

New York Times Bestselling Author

HEATHER GRAHAM



Mother's Day, the Krewe, and a Really Big Dog

"Graham's tight plotting, her keen sense of when to reveal and when to tease...will keep fans turning the pages."

--Publishers Weekly

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Heather Graham

Slush Pile Productions

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Mother's Day, the Krewe, and a really big Dog

A short Krewe story, approximately 7,000 words, and told from a different perspective, and with a different take on the Krewe!

Angela Hawkins is being stalked—right before her first Mother's Day. But unbeknownst to the stalker, the stalker is being stalked in turn.

The situation might be deadly, Jackson is worried. But through a different kind of assistance, disaster might be averted because questions will be raised, and while there is no easy solution, there is often so much more than meets the eye. A mother's love for her children is often infinite.

And on Mother's Day . . .

Love knows no bounds.

Mother's Day, the Krewe, and a Really Big Dog

I need to begin by letting you know that *I* wasn't *stalking* the woman. I was afraid for her.

I'd started hanging around the townhouse in Alexandria soon after the couple had begun; they fascinated me. They belonged to something that was unofficially known as the Krewe of Hunters.

Now, don't get me wrong. The world is filled with decent people. I honestly believe it's a small percentage who are . . . *evil*, for lack of a better word. Some are mentally ill, and that illness causes them to torture and kill. Maybe anyone who could callously kill another person is mentally ill, but then again maybe, as I sometimes believe, they are just *evil*.

But the thing of it is this—I watched her first. I watched the way she would set out milk or bowls of food if she saw a stray cat or dog. She'd tried to get them when she could and make sure she either got the creature to a vet for care or found a home for it. I know one cat that lived at their offices for several weeks. Luckily, none of their Krewe agents or techs is allergic to cats.

Her name is Angela Hawkins. She's married to Jackson Crow, Field Supervisor for the Krewe of Hunters. She's an attractive woman with golden blond hair and light eyes, but it's her smile and the way she cares that makes her so lovely in my mind. I knew she was kick-ass, and she went into the field now and then, but her work in the office was so important to others that she didn't go that often. I admit I am a bit enthralled. But, again, I wasn't *stalking* her.

I was looking after her.

Of course, because of her, I started watching *him*.

He's a cool looking dude. Tall and fit—agents spend a fair amount of time in the gym and many take extra classes in self-defense—so yeah, he's going to be fit. He has very dark hair, light eyes, and bronze skin. And those eyes of his against his skin color . . . well, I can only imagine him in an interrogation room. He worked some damned tough cases before being

called in when Adam Harrison—called on quietly time and again because he had such a talent for finding the right people to get to the bottom of strange cases—formed the special unit of the FBI. I know all this, of course, because I know where to go and how to listen. Luckily, that's easy for me. I'm all but invisible to most people.

That's why I saw the man who was watching her. Following her. Stalking her.

Now, these people are careful. They go after the most ungodly murderers as their vocation from positions on high.

They have a damned good security system. They lock their doors. They're good at self-defense.

But Mother's Day was approaching. And she was particularly happy that year. They'd adopted a young boy without a home just after Christmas, *and* they'd discovered they were about to become natural parents to a babe as well. She was humming all the time. And she liked to sit on the steps with her son reading, doing homework with him. School was on-line, and she made sure he kept to it! He was a great kid. Oh, they were normal—well, as normal as anyone could be wearing masks and making sure they stayed six-feet away from one another.

Yeah, masks . . . people in masks.

The man who followed her was crafty. He kept his distance. He always wore a mask and a hoodie. He had hoodies in different colors and different masks. If I weren't on the lookout and aware of what was going on, I might not have realized it was the same man.

Well, that and the way Kelly was barking.

Kelly was a stray. Probably one of the ugliest strays I've ever seen. I say *was*, because she wasn't a stray anymore. Angela had taken her in. She had been hurt. Some dirtbag threw her out a car window, and Angela took her to her vet. She couldn't place her in a good home, and she now had a kid, Corby. Corby fell in love with the dog. Now Corby is one damned good-looking kid; but until Angela and Jackson had come along, the orphanage had had trouble placing him because he was mixed race. That didn't bother Angela and Jackson. Jackson was half Native American and maybe Irish or something like that. The agency had told them he might have trouble because some white people might not like the black and some black people might not like the white. But Angela and Jackson didn't care; Jackson had

found that confusing. They were all *people*, the human family. They'd deal with anything that came up as a family.

But I think Corby saw something of himself in poor Kelly. So, Kelly—this little sucker looks like a cross between a pot-bellied pig and a Scottie—now has a home. With Angela and Jackson and Corby. Man, I do mean an ugly dog—a serious underbite and short, stubby, little bowed legs. But she could be fierce, in the way all tiny dogs could be fierce. And she loved her family!

So, back to Mother's Day—it was a few days before, and Angela was taking Kelly for a walk. I was just watching. Then I saw Kelly stop in the street and start barking.

The man slipped behind a UPS truck; Angela couldn't see him.

I could; he was still watching her from behind the truck.

"Kelly! Hey, it's all right, girl, you don't have to be afraid of everything now. You're with us. Come on, let's get back in. We still have to be very careful. I love our walks, but I see more people on bikes and out walking, and I didn't bring my mask just to run you around the block. So come on, girl, we'll get back in."

I could see Kelly looking at me. There's a lot you can read in the way a dog looks at you.

Kelly saw something really wrong with the guy. Dogs tend to know their stuff.

I decided to follow the man, and I tried. But he jumped into a car down the street and was gone before I could reach him.

I would just have to keep watching out for her.

*

"You okay?" Jackson asked Angela.

He had just come home; Angela had been working from home. They had many agents out in the field. Sadly, lockdown didn't prevent crime in the country.

They were essential.

Jackson was working from the office, and they were following strict protocol there, keeping distances from one another when they had to be in, and wearing masks.

The hard part for them, of course, was the criminal element didn't always believe in following protocol or wearing masks; so when at the office, they were all extremely careful.

He had convinced Angela to stay home as much as possible, and it was logical because she did a great deal of work via computer. She was also helping Corby with his schoolwork, and she knew everyone was paranoid about her or for her because she was expecting her first child.

He had wanted so much for Angela on this, her first with Mother's Day approaching. When the adoption had gone through, he had wanted to get her a day at the spa, flowers, chocolate . . . anything and everything. They had wanted children for a long time, and now, this was her first Mother's Day. Corby was their child, legally all dotted and signed; and while they were all new at the arrangement, the love was there. And his little sibling would be along in a few months.

Angela was sitting at her desk; Corby was playing an online game with friends. The dog was curled up on Angela's feet.

Kelly stretched and wagged her tail at Jackson's arrival, but she didn't bother to get up. She was with Angela. Jackson knew the dog liked him, too; but, hey, Kelly loved Angela and she was comfortable.

"Me?" Angela looked up at Jackson. "I'm good—found some info for a case Kat and Will are on, sent a few dossiers on to a few other agents . . . I got a call, though, from Detective Henson."

"George?" Jackson said.

She nodded. The D.C. police detective was someone Jackson worked with often. While they lived in Alexandria, Virginia, and the Krewe offices were in Virginia as well, due to the geographical layout of Washington, D.C., situations often spread out over Virginia, Maryland, and beyond.

George was a great guy; he had been with the force for twenty years. He was careful and logical and determined, never flying off the handle, but ever alert and thoughtful.

"And?"

"He said it was a heads-up. He isn't sure if someone getting a bit of cabin fever is acting out, or if it's a real threat. But they received calls today from a burner phone that can't be traced, warning Mother's Day is on the horizon—and there will be retribution."

"Retribution—for what?"

"The caller didn't say. Listen. He sent me an audio file."

She hit a key on her computer and played the file. The voice one might expect in such a call—low, rough, and raspy, possibly manipulated—came

on.

“Mother’s Day! Flowers and candy and . . . retribution! Someone will pay!”

Jackson sank into a chair, staring at her. “What did George think? A prank—or real?”

“He doesn’t know; he just called because he said it was a head’s up.”

“Still,” Jackson murmured. “Crank calls and real calls come in every day. He doesn’t call us.”

“It isn’t a Krewe situation,” Angela said. “George said the call was to the police; the police are trying to fathom what is going on. He is worried, though.” She hesitated. “I may be able to help him.”

“By?”

“Research. Looking for situations that occurred on Mother’s Day.”

Jackson nodded. As he did so, he felt his own phone buzz. He looked at the caller I.D.

Not available.

But he answered anyway. “Crow.”

“Pay back, my friend. It’s coming.”

It was the same voice he had just heard, possibly manipulated, possibly not.

“Pay back for what?” Jackson asked.

“Mother’s Day . . . and cops and agents who don’t give a fig about mothers!”

The line went dead.

Angela stared at him.

“I guess you’d best get on that research,” he told her.

*

I slid up next to Kelly when Angela and the boy took her out for a walk.

Dogs are different from people. Well, that’s obvious, but a dog has certain senses that just come naturally. They don’t have to worry about looking crazy or being afraid of what others might think.

“Morrie!” Kelly said, greeting me. To the humans, it sounded like a little yap.

“Come on, Kelly. We don’t stay out too long, and we’re lucky we’re residential, and we can take walks,” Angela said.

Kelly wagged her tail and quickened her pace. Now, people are sometimes talented—it’s rare. Maybe it’s genetic; I don’t know. Angela,

Corby, and Jackson can all see the dead—well, the dead when it comes to people. They didn't see me.

I guess I should explain. I'm Morrie. In life, I was as fabulous looking Irish Wolfhound. I wasn't mistreated; I was loved by my owner, Bobby, who died because of a seizure. His wife then cared for me, and I lived out my days and died at a ripe old age. Why I came back as a ghost dog, I don't know. Except that maybe it's to help my friends. Sally, a pointer, was left out in the snow and froze to death. Ruff, a pit bull, was euthanized when it went around that all pit bulls were bad—hm. In my mind, the humans who bred them to fight are the ones who should have been euthanized! But I digress. I'm a dog and I'm a ghost. A dog-ghost. And I guess I watch out for Angela mainly because she does try to save so many of my friends.

"Meet me in the house," Kelly told me. "If I start yapping here, they're going to head straight back to the house and I really gotta go!"

I groaned softly. It was rude just to come in people's houses and I . . . well . . . maybe I was afraid of being seen, thrown out . . . somehow sent on my way.

But she knew something and I needed to know it.

"I'll be there," I said.

I followed them back. We were almost there when I heard the footsteps. I turned quickly, but whoever was out there had disappeared behind a tree or down or up steps to a door.

There was no one on the street. But I went back, racing down the street to see who it had been. They couldn't have completely disappeared, and remember I was an Irish wolfhound—I could run!

And still, I missed him. A car was pulling away from the curb. A sedan, maroon in color. I wasn't sure of the make, and the tags were covered in mud.

I hurried back and slipped into the house a few minutes after Angela, Corby, and Kelly had returned to it. I saw Kelly had taken up a spot in the parlor away from the others. Corby was in the family room—actually reading one of his schoolbooks! Angela was busy on the computer, and Jackson was sitting near her in the office.

"So, what? Tell me!" I begged Kelly.

And Kelly told me about strange phone calls that had gone to the police and to Jackson himself.

Someone wanted to hurt others, payback, on Mother's Day.

“He’s out there; he’s watching this house,” I told Kelly. “He’s watching Angela.”

“That makes no sense! She doesn’t do anything that isn’t right or good.”

“But he’s watching her and now I’m really afraid.”

“What are we going to do?” Kelly asked. “I mean, in life, you were bigger than most people. I’m just a little bit of a thing and ugly as all hell at that. But I’d protect Angela with my life—I mean, I have a life, because of her!”

“He’s out there,” I said. “The phone calls . . . the stalker. For whatever reason, he’s after our Angela!”

“I have to tell Jackson and Angela,” Kelly said. “I can’t tell Jackson and Angela. I’m a dog! I can bark my fool head off, and they won’t have a clue.”

We had to think of something.

Tomorrow was Saturday. Then . . . Mother’s Day.

“Stay here; stay in the house with me,” Kelly said.

I wasn’t their dog; I had never been their dog. But . . .

It was a warm and beautiful home. Oh, I’d seen Jackson and Angela argue; they weren’t Barbie and Ken. But they were good people. They chastised Corby when needed—he was a kid.

It was the kind of home where I could have been really happy.

I nodded. I was staying.

*

“Not even our people can trace anything; it’s a burner phone this guy is using. Angela, you can’t go out of the house. I mean, we’re a bit homebound at the moment anyway, but I’ll be walking the dog until we find out what’s going on,” Jackson said.

“That’s not logical. You might have to go into the office,” Angela said. “I’m a crack shot—you know that.”

“Sure, if you know what you’re shooting at,” Jackson said. “But this is . . . strange. This is someone who might be watching. The street is laden with trees, and it’s spring and they’re rich with fresh growth; and while there isn’t a lot of traffic, there are cars parked out there sometimes.”

“But why would I be in specific danger?” Angela demanded. “The threat isn’t against me. And I swear, I never did anything to anyone on Mother’s Day. I have found a few interesting cases that might have something to do with this.”

“Go on.”

“I’ve sent what I’ve found on to George, too. I have printouts for you to read. But two years ago, there was a case in D.C. where there was an auto accident on Mother’s Day. The driver who caused the accident was drunk and the arresting officer was angry—a child in the other car went to the hospital in critical condition. But the drunk driver wound up dying, he hit his head, and he was put in lockup and died. He’d been with his mother; she survived. She lives in Maryland. George is calling friends; they’ll be visiting her.”

“Well, that’s great, but I don’t know what good it will do. They can’t just search her home for the phone, and she’s probably going to be furious. She filed a suit against the police and the state, if I remember correctly.”

“Another incident—drug bust gone bad. That was the FBI, right in D.C. There was a raid on a crack house; four there were killed.”

“George is going to get right on that. What else?”

“There have been murder and accidental deaths on Mother’s Day throughout the country and time, but those are the most pertinent to us and the police that I can find. Jackson, you’re the head of the Krewe. There’s no reason for you to be especially concerned for me.”

“There’s—me,” Corby said.

They hadn’t known he was standing by the door. He hurried over to Angela and hugged her tightly.

“I’ll be careful,” she promised.

*

I was glad to be there; glad to see what was going on myself. That meant, however, that I wasn’t on the street.

I was going to take a cruise around the neighborhood at some point in time.

And that wasn’t hard; I could explain what I was doing to Kelly. While she sometimes slept at the foot of Corby’s bed, she was never in the bedroom with Angela and Jackson. They’d been married some time, but in Kelly’s words, “Those two can still go at it!”

I slipped out that night. At first, I saw nothing. Then, there was movement. He was there again. His mask was black and his hoodie was black. And he was by a power pole just watching the house. Then I saw him pull out a gun and point it at the house.

I had to do something, but what, I didn’t know.

Saturday dawned. The family had breakfast together, laughing their way through it. Then Jackson and Corby took Kelly for a walk.

I stayed behind.

That afternoon, Jackson went out to work with George. They were interviewing people who had to do with the Mother's Day drug bust a few years back.

I didn't like it. I didn't like her being home alone. But the house did have a good security system.

And she had passed the FBI academy and had been a damned good agent for years.

I tried to reassure myself.

Jackson was home from work. They played Monopoly during the afternoon. Corby and Jackson talked about cooking; Angela suggested sweetly that they just order out—restaurants all around were offering delicious dinners with great prices for delivery.

She was at the computer again after dinner.

That was when I made my first breakthrough.

I excused myself to Kelly, first. And I sat next to Angela. I placed my nose on her lap and whined softly.

I saw her frown and sit straighter, touching her lap.

She'd felt me!

But she rose and stretched and asked Jackson, "Have you . . . sensed anyone here? In the house?"

Jackson looked perplexed. "You mean a ghost? No. And honestly, between us, if a ghost were here trying to reach us for any reason, one of us would know."

"Of course," she said.

The Maryland police reported back; George reported back. They'd done their best, but everyone they had questioned denied making phone calls and without more . . .

They had to know more about the man in the street.

Sunday morning dawned. Mother's Day. Jackson came out of the room, spoke with Corby, and together they headed into the bedroom with gifts. Corby was quite a little artist. He'd done a drawing of the family—Angela looking very pregnant in the sketch. It came with a caption that read, "Our family—with my little sibling hiding in my mom's tummy!"

It was such a beautiful scene. Kelly leaned against me sobbing in dog fashion.

For an ugly dog, I thought she was beautiful.

And now that they were all up. Jackson decreed that all was well and handled at Krewe headquarters; it was a family day.

Breakfast was omelets. Angela made them, thank God, Kelly told me—with plenty of bacon, and, of course, Kelly was invited to share in the bacon.

Then Angela got to pick the movie. She didn't choose anything too sappy, but chose a very old favorite, *The Princess Bride*. After that they played Trivial Pursuit, which started them all laughing, followed by Charades. And during that, Kelly and I were laughing as well.

When Jackson and Corby went to pick up the evening meal Angela had chosen, I was scared. But the house was locked. The alarm system was on.

Angela couldn't help herself; she sat at the computer. This time when I put my head on her lap, she felt it and didn't deny it.

She looked down at Kelly. "Hey! Have you got a friend in here? I wonder who he is, hm? I haven't fell him around before."

Kelly barked her agreement. I think she understood.

"Well, he's welcome, of course," she said. And went back to work. She suddenly looked at the screen intently.

"I'm an idiot!" she murmured. "It was me . . . and it was just a few years ago!"

Of course I didn't know what she was talking about.

It couldn't have been her. She didn't do bad things.

"Oh, Kelly," she said, probably really just talking aloud, but might as well throw the dog's name out there. "Oh, no! I've got to get a hold of Jackson."

She pulled out her phone. Jackson must have answered right away.

"Jackson, do you remember Shelby Morrison?"

I strained to hear his reply. I was almost on her lap. If she felt me, she didn't give it away at that moment; she was probably too concerned with the information she had for him.

"Sure. The woman is in prison. She poisoned her husband."

"Right. It was about three years ago, a ridiculously easy case because we were the Krewe, and the husband had worked for a politician who was

friends with Adam. He knew all about it and right after his funeral, his ghost just stepped into our offices.”

“And we had to prove it,” Jackson said. “Yes, I remember, she had two sons. They were more horrified by her being put into prison than they were by the fact their father was dead.”

“Yes, which is making me wonder now. I mean, we investigated, of course. But there were no incidences of police being called to the house for domestic disputes. The children were never in emergency rooms . . . there was nothing to suggest she killed him in self-defense. The M.E. said she had systematically poisoned him with bits of rat poison over time.”

“Oh, Lord, Angela—you were the one who chatted her up at her gym, pretending to be abused.”

“I’m going to go and see her,” Angela said.

“Hey, wait, what—”

“I was never happy about it, Jackson. There was always something . . . wrong. But we’ve had so many cases since then . . . Jackson, I have to see what is wrong, and if something is really wrong, I have to fix it!”

“Angela, slow down. You’re an agent—”

“And now I’m a mom, too. For another mom, for her kids, I have to fix this.”

“Angela! It’s Mother’s Day. Corby and I will be right back. Don’t—”

“I’ll be armed,” she promised.

She hung up; the phone rang again and she ignored it. She checked her Glock and slid her little holster into the back of her pants.

Angela might have been home in the lockdown, but she still dressed every day and she grabbed her jacket.

Kelly let out a mournful bark.

She looked at her and said, “I’ll be right back, buddy. But I have to do this!”

She headed to the door. I looked at Kelly.

“I’m running, lass. I’ll get myself in that car.”

Angela made phone calls, arranging to get into the prison for an interview with the woman. I sat next to her watching the street, ever vigilant.

She smiled suddenly as she drove. Her eyes were still on the road, but she spoke to me.

“I know you’re there,” she said softly. “And you’re a dog. I don’t know what kind, but you must have been a very clever boy—or girl.”

I barked once and her smile deepened.

“Boy?” she asked.

I barked a yes.

Then as she drove, she went through just about every breed of dog known to man—including mutt—before she got to Irish wolfhound.

“I always wanted an Irish wolfhound,” she said. “But I can’t buy a dog when so many need to be rescued, so . . . well, welcome. And thank you. You’ve been looking out for me, right?”

I barked again.

“Stick tight and tell me what you think,” she said.

She turned in her gun at the prison and signed all the right papers. She was brought to a small interview room.

Shelby Morrison wasn’t shackled; she wasn’t considered to be a dangerous prisoner. She looked sad and tired rather than lethal. Her gray hair was curly; her blue eyes were steady and a bit resentful as she looked at Angela.

“Well, what have we here?” Shelby asked.

“I think one of your sons is going to get in trouble,” Angela told her. “It’s Mother’s Day. One of them is planning something. And I don’t want to see one of them wind up in here, too. And sons love their mothers, but they usually love their fathers, too. Your boys didn’t seem to care that he was dead; they cared a lot that you were going to prison.”

Shelby leaned back, looking at Angela. “When you tricked me by wearing that wire, I suggested if you were too damned scared to leave an abuser, feeling he’d come after you no matter where you tried to hide, I told you poison was a way out.” She sighed. “We really thought it looked like a heart attack. Your recording is what put me in here, you know.”

“You did kill your husband. And that’s murder,” Angela said softly. “I just don’t want to see bad come from bad. Is there anything else at all you can tell me that I could present to the prosecutor? He didn’t beat you.”

The woman sighed. “He didn’t beat me,” she said softly. “Not physically. But in a way, words can be as cruel. I was worthless, but I could live with that. It was what he did to the kids that drove me to it, and . . .” She broke off wincing.

“What?”

Shelby shook her head.

"Please, I'm trying to help you."

"You tricked me and recorded me."

"That's my job! You'd killed a man."

Shelby was silent.

Oh!" Angela whispered. "You were . . . you were helped. One of the kids helped you."

"No, no! No—not, not on purpose! I never meant for Jerry to die . . . I wanted him sick. I wanted time to get far, far away. He kept telling the boys they couldn't do anything right; they were ugly. They were stupid. They were going to wind up on the streets. They couldn't play with their friends and they couldn't play video games . . . he was cruel and brutal to them, without ever touching them. When he was sick, I was going to get away!"

"But arsenic—doctors would have found it in his system."

"No. Because they discovered that we had contaminated water. We would have all tested positive—the water was bad. He wasn't—sick enough. I was just trying to make him sick so he would have had to have been hospitalized for a long time, and there were already lawsuits in our neighborhood against a factory and . . . I just wanted him out of the picture for a few days so that I could get a lawyer and disappear with the boys!"

Angela said quietly, "But one of the kids finished him off?"

"But not on purpose! I had a cake that I was dividing up and . . . yes. He was just supposed to have a piece, enough to add to the problem with the water so that . . . so that he'd be sick! He was being a jerk—saying he made the money, if he wanted the whole damned cake, he'd have it. Joey gave him the whole thing. He just didn't know. And he was only fifteen at the time and . . ." She broke off, shaking her head. "After I talked to you, I just confessed, and I was given a plea bargain. Please, if you have any compassion at all, leave this all as it is. I don't want my son in prison for my deeds!"

Angela looked at her. Then she stood up. "Your son isn't going to go to prison. Not if I can help it. But he loves you so much. I must stop whatever he's planning. And so help me, you still deserve prison time because—though your circumstances might have been horrible—you did poison a man. But we'll do what we can. Thank you for agreeing to see me now."

Angela started to leave. The woman called after her, "Please, please! If anything, save Joey for me!"

Angela retrieved her gun and signed out. We headed home. She was thoughtful.

“Can you find him for me?” she asked.

I realized she was talking to me.

I woofed out a “yes.”

Her phone rang; it was Jackson. She winced and answered it. He was upset; I could hear that. But she answered him with calm assurance and determination.

“I can divert a disaster, I think,” she said. “Trust me, Jackson. I know what I’m doing.”

I wasn’t sure what he said then, but she told him, “Yes, I’m coming home. I’ll be home soon. It’s Mother’s Day, yes, I’ll be there soon.” She ended the call. “It’s Mother’s Day. And she was wrong, and she needs to pay . . . but she’s a mom who is paying, and I’m . . . maybe I am wrong, but I have to do this. Maybe for myself.”

I didn’t know what she was doing. But she parked back by her home in Alexandria and yet didn’t head for the house.

She looked at me and smiled. “Wow. You are a beautiful dog!”

And she saw me, Of course, she saw me.

*

Jackson had no idea of what his wife was up to; she just scared him stiff.

He tried to be reassuring to Corby, telling him they’d get the dinner they’d just brought back all set up as soon as Angela was back.

He did a pretty good job. Corby nodded and headed to play his games.

“Love you, Dad,” he said.

“Love you, too, son.”

He waited, and then looked out the window. And looking down the street, he saw her car.

His heart stopped and he saw Kelly hanging at the front window—waiting for her, too.

The dog looked anxious—if a dog could look anxious.

“You stay here, girl—I’m going out,” he said. “Watch Corby!”

He checked his own weapon and headed out the front door.

*

The good thing in all this is that a stalker seldom expects to be stalked in return.

Yes, Angela's stalker was out there. We had a name now. Joey Morrison.

And yes, I could find him. But when he realized Angela was after him, he tried to back away first, sliding back from tree to tree along the street.

But then he reached the curb. And apparently, he had no choice.

That day, he was in navy—blue jeans, I should say, navy hoodie and mask.

He jumped out from behind the tree. He was carrying a gun, and it was aimed at Angela.

She didn't draw hers and she didn't shy away.

"Joey Morrison, I was just with your mom. She loves you; and if you love her, you're not going to want to go to prison, which you will, if you shoot me."

He looked stunned. I realized he was only about twenty years old. He dropped his mask and shook his head and then his gun hand shook.

He had never killed anyone, I knew. Instinct.

"But it's your fault she's in prison!"

"Joey, I want to try to get her sentence commuted."

"It should have been me."

"No, Joey, kids don't go to jail for innocently giving their father cake. I don't know all the legal ramifications, but I . . . well, I talked to your mom. There were circumstances that caused a lot of what happened. Still not right, but . . ."

"You tricked her. Now you're trying to trick me."

"No. Frankly, I want you to come in and have a meal with us, and then we'll take you to see her, and come Monday, I'll talk to the prosecutor."

"I . . . you really talked to my mom? She told you about—about my father?"

"I really did. I swear. I am not tricking you. I'm trying very hard to keep you from becoming a criminal."

The boy winced hard and looked as if he were about to cry.

Then we heard a new voice.

"Shoot her, you worthless ass!"

There was a man there. Dressed in a suit—the suit he'd been buried in, probably. I knew it had to be the ghost of Joey's father.

"You never could do anything right! You grew up to be the stupid ass I always knew. You have your mother in you, you jerk. Never could do

anything right. Come on! Shoot her damn it, do something right in your life!”

It was then we saw Jackson striding down the street; he had his Glock out and it was aimed right at Joey.

“No!” Angela cried. “It’s his jerk of a dad! Jackson, no.”

“Do it, do it, do it—damn it, do it! Do something right in your fool life!” Joey’s father swore.

The kid was shaking. No, he’d never worn bruises. But he’d been a victim all the same. He tightened his hold on the gun.

“I can do things right, I can . . . I can, Dad, I can do things, you just . . .”

I thought quickly.

I’d always been a lover, not a fighter.

But several things happened at the same time; Jackson was about to fire. Angela jumped in front of the boy, begging him not to.

And this guy, egging on his son, was a ghost. I was a ghost. Jackson couldn’t accomplish anything by shooting a ghost, but maybe . . .

I let out my fiercest growl. I took a bounding leap . . .

And I discovered a big ghost dog could take down a big ghost man.

Jackson holstered his weapon. Angela took Joey’s gun. He fell sobbing to the ground. “You don’t know . . . you don’t know what my mom went through, what she endured, trying to fight for my brother and me . . . I’m so sorry, this is insane. But he came into my dreams, my dad . . . he said it was all your fault, all your fault.”

Jackson had reached us. He saw me; he gave me a nod and a pat on the head. And then we both jumped back.

It seemed there was a sudden cloud of darkness like a miniature, swirling, black tornado.

The ghost of Joey’s dad was . . . gone.

It was sad, maybe. And maybe, I thought, there were people in the world who were evil. Bad people could do good things, and good people could do bad things. Shelby Morrison had done a bad thing.

I couldn’t help but think though her husband had just been evil.

Angela got the boy to his feet. She looked imploringly at Jackson.

“I was thinking . . . well, we need to eat. And then get Joey out to see his mom. Yes I know, we’ll have to hurry that up a bit and maybe get some special permission, but I know Adam can handle that for us and . . . please, Jackson.” She gave him a grimace. “It’s my first Mother’s Day, you know.”

Jackson let out a groan. “When did you, um, get this dog?” he asked her.

She smiled. “You know me. I can’t ignore a pup.”

“He’s dead, you know.”

“And damned fierce for a dead dog!”

“He’s a hero,” Jackson said.

I loved that!

“What’s his name?”

“I have no idea. We can give him a name.”

I couldn’t tell them my name was Morrie.

“Sean,” Angela said. “There’s a good Irish name for an Irish wolfhound.”

Hey, if she wanted me to be Sean, I was Sean!

“Well, you are one hell of a dog!” he told me.

They got Joey to the house. They got him to stop crying by introducing him to Corby and getting the two together. They had a dinner—with everyone at the table continually giving Kelly scraps.

And Angela managed it. She got Joey in to see his mother. Jackson took him because he wanted Angela to have the remaining few hours of the day with Corby.

What Shelby Morrison had done was wrong, but there had been mitigating circumstances. Angela and Jackson talked to Adam over the phone. I knew by Monday things would be going right.

When Jackson returned that night, he smiled at Angela and held her tight.

“What are you thinking?” she asked him.

“I think I’m glad it wasn’t Father’s Day,” he said.

She laughed. “You, my love, are the best father ever!” She assured him. Corby was there. He ran and hugged them both.

“I am the luckiest kid, mom and dad.”

It was so beautiful. Kelly and I sat together and cried.

Kelly looked at me. “I love you!” she said. “You’re going to stay, right?”

I hesitated. I loved Kelly, too. But . . .

“Kelly, you’re . . . well, you’re living. I’m not. I can’t be the mate you deserve.”

Kelly laughed. “You’re dead—and I’ve been neutered. Not to mention I’m one ugly dog.”

“Not on the inside; that’s where it counts!” I assured her.

She gave me the best dog smile.

“I think we’re fine. Besides, knowing Angela, we may wind up with puppies anyway!”

I realized Corby saw me, too. And I was pretty sure he liked me right off the bat.

But I wasn’t really certain I was wanted until bedtime.

That was when Jackson patted my head again.

“You’re a hero, boy. You know, Angela has always loved Irish wolfhounds. You’re staying, right? I know Kelly would love it; and well, boy, you turned out to be the best Mother’s Day present in the world!”

“The best!” Angela said, coming up behind Jackson.

Kelly barked.

And, yep, I knew it. I was staying.

I barked.

I think she understood my words.

Happy Mother’s Day!

About The Author

Heather Graham



New York Times and USA Today bestselling author, Heather Graham, majored in theater arts at the University of South Florida. After a stint of several years in dinner theater, back-up vocals, and bartending, she stayed home after the birth of her third child and began to write. Her first book was with Dell, and since then, she has written over two hundred novels and novellas including category, suspense, historical romance, vampire fiction, time travel, occult, sci-fi, young adult, and Christmas family fare.

She is pleased to have been published in approximately twenty-five languages. She has written over 200 novels and has 60 million books in print. Heather has been honored with awards from booksellers and writers' organizations for excellence in her work, and she is proud to be a recipient of the Silver Bullet from Thriller Writers and was awarded the prestigious Thriller Master Award in 2016. She is also a recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from RWA. Heather has had books selected for the Doubleday Book Club and the Literary Guild, and has been quoted, interviewed, or featured in such publications as *The Nation*, *Redbook*, *Mystery Book Club*, *People* and *USA Today* and appeared on many newscasts including *Today*, *Entertainment Tonight* and local television.

Heather loves travel and anything that has to do with the water, and is a certified scuba diver. She also loves ballroom dancing. Each year she hosts a Vampire Ball and Dinner theater raising money for the Pediatric Aids Society and in 2006 she hosted the first Writers for New Orleans Workshop to benefit the stricken Gulf Region. She is also the founder of "The Slush Pile Players," presenting something that's "almost like entertainment" for various conferences and benefits. Married since high school graduation and the mother of five, her greatest love in life remains her family, but she also believes her career has been an incredible gift, and she is grateful every day to be doing something that she loves so very much for a living.

Books By This Author

[Seeing Darkness](#)

She's being murdered.

It was supposed to be a fun girls' weekend in Salem, but when a past-life regression session instead sends a terrifying vision of murder to Kylie Connelly, she's shaken and doesn't know what to think. Worse, later she identifies the attacker from her vision: he's a prominent local politician.

Special Agent Jon Dickson of the FBI's Krewe of Hunters is on the trail of a suspected serial killer based on the scantest of clues and unreliable witness testimony. When he realizes Kylie's vision might be his best lead, he must gain her trust and get close enough to guide her new talent. Though she doubts herself, the danger Kylie sees is all too real—and the pair will have to navigate a murderer's twisted passions and deceptions to stop the killer from claiming another victim.