

Blue in the Moonlight

by S. L. Holling

BOOK ONE

Confessions of an Unwilling Oracle 1

BOOK TWO

Dangerous Beauty 155

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2007 by S.L. Holling

All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.

Book design, cover design, and artwork by S.L. Holling.

The text for this book is in Adobe Garamond and Franklin Gothic.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4196-7996-4


ISBN-10: 1-4196-7996-1

Visit www.booksurge.com to order additional copies.

This book is dedicated to Joss Whedon.
To his unique creativity,
To his humor,
To his unforgettable characters,
He's an inspiration to us all.

BOOK ONE

**Confessions of
An Unwilling Oracle**



Bad things never happen at bridal showers. Even in movies, when things are supposed to go wrong, it's at a bachelor party, not a bridal shower. Hollywood has so overused the bachelor party as a plot device that the first shot of the groom with a drink in his hand or the stripper at the door incites tension, even menace.

But bridal showers are *safe* in the minds of millions of moviegoers. The irony of this wouldn't occur to me until much later – long after I'd made my escape. And the fact that my problems didn't start until *after* the party ended didn't lessen the significance: the film industry has it all wrong.

As I made my getaway, I realized Jeannie's first question to me that evening should have been, "Could your life get any weirder?"

Apparently it could.



Jeannie didn't actually know how strange my life was. Not yet. But she knew exactly where to find me – hiding out in her Aunt Louise's kitchen, the only spot not occupied by giggling, inebriated women waving lingerie around like poor imitations of Gypsy Rose Lee.

Attempting to avoid a similar fate, I emptied my wine glass in the sink and put the kettle on to boil. "Do you want tea?" I asked.

Jeannie waved the glass of wine in her hand, indicating her preference. "So," she said, as she leaned against the counter. "What did you get my poor sister?"

Jeannie's disgust with Marcy's decision to marry Eric, whom she considered inferior and overly "guy-like", caused her to speak of her sister in tones usually reserved for the mentally incompetent or terminally ill.

"As requested, a gift certificate," I said. "Your sister is in the living room opening her shower gifts. Why don't you go out there and tell her she's making a huge mistake?"

Jeannie dropped her head into her hand. "Unh, I'm just so annoyed that she's marrying ... such a nimrod, for God's sake! What happened with Richard? Now, he was really nice."

Jeannie would be less concerned with Marcy's choice if little sis wasn't beating her to the altar. The fact that she had no date for the wedding except me also entered into it, I'm sure. Jeannie's one of those energetic, petite brunettes that I think of as a spitfire. It takes a certain kind of man to love a spitfire like Jeannie and a man like that hasn't been around in a couple of years. This worked to my advantage because Jeannie, regardless of her present concerns for her sister, wasn't one of those friends who constantly pointed out that I wasn't married.

I forced my brain from the topic of marriage to a more suitable replacement – food. Focusing on my favorite personal distraction, I said, "If these finger sandwiches are going to be it, I'm stopping for take-out on the way home."

"Jeannie! Sally! Marcy's opening presents. Why aren't you two in there?" Jeannie's Aunt Louise, a widow and the host of tonight's shindig, was obviously unhappy with finding two strays in her kitchen.

Jeannie left me to fulfill her sisterly duties of shower participation, plus enthusiasm. From the kitchen, I heard the women giggling over a particular piece of lingerie, teasing Marcy about her wedding night. I'd had one of those once – a wedding night. And a bridal shower, which, unfortunately,

are no longer the most felicitous events for me. I feel like a gambler at the betting window with a twenty in my hand. *I'll take a ticket for three years, please.* That's all I'm giving this marriage.

And then it started. As I listened to the distant gaggle of female voices, the little voice in my head began its litany. *You'll never get married again; you'll never find a man you can live with. Think of all the men you've met...*

Or not, argued the logic portion of my brain. I turned to the sink to load dirty dishes in Louise's dishwasher, attempting to ignore the pointless tirade of my brain's complaints.

It was all his fault!

Christ, shut up! I put my fingers in my ears, as though the physical effort would quiet my thoughts. *Geez!* Thankfully, everyone else was in the living room.

But my little brain never shuts up for long. Accusations lead to wondering and wondering leads to memories and it all leads to nothing except me standing alone in someone's kitchen or, if the kitchen's not empty, the bathroom.

But I do wonder, sometimes, about that night. I can't honestly commit to the idea that my husband was trying to kill us. What happened must have simply been the result of a short attention span – a stupid accident. Yeah, I know – there are no accidents. I have no answer and expect I never will. Even then, it took me a couple of weeks to make the connection between the incident that night and what happened afterwards – I began to see things – colors, images. Strange visions.

What nonsense, says the voice in my head.

Well, where did it come from, then? I argue. *Why was it that after that night, I could see inside of people?*

Oh, that shuts it up – logic and objectivity. But it does seem like nonsense. As far as I can tell, seeing inside of people is not what humans do. We see the outside – beautiful or plain, fat or thin, tall or short. But for me, that's simply a backdrop.

First come the colors.

If you took a paintbrush to an old black and white photo and swiped across each face or figure with a new shade, then you'd see what I see. And once I see the *aura*, that quick flash of color, *something* appears in my mind. Usually, it's a brief incident, like a flash of action on a TV screen, accompanied by an impression, and I simply *know*. Like peering through a

camera lens, I've seen inside someone's life – a *preview*, if you will.

It's like having a deep, dark secret, but it doesn't belong to me. What I see are other people's deep, dark secrets.

I've discovered that if you stand in the kitchen long enough, you eventually meet everyone at a party as they wander in, searching for tidbits or more wine. I commanded Louise's kitchen like a caterer, happily uncorking bottles, refreshing food trays and cleaning up. As a result, I was the last to leave.

Louise was extremely appreciative of my efforts and expressed her thanks by asking me to perform one additional task that only a thirty-year-old woman, unafraid of step stools, could manage – cleaning and packing her gigantic cut glass punch bowl. Weighing in at well over twenty pounds, the aquarium-sized article in question had to be washed and carefully repackaged in its even larger container.

Already sweating from exertion, I helped Louise carry this valuable piece of antiquity out the kitchen door and into a storage room off her back porch. Maneuvering a stool with the skill of an acrobat, I placed the bowl on its shelf and wondered how she'd managed to retrieve it in the first place. Had she carried it into the kitchen herself? I couldn't ask because she'd left to answer the phone.

I stepped out of the storage room, onto the back porch and into the cool night air. As moisture evaporated from my damp skin, I paced the concrete floor in privacy – the porch was surrounded on three sides by tall bushes already leafy with new spring growth.

I heard a noise and turned, surprised to see a large dog sniffing intently at the metal trash can between me and Louise's back door. Absorbed with whatever it smelled, it didn't notice me at first. When it did, it ran away, startled, through an opening between the bushes.

I'd never seen a dog like it and I followed its path through the bushes to watch it run up the slope to Louise's front yard. In the moonlight, it looked like a wolf. I thought it was leaving as it reached the street, its image now only a small silhouette in the glow from the streetlight, but then it turned and ran back toward me and I realized it wasn't a wolf.

It had a sleek, dainty head with short, smooth fur and long silky ears. But the body fur was flecked with gray, bushy and wolf-like. It was one of the strangest dogs I'd ever seen. A mixed breed – part Shepherd, I figured. Tall, a bit taller than a German Shepherd, but lean and narrow, like a greyhound.

The dog was returning to the porch and for a split second I worried it was aggressive. But the dog ran past me into the darkness of Louise's back yard.

Surrounded on all sides by large trees, the yard contained only a small space open to the night sky and in that space stood a swing set. As the dog ran by, I noticed a man sitting on a swing. He leaned forward on his elbows, slouching, watching the dog. He was blurry and indistinct in the moonlight, except for his color – the man was blue gray, like dark smoke.

An aura. I sighed in resignation – there's no way to stop a vision once it starts – and immediately my mind slackened and relaxed, awaiting the impression of this man with the blue-gray aura.

But nothing happened.

Surprised, I looked again to confirm the color, thinking I must be mistaken. I was. As I stared more closely, I felt an increased thudding in my chest. It wasn't a vision, it was his *skin* that was blue gray. This was no trick of the light, nor was the night sky fooling me.

Frozen in fascination, I noticed that his hair began in a dramatic widow's peak and was short and bristly, like fur. His ears were long, obviously much longer than normal ears, rising like wings against the side of his head, tapering to wrinkled tips. These and the color of his skin identified him, unmistakably, as "not human."

He seemed so unconcerned – almost serene, sitting on the swing, gently swaying, that it seemed surreal for me to feel the terror rising up from my chest into my throat.

He glanced my way and noticed that I was staring at him, eyes wide, my lips open in preparation of a strangled squawk. He responded with shock – visible shock – obviously as astonished as I was. Realizing I'd spotted him, he stopped the swing, reached out an arm to me and cried, "Wait." But as he moved to stand, I ducked down behind the bushes surrounding the porch and scampered into the house. I didn't stop until I was inside and behind the door.

Louise turned from her sink to find me leaning against her back door, breathing heavily. She looked perplexed as I reached behind me to confirm the lock. Gasping quietly, I took a deep breath, attempting to slow the pounding in my chest. Louise spoke but the noise of my own heart was so loud I couldn't hear her.

She clearly required an explanation, one I was unable to provide.

I simply wanted to leave – immediately – but I was afraid to go outside.

How am I going to get home?

“Are you all right?” she asked.

Hand on my chest, I attempted to control myself. I’d have to risk it. But where’s my purse, my keys?

“You didn’t drop the punch bowl did you?”

Intending to appear calmer than I was feeling, I said, “No, it’s fine. I’m sorry, I have to leave. I...I’m not feeling well.” I feared that every minute I stayed somehow put her in danger.

“Are you sure you’re all right? I can make you some tea.”

“I apologize,” I said. I couldn’t bear to watch her concerned face and didn’t know how to handle this gracefully. “I had a lovely time, thank you.”

Louise was troubled but saw me out and watched from her doorway until I was inside my car. When she shut her front door, sealing herself safely inside, I quickly flipped on my headlights. I wanted to get as far away as possible – fast.

A check of my rear-view mirror renewed my panic. The creature was now in the front yard, his dark form outlined by the streetlight behind me. The dog ran to his side as I hit the accelerator and squealed away, racing for my life.

Gasping for breath the entire drive, I sobbed with relief when I pulled in front of my house. Trembling, but too nervous to stay in the car, I ran to the front door, fumbled with the lock and slammed the door behind me. *Locked and bolted*, I confirmed and dropped onto the sofa.

Okay, I decided. Forget everything I said before. It’s all his stupid fault and I’m now officially, finally and forever, blaming my ex-husband for the incident that turned my life into a nightmare almost ten years ago.

