed.

"She's a firm believer in ghosts and spirits. I used to think she was just a crazy old woman, but the older I've gotten, the more open-minded I've become about a lot of things. I remember a few years ago she mentioned that Joseph's spirit was the loneliest one she had ever encountered. She said she knew when he was upset because the whole house would turn freezing cold, even in the summer. But of all the times

Landon and I have been in this house, we've never seen or heard anything out of the ordinary. Neither have our parents. I guess he just makes his presence known to those he feels comfortable with."

Corey furrowed her eyebrows and gazed toward the house.

"But why would he stay here? Why not just go on to wherever he was supposed to go?"

He smirked.

"Who knows? He was very charming. Maybe Heaven barred him and Hell couldn't hold him."

They both laughed just as Landon rounded the corner of the house with the others in tow. They were talking and gesturing animatedly, obviously excited about the task in front of them.

"I guess it's a go then," Keith remarked.

Corey nodded her head and smiled.

"I suppose it is."

Chapter Two

The following afternoon, Corey looked expectantly at the house while Landon unloaded boxes of decorations from the bed of his truck. Picking up a couple of them from the driveway, she followed him to the front door, being very careful not to crash through any of the gaping holes in the porch. Those would definitely be first on their list of things to fix.

Landon fumbled with the keys his mother had given him until he finally found the correct one. After opening the door and flipping on a light switch, they walked inside and set their boxes down in the large foyer that greeted them. Thank goodness the utilities hadn't been turned off.

"The rest of the decorations are for the trail. I'm going to take them around to the back of the house," Landon said. "I won't be long."

As soon as he walked out the door, Corey decided to take a short tour of the rest of the house. There was a beautiful winding staircase to the right of the foyer that led to the second floor. She brushed her fingertips along the ornately carved handrail when she walked past it. Whoever crafted it had obviously spent a lot of time on it to create such intricate detailing.

The first room to the left was the den. The only furniture that remained in the room was a large sofa, which was covered in heavy plastic. A fireplace stood against one wall and there was a door to the right of it that led into the dining area, which was empty except for the chandelier that hung in the middle of the room. On the opposite side of

the room, another door led to the kitchen.

Corey started to wonder if all of the rooms were joined. You could almost walk through the whole first floor without once having to step out into the foyer to go to another room. She had never seen anything like it, not even in her own grandparents' home. Across the hall were two smaller rooms. One was a bathroom and the other a storage closet. There was a door at the opposite end of the foyer that led outside to the backyard. Through one of the narrow windows beside it, she could see Landon unpacking boxes in a thick of oak trees behind the house.

Making her way back to the staircase, she took each step cautiously while running her hand along the beautifully carved handrail. At the top of the stairs, she walked to the first door on the right, which led to an empty bedroom. The next door opened to another bathroom, which was bigger than the one downstairs. Across the hall were two more bedrooms, but both were empty except for a red chaise lounge and a couple of framed pictures that remained in the largest of the rooms.

The sound of a door opening and closing downstairs caught Corey's attention, and she leaned over the handrail to peer down the empty stairway.

"I'm up here, Landon!"

Turning her attention back to the semi-furnished bedroom, she waited for him to come upstairs, but after several minutes, he didn't show. Bounding down the stairs to join him, she listened for his footsteps, but all was quiet and the rooms were still empty. Opening the front door, she stepped out onto the front porch, but he wasn't there either.

Walking back inside the house, she shut the door behind her and started for the back door when a gust of cold air wrapped around her body and stopped her instantly. Her breath caught and held as she looked anxiously around the large, open foyer. There was nothing there, but there was no denying the frigidity in the air. It hadn't been there before.

Listening closely, she could distinctly hear someone breathing. It was a faint sound, and one that probably wouldn't have been distinguishable to anyone else, but Corey was almost certain her heart had stopped beating, so there was no other audible sound in the room.

Closing her eyes, she focused on it more intently. It was undeniably the sound of someone's soft, yet somewhat labored breathing, and it was drawing closer. Not only that, but her body was becoming increasingly warm despite the chill in the room. Within seconds, the heat in her veins made it almost impossible to breathe.

The front door opened behind her, but she was too frightened to turn around.

"Corey?"

She exhaled painfully.

Landon.

"Why are you still here in the foyer?" he asked, walking over to stand in front of her.

She wanted to say something, but when she opened her mouth, nothing would come out, and her feet felt as though they had been permanently attached to the hardwood floor. Concerned, Landon cradled her head in his hands and studied her face.

"Your skin feels like ice," he remarked. "Are you okay?"

She was dumbfounded. How could she be cold when her body was slowly melting?

"Maybe I should take you home. You don't look so good."

With his hands against her skin, she felt the heat slowly ebb away to a dull ache. Once it did, though, it left her knees wobbly and her hands trembling. She shook her head and attempted to smile.

"No. I'm fine. Really. Just a little lightheaded," she replied, placing her hands on top of his. "This is helping."

Corey took a couple of deep breaths while he continued to massage her skin, working his way down to her neck and shoulders. She wanted to explain what had happened, but the sound of vehicles pulling into the driveway caught their attention. Car doors slammed shut, and then laughter radiated through the empty house. The others had arrived to help decorate.

"The Calvary is here," Landon said, smiling. "Now we can get the ball rolling and get this thing finished."

When he turned to walk away, Corey reached out and caught his

arm.

“Do you mind if I help you outside today?” she asked quietly.

Crossing his arms over his chest, he looked at her quizzically.

“Did Keith tell you some crazy ghost stories about this house yesterday?”

Her wide-eyed expression must have spoke volumes. Lord knows she couldn’t find the right words at the moment.

“Corey, I doubt those stories are true, and even if they are, a ghost can’t harm you,” he said softly. “They can be bothersome and annoying as hell, but they won’t hurt you.”

Now it was her turn to look at him curiously.

“You believe in ghosts?” she asked, amused.

He ran his fingers through his hair and gave her a charming, crooked smile.

“I used to do carpentry work years ago while I was trying to pay my way through law school,” he replied. “Let’s just say I’ve seen some strange things in my lifetime. After awhile, it’s hard to stay closed-minded.”

Before she could ask questions, the front door opened and the once barren house became a flurry of activity. Their coworkers had brought other friends along to help, and after awhile there was no time to dwell on anything except getting their ‘haunted house’ ready for Halloween.

Corey remained outside with Landon and a few others, while Keith took charge of the decorations taking place inside. The arctic air and the heat in her body had disappeared the moment the others arrived. From the short distance behind the house, she could hear their laughter. Nothing appeared out of the ordinary now.

She was starting to wonder if maybe she had just imagined the whole thing.

* * * * *

At first, Corey considered waiting for Keith to arrive before going inside the house. It had been two days, and like a coward, she had spent

all of that time working outside. She had helped her coworker, Wade, cover the holes on the front porch, and the haunted trail was perfect and couldn't have looked spookier. Now there was nothing to keep her outside. It was silly, really. She would have to go inside to help once people started arriving Halloween night. Better to just get it over with.

Using the keys Landon had given her, she unlocked the front door and stepped inside. Keith would be arriving soon with the last of the decorations anyway, and things seemed to remain quiet when there were other people around.

Corey flipped on the light and smiled when she saw the decorations. They had really gone to great lengths to make it look scary. With Keith in charge of the house, she should have known he wouldn't settle for anything mediocre. Fake cobwebs were strung everywhere, along with plastic skeletons, and a headless 'dummy' sat in a rocking chair in the corner of the foyer.

Walking into the den, she spotted a makeshift coffin on a large table against the wall. The plan was for Wade to dress as a corpse and lie inside the coffin so he could jump up and scare people when they passed by. And if anyone knew how to scare the pants off someone, it was Wade.

Before she could walk into the dining room, something in the corner of her eye caught her attention. Turning toward the other door in the den, she squinted her eyebrows and peered into the foyer where the movement had come from, but there was nothing there.

"Madelyn..."

It was a faint whisper, but she heard it just as clearly as she heard her heart start thumping rapidly against her chest. She couldn't move.

He *was* here. She hadn't been imagining things after all. She looked quickly around the den, but all that surrounded her was an eerie stillness that sunk deeply into her bones and caused a shiver to race up her spine.

"Madelyn..."

Suddenly, a rush of cold air blew past her, causing her to stagger backwards. Reaching out, she grasped hold of the marble fireplace behind her to keep from falling. It was like a nightmare coming to life. He was mistaking her for his killer. Pressing her back against the fireplace, she

closed her eyes and prepared for the worst.

Nothing happened.

Instead, the fire returned and coursed through her body at a much faster pace than the time before. The onset was immediate, and the raging inferno in her blood grew with frightening speed. It had an almost paralyzing effect, but it also made her skin crawl, like every nerve in her body was revolting against it.

Another blast of cold air ripped through the room and washed over her body in torrential waves that left her gasping for air. She opened her eyes, half expecting to find Joseph Harland standing in front of her. But still, there was no one.

Turning around slowly, she pressed a cheek to the cool marble and moaned in agony. She knew she should try and escape, but she could barely move.

"Corey?"

The voice was distant, but she could distinctly hear someone call her name. At the moment, she didn't care. All she wanted was for the torment to stop. Just as her legs threatened to give way, someone grabbed her from behind and whirled her around.

"What's wrong?"

Keith.

Anxiously, she looked about the room.

"Do you feel that?" she asked. She was sure her voice had raised a few octaves along with her panic. "Oh God...please make him stop."

She closed her eyes again and tried to keep from swooning. The heat was starting to make her weak, just like the time before. Keith placed his hands on her shoulders to keep her from falling. He probably thought she was losing her mind. Then again, maybe that was exactly what was happening.

"Corey, you're freezing."

Vehemently, she shook her head.

"No. No. I'm not."

He pulled her close to his body. With his arms wrapped securely around her, he rubbed his hands frantically against her back as if trying to

warm her up. She wanted to cry. Why couldn't he see what was going on?

But then, just as quickly as it started, she noticed with great relief that the fire began to subside. Relaxing against Keith's body, she waited patiently as the flame inside her blood dwindled while he held her close. It didn't go away completely, but it did die down to a slow ember.

"Corey, what's going on? Was it Joseph?" he asked softly. "You know you can tell me."

She raised her head and looked at him. Everything was quiet, and the cold air no longer lingered in the room. She didn't trust herself to speak, so instead she simply nodded her head up and down. Keith let her go and placed his hands on his hips. By the expression on his face, he was apparently just as confused as she was. He turned to gaze about the room, like it held some kind of clue.

As soon as his hands left her body, the fire returned with a forceful surge that knocked her to her knees. Corey gasped and reached for her throat. She tried to talk, but she couldn't utter a sound. Not even a scream. Alarmed, Keith knelt down in front of her.

"What's happening? Talk to me!" he yelled.

Her body shook uncontrollably. Joseph had to be reaping his revenge. She couldn't think of any other possibilities since he was mistaking her for someone who resembled his murderer.

Briefly, her mind wandered back to the first time when Landon had found her standing in the foyer. Reaching for Keith's hands, she rested them against her face.

"T-touch me," she stammered. "It...it might make him stop."

He looked at her curiously but kept his hands there. She didn't know what else to do, but she had to try *something*. Perhaps, in Joseph's own twisted way, he was showing her what it felt like to be burned alive. Wasn't that what Madelyn had done?

Keith caressed her face while she closed her eyes and waited. Just as she expected, the raging heat in her blood began to dissipate little by little. After several minutes, she was able to drag herself to her feet with Keith's help. But no sooner had she started relaxing when an icy breeze brushed against her skin. She stiffened immediately. The sudden

movement wasn't lost on Keith.

"What is it? What's wrong?"

It probably should have terrified her, but she was too tired to be concerned. When the fire loosened its hold, it took the remainder of her strength with it.

"He's still here."

For a moment, Keith paused, but if her words frightened him, he didn't let on that it did, and he didn't ask any more questions. He continued what he was doing, moving his hands gently over her body.

"Your skin feels like ice," he whispered.

His palms grazed her breasts, making her heartbeat quicken. She gazed up at him through weak, half-closed eyelids. His breaths were ragged, and his brown eyes were glazed over.

"Don't stop," she said wearily. "Please."

Wrapping his hands around her long brown hair, he laid her head back and placed his lips against the pulse at her throat. Slowly, he moved his mouth upward along her jaw while she held on to him and tried not to fall. It was a strange and dizzying sensation, being held between hot and cold. When his mouth claimed her own, the frigid air surrounding her never wavered.

Though she probably felt like a block of ice in his hands, the flame inside her body continued to lick her veins in a slow burn with each stroke of his tongue against her own. Effortlessly, he undressed her, leaving a heated trail with his lips across every inch of skin he uncovered.

"Turn around," he murmured against her lips.

His voice was deep and demanding, and she complied without hesitation. Turning around, she placed her hands on the fireplace while he knelt behind her and parted her legs. Placing a palm flat against her back, he pushed her upper body downward slightly so that she was bent over for his taking.

The chilling air was titillating and did nothing but stimulate her even more. When Keith rested his hands on her thighs and put his scorching mouth against her pussy, she moaned and gripped the marble with her fingernails. He started slowly, gliding his tongue up and down,

and stopping every few seconds to press it flat against her clit.

It felt so good. It was hard to keep still. When he sucked her clit into his hot mouth, she would inhale sharply and rise up on her toes without realizing she was doing so. And each time he would grip her legs tighter and push her back down.

Grasping hold of her ass, he kneaded the cheeks in his hands before spreading them open and shoving his tongue deeper inside her pussy. It was mind-bending the way he would forcefully drive his tongue in and out repeatedly while she grunted and writhed against his face like a woman possessed.

"Oh ...*fuck*...", she cried out, breathless. "Yes!"

With each insatiable stroke and push of his tongue, he brought her closer and closer to a release, until finally she felt her muscles begin to constrict.

"Faster...faster...", she pleaded.

Digging his fingers into her skin and spreading her open wide, he licked and shoved frantically until at last it consumed her. As her moans echoed against the walls, her body convulsed violently while he struggled to hold on. Wave after wave enveloped her, and each one stole her breath. Once her trembling subsided, he stood up but remained behind her.

Grabbing on to her hips, he rested his cock between the cheeks of her ass. He was so hard...so big. Biting her lower lip, she excitedly started grinding her body against it, while he smiled mischievously and pressed it harder against her. The waiting was excruciating.

"Fuck me," she begged. She wanted to feel his cock inside of her so badly it bordered on agony. "Please, Keith."

Holding her still with one hand, he placed his cock at her pussy and pushed forcefully inside, impaling her. They both groaned. Slow and easy, he fucked her, pulling almost all of the way out before pushing deep inside of her again and again. The way his massive cock spread her open was exquisite, and it didn't take long before his strokes became much more aggressive.

"Oh...*fuck*!" he yelled.

He held on tightly to her hips, and with each powerful lunge

forward, he pulled her back onto his cock just as hard, slamming their bodies together in a primal way that left her gnashing her teeth together.

The veins in his neck bulged, and beads of perspiration gathered on his chest. The cold air continued to flow around her as Keith drove his cock inside her pussy hard and fast while she held on to the fireplace and tried to keep from being lifted off her toes with each powerful thrust. Their mating was savage and just what she craved.

“Yes...yes...,” he moaned. “*Fuck!*”

He was getting closer. As she gyrated her body against his more intently, her breaths came out in short gasps while his pace quickened. He let go of her hips, and she felt his hands slide up along her back toward her shoulders, where he grabbed hold and buried his cock inside of her one last time before climaxing. His moans were deafening, and he shuddered uncontrollably.

When he pulled out, they sank to their knees, weakened and satiated. Ever so slowly, the ember that had coursed through her veins began to dissipate, and the chill in the air disappeared as quickly as it had appeared. Keith placed a hand against the small of her back, startling her and making her jump.

“Your skin,” he remarked. “It’s warm.”

Opening her eyes, she scanned the room. Except for their ragged breaths, everything was tranquil and still.

“He’s gone,” she replied.

Keith turned over and propped up on his elbow. He looked at her questioningly. “Do you think he’ll be back?” he asked.

Corey glanced around the room again and nodded her head. “I believe he will,” she replied quietly. “Something tells me he isn’t finished.”

Chapter Three

"But what if he decides to stop playing games and just hurt me?" Corey asked nervously.

It was a topic that she, Landon, and Keith had mulled over most of the day, with neither one of them coming up with any solid answers. It was all so confusing...like a thousand missing pieces that were threatening to drive her mad. *Why was this happening? Why her?*

As they put some finishing touches on the haunted trail, they passed ideas back and forth one last time while they were alone, before the guests started to arrive.

"Ghosts can't hurt you," Landon reminded her. "Maybe he just likes messing with you. Like I told you before, they can be annoying as hell."

Corey sighed and looked toward the sky. Lanterns were strung along the trail, and as the sun began to set, it cast an eerie glow over the woods and house. The aura couldn't have been more perfect for Halloween.

"I'm Madelyn in his eyes. I don't think he takes that lightly," she said, looking toward Keith. "Did your grandmother mention anything else about her?"

He placed an arm around her waist and hugged her close to his body as the three of them started toward the house.

"No, but she must have been quite a knockout."

Corey rolled her eyes at his playful attempt to calm her nerves. She

worried less about this night since there would be so many people occupying the house. Several relatives and friends had stopped by to help, making it even noisier and chaotic than ever. Perhaps that would keep Joseph away.

Landon walked a few steps ahead of them, and when they reached the back porch steps, he stopped unexpectedly and whirled around to face them. His eyes were wide and expressive, and he looked as though he could jump clear out of his skin.

"What if we're overlooking something else?" he worried. "What if he loved her too?"

Corey and Keith looked at him curiously. How could the Major love someone who made no qualms about murdering him in cold blood?

"Everything we've been told about that night is just hearsay. Only Joseph and Madelyn know what actually happened," he continued on, excited. "What if he loved her too but made a mistake that one night and got caught?"

Corey furrowed her eyebrows and shook her head.

"But why kill him over one bad decision?" she asked.

Landon shrugged his shoulders.

"An act of passion? An accident, maybe?" he questioned. "Unfortunately, we'll never know. She took all of the answers with her when she disappeared that night. My point is, why would he still be here? That's what *I* keep wondering. I've always been led to believe that the reason ghosts remain stuck between both worlds is because something in their life wasn't finished."

Keith nodded his head in agreement.

"I've always been told that too," he added thoughtfully. "Maybe he needs something to help him make that transition. If he *did* break her heart...maybe he's looking for forgiveness."

The realization struck them all at once and left them speechless. After awhile, though, Corey crossed her arms over her chest and adamantly shook her head back and forth.

"But if he loved Madelyn so much, and he's mistaking me for her, why would he torture me in such a way? And how could he look on while

both of you touched me? It just doesn't make sense."

Landon thought a moment and then looked at her intently.

"But, if you were a lost soul, and the only way you could be with the person you loved was through someone else's touch, wouldn't you do everything you could think of to make that happen?"

The question caught her off guard, but before she could reply, one of their coworkers opened the back door and motioned them inside.

At last, it was time to open their 'haunted house' to the public.

* * * * *

As far as Corey was concerned, all of their hard work was paying off tenfold. Just when she thought she had seen the last of the townspeople, someone else would run by her and out the front door, screaming.

Dressed in her witch costume, she stood at the foot of stairs and made sure no stragglers went upstairs to plunder around. At his grandmother's request, Landon had roped off the stairway to keep everyone contained on the first floor.

The guests were led along the haunted trail first before entering the house through the back door. The path continued on through the candlelit kitchen, dining room, den, and then finally out the front door, which now remained open after some poor soul almost took it down trying to escape.

Landon and the rest of her coworkers were dressed in their costumes and scattered here and there about the house, ready to pounce as soon as someone walked by. After two hours, she'd heard so many people screaming that it didn't faze her anymore.

Keith stood a few feet away beside the den door, dressed as a vampire. He hid his face behind his black cape, and when someone walked by, he yelled and lunged for them. It was funny to watch the expressions on their faces as they raced out the door.

"Madelyn..."

Corey's back stiffened. The noise in the house did nothing to diminish that voice. By now, she would have recognized it anywhere.

Looking across the foyer, she wondered if Keith had heard it too, but he was busy readying himself for the next victim to come by.

"Madelyn..."

It was getting closer. No sooner had she turned around and gazed up the empty stairway than the heat flooded her body and caused her to stumble backward. Grabbing on to the handrail, she steadied herself just as Keith yelled and another guest charged past her and out the door, screaming.

The warmth in her body smoldered with each passing second, but it never escalated to the point of being painful like the times before. Falling to her knees, she crawled under the rope and began making her way upstairs. His beckoning call was a magnetic force that refused to let go, like the cinder he kindled in her blood. Her feet felt like lead, but somehow she managed to make it to the stop of the stairs.

Glancing around expectantly, she inhaled sharply when she heard him breathing close by. It was a faint sound like the time before, but she could still make out his labored breaths, even above the noise that emanated from downstairs.

The only light to guide her way was the moon shining brightly through the large bay window in the front bedroom, which also seemed to be where the sound was coming from. When she walked inside the room, she looked for him, but he remained hidden. All that greeted her was the frigid air that embraced her whenever he was near.

Loosening the black cape around her neck, she let it fall at her feet before taking off her witch's hat and dropping it to the floor. She heard two sets of footsteps on the stairway, but she didn't turn around when Landon's voice interrupted the stillness.

"Corey..."

Before he could finish his sentence, every nerve inside her body painfully ignited all at once, causing her to scream and fall forward. In seconds, Keith had his arms around her and stopped her from hitting the hardwood floor.

"Madelyn..."

She heard Landon's quick intake of breath, and Keith's arms

constricted around her body. She almost felt like crying. Finally, someone else could hear it too. Maybe she wasn't going completely insane after all.

Keith turned her around to face him. Even in the moonlight, she could make out his terrified expression, which did nothing to ease her own fears. Placing his hands at her face and neck, he very gently caressed her skin while she fought to hold on and wait for the burning to stop. After what seemed like an eternity, nothing happened. Her body was an incinerator, melting her slowly from the inside out.

"Keith..." she begged. "Please..."

Through weary eyes, she could see the confusion and helplessness written all over his face as he rested his hands on her bare arms.

"You're freezing again," he exclaimed.

When he leaned forward and pressed his lips to her forehead, she closed her eyes and drifted. She tried to focus on something other than the pain, so she listened closely for the sound of his breathing. But now, above the commotion from downstairs, it was difficult to discern his presence in the room other than the way he singed her blood and held her in his freezing embrace. He was there. She could feel it. But his slow, steady breaths...they were gone.

Keith lightly brushed against her mouth and slid his tongue along her parted lips. It was maddening. His hands and mouth were so hot. *Why couldn't he feel the raging inferno as it coursed through her body and made her tremble?*

It was hard to believe Joseph could torment her more than he already had, but she realized with despair that this time was worse, much worse. With every fleeting moment, the fire grew until she prayed silently for him to just kill her and put an end to her misery. No matter how fervently Keith tried to caress the pain away, he refused to loosen his hold. She moaned in anguish as tears escaped and rolled down her cheeks. It was too much.

"Corey, please don't cry," Keith pleaded, cradling her head in his hands. He looked at Landon with desperation.

"We're leaving," Landon demanded, walking over swiftly and lifting her up in his arms. Weakly, she put her arms around his neck and

held on. "The only time he tortures her is when she's in this damn house."

"Madelyn..."

As they made their way to the stairs, Corey inhaled deeply when she felt a strange sensation flow through her body. Even weak and disoriented, she could tell that it was different than what she had been subjected to. It was cold. Whatever it was didn't distinguish the fire by any means, but it lessened the pain considerably. At least now she was able to take a breath without it threatening to rip her apart.

"Wait," she pleaded softly against Landon's throat. "Go back...please."

The two men looked at each other, unsure of what to do next, but in the end they conceded and returned to the bedroom. Landon carried her over to the chaise lounge and set her down carefully. Gripping the sides with her hands, she closed her eyes and tried to stop shaking.

He knelt on the floor in front of her, but both men remained quiet as they watched her. The screams and laughter from downstairs traveled up the stairway, but there was so much going on inside her body and mind that the noise left Corey unfazed. Keith left her side and walked over to the bedroom door to close it.

The blaze in her blood had dwindled, but though it was no longer unbearable, it was still a fire. Landon looked up at her questioningly as Keith came to stand behind him. Reaching out, she placed a hand against Landon's cheek and looked wearily at them both.

"Touch me," she whispered. "Please."

Resting his hands on her knees, Landon parted her legs and nestled himself between them. Wrapping his arms around her waist, he pulled her close so that their bodies were touching.

Unfastening the clasp on his cape, Keith took it off and threw it to the floor before coming to sit down behind her on the chaise lounge. Moving her hair to the side, he pressed his lips against the back of her neck. Though her skin may have been cold beneath their touch, their lips and hands were warm and tantalizing against her skin.

Landon lifted her dress and cupped her breasts in his hands. Pushing her back so that her head rested on Keith's shoulder, he leaned

forward and sucked a hardened nipple into his mouth. Coupled with the heat that wrapped around each nerve in her body, the dizzying sensation of his tongue on her skin made her arch her back and moan deeply.

Keith placed a hand under her chin and turned her head in his direction. She closed her eyes just as his mouth claimed her own, and he kissed her with an urgency that left her breathless. Finally, the fire that had once threatened to destroy her began to recede, until all that remained was a slow-burning flame that lapped wickedly at her blood.

Landon twined his fingers around the elastic on her panties and slid them down over her legs and feet. After tossing them to the floor, he put his hands on her thighs and spread her legs open wide. Pressing a thumb to her clit, he moved it in an intoxicating, circular motion while she dug her fingernails into the chaise lounge and writhed beneath him.

Keith broke their kiss and watched her. Her eyes remained closed, but she could feel the intensity of his gaze and the warmth of his ragged breaths against her face. Enveloping her in his arms, he rubbed his palms against her nipples just as Landon removed his thumb and dipped his head down to take her in his mouth, making her gasp.

He extended his tongue and glided it up and down her pussy at a languid pace, stopping every few seconds to suck gently on her clit. There was nothing rushed. His strokes were slow and easy. He was incessant about bringing her to the brink of release only to let her drop rapidly before lifting her up again and again. Her breaths came out in pants, and she gripped the chaise lounge so tightly that her fingers began to ache.

Keith twined his fingers around her nipples and squeezed while Landon continued licking, stopping only briefly to insert two of his fingers deep inside her pussy before pressing his tongue to her clit again. Between his strokes and thrusts, he steadily lifted her higher and higher, until he finally allowed her to fall over the edge.

"Oh..." she murmured. "Yes! "

A loud moan rushed past her lips while Keith and Landon held her through each wild convulsion that racked her body and weakened her to the point of exhaustion.

After several agonizing minutes, the tremors began to subside and

were quickly replaced with a drunken euphoria that flowed alongside the heat in her body and melted her bones. It was blissful.

Landon stood and pulled her to her feet while Keith undressed and laid down on the chaise lounge on his back. Her body felt incredibly light, making it hard to stand up straight. When Landon leaned over to kiss her, she felt him shiver when she slid her tongue deftly along his lips and supped at her juices that glimmered there.

A hand wrapped around her wrist. Looking behind her, her gaze drifted to Keith's fully erect cock as he pulled her gently toward him. Straddling his hips, she reached between them and positioned his cock at her pussy while Landon started disrobing.

Placing her hands on his chest, she inhaled and lowered her body slowly. Oh God, but he was big. Keith put his hands on her hips and guided her movements until he was buried inside of her body. They both groaned.

When Landon finished undressing, she motioned for him to come stand beside her. At the sight of his cock, her mouth started watering, and she didn't hesitate to reach out and grasp hold of it. Having both of them at her will was a powerful feeling, and she eagerly took him inside her mouth.

Raking her fingernails along Keith's chest, she rocked back and forth on his cock while hungrily devouring Landon's inch by massive inch. He tangled his hands in her hair and guided her mouth steadily up and down while Keith planted his feet firmly on the floor and thrust upward inside her pussy with such force that she felt for certain he was trying to rip her apart.

It was wonderful.

After several minutes, Landon stepped back and moved to the foot of the chaise lounge between Keith's parted legs. When she looked over her shoulder at him, she could see her saliva glistening on his cock in the moonlight, and her breath caught and held when he pressed it between the cheeks of her ass.

Putting a hand to her back, he pushed downward so that her upper body was flat against Keith's chest. His heart raced wildly against her ear,

and she closed her eyes and bit down on her lower lip when she felt Landon press his cock to her hole and push inside, leaving her gasping.

He did it slowly and carefully while Keith held on to her hips and kept her still. When he filled her ass completely, he stayed that way for a short while to let her body adjust to the both of them.

While Corey remained immobile between the two of them, they moved rhythmically inside her body, slowly at first. Keith continued thrusting upward, while Landon held on to her hips and drove inside her ass at the same time. Having both of their cocks in her, spreading her open in such a way, was indescribable, as always. It didn't take long before their mating became more primal.

"Yes..." Keith groaned. *"Fuck!"*

Faster and faster they pummeled her body while she gripped the sides of the chaise lounge and held on. The force of their cocks driving deep inside her body at the same time was exhilarating. She could hear Landon groaning behind her as he latched on tightly to her shoulders and pulled her back roughly onto his cock every time he pushed forward.

"Oh...yes! Fuck me!" she begged. *"Fuck me!"*

Their frenzied pace reached a savage intensity. Looking down at Keith, she saw his jaw muscles clench and unclench, and she coaxed her fingers inside his mouth to keep him from yelling too loudly and alerting the others downstairs. Not that any of them would have probably noticed over the screaming guests.

He sucked her fingers deep inside his mouth and nipped them with his teeth. The erotic sensation far surpassed the pain it induced. Several thrusts later, he bit down hard when he came. His moans were loud and echoed around the room. Seconds later, Landon followed.

Collapsing against Keith's chest, she sighed contentedly when Landon leaned forward and kissed her back before pulling out and crumbling to the floor. For the longest moment, neither one of them could say a word. By this time, the coals had finally turned to ash inside her weakened limbs.

"Your skin is warm," Keith remarked softly as he trailed his fingertips along her shoulders.

"Keith!" someone bellowed from downstairs. "Landon!"

They all jumped, startled.

"Damn it," Landon muttered.

He stood up and began gathering his clothes. Weakly, she crawled off of Keith so he could stand up and get dressed.

"Just stay here and relax," he said. "We'll be back in a few minutes."

She was in no shape to argue with them. Every nerve in her body was unwound, and she couldn't move two feet even if she tried. When they finished putting on their costumes and left her alone in the room, she stretched out across the chaise lounge and rested her cheek against it. She closed her eyes and inhaled deeply, trying not to fall asleep.

"Madelyn..."

His voice fell gently against her ears, but she didn't move. The icy chill in the room slowly diminished until all that remained was a calming breeze that washed over her body in soft waves and left her feeling at peace.

If she listened carefully, she could hear his shallow breathing close to her ear, and for the longest moment she simply lay there with her eyes closed, enjoying the sound of their breaths intermingling.

"Joseph..." she whispered. "I forgive you."

* * * * *

Two days later, the house was returned to its original state.

"Still nothing?"

Corey turned to find Keith propped against the doorway of the den, smiling at her. Their coworkers had already gone home, leaving the three of them to tie up any loose ends they might find before locking up. Landon walked in the room and picked up the last box of decorations.

"He's gone," she replied quietly, gazing around the empty den. "I hope your grandmother doesn't get upset when she finds out."

Landon grinned.

"I think we should probably keep this our little secret," he said

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with a wink.

Keith and Corey nodded their heads in agreement. As they made a final walkthrough of the house and turned off the lights, she picked up their first place trophy from the bottom step of the stairway and hugged it close to her body.

Standing in the empty foyer, she listened closely for the sound of his voice, but there was nothing. Not a breath. Not even a whisper.

Following Keith and Landon out the front door, she looked behind her one last time and smiled. Major Joseph Harland truly was gone.

More than a century after his death...his soul had finally been set free.

The End

Author Bio

Growing up in a household that consisted of four brothers and no sisters, Stephanie Adkins spent most of her childhood locked in her bedroom, escaping the testosterone by filling page after page of her diaries with short stories and poetry.

Now, surrounded by even more men in her life—her husband of fifteen years and two sons—she still enjoys the “great escape” by turning her childhood dreams into reality...one story at a time.

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