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SIERRA

WOLFE

# LOVE CAN BE MURDER

Love Can Be Murder  
*by Sierra Wolfe*

**The Wild Rose Press**

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## **CONTENTS**

[Love Can be Murder](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[About the Author](#)

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Love Can Be Murder  
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The large wooden door of his office crashed against the wall as he shoved it open. He strode over to his massive mahogany desk and reached for the notepad resting where he'd left it with an Aurora pen on top. He picked up the pad and tore off the top sheet. *Willow Cowan*. The name and phone number of the local witch were scrawled diagonally across the paper. He shook his head. He'd heard of her.

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Love Can Be Murder  
*by Sierra Wolfe*

## **Love Can be Murder**

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Sierra Wolfe

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Love Can Be Murder  
*by Sierra Wolfe*

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

Love Can be Murder

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Visit us at [www.thewildrosepress.com](http://www.thewildrosepress.com)

Publishing History

First Faery Rose Edition, 2009

Published in the United States of America

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **Dedication**

To my wonderful daughter, Amber. Thank you for putting up with me all those hours I spent writing and editing. Your love and support mean so much.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## Chapter One

Alexander Forsythe stared at the ghost of Abbie Cowan hovering above him. The house had been haunted for as long as he could remember ... and being a one hundred and three year old vampire, he should know. He knew her ghost only too well.

Long hair cascaded down her back and her gown flowed freely around her feet. Her apparition proved she'd been beautiful when she lived. If she didn't constantly rage at him and destroy his house, her presence wouldn't bother him at all.

The specter glared at him. Her eyes glowed red, the only color visible in her translucent form. She used her full force to throw a picture at him. The frame whooshed past his head as he ducked, barely dodging her violent attack.

"Damn it, woman! Stop trashing my house." Alex raised his fist in the air. Her mania had finally crossed the line, and he was fed up.

"Your house?" Her head flew back and her cackle vibrated the air. Madness echoed through the room. "What makes you think this is your house?"

Alex growled. Anger drew his fangs to the surface. They threatened to break through his gums, while he struggled to force them back. "The damn deed, that's what. It's got *my* name on it."

"Papers?" she screeched. "As if I give a damn about some stupid papers. Don't forget, you don't own this house, boy. I



do! I've lived here longer, and I'm not going anywhere." Crossing her arms over her chest, she dared him to disagree.

Alex flinched. She attacked him with facts he felt hit him like a verbal slap. He hated when she was right. The last attempt he'd made to have her removed severely backfired. What made him think this time would be any different?

One thing had changed. He knew who she was now. Abbie Cowan. To his surprise, that little bit of helpful information fell into his lap just yesterday.

Abbie focused her attention on him. Cold air bit at the skin on his arms, and his breath formed a white cloud with each exhale. Her rage increased when she realized he wasn't backing down. Books and knickknacks crashed into the walls. Bits of ceramic and glass showered the room, covering him and the floor. Shards of glass cut into his arms until he looked like he'd been stabbed multiple times with an ice pick. Thick red liquid oozed down his arms. Alex cursed. This was his limit, all he could take. The crazy ghost-bitch had to go, and fast.

He slammed the door behind him as he stormed out, leaving her alone in her fury. Once and for all, he was going to eliminate her.

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Grabbing the phone, he dialed Willow's number, shaking his head as he turned the rotary dial. The slow click-click-click sounded in his ear as the dial worked its way back to zero. He smiled, pleased with himself, enjoying the sound. Most people hated rotary phones and wouldn't take the time to use one. Everyone was in such a hurry. The get-it-now mentality had taken over the world. The slow, leisurely life he'd built suited him fine. Well ... leisurely when the ghost allowed.

A photo of Willow lay on the desk where he'd set it after printing it off the Internet. Okay, maybe he did enjoy some modern conveniences. The computer came in handy with his research.

A smiling beauty looked up at him from the photo. If he didn't know he was looking at a picture, he'd have sworn her stare passed right through him. She was sexy, he'd give her that. Light brown hair curled around her face, framing a pair of clear azure eyes. Her plump lips, angled up in a smile, made a quiver rise in his gut. The lighting emphasized her creamy skin. He liked the look of fair skin on a woman. Today's women were too tanned. They wanted to be bronzed, almost unnaturally so.

Willow's breathless voice chimed in on the fifth ring. "Hello?" The soft, husky tone made him lose his train of thought. "Hello? Is anybody there?" she asked again when he didn't answer right away.

Her sigh reverberated through his chest. "Yes, hello. Um. My name is Alexander Forsythe. Is this Willow Cowan?"

"Yes, Mr. Forsythe. What can I do for you?"

He twirled the twisted cord around his index finger. "I'd like to meet with you. I wondered if you could come to my house this evening so we could discuss some business." The words formed a bitter taste in his mouth. Just the thought of inviting a witch into his home made him want to reconsider. But, he reminded himself, he needed this particular witch's help.

From what he'd heard, local nut-jobs constantly hounded her to perform one spell or another to improve their miserable lives. Witchcraft however, was not something he would even consider. He didn't need Willow for her witchcraft, he needed her because she was related to his ghost. The fact she was a witch was irrelevant.

"Oh. Sure. Let me get your address."

She agreed to meet him too quickly. He was amazed and concerned. What if he'd been some kind of whacko who wanted to kill her? No! He wasn't going to question her naiveté. As long as she helped him get rid of the ghost, she could do whatever she wanted with her own time. She wasn't his concern.

Alex rattled off his home address and asked, "Would seven o'clock be good for you?"

"Seven would be fine. Can I ask what kind of services you need? It'll help me decide if I need to bring anything special with me."

Alex pinched the top of his nose, massaging the area between his eyes. "I have a ghost."

Her gasp warned him she'd be reluctant to help. "Oh, I'm not sure I'm the one you need. I don't know much about ghosts."

"Oh, you're the one I need, all right. I'll explain tonight. Goodbye." Alex hung up the phone before she could refuse. It may have been rude, but he figured she'd show up anyway, out of curiosity, if for nothing else.

\* \* \* \*

Willow pulled into the long drive and watched as the gate closed behind her. Rows of tall pine trees bordered the lane, their thick green needles jutting out like sharp teeth. She drove her Ford Taurus slowly over the gravel, taking in her surroundings. The house was hidden by the trees, in the middle of nowhere. She felt isolated.

Love Can Be Murder  
*by Sierra Wolfe*

Her chest tightened as she inched closer to the building. What if this guy was some kind of psychopath? She should have considered the possibility earlier, before agreeing to meet him. This place gave her the creeps. But, since his problem was a ghost, she needed to see the house. Her foot pressed harder on the gas pedal. Might as well get this over with. If he tried anything crazy, she'd turn him into a toad or something. A smile forced its way through her fear. At times like this, it paid to be a witch.

The car finally broke through the line of trees, and she pulled into a circular drive. Her fingers, gripping the steering wheel, turned white at the knuckles, and her rings pinched the skin around them.

*Wow!* The place was huge. A massive two-story mansion loomed before her. Several lights glowed through the tall lower floor windows, making the remote location seem less ominous. She shut off the engine and pulled the keys out, sliding them into her pocket as she stepped out of her car.

The air smelled of pine, reminding her of Christmas's past. She sucked in a deep breath, enjoying the crisp, cool air. An owl hooted in the distance, jarring her from her reverie.

She noted the sound her feet made pounding on the steps as she walked up to the over-sized door. A large metal doorknocker hung in the center. When she banged it against the wood, the sound pierced the quiet night. The door creaked open, and she stepped back. A tall, pale man stood on the other side, his broad shoulders tapered down to a thin waist. The red Polo shirt he wore didn't conceal the muscular frame underneath. He had his long black hair pulled back into

a ponytail at the base of his neck. Deep-set emerald eyes stared back at her and a shiver ran up her spine. The response her body had to him wasn't a bad shiver. "Hi. I'm Willow Cowan, I'm here to see Mr. Forsythe."

"Come in." He backed away from the door to let her enter. Her arm brushed his as she passed and the musky scent of his cologne wafted through the air around her. She smiled, loving the earthy fragrance.

The huge foyer greeted her like an art museum. A large crystal chandelier hung overhead, light twinkling from the glass. Dark wood trim framed cream-colored walls.

Her breath caught in her throat. Fear of embarrassment gripped her. She wasn't used to being in such a fine home.

The door shut with a slow creak, and the man walked up behind her. "Right through here." Holding out his arm, he motioned to a sitting room to the right.

Willow walked inside and glanced around at the fancy furnishings. An oversized brown leather couch centered the room, and she took a seat. "Will Mr. Forsythe be here soon?"

He grinned at her, humor twinkling in his emerald green eyes, as he sat in the matching leather chair across from her. "I'm Alexander Forsythe."

"Oh." Heat rose to her cheeks, and she dropped her glance down to her hands watching her fingers play with the cord trim on the couch. She'd assumed he was the butler or something. Not that he looked like a butler, but what did she know? The only time she'd ever seen one was on television. A lump caught in her throat, and she tried to clear it. "It's nice to meet you."

He nodded. "I'm very glad you were able to meet with me here this evening. Can I offer you a drink or something to eat?"

"Water would be great. Thanks." Her throat dried up when she was nervous. And this man certainly had a way of making her nerves sizzle.

Alex walked over to a large, mahogany bar and dropped small square ice cubes into a crystal glass. Opening a bottle of Perrier, he tipped the container until clear liquid trickled from the opening, sounding like a tiny fizzing waterfall. "I realize you don't specialize in ghosts, but once you hear the story, I'm hoping you will decide to help me." Carrying the glass to the coffee table, he placed it on a tan ceramic coaster.

The cool water soothed her parched throat. "Well, as I said, I don't know much about ghosts, but I'll do what I can. I can look up some spells and see what I find."

Alex frowned, and she wrinkled her forehead in confusion. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"I don't want to use spells," he explained.

She set her glass down on the coaster and leaned forward. "I'm sorry. I don't understand. Why did you ask me here then?"

He cleared his throat. "Well, I need your assistance, not your magic."

She ignored his scowl. "I'm sorry. What?"

Alex sighed and rubbed his temples. "You see, my ghost is related to you. I wanted your assistance, because I thought

maybe since you were a descendant, you could help. I'm not looking for magic."

Willow closed her eyes. Was this guy serious? How would he know she was a descendant of his ghost? And even if she were, how would that help him? What would the spirit of one of her ancestors be doing here? No one in her family, as far back as she could remember, could have afforded a place like this. "How do you know we're related?" She narrowed her eyes. "Do you know who she is?"

"I've done some research on her. I found an old picture in one of the family's history books, and her name was written across the back, Abbie Cowan. I researched her family tree, and it led me to you." He shrugged his shoulders.

Willow stared at him, her mouth open wide. Finally, shaking her head, she spoke. "Um. I need to think about this a bit." Scooting forward in the seat, her pants slid across the leather. She stood and paced the floor. This was some story. An ancient ancestor of hers was a restless spirit haunting this man's house? Interesting. She walked to the fireplace and ran her finger over the cold stones of the mantle. Spinning on her heels, she turned back to ask him, "Why is she here? Why this house? It doesn't make any sense."

Alex rose and joined her. "I know. I can't figure it out either. She rarely speaks, and when she does, it's only in anger. That's why I'm hoping you can help me. If you have anything from your family. Histories, photos, that kind of thing. If we could work together, I'm sure we could figure it out."



Love Can Be Murder  
*by Sierra Wolfe*

A pained look covered his face, and Willow felt sorry for him. Living with an angry ghost must be difficult. She wouldn't want to do it. "How long has she been here?"

"For as long as I can remember. She says she's been here long before I was born."

Willow nodded. "I see." This was not what she'd expected, that's for sure. Turning to face the wall, she closed her eyes.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## Chapter Two

Willow opened her eyes to find herself looking into eyes the deepest shade of emerald she'd ever seen. Alex's stare mesmerized her. Unable to pull herself away from them, she forced herself to take a deep breath and steady herself.

With a great deal of effort, she tore her gaze away from his and glanced at the wall. Art hung everywhere, but there were no family photos. *Weird*. She'd never been in a house with no personal pictures. Maybe he kept them in a different room. There were certainly enough rooms in this house to display them.

A shadow box caught her attention, and she stepped closer to examine its contents. Willow gasped. The diamond and sapphire necklace shocked her. Light glittered off the gems cascading into a large V.

"Where did you get that?" She turned on her heels and stared at him.

"What?" He glanced up at the wall where she stood. "The necklace?"

"Yes! The necklace. Where did you get it?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I've always had it. It's a family heirloom. It's been passed down for generations."

"You can't be serious. That necklace belonged in my family once. I've seen it before, in a picture."

Alex narrowed his eyes. "I don't think so. You must have seen another necklace. This is one of a kind and has never

been outside my family. It was personally designed for one of my ancestors."

Willow put her hands on her hips. "But I know that's the one in the picture I saw. I'm certain of it."

Alex frowned. "Well, maybe someone saw it and had a knock off created." He cocked an eyebrow.

She glared at him. "Are you saying my family stole the design? We may be poor, but we're not thieves!"

"I wasn't accusing you of anything or your family either. Willow, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. I just thought *someone* might have duplicated it and your family might have bought the reproduction. I didn't mean they stole anything."

She stiffened. "It wasn't a knock off. It was real. The story has been passed down in my family forever. The necklace was real, and then it disappeared, along with the woman who wore it. The family thought she had run off and taken it with her."

Alex turned and walked to the bar. "I'm sorry, Willow. But this necklace has been in my family for centuries. I have the documentation of purchase." His turned to the bar, and she watched as he dumped ice cubes in a glass. Popping the lid off a bottle of brandy, he poured a shot of the brown liquid and raised the glass to his lips. In one swift move, he drained the glass.

She could almost feel the burn of the strong liquor sliding down her throat as he swallowed. A small drop of brandy remained on his lower lip, and Willow's gaze locked on it. A sudden urge to suck the fragrant liquid off his lip overwhelmed her right before his tongue flicked over his lips.

Her muscles tensed, and she cleared her throat. What the hell was the matter with her? Her reaction to men wasn't usually this strong. Hell, she'd always tried to avoid them when possible. If she required a man, she could easily pick one up for a short fling, and had from time to time. But she didn't want one for anything serious. There was no way she would depend on one.

This attraction was different. Why was she finding herself so drawn to Alex now? It hadn't been overly long since she'd had a man in her bed. She usually went much longer without the need for sex. But as her eyes roamed down his body, noticing the way his jeans clung to his hips, she longed to touch him. The tight fit had her chest aching. She wanted to see more of him.

Whew! Need traveled through her body, escalating. If she didn't calm down soon, she'd go into meltdown. She swiped at her brow with the back of her hand.

Alex turned back and smiled at her. Heat spread to her neck, and she took another deep breath. Hopefully, he couldn't read her thoughts.

"Would you like another drink?"

"No. Thank you, I'm fine." Walking back to the couch, she sat down and crossed her legs returning to the subject. "So, tell me about this ghost. What exactly is your plan?"

When Alex came over and sat next to her, she felt the wall of heat from his body sear her skin. The scent of his cologne muddled her mind. She shifted in her seat.

"As I said before, I hoped you would help me research her existence. Perhaps with your family's information and mine, we can figure out why she's here and ... help her move on."

Willow stared down at her ice water. Droplets formed outside the glass and slid down the side. Her fingers gripped the glass as she brought it to her lips. The cold liquid felt good against her warm skin. Taking a sip, she waited to answer him.

This evening wasn't going the way she planned. What was she supposed to do? She thought she came here because of her witchcraft, not because she had an angry ancestor to appease. If she did help him, maybe she could figure out a way to get the necklace back for her family. Maybe she could buy it. Besides the necklace, didn't she have a family responsibility to help an ancestor rest in peace?

"Admittedly, I know nothing about removing ghosts, but if you think I can help...?"

"Oh, I'm sure you'll be a help." Alex sounded enthusiastic.

It would take some powerful magic to send the ghost to the otherworld. She wasn't sure she was capable of strong magic, but she'd give it a try. If he would let her, that is.

Her hand trembled as she set her cup down on the coaster. The ice clinked against the side of the glass and the water swirled inside. "All right. I'll tell you what, I'll help you with the ghost, if you give me the necklace as payment."

\* \* \* \*

Alex stared at her. She'd lost her mind. If she thought he was going to give her a priceless family heirloom, she was

crazier than he thought. As far as he was concerned, anyone who practiced witchcraft was mad. He should have known she'd be nuts, look at the lunatic ghost she was related to. Mental illness must run in the family.

Alex scowled as she stared at him with those gorgeous ice blue eyes. Taking a deep breath, he shook his head. "I can't part with the necklace. I can't. It's been in my family too long for me to just give away."

She frowned, obviously not pleased with his decision.

"The necklace has been given to the wife of every first born son. Every generation passes it down to the first son to give to his bride on their wedding day. Surely, you can understand the significance of such a tradition."

Willow walked over to the wall where the necklace hung. A knot formed in his stomach as he watched the sway of her hips. Curves rounded all the right places of her body. He itched to find out just how soft she'd feel in his arms.

"I understand it would be hard for you to part with, but you have to understand my point of view, too. Apparently, this necklace means a lot to both of us." Her long lashes fluttered closed.

Alex sighed. "I'll make a deal with you. We'll decide on the payment method when the job is done. I'm not going to say yes or no at this point. But I'll consider it. Fair enough?"

Her lips twitched into a smile, sending a jolt to his stomach. He wanted to feel those lips on his body, taste them, savor them with his mouth. He could just imagine how soft they'd feel against his skin. He wanted her. The desire was pure and simple.

Shaking his head, he already regretted the agreement, but he wouldn't back out on his word. Besides, he hadn't said yes exactly. "Well? What do you say?"

"Deal." She sauntered back to the couch and sat down beside him. The thought of taking her right there on the soft leather stuck in his mind, and he couldn't tear his thoughts away from what her warm naked flesh would feel like under his hands. Shaking his head, he tried to clear his mind. Sharp incisors pushed against his gums and he ran his tongue over the tips to ease them back.

"I think there's something you should know before we work together. It's not something I normally tell people, but I feel you have a right to know if you're going to be working closely with me." Clearing his throat, he swallowed the lump forming there.

"Okay. What is it?" A glint of fear flashed in her eyes.

"I'm a vampire."

She blinked a few times. "Okay?"

"That doesn't bother you?" Cocking his head to the side, he watched her.

Her mouth twisted for a moment before she spoke. "Well, I guess that depends. You're not going to kill me, are you? I've been here this whole time, and you haven't tried to kill me yet, so I'm hoping that means you don't want to."

He chuckled and shook his head. "No, I have no intention of killing you."

"Good to know." She chewed on her lip for a few seconds before continuing. "You don't plan on biting me either or anything like that, do you?"

Love Can Be Murder  
*by Sierra Wolfe*

His eyes focused on the curve of her neck. He watched the pulse beat and knew how much he would enjoy her suggestion. A smile curved his lips. "Not unless you want me to."

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)



### Chapter Three

The next evening, Alex watched Willow pull into the driveway and rushed to meet her. Anxiety pushed him to get started. The day had been peaceful, as far as the haunting was concerned, but he hadn't slept well. Willow's image danced through his mind all night. The dark circles under his eyes were prominent, and he knew she would wonder about them. Hopefully, he could blame his lack of sleep on Abbie. The crazy ghost deserved to be blamed.

He pulled the door open before Willow had a chance to ring the bell. "Good evening."

"Hi." Arms loaded with books, she shot him a curious look and walked inside. "Any more news from the resident spirit?"

"Not much. She banged around a little, but nothing out of the ordinary."

His collections of family histories were already spread out on the table in the study, and he led her to the room. "Did you find anything good?"

"Not yet. We will though." Her books dropped with a thud on the large mahogany table, and she let out a large breath. "Whew! That's heavy stuff."

Dimples deepened in his cheeks as he grinned at her. "Sorry. I should have taken those from you. Not very gentlemanly of me, was it?"

Curls bounced against her shoulders as she shook her head. "That's okay. I probably would have dropped them if you'd tried."

Glancing at the dusty covers, he lifted a few of the books to examine them closer. They obviously hadn't been opened in quite some time.

"Yeah, sorry. They're a little dirty. They've been in storage." She smiled.

"That's okay. We should start pouring through these. No telling how long it'll take to find our answers."

She heaved the heavy backpack onto a chair, then removed a few candles and placed them on the table. "I've got us covered."

He wrinkled his forehead. "What's that for? We have electricity."

Her soft laughter floated through the room. "No. They're not for light. They're for a spell. I thought I'd use one to help guide us in the right direction."

Alex stiffened his spine. "I thought I told you I didn't want magic used?"

She froze, a purple candle held in midair. "You said you didn't call me for my magic, but I thought you meant you called me because I'm related."

Alex cleared his throat. "No, I remember specifically stating that I didn't want any magic."

"What's wrong with magic? There's nothing wrong with doing a simple spell to help us find what we're looking for."

He frowned at her. "I don't like it. I don't want you using it here, in my house."

"I see." Lips pressed tight, she slammed the candle onto the table. "If you feel that way, then why did you bother

calling me? You know I'm a witch. Obviously I'm going to want to use my abilities."

Alex shook his head. She was being unreasonable. He'd been perfectly clear expressing how he felt about magic, he'd told her so flat out. Fighting with her wasn't what he'd planned, but damn it, it was his house. The least she could do was respect his feelings in his own home. "Look, Willow—"

"No. I will not look. You look. I'm a witch. I use spells and magic. If you don't like that, then I can just go home right now. I don't need this crap."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Calm down." Hands held in the air, he tried to pacify her. "I'm not trying to upset you."

"Not trying to upset me? Are you serious? You've basically told me that all I am and all that I practice is crap. That's the way I took it." Her fisted hands banged against the table.

"That's not what I said." *There she goes, blowing it all out of proportion.* "Don't put words in my mouth."

"Fine. Tell me what you meant then." Crossing her arms over her chest, she dared him to explain.

Alex sighed. "I'm sorry. Okay? I apologize. Please, don't go."

"I can use my spells?"

Squeezing his eyes shut, he tried to find acceptance. *Damn, she was stubborn.* "What kind of spells?"

"Well, I can use a spell to tell us where to look in the books to help us find what's important. It will save time and keep us from reading through stuff we don't need."

Love Can Be Murder  
*by Sierra Wolfe*

"Fine. Do your spells. Let's just get to work." Pulling a book from the stack, he seated himself at the end of the table. "I'm just going to start searching through this one."

One by one, she lit the candles she'd set up. The scent of lavender filled the room, and he wrinkled his nose. The little ceremony she performed irritated him, so he tried not to watch.

When she started chanting, he couldn't resist glancing up from his book. The flicker of candlelight laid a soft glow over her skin and his throat went dry. His attention was riveted on her form. Staring skyward, she continued to chant. The candles flickered, and the flames shot higher. He felt the heat of the power she emitted. She was forceful and downright sexy.

She lifted her arms toward the sky and completed her spell. He was captivated when she locked her eyes on his. Holding steady, she said, "You've got the right book."

His gaze remained fused to hers as his fingers traced the page. Her smile grew with satisfaction as she walked up beside him. Pulling out the chair next to his, she grabbed another book from the stack and sat down. "And this one, too."

"Um. Okay." His chest tightened. Willow leaned in and glanced at what he was reading. Her low cut t-shirt slid down when she moved, and his eyes lowered to enjoy the view of her cleavage. Glancing back up to her face, he leaned in and pressed his lips to hers. His mind muddled as her smooth lips grazed his. Wrapping his arms around her, he pulled her tighter against him.

For a split second, she paused before wrapping her arms around him. Her lips parted for him and she pressed her body against his. His hand cupped her neck and he intensified the embrace. Willow moaned softly, as he brushed his lips across hers, tasting her with his tongue, her body shuddered against him. It took all his effort, but he pulled back. Her eyes remained closed for a few seconds before her lids fluttered open.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that," he said, his voice thick with arousal.

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Willow flipped through the pages of her family history book. The silence of the room wracked her nerves. Alex concentrated on his book and she couldn't help wondering if he regretted kissing her. He hadn't said anything since it happened, not much anyway. Sitting next to him in silence was growing old. Why wouldn't he talk to her? The quiet was maddening.

Glancing at Alex, she sighed. Immersed in the book in front of him, she doubted he knew she was even in the room. "What's so interesting?" Resting her chin on her palm as she watched him.

He looked up at her. "What?"

"The book. What's so interesting in it?" She shook her head.

Frowning, he looked down at the book in question. "Nothing yet."

"It's in there. I promise you that."

Returning his attention back to the page he'd been reading, he nodded.

"Alex..." Willow chewed on her bottom lip, not sure what to say next.

A blank expression covered his face as he looked up at her.

"I just think maybe we should talk. About the other night."

"What's there to talk about? I said I was sorry. Do you not accept my apology?"

"No. Well, it's not that I don't accept your apology, it's just I don't think you had anything to apologize for."

Alex stood and paced the room on the other side of the table, clicking the pen he'd been holding. "I'm glad you don't feel that way, but it's still true. I was out of line."

A smile twitched at the corners of her lips. "Is that why you've been avoiding me? Because you think you've done something wrong?"

"Yes. I feel guilty for taking advantage of you that way."

Willow walked over to him. "You didn't take advantage of me. Why would you think so?"

He shrugged. "Well, when I kissed you, you shuddered. I thought, maybe you didn't like it. Felt uncomfortable or something."

She smiled up at him, and he turned away. Cupping his face with her hand, she pulled his gaze back to meet hers. "That's sweet, but I didn't shudder because I didn't like it. I shuddered, because I did. How could you think I didn't? The way I kissed you back should have told you otherwise."

Pulling him closer to her, her mouth grazed his. Her tongue slid across his lips before sliding inside.

Alex wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close to him. He hardened against her, and her mind thrilled at the thought of being with him. His fingers coursed through her hair as he crushed his mouth to hers. She moaned in response.

His hand's snaked down her backside and cupped her bottom. Her leg wrapped around him, pressing her pelvis against his.

Alex's mouth moved to her neck, and she bent her head to the side. Her mind blurred as he sucked on the sensitive area. If he'd sunk his teeth into her at that very moment, she wouldn't have cared. His tongue swirled over her skin, and she sighed.

Rubbing her back, he placed a small kiss on her neck and pulled away from her.

Willow stumbled backwards, and he steadied her. "Wow!" A burning sensation filled her chest. She was light-headed, probably from the heavy breathing she was doing. She blinked rapidly, trying to focus.

Alex nodded. "Yeah. I think we'd better get back to work, before this goes any farther."

She ran her hands over her hair, smoothing her tresses. "You're probably right."

Willow plopped into the chair she'd left empty a few moments ago. The book sat opened before her, but she couldn't concentrate. Thoughts of Alex raced through her mind.

Alex took his chair beside hers. Flipping the page of the book he'd been reading, he stared down at it. "This is it! It's her." He glanced up at Willow.

"Where?" Anxious to check out the page, she scooted closer. It was Abbie Cowan. Shock filled her. She was the aunt who wore the necklace in the pictures she'd seen. "Are you sure it's her?"

"Yeah. It's Abbie all right. I would never forget that face."

Willow shuddered, and he rose from his seat. "I'm sorry. Are you cold?"

"It's a little chilly in here."

"I'll start a fire. I wish you'd have said something. The cold doesn't affect me like it does others, so I rarely notice the temperature." Alex tossed a starter log in the fireplace. Grabbing a long match from the mantle, he struck it against the stones. Flames burst from the end of the stick, and he touched it to the log. Heat poured from the burning wood.

He grabbed a couple of blankets from the closet and spread one on the floor then tossed some pillows from the sofa on top of it. "Come on over here and warm up. It won't take long for the fire to catch."

Willow joined him, sitting cross-legged on the blanket. He wrapped the second blanket around her shoulders, and she pulled it tighter around herself. "Thanks."

He sat down beside her. "So do you know who she is? The ghost?"

She nodded. "Yeah. She was an aunt way back. She's the one who wore the necklace."

Alex stared at her. "That's interesting."



"I know. She just disappeared, and no one knew what happened to her or to the necklace. Until now."

Alex frowned. "No ideas at all?"

"Nope. Some thought she'd run off. Others think her lover had something to do with her disappearance, but no one knows who he was."

"Maybe we're supposed to find out."

Willow chewed on her bottom lip. "You may be right. Maybe she can't rest until the truth is told."

"That's possible. It would explain why she's been so hostile to me. Maybe her lover killed her, and now she hates men."

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## Chapter Four

Willow leaned her head against Alex's shoulder, and he wrapped his arm around her. The jasmine scent of her shampoo hung in the air, and he inhaled the sweet aroma. He loved the feel of her in his arms.

Alex leaned back on the pillows, and she rested her head in the crook of his arm, her left hand settled on his chest.

The fire crackled and small sparks floated upward. A soft glow lit the room, creating shadows on her face. His attention focused on her soft features. He caressed her jaw with his thumb.

She looked up at him with warm, hazy eyes, pulling her mouth to his. Her lips felt like silk against his, and Alex drew her closer.

She tasted as sweet as she smelled. Like honey. His tongue explored her mouth. Her hand slid under his shirt and stroked his chest, her fingers twisting through his hair.

Willow sat up and moved on top of him, straddling his hips. His body reacted immediately, and he felt his jeans tighten in the groin. Unbuttoning his shirt, she exposed his chest and let her fingers roam through the mass of hair that grew between his nipples.

Her eyelids fluttered, her lips forming a pouty o-shape. Damn, she couldn't have been more seductive if she'd tried. Her fingers worked the buttons on her top, loosening them one by one, she let the material slide off her shoulders. Her black lace bra teased him as her creamy flesh bulged over the

top. He groaned and pulled her down to taste her smooth skin.

She giggled as he crushed his mouth to her chest. "Do you like what you see?"

"Oh, hell yeah." His hands cupped her breasts, his thumbs caressing them through the flimsy material. She was as soft as he'd imagined. Her breasts filled his palms, with more to spare. She was like a potent drug, and he was a junkie, craving more. He grabbed her bottom and flipped her to her back, landing on top.

Willow lay beneath him, her brown hair fanned out around her. Moving to the side, he yanked at her pants, sliding them down to her ankles. Kicking her legs in the air, she pushed the pants off her feet. She groped at his clothes, her fingers fumbling over his buckle. It was a struggle to undress quickly, neither moving fast enough.

His hand roamed over her body, feeling every last inch of her. Everywhere he touched, she was smooth and supple. Her thumbs grazed his thighs as she slid his pants down his legs, groaning. He slid his hands behind her back and released the clasp to her bra. Slipping the straps down, he pulled it from her body. Her breasts jiggled in freedom.

God, she was heaven. He wanted to sample all of her. He could dine on her forever and still die of hunger. Lowering his head, he took her breast in his mouth, suckling the nipple into a point. His tongue toyed with the tip. She wiggled under him, and his cock throbbed in response. His hand kneaded her free breast as he sucked on the other, relishing the salty taste of her skin.

Willow tossed her head from side to side as he enjoyed his treat. Her fingers slid through his hair, and he pulled himself up to her. Her breathing was brisk, and she panted as he settled on her neck. Pulling the skin into his mouth, he sucked on the soft curved area. Her pulse throbbed under his tongue, sending heat through him. His fangs emerged, and he scraped them across the silky skin. A shiver ran down his spine. His skin sizzled with her touch.

He wouldn't bite her. He'd promised. But damn, did he want to. Drool pooled in his mouth, and he wanted to taste every last bit of her.

Removing his mouth from the temptation, he focused on her ear. His tongue flicked the lobe before pulling it into his mouth. Heat coursed through his veins as Willow moaned in pleasure. Madness overtook his mind and he couldn't take much more.

Willow pulled him away from her ear and kissed his face, his chin, his neck. Her mouth laid warm whispers against him.

He trailed kisses down her abdomen and curved along the rim of her belly button. Journeying further down her body, his hands found the warm wet area between her legs. His fingers slid up her center, and his thumb massaged the rounded nub. She cried out as he rubbed the hardened area.

Giving her pleasure was like a jolt of electricity to his system. He thought he would explode watching her writhe beneath him. Her eyes glazed over, and the lids fluttered shut. The smile on her face rocked his heart. He wanted to give her more, all that he could.

He slid down her, his mouth replacing his hand on her most sensitive spot. His tongue flicked and nipped at the small area. She bucked beneath him and his hands slid under her, squeezing her bottom. His lips roamed to the surrounding area, sliding over the moist skin. His tongue slipped inside of her, and she whimpered as he wiggled it in the dark, tight space.

He brought his hands around the front to continue kneading her pleasure spot. His eyes lit up as he watched her buck and lurch in response to his movements. Removing his mouth, he sat up to watch her, to enjoy the full beauty of her body as she succumbed to the pleasure he'd built in her. His fingers moved rapidly inside her. She wiggled and moaned with the ecstasy he provided. When she cried out his name, he nearly exploded.

He wanted to be inside her. Wanted to feel the enclosed space covering him. But he wasn't ready, not yet. He had to bring her to climax before he enjoyed that same pleasure, he'd never forgive himself if he couldn't watch it happen.

Whimpering, she tossed her head side to side. Her lips parted as she cried out in delight. His hand continued its torture until she stiffened and allowed herself release. He smiled.

Her breasts heaved with her heavy breathing. There would be no time to relax. He wouldn't allow it. Slowly, he slid over her and brought his pelvis to meet hers. Her eyes popped open in shock as he entered her, moving against her in a steady rhythm. With each thrust, her breasts jiggled. Oh God! He was in heaven.

His muscles tightened as he pushed harder, faster. Holding on to him for support, she gripped his arms and squeezed. Her head rolled back and her chest rose. She moved under him in a rhythmic dance, bodies entwined, one. "Oh, Alex. Goddess help me!"

He closed his eyes, allowing the pleasure to spread throughout his mind. Heat filled his stomach and his body burned as the warmth spread throughout him. Sparks lit under his skin as his nerves flamed. Willow screamed, her voice high and sharp. His shaft slid in and out of her, and he could feel his muscles tighten. They rode the moment until they both exploded with pleasure. They reached the peak and thrilled in each other. All else fell away, the world dissolved around them. Alex landed on top of her.

"Holy shit." Willow's breathless words spoke volumes.

Alex rolled to his side and collapsed on a pillow. Willow reached over and snuggled into his arms.

He waited until her breathing returned to a semi-normal state. The flames flickered in the fireplace, and Willow closed her eyes. Her head rested against his chest.

"That was nice." Alex kissed her forehead.

"Mm. Hmm." She sighed against his chest, and he chuckled.

"Are you going to sleep? I thought it was the man who was supposed to do that?"

Growling, she slapped his chest. "Don't tell me you want to talk?"

His laughter echoed through the room. "No, I don't want to talk. I was just thinking ... Are you ready to go again?"

Love Can Be Murder  
*by Sierra Wolfe*

\* \* \* \*

Willow laid in his arms and felt comforted. His strong body protected her from the outside world. She wished she could trust herself with him. She might really fall for this one. But she knew better. Too many women in her family had made that mistake, and she wasn't going to take that chance.

Of course, true love was possible. After all, her mother had it. But she'd been lucky. Willow didn't think it would happen for her. In fact, she was so sure of it, she avoided the prospect all together.

Alex lay still under her. They'd just spent a glorious night together. Wasn't that enough?

She hoped he didn't want more than she was able to offer. It was too much to risk, but Goddess did she want to. To have her heart broken, especially by Alex, would kill her. She just wasn't strong enough to survive a breakup. If she allowed him to get close enough, that's just what would happen.

He squeezed her shoulder, and she looked up to find him smiling down at her. "Hey, you okay?"

She sighed. "Yeah. Just tired is all."

His lips twitched into a smile. "Hmm. Tired, huh?"

Narrowing her eyes at him, she sat up and wrapped her arms around her bent knees. He had a cat that ate the mouse grin on his face. "Don't be so proud of yourself. It's cocky, and it doesn't make you look good."

He laughed heartily. "Sorry. I'll have to remember that. But just so you know, you're grinning pretty damn good yourself."

Her cheeks flushed, and she chuckled. "I am?"

"Yeah, you are." He sat up beside her. "What's really wrong, Willow? Are you regretting what we did?" His eyes, intent on her face, watched for her response.

"No! Absolutely not. I'm glad we ... you know. It's just—" She sighed. "I'm worried about how it will affect our relationship."

"Ahhh. I see." He looked down at the floor and frowned. "What exactly do you have in mind?"

Willow exhaled. "I'm not sure. I knew this was going to happen, but I'm not sure where we go from here."

\* \* \* \*

Alex leaned back against the pillows. Willow stared into the fire. He didn't know what to tell her. It was never good when women wanted to talk about the relationship. He didn't want to hurt her. It was for that reason alone that he usually avoided the opposite sex.

The attraction that grew between them had been hard to fight. He'd tried to resist those pouty lips and clear blue eyes, but it turned out to be impossible.

Willow surprised him. She wasn't like any woman he'd met before. Living for one hundred and three years, he'd met his share of females, but somehow, Willow was different. She was smart and feisty. He chuckled to himself. She knew what she wanted, and she went after it. A man had to respect that.



Just because he was attracted to her, and respected her as a woman, didn't mean they could have a relationship. Actually, he wished he could be with her that way. It would be great to spend time with Willow and get to know her quirks, what made her laugh, what made her cry. He'd love nothing more than to learn every aspect of her personality, but it would be wrong. That much, he knew was true.

He sighed. He wished he could give her a straight answer. What was he supposed to tell her? That his family was lousy at relationships, and he'd end up hurting her? Admitting it to himself was hard enough, he could never say it to her.

Every man in his family had hurt the people they'd loved. His family history was full of stories where the men had ruined the women they'd married. He didn't want to do that to Willow. He wouldn't. If it meant he could never see her again, that would be better than hurting her. It would kill him, but he had to protect her. Sometimes a man just had to do what's right, not what would make him happy. Alex had decided that years ago.

Willow looked up at him in expectation. Unasked questions filled her eyes. Alex grabbed her hand and gave it a squeeze. "Why don't we just wait and see what happens? We don't have to decide anything now, do we?"

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## Chapter Five

"Alex," Willow called as she walked into the foyer. Where was he? When he hadn't answered the door, she'd wondered what happened. She entered the main room and glanced around. This was where she'd met him that first evening. She smiled to herself. Thank the Goddess she'd agreed to come. He had been an interesting distraction.

"Alex! I'm here!" She yelled, waiting for his reply. Still no answer. Her forehead wrinkled as she frowned. This was weird. Cool air brushed her arms, and she rubbed them with her hands. The silence was deafening, freaky. Her shoes clapped against the tile as she walked, echoing throughout the room. Hair stood up on the back of her neck and she turned to glance behind her. Shaking her head at her runaway imagination, she continued further into the room.

Willow walked up to the fireplace and glanced above it to admire the necklace. What she saw damn near knocked her over. It was gone! She whipped around to check the rest of the room. He hadn't been robbed, had he? There was no visible sign of a struggle. The windows were shut and curtains pulled closed. Everything was in the same place as it had been the first night she'd been here. Other than the necklace, nothing was missing, so where was it?

"What's going on? I thought I heard you calling me, why didn't you come back to the library?" Alex strolled up to her.

"What's going on? Why didn't you answer your door?" She narrowed her eyes at him and crossed her arms.

"I didn't hear you knock. No big deal, you let yourself in, and I heard you calling. Sorry." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Fine. Where's the necklace, Alex?"

"What necklace?"

He had the nerve to look confused, and Willow fumed.

"What do you mean, what necklace? The necklace that used to hang right there!" Pointing to the empty shadow box, she glared at him.

"Shit! Where'd it go?"

"Exactly my question. What did you do? Hide it?"

Alex looked back at her and frowned. "Of course I didn't hide it. Have you lost your mind?"

"I don't think now is the time to be making fun of me. Why did you do it? Did you think I was going to steal it or something?"

His face reddened, and his nostrils flared. "Don't be ridiculous, Willow. I would not accuse you of stealing anything. If anyone is being unreasonable here, it's you. You know damn well I didn't hide the necklace." He fisted his hands on his hips. His chest heaved, and he shook his head.

"I'm not being ridiculous, and I don't appreciate the insinuation that I am!" She turned from him and faced the wall, she couldn't even look at him right now. Tears burned behind her eyes. How could he do this? He knew how important the necklace was and what it meant to her. It was bad enough he hid the necklace as if she would to steal it, but then to call her ridiculous was even worse.

Alex grabbed her arm, swirling her around to look at him.

"First of all, I didn't hide the necklace. Second, I didn't accuse

you of stealing it, nor did I think you had. I don't appreciate your accusation, either, Willow. Frankly, I think you owe me an apology."

"You didn't hide it? Then, why don't you tell me what happened to it, Alex?" She blinked back the tears threatening to spill.

"I don't know where it is. It was here the last time I looked, which, by the way, was the last time you saw it."

"If you didn't know it was missing, then why aren't you more concerned about it? If I was missing a priceless family heirloom, I'd be pretty upset right now."

Alex rolled his eyes. "You don't think I am? Of course, I'm upset about it. But I haven't had time to register that yet. I'm currently trying to defend myself from your attack. One crisis at a time, please." Alex growled, turned on his heels, and stormed out of the room.

Willow didn't know what to say, not that there was anyone left to hear her.

\* \* \* \*

Alex stomped through the hallway and entered his study. Books shook on the shelf, and a few toppled off when he slammed the door shut behind him. He sat in his chair and rested his head on the desk. The wood cooled his forehead.

What was it with women? What the hell went through their minds, and why couldn't he ever figure it out? No matter how hard he tried, he was at a loss.

He couldn't believe she'd accused him of hiding the necklace. Absurd. What would possibly make her think that? Had he done anything to indicate he'd do something so cruel? Not to his knowledge.

Stretching his neck, he heard the pop and felt automatic relief. Since she'd come into his house, the tension had doubled. Now he knew why. Trouble, that's all she had become. More trouble. The ghost was more than enough, now he had two angry women on his hands. He didn't need a second one, but that's just what he got. He should have known. They were related after all. Maybe all the women in their family were crazy. Every one he'd met so far had been. That's for sure.

How could she think so poorly of him? Especially after the night they'd shared together. He had to admit a strong physical attraction had them rolling around on the floor, but he thought there had been more, an emotional bond also. Maybe, it wasn't love, but he did care for her.

He would never have treated her with such disrespect. They'd had an agreement, and he was a man of his word. He'd proven that. He'd thought she cared for him, but after today, he wasn't sure.

The necklace was still missing, and he had to figure out what happened to it. No one had been in his house, of that, he was confident. He owned the best security system money could buy, he'd made sure of it. Besides, his vampire senses would have told him if an uninvited human had been on the property.

Love Can Be Murder  
*by Sierra Wolfe*

He shook his head. Well, he had to find the necklace. It had to be in the house somewhere. He sighed. He had no clue where. The only thing to do was search. If he had to, he'd turn the place upside down. Because if it was the last thing he did, he would find it and prove to Willow she was wrong.

Alex rose from the desk and pushed his sleeves up to his elbows. Might as well get started, he wasn't going to ask Willow for help. It was up to him to find it. He didn't want the help of some witch, anyway.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## Chapter Six

Willow sat in the large empty room searching through the history books. The massive table loomed before her, reminding her how alone she was.

She slammed the book shut, and a cloud of dust formed in front of her. She coughed and waved the thick air away from her face.

For the life of her, she couldn't concentrate. How was she supposed to think clearly when she was this angry? Alex had some nerve. Where did he get off being mad at her? She wasn't the one who wanted to play dirty. They had an agreement, and she came here expecting to do the work they'd agreed upon. Okay, so she didn't have any rights to the necklace, not yet anyway. But he had agreed she might get it back after they cleared his house of the ghost. That gave her the right to question its whereabouts.

Picking up the book, she threw it. It crashed into the wall and landed on the floor with a thud. She grinned.

"Feels good, doesn't it? Throwing things. It always makes me feel better."

Willow turned and stared into the eyes of her ancestor. Wanting to make sure she was seeing clearly, she rubbed her eyes with her fingertips. Although, she believed in ghosts, she'd never actually seen one. "Umm. Yeah, I guess."

Abbie laughed and drifted closer to her. "Willow? Is that right?"

The room chilled around her, and she shivered. The cold air burned her lungs, and bit her cheeks with razor sharpness. Willow swallowed a lump forming in her throat. "Yes. That's right."

The ghost smiled. "I understand you belong to my family. Why are you helping the vampire?"

The fire crackled in the background. Its flames cast a glow on the ghost, causing her transparent form to shimmer.

Willow's chest twisted as she thought of her night with Alex. Why was she helping him? What was she supposed to say? She didn't want to piss Abby off, that's for sure. "I wanted to see you and find out what happened. Hopefully, to help you pass into the other world, so you aren't stuck here."

Abbie shook her head. "Maybe. But that's not the real reason, is it? Not all of it, anyway."

Willow rose and walked closer to the spirit of her aunt. It was amazing, she could see clear through her. She swept her hand through Abbie's translucent form. Her fingers paled as the icy cold air wrapped around them. "I, uh, wanted to retrieve the necklace. It belongs with our family."

The ghost hovered over the chair, lowering herself so she appeared to be sitting. A smile formed on her lips. "Our family?" She laughed, sending chills down Willow's spine. "No, dear. The necklace belongs to me."

"I understand that, but since you can't wear it anymore wouldn't you rather it belong to a member of your family?"

Abbie narrowed her eyes, crossing her arms over her chest. "I don't know about that. My family didn't support me when I was alive. Why should I care about them now?"



Willow gasped. "What do you mean? Why didn't they support you?"

"They treated me like an outcast. They didn't care what happened to me." Abbie flew around the room, soaring to the high ceiling and back around to face Willow. Her eyes flashed bright red. Willow almost missed the burst of color.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know."

Abbie stared at her, and Willow shrank back. Now was not a good time to make her angry. Not with everything else going on.

"I think you mean that. All right. I'll give you the benefit of the doubt."

"Thanks." Willow cleared her throat. "It really doesn't matter now anyway, the necklace is gone." Willow lowered her eyes, twisting her hands together. She feared Abbie's reaction.

A smile hovered on her face. "It's not gone. It's safe, I assure you."

"What? You know where it is?" Willow stared wide-eyed.

"Of course, I know where it is. Did you think I was going to let it out of my sight? I told you, it's mine!" Her eyes flickered red for a moment before the smile returned to her face.

"Don't worry about it, dear. It's not going anywhere."

"You mean you took it?" Willow swallowed to ease the scratching in her dry throat. "Alex didn't hide it?"

Abbie roared with laughter. "Of course not. Why would he do a silly thing like that? He couldn't hide it from me. Don't be ridiculous." She waved a hand in the air, dismissing the idea.

Love Can Be Murder  
*by Sierra Wolfe*

Willow's chest tightened. What had she done? She'd accused Alex of stealing it, and he was innocent, just like he'd said. She sat at the table and placed her head in her hands. Closing her eyes, she let the darkness engulf her.

She was an idiot. Why didn't she believe him? He hadn't done anything to earn her mistrust. No wonder he was angry. They'd become so close, and then she accused him of something like hiding the necklace. She'd have been furious.

Abbie hovered over her, concentrating on Willow. "What? You're not in love with him, are you?"

Willow's face snapped up. "Love? Who said anything about love?"

Abbie shook her head. "Tsk. Tsk. Tsk. That's what I was afraid of. You need to stay away from him. The men in his family are not good. He'll end up hurting you, or worse. Just leave him alone."

Willow watched as Abbie disappeared, vanishing into thin air. What did she mean by that? How would she know about the men in Alex's family? It didn't matter anyway, because she wasn't in love.

\* \* \* \*

Alex tore through his office, tossing books and papers out of the way as he searched for hiding places. There were secret compartments all over the mansion, and he didn't know where ninety percent of them were. At this rate, he'd never find the necklace.

Willow walked in slowly, dodging a flying book. "Alex?"

Alex cringed. What did she want now? To have him hanged for stealing something he owned in the first place? He didn't have time for her games, he had to find that necklace.

"Alex. I wanted to talk to you."

He growled low in his throat. His fangs shot through his gums. Willow gasped as he stood baring his teeth at her.

"What? What could you possibly have to say to me?"

She remained motionless. He thought he would have scared her off by now. Fear flashed in her eyes, but she didn't back down. For that, he respected her.

"I wanted to say I'm sorry."

She looked down at her feet when she spoke, and Alex almost didn't hear her whispered words. She was sorry? He didn't know whether to believe her or not. Maybe she was just scared to see him angry and in his full-blown vampire state, but she seemed sincere.

"Sorry for what?"

Clearing her throat, she spoke louder this time. "I'm sorry I accused you of hiding the necklace. I know you didn't do it, and I shouldn't have accused you like that."

Pulling at a strip of hair, she twisted it between her fingers. Alex felt a jolt in his stomach. Damn it. Why did she have to look so sexy and vulnerable? He was angry and wanted to remain that way. He wasn't ready to let it go.

"What changed your mind?" He cocked an eyebrow and waited for her response.

She closed her eyes for a second before meeting his gaze. "Abbie told me. She's the one who took the necklace. I'm sorry. I should have known you wouldn't do that. I don't

know why I was so ready to blame you, but I was wrong. I wanted you to know what a fool I am."

Alex sighed. Realizing she meant every word, his fangs rescinded. When she'd apologized so completely, he couldn't remain angry with her. "I'm glad you found out the truth, but I'm still disappointed you thought so little of me, you believed I would do something like that."

Willow stepped forward and touched his face. Her soft fingers sent tingles over every inch of his skin. "I know. I'm sorry. Deep down I knew I was wrong, but I didn't want to admit it. I needed someone to blame, and well, you were there. It was just easier to blame you, than to trust you." She chewed on her lower lip.

Alex shook his head. "All right. You're forgiven. Thank you for telling me the truth."

He sat down on the leather couch and examined the mess he'd made. Papers and books were strewn around the floor, covering the carpet completely.

Willow looked down at his mess and smiled. "It looks like a tornado hit in here."

Alex smirked. "Yeah. I was searching for the necklace. It's not in here."

Willow nodded. "Why don't we search together? I'll help."

"Okay," Alex agreed. "I think we should hit the library next."

Willow frowned. "All right, but we'll try not to make such a mess in there." Her eyebrows rose. "It's going to take forever to clean this up."

Walking to the door, Alex held it open for Willow. "I know. I don't want to think about it right now. Shall we?" He motioned for her and waited as she walked into the hall.

They entered the library, and Alex went over to the fireplace. The flames had died out, and only coals remained. Stirring the coals, he watched as sparks fluttered up. Alex tossed on a starter log and let it take hold, flames shot out from underneath. Wiping his hands on his pants, he walked over to join her.

"Where should we start?"

Willow glanced around and sighed. "Why don't we start with this rack and work our way around the room?" She pointed to the row of shelves closest to the fireplace.

"All right. I'll get the ladder and start at the top. You can start at the bottom, and we'll meet in the middle. How does that sound?"

Willow nodded and waited as he pulled the ladder to the first row of bookshelves. He climbed the steps and watched as she pulled several thick texts from the shelves below him.

"You've got some really interesting books in here. I'd love to spend a month just going through them."

He glanced down at Willow. "Sure, when this is over, knock yourself out."

Starting his task looking for the necklace behind the books, Alex found the first one stuck. That was weird. He tugged harder on the book, and finally the top pulled out, but the bottom remained stuck. Willow gasped, and he looked down. "What?"

"You opened a drawer." A small compartment hung open in the stones of the fireplace.

The book must have been the lever. He pulled it again and watched the small drawer shut. Interesting. He'd never known it was there. Yanking one more time, it popped open again.

Alex climbed down the ladder and watched as Willow pulled a shiny object out of the opened chamber. The jewels glittered in the light as she examined the necklace.

"What luck! We found it!" She held the item up for him to see.

He glanced in the drawer checking to see if anything else was hidden inside. It was empty. "I wonder how she knew the drawer was there? I didn't even know about it."

Willow looked up. "Well, didn't you say she'd been here before you? Maybe the last person who lived here used it."

"That's possible." He took the necklace from her. Placing it around her neck, he secured the clasp. "It looks beautiful on you."

Willow's hand rose to the jewels on her neck. Her fingers stroked the necklace softly. "It's so pretty."

A smile twitched on Alex's mouth. "You make it prettier."

She looked up at him, her eyes misted over. "Thank you."

Alex turned her in his arms and cupped her face in his hands. "You're so beautiful, Willow. It amazes me." His thumb caressed her cheek. Her skin was as smooth as polished stone. An artist couldn't have done a better job creating this masterpiece. He thought she was perfect.

She gazed into his eyes as he lowered his mouth to hers, placing a soft kiss on her lips. Willow reached around him and cupped his head with her hands, her fingers intertwined in his hair, sending shivers up his spine.

As his tongue explored her open mouth, his mind cleared of all thoughts except her. She filled his senses. Her floral perfume lingered and surrounded him. His hands caressed her smooth skin. Her soft body pressed closer into Alex, and the blood rushed to lower portions of his anatomy. The area between his legs tightened against his jeans. Throbbing, aching, wanting to be freed.

Willow agreed, obviously, because she instinctively reached down and unbuttoned his pants, pushing them down. Cupping him in her hands, she massaged his growing need. When his knees threatened to buckle under him, he pulled her down with him onto the couch, positioning her above him.

Alex pulled her tighter against him, enjoying the feel of her body laying on his. Willow slid off the couch onto her knees, and he groaned in protest. "Hey, where you going?"

A wicked gleam lit her eyes, and he smiled. Her hands roamed over his body and yanked away his remaining clothes, leaving him completely naked on the couch. She stood up and backed away.

He tried to sit up, but she pushed him back down with her palm. "No. You wait there."

Moving her hips from side to side, her fingers unbuttoned her blouse as she danced. A jolt shot through his stomach. She reached the bottom button and let her shirt slide off her shoulders. It slipped down her back and landed in a heap on

the floor. Swaying her hips, she unbuttoned her pants and edged the zipper down. Her thumbs hooked inside the waistband and slowly pushed them to her ankles. As she bent forward, he got a good look at her cleavage. The creamy, white skin of her breasts bulged over the top of her bra, and he wanted to hold them in his hands right before he suckled them between his lips. The show she was putting on had him paralyzed, boiling the blood in his normally cold veins.

Black lace teased him as she stood before him in nothing but her bra and panties. Her hips moved in small circles as she danced. Alex groaned.

Turning her back to him, she reached behind her and unhooked her bra. His eyes grew wide at her bare back. His tongue craved to travel down her spine tasting all that pale white skin. She turned back around, still holding the bra to her breasts and bent her knees, her bottom nearly touching the floor, before standing straight. Her breasts jiggled under the material, held in place only by her arm. With one hand, she pulled one of the straps down her arm. Once it was free, she worked on the other side. Her breasts were still covered as she held the bra, her arms tight to her sides. She shook her shoulders side to side, and he watched wide-eyed as the skin shook under the flimsy material.

She finally tossed the bra aside, and he smiled as the rounded shapes burst free. Her breasts danced with her as she continued to gyrate her hips. He was in heaven. Her soft curves teased him harder than a rock.

She slid her hands in her panties and pushed them down. They landed at her feet, and she kicked them to the side.



Alex licked his lips, hoping the moisture would relieve the dryness. He wanted her now, and didn't know how much more he could take. She turned from him, and he gazed at her rounded bottom. Bending forward, she gave him a better view of the area between her legs. He felt his cock throb. She pulled herself back up and glanced at him over her shoulder. A small smile played on her lips.

"You better get over here soon, or I'm going to have to come get you." The sound of his voice was nothing more than a low threatening growl.

She grinned and walked back to the couch. Lowering herself to her knees, she grabbed his hardened cock in her hands. Her lips pressed against his chest, working her way around the muscled area. Driving him to the brink of insanity, her hand massaged his thick shaft. Her mouth moved down his abdomen, placing small kisses as she moved. His skin burned with fire everywhere she touched.

She rose and straddled his chest, facing his lower half. Leaning forward, she took him in her mouth. Alex groaned in pleasure. Her ass bounced in front of him as her head bobbed over him. Grasping her ass with his palms, he gave her bottom a squeeze.

The pressure continued to build inside him as she licked and sucked. His hand reached between her legs and found her wet and ready. He slid his fingers inside. She moaned as she continued her work on his rod. His fingers moved faster inside her, and she squirmed against him.

He cupped her hips and pulled her back to his mouth. His tongue slipped between her folds, and she bucked. Her mouth

moved faster over him as he pleased her. His tongue thrust in and out of her as her lips and tongue moved over his shaft. His stomach quivered, and the sensation spread to his chest.

His mouth roamed over her until it found her small pleasure button. His tongue flicked and massaged it. He lapped at her. The scent of sex filled his nostrils, and he slid his fingers inside her, wiggling them.

Her tongue teased his tip, and she went down on him again. Her mouth reached his base, and she sucked harder. Knowing he was about to blow, he couldn't stop himself. With a raspy groan, he exploded in her mouth. His fingers continued to massage as her moisture flowed over his hand.

Willow raised and turned to face him. She lay on top of him, kissing his neck. His head turned to the side as she sucked on his skin. Her hands caressed the back of his head as he closed his eyes, knowing it wouldn't take much, and he'd be hard again.

Willow's hands roamed over his body, caressing and teasing. Her thumb and forefinger pinched his nipple between them. With her teeth, she pulled at his ear. As she spread her legs, he felt the hot moisture of her arousal on his belly. His cock throbbed and hardened against her bottom.

Her giggle was coy, giving him the impression she'd just begun her sexual foreplay.

Sitting up, she slid down his body, taking him inside her. Her hands pressed against his chest as she moved over him. With each thrust, her breasts jiggled. His hands cupped them, his thumbs caressing the hardened tips. Willow threw her head back and closed her eyes. He continued to knead and

massage. While he teased the nipples of her large breasts, she rode him hard, and he pushed against her, matching her movements.

Willow leaned forward, and he brought her breasts to his mouth, suckling on them like a babe. Pulling the skin tight inside his mouth, he rubbed it with his tongue, and Willow sighed.

He pulled her down to him and kissed her neck. Moving around until her lips were in front of him. He nipped at them and pulled her bottom lip into his mouth, sucking on it. She moaned, her breath warm against his skin. He pushed his body hard against hers, and she cried out. "Oh, Alex."

He couldn't take it anymore. He needed to press deeper inside her. He raised her up and flipped her around on the couch. On top of her now, he pushed himself into her warm opening. As his body thrust, his mind reeled with pleasure.

His head rested on her neck, sucking on the smooth skin.

"Bite me." Willow moaned.

His movements paused for a moment to determine what she'd said. "What?" He looked down at her, naked and wanting below him.

Her eyelids fluttered open. "I want you to bite me."

He took her mouth in his, a feral kiss. Her hands linked behind his head. He wanted her now, more than ever. His fangs protruded from his gums. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. I want to feel you inside me, completely."

A jolt of electricity hit him, and he lowered his head to her neck. She turned her head to give him more room. He

stroked into her, harder and faster than before. She squealed, her body rising with each thrust.

He sucked on her neck, feeling her pulse hum as he licked the skin. The energy she put off coursed through him, and he wanted her even more. His teeth scraped her skin, and he plunged his fangs into her delicate skin. She stiffened and whimpered. He tried to pull away, but her hands cupped the back of his head, keeping him firmly against her neck. Her energy filled him, and she cried out. He slammed into her, and she shook under him.

Alex closed his eyes as he took everything she offered. The hot release of his climax washed over him. She trembled, and he knew she was feeling it, too. He rocked her to the brink of insanity and fell against her when they'd both been depleted.

Pulling his mouth away from her neck, he licked away the last few droplets of blood off her skin. The puncture closed quickly, the skin healed, and barely a mark remained. Willow was breathing heavily, and he kissed the side of her mouth. "Are you okay?"

Her eyes fluttered open to watch him. "I'm great."

Alex squeezed in beside her on the couch, wrapping his arm around her, pulling her tighter to him. The fire crackled from across the room. A cool breeze fluttered over his body, caressing his heated skin.

He listened as Willow's breathing slowed. A smooth rhythmic sound as her breasts rose with each breath. He cupped her breast with his hand. He wasn't ready to end their time together. He needed to feel the heat of her body against his.

Love Can Be Murder  
*by Sierra Wolfe*

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## Chapter Seven

Willow's eyes fluttered open and found Alex watching her. She smiled. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I was just thinking how beautiful you are. I'm so glad I met you, Willow."

Her heart contracted in her chest. What did she say to that? She wasn't used to having a sweet, caring man. The "Wham, bam, thank you ma'am" type was more common these days, and she tended to stay away from men who could break her heart. Alex was definitely capable of doing just that. She was already falling for him in a bad way. It felt nice, and a little scary. A vampire and a mortal, a witch at that ... was this really a good idea? What would come of the combination?

"Are you hungry?" Alex looked down at her, his head resting on his hand.

"Starved."

"Good. Come on. I'm going to fix you something to eat." He stood and reached down for her hand. She accepted, and he pulled her up from the couch.

Willow bent to pick up her clothes, but Alex pulled her back. "I don't think so. Who said you could get dressed?"

"But—"

He shook his head and pulled her close. "No. I want you naked. I want to enjoy the sights while I cook." Bringing her hand up to his mouth, he kissed her knuckles.

Wrapping his arms around her, he tugged her to the kitchen. While he searched the cabinets for food, she sat at the table. "What would you like?"

She shrugged. "I don't care. Whatever. I'm not picky."

"Good. I know what I'll make. A patented Alex original omelet. Do you like everything in it?"

"Sure. Sounds good." Willow watched as he pulled a carton of eggs out of the refrigerator. She got a good view of his butt as he reached in the cabinets for the ingredients. She chewed on her bottom lip, wanting him all over again, as she watched his naked cooking show.

He made her feel comfortable, and he was fun. She really enjoyed the freedom of being herself with him.

Her hand rubbed her neck, her fingers landing on the spot where he'd bitten her. She didn't know what she'd expected, but the bite had been so feral, her neck tingled from the memory. It hadn't hurt at all. In fact, it felt damn good, as if he'd injected a drug into her. The tingling sensation lasted, and her mind swirled as he'd taken from her. She wondered if it was like that for everyone, or if it had been different with Alex, because they'd been making love.

Alex whipped the eggs in a metal bowl and poured the mixture into a skillet. The grease popped and sputtered as the eggs fried. He whistled as he cooked her meal, and she couldn't help but grin. Standing there naked, cooking for her, she thought he was the sexiest man she'd ever seen. Moisture pooled between her legs as she watched him, tempting her to forget the food and start feasting on him all over again.

He scooped the eggs, and laid them in a plate. "Would you mind grabbing the milk and juice out of the fridge?" He carried the meal to the table and went back to the cabinets, pulling out cups and plates.

He set the table as Willow returned to her chair. The scent of the fried eggs and peppers filled her senses, and her stomach growled. "This smells good." She bent down to get a better whiff. "Where'd you learn to cook like this?"

He chuckled. "When you live by yourself for nearly a hundred years, you learn to cook. Frozen dinners can get pretty old after a while."

"I bet." Scooping up her eggs, she stabbed her fork into the tender food. She lifted the fork to her mouth and let the flavor sit on her tongue. The spicy flavor thrilled her. "Oh Goddess, this is good. Mmm."

Alex poured her a glass of orange juice and chuckled. "I'm glad you like it."

"I do." Biting into a pepper, she moaned.

She finished her meal in silence, looking up occasionally to find Alex watching her. The heat rose to her face, but she couldn't stop it. "Would you stop staring at me?"

"No. I like staring at you." He rested his chin on his palm and continued watching her.

"Well, aren't you going to eat?"

"I don't feel like it. Besides, technically, I don't have to eat." His grin unnerved her.

She sat her fork down on the plate and pushed it away from her. "Fine. I'm done."

Alex frowned. "Not because of me, I hope."



"No. I'm full. Should we get back to the library? I wanted to show you the picture I found."

"All right." Alex stood and joined her on the other side of the table. He leaned in and kissed her softly. "Let's go."

Arm in arm, they strolled back to the library. Alex opened the door, and Willow walked in to find the biggest mess she'd ever seen. Books and papers were thrown all over the floor. All the research she had been stacked neatly on the table was now mixed in with the other papers. She couldn't even see the carpet. What were they supposed to do now?

She turned back to Alex to find him staring around the room, his mouth wide. "What the hell?"

Realizing she was still naked, Willow searched for her clothes in the mess. Tossing papers aside, she found only bare floor underneath. "Shit!"

Placing her hands on her hips, she stared at him. "My clothes are gone. So are yours."

He frowned. "I guess your aunt didn't like us running around here naked. Must have wanted to teach us a lesson."

"Aargh. This is ridiculous. I can't stay naked all night."

Alex cocked an eyebrow. "Why not? I like it." A wicked grin played on his lips.

Willow glared at him. "Get me some clothes."

"All right, all right. Don't get your panties in a wad," he said, throwing his hands in the air. "Oh, that's right, you can't. You don't have any." A sinful gleam twinkled in his eyes.

Willow threw a book at his head, narrowly missing him as he turned. Dodging it just in time, he made his escape, his chuckle echoed down the hall.

Wonderful. Now what was she supposed to do? She started picking up the papers and placing them in a stack on the table. It was going to take forever to put them back in any kind of order. At this moment, she wanted to kill Abbie. Too bad she was already dead.

"What was the point in this? Huh?" She screamed it to the air. She didn't know if Abbie was listening or not, but she damn sure hoped so. "We were only trying to help you, ya know? How are we supposed to do that when you're acting like a two year old?"

She waited a moment and when no response came, she went back to the task of cleaning the room, grumbling to herself.

"What was that all about?" Alex walked in carrying a stack of clothes. He handed her a pair of sweat pants and a t-shirt. "Here. These should fit."

"Thanks." Willow grabbed the clothes and slid into them, they were about two sizes too big, but they stayed up, and that's what mattered. She looked down at her outfit and a wry smile curved her lips. "Got blood? How appropriate."

Alex chuckled as he slid into his own clothes. "Of course. What else would a vampire wear?"

His clothing fit perfectly. Willow could see his muscular build through the material and felt her chest tighten. Damn! He looked good in everything he wore.

He picked up a few books and stacked them on the table. "This is going to take forever. Don't you have some spell to put them back the way they should go or something?"

She laughed. "I wish. I'd never have to clean my house again. Come on. We can do this. Let's just get busy."

They worked for hours, and Willow's neck popped as she twisted her head from shoulder to shoulder. They'd managed to get the books back on the shelves where they belonged, and the papers were stacked in a neat pile, ready to be sorted.

The only problem was that the book she'd been looking for had disappeared. The picture of Abbie wearing the necklace was in that book, and now she couldn't show Alex. It was gone. Her hand reached up to the necklace wrapped around her neck, making sure it was still there. She didn't know how the ghost would have removed it, but she wasn't taking any chances.

Alex sat at the large table and sorted through the huge stack of papers. A loud bang echoed through the room. Willow jumped, and Alex rushed to her side.

\* \* \* \*

"It's Abbie again. She must not be done. Come on." Grabbing her hand, Alex pulled Willow with him to investigate the noise.

Willow wasn't sure she wanted to see Abbie in action, but it looked like she didn't have a choice. They followed the noise down the hallway, the crashing and banging growing louder as they approached Alex's study.

"Damn it! She's trashing my office. Just what I need." He grasped the handle and shoved the door open. A book flew across the room, nearly smacking Alex in the head.

He pulled Willow down with him to avoid the flying debris. "Damn it, Abbie! Would you stop destroying my house?"

Abbie turned to them, her eyes glowing red, and her temper tantrum reached full force. "I will not." She swept her hand across the room, sending objects flying in all directions.

"What's the matter with her?" Willow sidestepped a flying picture frame.

"I don't know. She does this shit all the time. Who the hell knows what's going through her mind?"

"Well, have you ever asked her?" Willow stared at him.

"Ask a woman what she's thinking? Are you serious? I'm not suicidal." The wind swirled through the room like a tornado, and Alex grabbed the doorframe to hold on.

She shook her head. "It's not very bad." Walking into the room, Willow didn't flinch as objects flew past her head. "Abbie? Can I talk to you for a minute?"

The ghost turned on her. Her red eyes narrowed as Willow approached. "What do you want?"

Willow held her hands up in a sign of surrender. "I just want to talk, honest." The winds died down slightly, and Willow walked closer. Abbie's eyes continued to glow, but she seemed calmer.

"Abbie, I just want to know why you're so angry? What set this off?" Willow motioned around the destroyed room.

Abbie appeared to take a deep breath, even though she was dead and couldn't breathe. Willow didn't know why she found that so interesting.

"You want to know what set this off? You set it off, you stupid girl." Like a parent scolding a disobedient child, Abbie pointed her index finger at Willow.

"What did I do?" Willow stared at her ancestor in disbelief. She couldn't believe she had been the reason for Abbie's rage.

"You're wearing my necklace and sleeping with that, that thing." She pointed to Alex. "How could you? Betray me like this?"

Willow blinked. "Yes, I am wearing the necklace. I apologize for that. But as for sleeping with Alex, I don't know what business that is of yours, or why you'd care."

"Then you really don't have any sense, after all. I should have known better."

Willow sighed. "Can't you just tell me? I really don't know."

Abbie shook her head and frowned. "No. You need to find out on your own." Without saying another word, she vanished.

Willow turned back to Alex, who hadn't moved from the doorway. "Well, there you go. Now we know why she's so pissed."

Alex shrugged. "For today, yeah. But, she's like this all the time, even before you came here. So, don't let it bother you."

He stepped into the room and glanced around at the chaos. "Looks like we've got our work cut out for us." Alex bent down and started cleaning up yet another disaster.

Love Can Be Murder  
*by Sierra Wolfe*

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## Chapter Eight

Willow sighed and bent down to help Alex sort through the mess. She was really getting tired of having to pick up after a ghost with temper tantrums. Alex concentrated on picking up stray sheets of paper while Willow piled the books. They formed a working rhythm, and before she knew it, an hour had passed.

Alex grumbled to himself, and Willow had to giggle. She hated it too, but it was funny to watch him fume at something he had little control over.

Reaching down to pick up a book, she glanced at the cover. "This is it!" Willow jumped up and rushed over to Alex. "This is the book I was telling you about."

She plopped down on the floor beside him before he had a chance to look up.

"What book?"

"The one with the picture I wanted to show you. It was in the library. I don't know why she brought it in here." Willow flipped through the pages, stopping once she found the picture she wanted Alex to see. "Here. Here it is."

She held out the book, and Alex glanced down at it. It was a picture of Abbie wearing the necklace, standing beside an unknown man. She wanted to know who he was. He must have something to do with the mystery of why Abbie still held on.

Alex frowned. "I know him. He's a relative."

Willow followed Alex as he led the way to the library. He didn't say a word, just searched through the shelves. Pulling out an old tan-covered book, he brought it to the table. Alex scanned the contents until he found the picture he was looking for. He pointed to the page, and Willow leaned in to read it.

"Wallace Cade?" She glanced at Alex.

"Yeah, he's a distant ancestor. Rumor is, he was mean as shit. He must have been Abbie's boyfriend. That has to be how she got the necklace in the first place. The one thing I can't imagine was him giving it to her, since they weren't married." He wrinkled his forehead and frowned.

"I wonder if he's the one who killed her."

Alex looked up sharply at Willow. "You think? Could be. History paints him as one mean bastard. I've heard stories about him."

Willow nodded. "I think we need to check those stories out."

\* \* \* \*

Willow sat at the long wooden table and sifted through the stack of books she'd pulled from the library shelves. She was getting cross-eyed from all the reading. Alex seemed to be absorbed in something a bit more interesting than what she'd found.

"What have you got there?" The chair legs scraped the floor as she scooted closer to him.

Glancing up from the page he'd been reading, Alex smiled. "It seems to be a diary. I just started reading, but there's



some pretty hot stuff going on. You'd think I was reading a romance novel."

"Hmm. I wonder who this belonged to." Willow pulled the diary out of his hands.

He chuckled. "I don't know. I couldn't read the name. It was smeared."

Willow flipped to the front page, but she couldn't read it either. Closing her eyes, she chanted, her hand moved in small circles over the book. She opened her eyes and gasped when the name appeared. She exclaimed, "Oh, Goddess! It's hers."

Alex stared at her. "Abbie's? Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure. We have to find out what she wrote." She flipped to the ending. "It ends abruptly."

Alex nodded. "That would make sense if she was murdered. What does it say?"

Willow turned back a few pages from the end and read the passage to herself. Alex groaned, and she looked up at him. "What?"

"Well, hurry up. I want to know what it says, too."

"Sorry." She sped through the last few pages and handed him the book. "It's not good. Looks like Wallace was her lover. He was trying to get rid of her at the end, at least that's what she thought. She was afraid of him."

Alex frowned as he read the pages. "Looks like it. Damn. That means I have a murderer in my family. I don't like that."

Willow put her hand on his shoulder. "I'm sorry. There's nothing you could do about it. We can't control who our

relatives are, believe me. If we could, I'd definitely have a whole different family." She grinned at him.

Alex smiled back. "Yeah. You're right about that. Okay. Well, now we know. I wonder if we could get her to tell us what happened."

"I doubt it. She wanted us to figure it out, remember." Willow chewed on her lower lip and considered their options. They pretty much knew what had happened ... Abbie had been killed by her lover. They just didn't have the details. Was that information important? Would the fact they knew he murdered her be enough to allow her ghost to rest, to free her from the mortal world.

"What do you think we should do? Should we try to confront her, or should we keep looking for clues?"

Alex frowned, mulling it over. "I don't know. Maybe we should contact her and see what she says."

"I think so, too. Let's give it a try." Willow walked toward the fireplace. Hoping she would appear before them, Willow called the ghost's name.

Alex joined her. "Abbie!"

They shouted until they were hoarse. "I can try to contact her through witchcraft. It might work."

Alex nodded. "Okay. Let's get some water first." He pulled her with him to the kitchen and poured them both a glass of ice water. He turned to hand the glass to Willow and found her standing face to face with Abbie. Water splashed over the side of the glass as he halted. Willow grinned.

Abbie hovered over one of the barstools at the counter. Willow stood before her, hands on her hips. "Abbie, we need to talk. We know about Wallace. We know he killed you."

Abbie nodded. "He did." Willow saw the flames flicker in her eyes.

Willow wanted to keep Abbie calm for their talk. "Is that enough for you to rest? Now that we know the truth."

Abbie laughed. "Hardly. I want revenge."

"But how? He's dead. How are you going to get revenge now?" Willow gasped as Abbie's eyes traveled to Alex.

"He's not dead, technically." She raised her eyebrows at the vampire standing in front of her.

"No! You can't punish him for what his ancestor did. That's not fair. It wasn't his fault."

Abbie flew to the ceiling, her voice deep. "I don't care if he wasn't directly involved, or whether he was responsible or not. It was his family, and I'd expect you to stand up for your family, girl. Not take the side of a murderous scoundrel."

"I'm not taking sides with a murderer. I'm siding with an innocent bystander. I know you're angry, Abbie, but I can't let you hurt someone who's not guilty."

She narrowed her eyes at Willow and nodded. "Fine. Then find a way I can get revenge on the bastard himself, and I'll leave your precious vampire alone." Abbie disappeared before Willow could argue her point.

Willow let out a long, low breath. "Wow! How about that?"

Alex stood frozen in place. "Yeah. How about that?" His flat voice showed no emotion.

"She's not going to hurt you, Alex. I promise."

"I'm not worried about her. What's she going to do? She can't kill me." He smirked.

"Well, we're going to have to find a way to bring Wallace to her."

Alex looked at her and cocked his head sideways. "Great. Just what I need, another ghost. How exactly do you plan to do that, anyway?"

"I think I should try to contact him. See if I can bring him here for a short time so Abbie can talk to him." Willow pushed the hair out of her eyes and tucked it behind her ear. "What do you think?"

Alex shook his head. "I don't know. Can you do that?"

Willow shrugged. "I guess we'll find out."

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## Chapter Nine

Willow stood within the circle she'd cast in the middle of Alex's library. Candles flickered in the breeze thrown down by the ceiling fan. Alex watched, awestruck as she raised her arms to the sky. Her eyes closed, she chanted. Alex still wasn't sure about her magic, but he grew, somewhat, used to it.

The ancient text left to her by her grandmother held the answers she'd been looking for. She chanted the words to the spell she'd memorized last night. The book had been an invaluable resource, but this was something she'd never attempted before.

The wind picked up and wrapped around her, icy fingers pulling at her arms. The candle's flames shot up, throwing off heat, battling the wind for control. Alex sat on the other side, eyes wide. She smiled to let him know she was okay and continued with her spell.

Hopefully, it would work. They really needed this. It was their last chance to free Abbie's spirit. Alex needed it for his sanity alone.

Willow called up the goddess of her choice and asked her favor. She knew the moment Abbie arrived to watch. A cold gust of air raised the hair on her arms. Abbie watched with curious eyes, cool and blue this evening, unlike the fiery red she wore so often.

Willow pushed her energy forth to complete the spell, giving every ounce she could, hoping it would work.

A dark shadow hovered in front of her, and she knew it was him. Wallace Cade had come to play. His form shimmered into view, and Willow nearly stumbled back. His coal black eyes revealed the callous evil he carried inside him. Wicked laughter met her ears.

"Are you Wallace Cade?" Willow stumbled over the words.

The laughter continued as the winds died down. The candle flames flickered lower.

"I am. Who calls me from my grave?"

Abbie flew to the circle and hovered above Willow. "I do!" She screeched the words at him, her eyes narrowed. "We have business to attend to, Wallace."

He stared at her, his mouth twisted in a snarl. "How dare you bring me here for this!" His eyes shot daggers at Willow. "I have no time for trash. I disposed of you years ago, Abbie."

Abbie's eyes flamed red as she soared toward him. "You owe me, Wallace, and I expect to receive my payment right now."

He laughed at her words. "What makes you think I would give you anything? You were worthless to me then, and you are worthless now."

Abbie held out her hand, and flames grew from her palms. Raising the fire, she formed it into a flaming ball, hurling it at him. Wallace shriveled back, screaming out in pain.

"What is this magic? You were an evil witch when you were alive."

"Not as evil as I feel now." Abbie laughed at his burning stomach. "You will pay me what I'm due."

Alex grabbed Willow and pulled her away from the dueling spirits. His arms wrapped around her so tightly, she could barely breathe. "Stay back. I don't want you getting hurt," his whispered words tickled her ear.

The ghosts continued their battle, each with weapons of their own. Willow feared they would destroy Alex's house before the battle was through. Or worse.

She understood Abbie's need for justice, but this was going too far. If only she hadn't called him here. Her thoughts raced to figure out how to send him back.

Abbie hovered over Wallace's dark form. "This is the offspring of your family. Why don't you tell him how you killed me in cold blood? He'd love to hear the story, I'm sure." She pointed to Alex, and Wallace turned to face him.

"If he's my family, then he knows witches deserve what they get."

Abbie took a deep breath. Exhaling sharply, she blew icy daggers at Wallace. He shrank back and built a wall of flame in front of himself, using it as a shield. The ice melted against the flames. Wallace laughed at her failed tricks.

"You can do better than that, Abbie. You fought better when you were alive, before I took your last breath."

She formed another ball of fire to shoot at him. The ball traveled through his fiery shield, growing larger before it hit him, knocking him back several feet. Wallace groaned. "You bitch!"

Abbie laughed. "Tell them, Wallace. Tell them how you killed me."

Wallace turned to Alex and grinned. "I suffocated her. I waited until she slept and shoved a pillow over her face." His grin grew larger as he told the tale. "I waited until her breathing stilled, and then I buried her in an empty field."

Alex swallowed, and Willow leaned into him. How could he speak so callously of her murder? He showed no remorse, only contempt. It was hard to imagine such a man was part of Alex's family tree. Wallace was pure evil, a sight Willow wished she'd never seen.

Wallace laughed, then focused his eyes on Willow. "And who is this?" He moved closer, his hand reaching out to grab Willow by the throat. "Is this one of your witch relatives, Abbie? Should I dispose of her now?" Pulling his arm back, Wallace doubled his hand into a fist and lunged toward her.

Alex jumped in front of Willow, blocking the blow with his body. Wallace raged. "Move, boy. Get out of my way, or I will kill you both."

Abbie grabbed Wallace from behind and yanked him back. "Don't you ever touch one of mine. I will destroy you with my bare hands."

A sinister smile crept onto his lips. "And what will you do about it, pray tell? Nothing! Just as before, you will quiver before me like the rodent you are. Worthless." He leaned forward and spit in Abbie's face.

Willow wasn't sure he'd actually spit. Could ghosts create spit? He performed the action, anyway, and it was still degrading.



Willow cringed at his actions. What would Abbie do now? Would she fight him or give up? Apparently, she'd feared him in the past. Would that fear rise now and take hold?

Abbie wiped her face with her sleeve and rose up above him. "You will never disrespect me or my family again. You will pay."

She raised her hands into the air and chanted a spell that Willow didn't recognize. Flames grew around her body. Willow watched Wallace's eyes grew wide. Abbie pushed her arms forward. Fire shot out of her palms and hit Wallace with a force strong enough to send him flying backwards into the wall. The wood cracked with the weight of his body.

The flames held him immobile. A thick blue line shot from him and ricocheted to the necklace Willow still wore. Heat burned her skin where the jewels rested. Wallace shriveled, as the line grew thicker. Willow stood, mouth agape, as she watched Wallace slowly disappear into nothing.

Her skin burned where the necklace touched her. She grasped at it, trying to pull it off. "Help me, Alex. Get this off of me."

Alex loosened the clasp and yanked it free. Her skin flushed bright red where the necklace had laid. His eyes narrowed as he examined her neck. "What did you do?" He screamed the words at Abbie.

"I got my revenge. He'll never be freed now. He's trapped inside the necklace, in an eternity of nothingness. Just what he deserves."

\* \* \* \*

Abbie glowed bright against the dark wood interior of the library. The smile lit up her face as if she'd just won the lottery. Alex stood back and watched as she huffed out air from her nonexistent lungs.

Willow remained wrapped safely in his arms. He was afraid to let her go. His murderous uncle nearly killed Willow tonight, and he wanted nothing more than to hurt him for putting her in danger and scaring her that way. His fangs pushed through his gums as they always did when his anger rose. He wished he'd never let Willow call him here. At least now, the bastard was banished. He owed Abbie big time for that.

He looked up into Abbie's eyes, now a cool blue. "Thank you."

Abbie nodded, her lips pressed into a thin line. "He got what he deserved."

Willow didn't speak. Her eyes were closed, and she leaned her head into him. Alex squeezed her tighter in his arms. She'd done all this just to help him; she'd been so brave. He couldn't believe he'd nearly lost her tonight. If Wallace had laid one hand on her ... He didn't even want to imagine the outcome. Thank God, he hadn't.

Abbie moved closer, and Alex pushed Willow behind him. Even though she'd destroyed Wallace tonight, he didn't trust her. He knew her anger had been about the situation and directed at them, but he couldn't help wondering if she would remain calm now that she'd gotten what she wanted.

She smiled at him. "You love her."

Alex didn't know what to say. This wasn't the way he'd envisioned telling Willow he loved her. He did love her. He couldn't deny it. The feelings he felt for her reflected in his eyes, even if he didn't speak the words aloud. He couldn't hide his love.

Abbie nodded.

"What now?" Alex asked.

"I can go. Rest. Your house belongs to you alone. I won't bother you anymore."

Alex took a deep breath, not that he needed to, but it was a comfort anyway. "What about Wallace?"

A smile lit her face. "He's locked inside the necklace, never to be released. He's trapped forever." Abbie floated over the room and toward the fireplace. "I can finally rest in peace."

Abbie disappeared in a puff, leaving nothing behind but the memory of her existence.

Alex pulled Willow tight to his chest, cradling her head in his hands. Thank God, she was safe. He'd damn near lost her. Kissing her forehead, he closed his eyes. Now that he'd met her, his life would be empty without her. He'd never survive.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## Chapter Ten

Willow leaned into Alex's arms, feeling safe and secure. She didn't want to let go. Wrapping her arms around his waist, she rested her head on his chest, while Alex stroked her hair and kissed the top of her head.

His deep voice whispered, "It's okay now. It's over."

Willow nodded. "I know. I'm so glad. I've never seen anything so wicked in my life. Until now, I guess I didn't believe real evil existed. I thought there was something inherently good in everyone."

She shook her head against his chest, squeezing her eyes shut. Taking a deep breath, she inhaled his cologne and sighed at the comfort it provided. His muscles tensed against her, protecting her.

Alex sighed. "I know. You're such a good person, Willow. You don't like to see the bad in people. Seeing something so evil would be a shock."

Willow shook her head. "It doesn't matter anymore. It's over, and that's what's important."

She pulled away from him and glanced around the room. The place was in a shambles. The candles had melted down to nothing, and papers were strewn everywhere. A huge burn hole marred the floor from the fire the ghosts created, and the air was tainted with ash. Willow shook her head. "It's going to take forever to clean this mess up. You're going to have to replace the carpet."

Alex nodded. "That's okay. Carpet is no big deal. At least the house is still standing." He chuckled. "Actually, the house could have fallen down, and I wouldn't have cared. As long as you were all right, I could care less about the rest."

Willow smiled. Tears filled her eyes. She didn't know what to say to the fact that his concern through all this was for her, not his home. He cared about her. Her heart flipped in her chest.

Heat still rose from her neck where the necklace singed her skin. Reaching down, she placed her fingertips on the piece of jewelry. It was cold to the touch, no longer searing, but hot enough to burn. Her eyes opened wide in amazement.

Alex joined her. He picked up the necklace and held it in his hands. Willow watched as he examined it for changes. There were none. It looked exactly as it had before Abbie had condemned Wallace to an eternity inside the stone.

Alex turned to her. "Do you still want the necklace?"

Her hand flew to her neck. Did she? She had wanted it so badly before this all started, but now that the evil spirit of the ghost resided inside, did she still want it? A smile curved her lips. Strangely, she did.

Her heart melted as she remembered the other night, how much it meant when Alex had placed the necklace on her. No matter what happened, she would always treasure the necklace because of that moment with him. "I do still want it." She glanced up to find him studying her.

Alex stepped closer. "You know what that means then."

"What does it mean?" The words were spoken on a shudder.

Pulling her into him, Alex wrapped his arms around her waist. "It means you have to marry me. The necklace can only go to the bride of the first son. I'm the first son. So, in order for you to get the necklace, you have to marry me."

Willow looked into his dark eyes. They were steadily fixed on her face, searching. "You. You want to marry me?" Her eyelids fluttered. Was he serious?

Alex leaned down and kissed her softly on the lips. "I want to marry you." This time when he kissed her, it was firm, secure.

Willow pressed her length against him and lost herself in his kiss, sighing against his mouth. Alex pulled away and gazed into her eyes, waiting for her answer.

Willow smiled. "I would love to marry you, Alex Forsythe."

He pulled her firmly against him. "Thank God. I would have died if you said no."

She grinned. "Never. That would never have happened. I love you, Alex. I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

Alex bent down and nuzzled her neck. "Life? What about eternity?"

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **About the Author**

Sierra Wolfe has an Associates Degree in Nursing and works as a traveling nurse. Born and raised in Missouri, she is currently on assignment in Texas. Although, she misses her family and friends back in Missouri, she enjoys meeting new people and loves to travel. Of course, she wouldn't go anywhere without her wonderful daughter and two rotten dogs. Writing has always been a part of her life, but for many years, she thought it was only a hobby. Finally learning that she couldn't live without writing her beloved stories, she decided to see where it would take her. Who knows where her next adventure will be? Either in nursing or writing, she will continue to look for new and fun places to explore.

Visit her at [www.sierrawolfe.com](http://www.sierrawolfe.com)

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

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