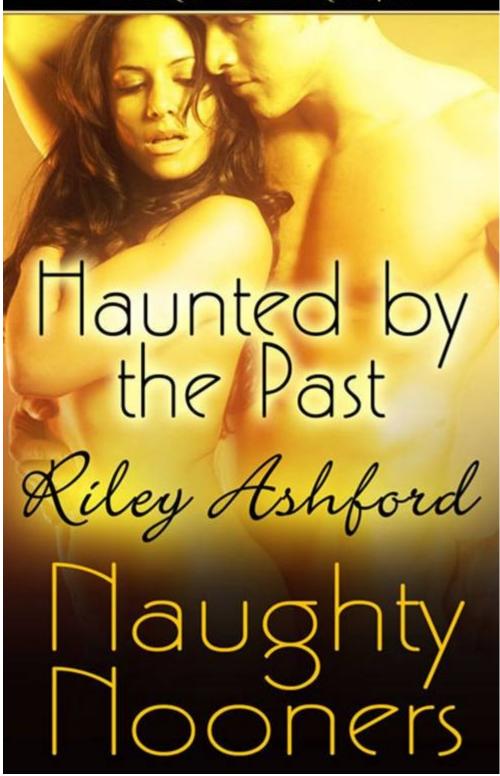
ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



Haunted by the Past

Riley Ashford

Twila spent the best summer of her teenage years at Miller's Lake. She never forgot the night she saw the ghostly Bride drift across the water, or the reason she'd been inside the rickety old row boat—her first real crush, Kyle Danport.

Ten years later, Twila decides Miller's Lake is the perfect place for emotional convalescence. She figures the boy and the ghost are long gone, but it seems neither of 'em left. Both want something from her—the Bride, to solve a fifty-year-old mystery, and Kyle, to finish what they'd started on that long ago starlit night...

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Haunted by the Past

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Riley Ashford

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Chapter One

"I don't believe in ghosts," lied Twila Montgomery. The elderly but spry Elwood Parson had been walking his huge, floppy-eared Golden Retriever, Mitsy, along the lake shore when he spotted her hauling suitcases into the cottage.

"No one's stayed longer than a night or two," he said, grinning. Twila stared at his stained teeth. Good heavens! His dentures needed an emergency dip in Polident.

"Honeymoon couple," he continued, nodding. "Jonathon and Millie Dutton. Jonny's brother figured himself in love with Millie. So he followed them all the way to the cottage. Jonny got it in there—Pow!—bullet to the skull. No one knew what happened to her. The night after the murder, people started seeing the Bride walk from the middle of the lake right to the back porch. Y'know they dredged the lake. Didn't find a thing."

Twila held on to her temper. Mr. Parson was the fifth person today to regale her with tales of the Bride, whom she'd seen with her own eyes ten years ago *thank you very much*, though the other stories lacked his bloodthirstiness. "I'm sure she's as lovely a person in death as she was in life, and we'll get along just fine."

He peered at her with rheumy blue eyes. "Thought you didn't believe in ghosts."

Oh for the love of Pete! The ol' ornery goat was teasing her—probably had nothing better to do. Everyone who lived on the lake seemed to be seventy years or older. Twila worked up a decent smile for her new neighbor. "If you'll excuse me, I need to finish unloading my car. It was a long drive and I'm very tired."

"Sure, sure. Y'know, today is the fiftieth anniversary of the murder." He looked at her, squinting. "Yep. Fifty years ago *exactly*."

"Thanks for sharing that information with me." She was sick to death of hearing about the tragic deaths of the newlyweds. Obviously nothing interesting had unfolded

at Miller's Lake since then. Still...fifty years ago *today*? How was that for timing? Sheesh.

Mr. Parson whistled for his dog. Mitsy romped up from playing in the water, shaking her wet fur as she danced around her master's feet. "Barbecue at Marv's tonight." He pointed to the left. "Three houses down. Has that ugly red roof—some feng shui thing his wife commissioned."

"I was planning on turning in early," said Twila. "Maybe another time."

"If you change your mind, bring a bottle of wine and can of bug repellent. The skeeters like sweet things like you." He ambled down the stone path that snaked to the crusty beach.

She rolled her eyes. Desperate as she was for a social life, she had no intention of partying down with a bunch of senior citizens. She wanted peace and quiet. No complications. No drama. She'd had enough of that shit.

Twila had spent her most memorable summer at Miller Lake. Her parents, already teetering on the edge of divorce, had taken separate vacations. Dad had gone on some sporting adventure in Canada and Mom had spent two months in Asia trying to find her "spiritual center". So, at the age of sixteen when going to the mall had been her life, she'd been shipped to Auntie Pearl's podunk cabin in Nowhere, USA. There she met Kyle Danport, who'd been better than any mall. Her first kiss—and the next hundred or so—had been administered by Kyle *and* he'd been the first boy to ever get to second base. Hell, he'd almost gotten to third.

Ten years later, with her life crumbling around her—dumped by her cheating boyfriend, fired by her lecherous boss, evicted by her bitch landlady—she decided returning to Miller Lake was just what she needed. She didn't care that she had to rent the "haunted" cottage, either.

Sighing, she turned her gaze to the lake, pinpointing about where she and Kyle had been in the rowboat when the ghost had drifted by. The Bride wasn't the only one searching for something, maybe anything, to feel whole again. I hope you're gone, Bride. I hope you found what you were looking for.

She swam in the sun-warmed water of Miller's Lake, delighting in the naughtiness of a late afternoon skinny-dip.

She felt a big, male hand slide up her calf...buttock...then pop. There he was.

"Look what I found! A mermaid!"

"I don't have a tail."

His hand found her buttock once more. "Oh, yes you do. A very lovely one."

She splashed him, giggling. He pulled her into his arms. They trod water together, her nipples scraping against his chest.

He kissed her softly, his tongue invading her mouth. His gentle seduction sent her pulse racing. He released her mouth, only to torment her by nuzzling her throat then moving his lips over her ear where he nipped the lobe. She wrapped her legs around his waist and ran her fingers through his wet hair. "Let's make love."

Grinning, he cupped her face. "Sweetheart, you're lucky I'm standing on a very big rock."

Her lips melted against his. They indulged in a long, slow kiss. Embers of desire flared into hot need. His hands drifted to her thighs then rounded on her ass and squeezed. She clutched his shoulders and shamelessly rubbed her breasts against his muscled chest. Groaning, he lifted her until her breasts were freed from the water.

As he tasted those taut buds, licking beads of water from her flesh, she let her head drop back. He pleasured her nipples as her fingers sought his skin, touching whatever she could reach as he gave detailed attention to her breasts.

Slowly, he lowered her into the water, his gaze on hers. His eyes gleamed with desire...and love. He pressed his cock between the folds of her pussy, rubbing her sweetly tingling clitoris, then he guided his cock inside her.

Haunted By The Past

The water made his entry easy, but her juices already flowed for him, allowing him to plunge deep. Thrust after thrust, she clenched his cock with her inner muscles. She moaned and the breath skittered across his neck.

"Please, baby," she begged. "Please, fuck me hard. Make me come."

"The problem is that I'm going to come. You feel so good that I'm already on the edge."

"Hmm." His confession pleased her. How wonderful to be in love with a man who desired her so much, he was ready to come inside her pussy in an instant.

"I don't care if you come," she said. "Fill me up with come, baby. Just fuck me."

"Oh God." He plunged inside her, frantic, his eyes closed, his breath harsh.

Her fingernails dug into his shoulders as she rode him. Her pulse raced, her heart thundered and her cunt pulsed. He had made sex a wonderful, beautiful act. God, she loved him. Loved him so much.

She felt the orgasm as it rolled into a wave, a wave that crested...

"Yes," he cried. "I'm coming in your sweet, tight pussy."

She went over, too. And for a long moment there was no one in the world except her and him.

"Do you remember, Millie?"

"Remember what?"

"Where did you bury the body and the gun?"

Shocked, she stared at him. "I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Yes, you do." His voiced faded. "Millie..."

Twila woke up. The book on her lap slid off, plunking onto the wood floor. Yawning, still feeling incredibly tired, she sat up. After unpacking her suitcases, tidying the cottage, and eating a bowl of soup, she'd settled on the couch with her favorite mystery. She hadn't read more than two words before her eyes drifted shut.

"Weird dream." She stretched then looked at her watch. It was just after 9 p.m. She usually didn't go to sleep this early, but with the long drive and everything else, she was ready to call it a day. The dream had been sexual, she remembered that well enough, but the rest was fuzzy. Shrugging it off, Twila went into the bathroom and got ready for bed.

The minute her head hit the goose-feather pillow, she was out.

* * * * *

"I missed you," he whispered as he climbed into the bed.

"I missed you, too," she whispered back, opening her arms. "But we'll never be apart again."

Never."

She had been disrobed for nearly an hour, waiting for him to arrive. He had shed his clothes quickly as soon as he saw her splayed on the sheets, wearing only a smile.

He nuzzled her neck, sampling her flesh. His hands were busy with her breasts, fingers teasing the nipples into hardness. She squirmed, her body prickling with excitement.

"I never thought I'd get to do this again," he murmured against her throat. "To touch you, to love you."

"Ssshh." She ran her hands over the muscled contours of his back, trying to reassure him that she was real and she was his...always his.

His mouth closed over one nipple. She mound and sank her fingers into thick strands of his black hair. One of his hands coasted down her thighs and stroked the slippery folds of her pussy, teasing her clit unmercifully before dipping a finger inside.

Hot shivers wound through her, a tightening rope of pleasure. She wiggled against him, rubbing her breasts on his chest, and sighed with delight. He inserted another finger, and while his mouth tended once again to her breasts, he mimicked with his fingers what she hoped his cock would soon do. As always, he brought her such joy, such pleasure. Her body was made for him, responded only to him. That was what love did to a woman, it made her weak...but it also made her strong.

He wrapped his arms around her shoulders. He flipped onto his back, rolling her over with him so that she sat on his stomach. His eyes glittered with desire, but also with love. She never doubted that he loved her.

As she slid onto his hard, hot cock, she felt flares of lust join pangs of love. For a moment, she stayed put, unmoving, just enjoying the feel of him filling her so completely. She squeezed her inner muscles, eliciting a groan from him.

She laughed softly then planted her hands on his chest and rode him. God, this felt good. She loved the feel of their joining, of how she connected with his body, opened the way to his heart, to his soul. He didn't think he was worthy of her. But he was. She was the one who didn't deserve him. Wasn't she the one running away in disgrace?

He played with her breasts, his fingers twisting her nipples. Oh, how she loved those delicious zings created by his rough treatment. He bucked underneath her, matching her stride for stride. Her gaze met his and held as she fucked him.

She leaned forward, her knees digging into the cotton sheets as she dragged her clit against him, groaning every time his cock penetrated her swollen pussy.

"That's it," he cried. "Fuck me, sweetheart. Fuck me hard."

The orgasm tore through her, leaving her breathless and shuddering. He came next, thrusting upward, his cries mingling with the echoes of hers.

"Yes, baby," she purred. "You know how I like that big, hard dick ramming into me."

"Jesus," he muttered, "it drives me crazy when you talk like that."

"You like it when I talk like a whore, don't you?"

He gave a ragged chuckle. "You're no more a whore than I am a country preacher."

They snuggled together on the bed. Her gaze traveled around the room. The little cottage was the perfect getaway. Though they could only stay for a couple of days, she would always remember Miller's Lake. Feeling drowsy as her lover stroked her back, she blearily looked at the old-fashioned brass clock on the nightstand. It read 10:10 p.m.

Suddenly, the man whom she loved more than anything bolted upward. He grabbed her arms, jerking her upright, and stared at her. "Remember, Millie. It's very important that you remember."

"Remember what? I-I don't understand." Her heart pounded as fear iced her spine. Something was wrong. Horribly wrong. "Everything's all right now. We're together. We're safe."

His blue eyes went dark with sympathy. "You know that's not true. And we can't be together unless you remember. The gun, sweetheart. The body. You have to tell Twila where they are. She believes in us. She'll understand you."

"Who the hell is Twila?" Panicked, she licked her suddenly dry lips. "Gun? Body? I don't know what you're talking about! You're scaring me!"

She looked around the room again, avoiding his eyes. His hands squeezed her arms and he gave her a tiny shake. Her gaze landed on the clock again. 10:13...or 10:14? One could never tell with those little black metal hands.

BOOM!

The door to the cabin flew open. She knew the man who stood in the doorway staring at them with wild eyes. "Millie! You bitch!"

* * * * *

Twila woke up and threw off the covers, her heart raging. Jesus, Mary and Joseph! What the hell was going on? She glanced at the digital clock on the nightstand. Its red numbers confirmed the time: 10:13 p.m.

Holy shit.

Rattled, she turned on the bedside lamp and sucked in a few steadying breaths. *No reason to be upset, Twila.* You heard the same ghost story a hundred times today. Your imagination is good and you haven't been with a man since...well, too damned long. No wonder you dreamed of hot sex and old mysteries.

Not exactly reassured by her internal pep talk, she opted to make some herbal tea and read for a while. In the tiny kitchenette, she put a kettle on to boil then decided some fresh air would do her good.

She locked the back door, a habit from the city she couldn't break. Then she stepped out onto the porch and dragged in deep breaths of cool, night air.

A large oak tree leaned over the cottage like a protective mother shielding her child. The grass was overgrown and weed-littered. Hmm. Maybe someone could lend her a lawnmower. Her gaze followed the stone path to the beach and from there, the still waters of Miller's Lake. The moon shone brightly and a light breeze flirted with the long grass and dead leaves.

Twila listened to the gentle sloshing of the water against the shore as she studied the lake. It looked as black as the night sky, but peaceful. Vaguely, she wondered what secrets it hid. Then she watched a misty glow form over the middle of the dark water. Weird fog or a trick of moonlight?

The white shape slowly moved across the lake as Twila watched. *I know you. I remember you.* Mesmerized now, she watched its progress. By the time the figure glided across the stone path that led to the back porch, Twila knew she was staring at the Bride. The spirit was blurred, as if someone had taken an out-of-focus picture, but it definitely had a feminine shape.

About the time the Bride reached the porch, Twila's sense of wonderment gave way to gut-gnawing fear. What a ninny she was for standing there, waiting for it. The Bride hovered over the porch and Twila thought for sure the thing would disappear. After all, it had made its nightly journey. For whatever reason, the Bride had been caught in some kind of loop—stuck in a circle of action that couldn't be broken. Twila tried to think of all those ghost shows her stupid ex-boyfriend had loved so much, but nothing helpful came to mind.

The Bride continued her slow walk until she was mere steps away from Twila. Her heart jumped to her throat. The woman's face was vaguely discernible, but her eyes—

those were as haunted as any gaze she'd ever seen. "What happened to you?" she whispered.

The Bride pointed to her wrist then to the porch then to the lake. She stared at Twila, talking quickly though no words were audible.

"I can't hear you. I'm sorry."

Eerily, the ghost's ill-shaped mouth continued moving. Once again, the Bride pointed to her wrist then to the porch then to the lake.

"I understand." She pointed to her own wrist. "It's time." She pointed to the porch and to the lake. She knew what the Bride wanted; she just didn't know how she was going to accomplish the tasks.

"Maybe when the truth is revealed, you can be with him again. You loved him, didn't you?"

The Bride nodded, her mouth stretched into a warped smile. Then, the Bride pointed at Twila then at her own heart...then at her wrist.

Time for me to do what? Find love? Was that the Bride's implication? Apparently the ghost believed Twila had gotten the message. Within seconds, she faded into nothing.

For a long moment, Twila stared at where the Bride had stood trying to communicate, then her knees gave way and she slid in a boneless heap to the porch. Suddenly freezing, she wrapped her arms around her knees, her teeth chattering. She heard the kettle's shrill whistle.

"Fuck tea," she whispered. "I'm gonna need something a lot stronger."

Chapter Two

"You want me to dig under the porch?" asked *Officer* Kyle Danport. He'd been good-looking as a horny seventeen-year-old and he was better looking as twenty-seven-year-old cop. He was tall and lean, with sparkling blue eyes, a square jaw, and whiskered cheeks. Tufts of black hair stuck out from his white cowboy hat. He wore a dark green uniform with a black belt, which secured his firearm, cuffs, and baton, and black cowboy boots. He fit that uniform in a way that suggested he worked out and damned if Twila didn't want a gander at those muscles. This time, she was willing to let him go way past second base.

"Twila?"

She blinked, gaping up at him. "Huh?"

"I'm not married and I don't have a girlfriend."

A blush swept up her cheeks, but she managed a smile. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to look at you like I was a carnivore and you were a steak."

"That's okay by me," he said. He leaned against the porch railing, matching her stance. They each held a mug. His was filled with tea, but hers had vodka and plenty of it. "Long as you don't mind if the steak bites back."

She looked at the man a foot away from her and imagined the possibilities. Well, why shouldn't she strip away all inhibitions, and Kyle's clothes, and just ride his ass until they were both sweaty and orgasmic?

"You keep looking at me like that, Twila, I might have to assume you have something entirely inappropriate in mind."

"Assume away," she said. "You should know my boobs are much bigger these days."

"They weren't too bad back then." His gaze dipped to her chest. "But I'd love to test my memory."

It was past 11 p.m. She'd called Miller's Lake tiny police department and asked someone to come out, thinking it might be easier to convince a live person she wasn't crazy. She almost fell off the porch when Kyle sauntered up to take the report.

"Tell you what...we'll see if you rate getting to third base if you promise that tomorrow morning, you'll dig under the porch. And you gotta take a boat to the center of the lake and dive to the bottom."

His brows rose nearly to his hairline. "Oh, that's all?"

"Yeah." She met his gaze. "It's weird and illogical, but it's important."

He studied her for a full minute then nodded. Twila took their empty mugs and opened the back porch door. Kyle stayed near the railing, watching her. She looked over her shoulder. "Are you coming?"

"I sure hope so." He followed her inside, grinning widely.

She deposited the mugs into the sink then marched to the bed and ripped off her long T-shirt, panties and thick socks. Now that she'd decided to fuck Kyle's brains out, she wasn't gonna waste time with regrets or guilt or clothes. She put her hands on her hips and looked Kyle's uniform. "How long will it take you to get out of that?"

Silence met her inquiry. She looked up. "What?"

He was devouring her with his eyes, which was damned flattering. He seemed particularly enamored of her breasts. Her nipples appreciated his fascination—they hardened under his hot gaze. Finally, he looked up. "You're very pretty."

"Oh. Uh...thanks. Now, get naked."

"In a minute." He took off his hat and put it over the clock on the nightstand. He sat on the bed to remove his boots and socks then he took off the holster that held all his weapons. Twila crawled onto the middle of the bed and spread out. Expectant, she looked at him. He was removing the simple black belt from his pants. She thought he would toss it to the floor. Instead he wrapped the end with the buckle around his fist. She guestimated he had about ten inches of leather...to do what with?

"Turn over, Twila. Let me see that sweet little ass of yours," he demanded in a lazy voice, but his eyes were on full alert.

She looked at the belt then at him. She rose up on her elbows. What the hell was this? She wanted hot and heavy sex and he wanted to spank her? Gah!

"Are you afraid?" he taunted.

"Uh, yeah."

"If you don't like what I do, say 'second base' and I'll stop."

Her heart skipped a beat. She licked her lips as she considered what he meant to do. He was remembering the last spanking he'd given her, and that made her remember, too. She'd put ice down his shirt and run away, screaming with laughter...until he caught her.

Slinging her over his lap, he'd waled on her ass until she was breathless, tears streaking her face. Her pussy was hot and wet and she was bucking against his muscled legs, wanting something, but not quite knowing what.

He dropped her onto the ground and covered her, kissing her while pressing his hard cock into the vee of her thighs. They still had clothes on, but as turned on as she was, she was also scared...of how he made her feel, of how he could control her body and own her heart.

"That was a long time ago," she said.

"You got me so hot, Twila. Then you ran away." He grinned. "I went farther into the woods and jacked off. I thought about you the whole time. I meant to have you, all of you."

"And we see how that turned out."

His smile slipped. "Yeah." He scooted across the bed and knelt between her legs. "I've been dreaming of this ever since you told me to shove that condom up my ass."

She laughed. "Did you?"

"Har. Har. I was horny and stupid. I really did like you, Twila. I talked you into the moonlight boat trip and... Then you left without ever speaking to me again and never came back."

Twila hadn't expected this kind of confession. Not from Kyle, who'd had his pick of teenaged beauties that summer. She always thought she'd been one of his conquests. That's why she didn't appreciate his eager assumption that she was going to let him into her pants. "I liked you, too, but I didn't think you felt the same. But y'know, you could've written or called or something."

"Did I mention the part where I was seventeen and stupid?"

"I guess we all have our regrets." She thought about the Bride. Maybe Millie hadn't gotten the fairy-tale ending, but she'd known real love. Twila looked at Kyle. The Bride's message... time to find love. "I won't run away again."

"I know." He stared at her, his eyes glittering. "Turn over."

Apprehensive, but giddy as well, she rolled onto her stomach. For a long moment, he did nothing, which built both her fear and excitement. If she expected him to be a gentle lover, to stroke her flesh with fingers, to lightly slap her with palms or the tip of the belt...

She was really damned wrong.

The first slap landed across her buttocks. Then another. And another. She gasped as pain radiated from her ass to her pussy, but she bit her lip and clutched the covers, raising her ass, daring him to give her more.

"That's my girl," he said in low, dark voice.

The blows rained harder, faster until all she felt was the undulating sensations of pain and pleasure. Her nipples hardened against the soft cotton bedspread and she pressed them deeply into the fabric, but nothing relieved their ache. Her hips bucked against the bed and once again, she found herself straining, but this time, she knew exactly what she wanted.

"Kyle!"

The bed creaked as he moved off it. As her body thrummed, eager and impatient, she listened to the belt drop to the floor, the whisper of his shirt sliding off, the *tat-tat-tat* of his pants' zipper...oh thank God. *He's getting naked*. Tears tracked her cheeks—her ass *hurt*. But she felt revved up, her entire body on high alert.

Then Kyle returned to the bed.

She felt the smooth, warm caress of his lips on her ass cheeks, soothing every welt he'd made. She shuddered and moaned and nearly levitated when she felt two of his fingers slip inside her pussy.

"You are so fucking wet," he murmured. "Put your hands behind your back."

"I bet you say that to all the girls."

He chuckled as she obeyed him. He stroked her arms, gently pulling them over her back until her hands met. The cool metal of handcuffs snapped around her wrists. Her heart leapt straight into her throat. "Kyle..."

"Second base?"

Her ass throbbed fiercely...and so did her pussy. She wanted his cock inside her. Oh, God—did she ever. "No."

Now, she was slightly bowed and her aching nipples scraped against the fabric. He so owed them attention and she knew before the night was over, he would give her breasts—and everything else—all the attention they ever wanted.

"I can't tell you how many times I've fantasized about taking you like this," he said. "Don't worry. I'm wearing a condom."

His big, warm hands grasped her thighs and lifted. She felt his cock tease her entrance and she clenched her vaginal muscles as he slid all the way inside. Turning her face to the side, she breathed against the ache of her arms and the stinging of her ass. Kyle sure knew how to give a whipping. She wondered if he was willing to get as good as he got.

"I'm going to make you come," he said as he thrust deeply inside her. His fingers dug into her hips as he pounded her pussy. "All I ever wanted was...you. And now you're here. Oh God."

Moaning, she shut her eyes and let the sensations take over. The pleasure coiled, tightening, tightening...she met his thrusts, wanting...needing...

Then Kyle smacked her ass with his open palm.

She screamed as the pain ricocheted straight into her pussy. She was desperate now. She rocked back as he pounded her pussy, sweat dotting her spine and dribbling off her temple. Goddamn it, her arms had gone numb.

Then he jerked out of her.

"What the fuck!" she yelled as frustration roared through her.

He didn't answer. She heard a tiny jingle, a click, and her arms were free. Her joy was short-lived. He rolled her over and handcuffed her arms in front of her. He looked down at her, sweaty and gorgeous and oh so serious. "Second base?"

"Fuck you."

"Excellent idea." He lay beside her and turned her so that her back was pressed against his chest. Cupping her breasts, he squeezed them hard, kneading them. "Better than I remembered."

He rolled her nipples between thumbs and forefingers, pinching and twisting. *Zing*. *Zing*. She sucked in a breath. It felt as though a taut wire stretched from each nipple to her clit and every time he tugged, pleasure hummed down the wires.

Kyle lifted her leg and guided his cock into her pussy. The bastard didn't move, instead his fingers danced along her vulva, teasing the swollen flesh with tiny pinches.

Then he stroked her clit.

"Whoa. Yeah, do that," she begged, wiggling against him. "Oh, Kyle..."

While he played with her clit, he began to move again. His big cock filled her completely, and as he plunged and stroked and whispered how much adored her...she went over the edge and into sparkling oblivion.

She heard his cry of completion as she felt the final, sharp thrust of his cock. He wrapped his arms around her and nuzzled her neck. Twila smiled. Maybe she'd found what she'd been searching for...

* * * * *

To whoever finds this letter, please give it to the police immediately. My name is Millie Dutton and I murdered my husband, Jonny Dutton. By the time you read this confession, I will be dead. You will find my body in the middle of lake tied to two concrete blocks. I hope I will not be too difficult to find.

Please do not judge me too harshly. Everything I have done, I have done for love.

Jonny was a cruel man. He drank heavily and gambled away our meager earnings. I realized practically on our wedding day that I made a mistake. The only ray of hope was his younger brother, Lloyd. Dear, sweet, gentle Lloyd.

Maybe it was shameful to turn to Jonny's brother when I needed support, when I was scared...I don't know. I only know that I grew to love Lloyd more than I loved anyone. He became more important to me than my marriage, than Jonny's terrible jealousy, than even what others might think of me.

Lloyd and I decided to run away. We stopped at Miller's Lake because it was so beautiful, so peaceful. But Jonny followed us. He burst into the cottage, drunk and crazed. He struck Lloyd with a lamp and killed him. I had stolen the little gun from Jonny and I kept it on the nightstand. He would've killed me, too, but I shot him right in the forehead.

I am not sorry that I killed Jonny. If I go to hell for that justice it can be no worse than living without the one who is my heart. I would like to believe that two souls who love each other on Earth are offered the same privilege in the afterlife.

If it's possible, I would like to be buried next to Lloyd near Miller Lake. Our love shone brightest here – however brief.

Twila put down the letter, tears in her eyes. "It's so sad."

Kyle sat on the couch next to her. "We'll see to it that Millie and Lloyd are buried next to each other. It's the least we can do."

He'd spent most of the day helping volunteers dig under the porch while another team searched mid-lake. Twila had watched all the efforts, but mostly she had watched Kyle. He'd taken a shower and wore a T-shirt and jeans. He looked just as handsome now as he did with mud streaking his face and arms, as he did in the dark green cop uniform. Eventually two sets of skeletal remains were found—a man under the porch and a woman in the lake.

"How did you know, Twila?"

"I didn't. The Bride told me where to look, but not what we would find."

He seemed to take that news in stride. "She talked to you?"

Twila shrugged, not really wanted to explain her weird connection to Millie Dutton. "She didn't speak...but I listened."

Kyle reached out and took Twila's hand, drawing circles on her palm. "She dug Lloyd a grave. Must've taken her a couple of hours. Wrapped the gun and the letter in a garbage bag and duct-taped it. She thought whoever found Jonny would find the grave, too."

Fifty years ago, the cottage was still under construction. The couple had gotten it cheap because it hadn't been finished. But the grave had not been found. Jonny's murder and Millie's disappearance were written off as a burglary gone awry. After the crime scene had been released, the final work on the porch was completed. Concrete was poured over the grave—and the Bride couldn't move on to the next life because the one she wanted to be with was still here, undiscovered.

"Will you stay?" Kyle drew Twila into his arms and she put her head on his shoulder. "Please?"

She looked at him, smiling. The Bride had been right. It was time for love. "Where else would I go?" she asked softly. "I have everything I need right here."

About the Author

Riley Ashford loves to write sensual love stories that explore unusual relationships and supernatural settings. She lives in the Midwest with her family, and enjoys reading, knitting and watching action flicks.

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her <u>author bio page</u> at <u>www.ellorascave.com</u>.

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