

Deathly Embrace
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Complimentary Excerpt



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A few days later, Logan moved in. The tension between him and Paige had eased, and he'd made a concerted effort to put the steps incident behind him, along with the ones from their childhood.

It had taken some deciding what to store and what to bring, but between them, they'd eliminated all the double up in furniture and white goods. Along with Sarah Hamilton's old-fashioned stuff, they had put everything they didn't require right now into a large storage shed. They had kept the furniture to a minimum, leaving most of the rooms sparsely furnished or empty ready for renovation.

Logan was glad to have a chance to inspect the place, alone, and decide on what would be done, which was most urgent and which was most costly. As he worked with Paige over the Internet to draw up plans and collate ideas, he'd become more and more enthused about this restoration project.

He climbed on the roof and into the roof space, poked and prodded pipes and wires, and made copious notes on tasks to be done—what was needed and who he should get to assist him. He went through each room, one at a time, and drew up plans for changes.

It was obvious the lounge room had not been used in ages and badly needed airing, so he put his paperwork down on the floor and went to unlock the windows. Before he could open them, there was a rattle and a crash behind him. He turned and his heavy notepad caught him squarely in the side of the head.

"Ouch," he yelped.

He touched his face, and it came away with a smear of blood. He glanced around the room. All was still and silent. What the hell had caused that? He refused to believe in Paige's ghost. He hadn't as a child, and he certainly didn't as an adult. He shrugged. There must be a simple explanation. Then he saw the cat sitting on the hearth. It was busy cleaning its front paws and wiping its face. It paused in its ablutions and hissed at him. He put his hands on his hips and glared at the feline.

"So, was it you, Cat? I gather you don't like me, but you will have to do better than that to scare me off. This is my house, so you can stop the scare tactics right now."

In a blur of orange, the cat pounced. With a flurry of claws and fur, his pencils and rulers whizzed off the floor, and stabbed at his legs and chest with sharp points.

As he fought off the missiles, he shouted at the cat. "Hey, you, enough! This is *my* house. Get lost."

He waved his hands and made a spitting noise at the cat. It spat back at him before it turned and stalked out of the room, its tail straight in the air, the tip snapping from side to side.

Stillness and silence descended.

"That's better. Get out and stay out, Cat." Logan felt foolish talking to the empty room.

Nothing stirred. He gathered up his materials, opened the windows, and moved to the next room.

By late afternoon he had a long list of work to be done in addition to the big jobs he and Paige had already agreed upon. Tired, but satisfied with his day's activities his thoughts turned to food.

When they had discussed their accommodation arrangements, he'd made it clear, that if she expected him to share cooking duties; he would not be using the wood stove. Fortunately, she agreed wholeheartedly with his suggestion they get a portable gas stove, to supplement their microwave although she did admit to cooking a chocolate cake in the oven once, under Sarah Hamilton's supervision.

With plans to demolish the current kitchen, which was no more than a lined lean-to on the back of the house, they had chosen the room adjacent as a suitable substitute kitchen. The light was mellow, barely reaching the corners of the room and the high ceiling that towered overhead. He lit the small primus and slapped a steak from the fridge onto the grill. He tossed a salad.

The yowling of a cat disturbed the quiet. He looked around, and saw Cat sitting upright on the outside window ledge, running its claws down the glass. Logan stared at the cat. He had no intention of letting the vicious feline in and so he didn't feel guilty refusing it's desire to come in, he pulled the curtains across.

It's smell of filled his nostrils and clogged his throat. He coughed. His head spun, and his vision blurred. He swung around. The flame on the primus stove was out, but the gas continued to hiss. He turned it off then fled outside for some fresh air. The back door slammed shut behind him, so hard the glass in the adjoining window shuddered.

As he wiped the tears from his eyes, he stared at the door. There was no wind outside. *It must have been a draft in the house or that wretched cat.* He felt in his pockets. Damn, the keys were on the dining room table, as was his mobile. Frustration flared—he was hungry, tired, cold and now locked outside in bare feet.

Then he remembered the windows he'd opened earlier. Probably a breeze wafting through had blown the door shut, but they were also his way back into the house. He struggled to find his way around the side of the house in the dark, through the over-grown garden, and along the crumbling concrete path. Stabbing pain shot across his foot and up his leg. "Owwww." He peered down. It was too dark to see the damage to his big toe, but he felt the slippery moisture between his toes. He hobbled. Stones stabbed into his soles and he hopped from one foot to the other. *Damn damn damn. Note to self, carry keys, get a torch and suck it up.* He sensed rather than saw the branches hanging low by the corner of the house and ducked. The foliage brushed his hair. Two more steps jiggling steps. He reached the first window.

His hand touched the sill. Peeling paint crackled, timber creaked. He snatched his hand away as the window dropped down and slammed shut. The ledge trembled. The faint reflection of the moonlight in the glass shimmered. The glass creaked. Logan bucked back. His heart pounded. "What the fuck?" A cat howled. Unease raced in cold fingers over his skin.

He pushed it away and turned to the second window of the pair. He looked at the timber and glass pane suspended above him. It seemed solid. He slapped his hands on the frame and hiked his leg over the sill. He straddled the opening. The timber creaked. The window sash jerked and snapped against the frame. Logan lunged into the room. The heavy bottom rail of the window crashed hard across his backside and scraped the full length of his thigh as he slid through the opening and thudded onto the floor. The window slammed shut. The glass rattled in between the sash bars.

Even with the heavy drapes drawn full open, it was almost completely dark inside. His back throbbed and his leg stung. He guessed he would be bruised and sore tomorrow. He lay for a while on the floor, absorbing his pain. *God that hurt.* He looked up at the windows. *Well can't blame Paige for that one.*

His mind drifted back to the first incident involving him and three-year-old Paige. He'd been left to wait in his parents' car as they said farewell to Sarah. Paige had been by the driver's door blowing him kisses. The next thing he knew, he was alone

in the car, and it was rolling down the driveway. His father and Paige's had dashed after the car, but neither reached it by the time it veered off the driveway and into the gatepost. He'd been shook up, but not hurt. His father had berated him about touching the mechanics of the car, even though he'd vigorously denied doing anything. Malcolm had blamed his own daughter, but when questioned, Paige had blamed the ghost. Sarah and Paige's mother, Jane, had laughed it off, and Sarah delicately suggested that his father, David, had not put the hand brake on sufficiently.

He shook his head. *No I can't blame Paige this time.*

With a groan he climbed to his knees and crawled with painful caution across the room. He was going to need a wall to get up. A spasm of pain stabbed down his back and thigh. His big toe throbbed and stung.

He reached for the door jamb and levered himself up. A movement. The tiniest change in the darkness. He swung his head around. Lost balance. Grabbed the door and steadied himself. He probed the gloom, squinting his eyes to see better. A shimmer against the shadows. A swirl of grey mist. He gulped. His heart leaped then pounded in an erratic rhythm. A woman ethereal, translucent—tall and willowy, with long curls done up under a delicate lace cap. Unease shivered along his skin. The hairs on his arms rose. *What the fuck?*

He recognized the face—its delicate beauty, high cheekbones, and soft strawberry curls—Paige.

“Paige?” he asked. There was no answer. “Come on, Paige, this joke has gone far enough.” Irritation flared. “It's not going to work, you know. There are no such things as ghosts. Give it up, Paige.” Irritation transformed to anger. “Enough.”