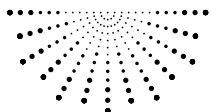


DEADLY EYES



KEE PATTERBEE

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2019- The book was revised and updated. After realizing it is not a cozy mystery I released it as a Romantic Mystery featuring a woman sleuth.

This book was formally published as: The Eyes Of Abigale. It has been enhanced and edited with a new name and cover.

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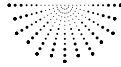
Cover design by Adrianna Vines

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To my loving husband, Mr. Patterbee

“Green. Black. The unforgiving colors of eternity; of knowing more than one is allowed and paying the price for that knowledge.”

PROLOGUE



The building was dark, almost inky black. The cold circled her body like a hungry wolf seeking a weak meal. When she looked toward the steps ahead, she could just see ten feet in front of her. Struggling, she pointed the flashlight forward. The quickly diminishing light broke her heart. She knew what was pacing her now. Coming for her. Calling her. For the past hour or more, she had been chasing it, and then had been chased by it. She was tired, worn, and defeated. Why had she come? she asked herself. Wondered. Now, it made no difference. Her heart pounded. Sweat poured from her. What had been a life sentence now was being collected by the one who held that debt.

She was ill before she came. Dying slowly. Now she was slowly dying. Not as slow as before, but dying all the same. She glanced down at the picture. Held it. Looked into similar eyes. Knowing eyes. Pretty eyes. She wondered if the woman too had looked for what she herself had sought. Was that why she was here with her? Held in a glass and wood frame prison? Staring out, proud and unsmiling. She swallowed hard. The picture slipped away. It hit the ground, coming to

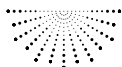
rest against the wall. Then the flashlight. Finally, she. One more breath. Eyes fixed forward on the picture halfcocked semi upright. Her eyes staring.

“Abigale,” she uttered.

Abigale came and took her away.

They slipped away into the night, as she stayed behind, unmoving.

CHAPTER ONE



Hannah Starvling-Miles could hardly contain herself. Her voice fluttered between eager and ecstatic. “The Price Building,” she said. Her sea green eyes twinkled with delight in the radiance of the afternoon sun. The day was sunny but cold. She pulled her arms in tight and pointed across the way where there stood an abandoned, red brick, three-story Victorian style building. “Hymn bought it for us. We’re going to fix it up and live here.”

Sindee ‘Gran’ and Jayland “Papa Jay” Starvling stared at the dilapidated structure. Hannah’s grandparents stood silent for a long time. Finally, Papa Jay twisted his mouth around a bit.

“That’s a lot of room for just two people, don’t you think?”

“Well, we’ll just be living on the upper floor, but we...”

“What about the rest of the building, dear?” Gran interrupted. The elderly woman eyed her granddaughter. A mischievous glint sparkled in her still vibrant eyes.

“Well, I suppose you could rent out the lower floors,” Papa

Jay noted. He gestured toward the building. "Let it pay for itself."

"We bought it outright, Papa Jay."

The elder Starvling nodded. "Smart move. No payments." He crossed his arms. "Still could rent some of it out. Make a few bucks on the side."

"Well, actually, I was thinking about..."

"Or you could rent the lower floor. Keep the second-floor open in case you need more space," Gran again interrupted.

Papa Jay shot his wife a look. "How much space do you think two people need, woman?"

"You never know, you old grumpus. They might need extra space for *others* who might come along."

The old man's eyes pulled in a bit with sudden understanding.

Hannah glanced over at the two. She knew exactly to what her grandparents were referring. In particular, she knew to what Gran hinted. Ever since Hannah hit her twenty-first birthday, Gran had an agenda, as Papa Jay referred to it. She even had it in list form. Hannah recalled Gran counting it out for her on that birthday. "First, meet a handsome man. Don't settle for less than what your grandfather has," Gran insisted. "It doesn't hurt if he has a nice butt and lots of money too," she would add. "Second, get married. You can elope. I would. Spend the wedding money on a good vacation in a quiet, secluded, romantic hotel on a beach somewhere." The last was the one that Hannah was most often reminded of by her grandmother. "Last, get me some great-grandbabies."

Hannah considered the list for a moment. She had accomplished two of the three. First, she met Hymnal "Hymn" Miles. Though he was not wealthy, he did have a good retirement going for him. Plus, he had a nice bit of inheritance left from his mentor, the late Reverend Whip-

son. *He does have a nice butt, too*, she thought, smiling to herself. Second, she married him. *Best day ever*, she added to herself. As for the third, the smile rolled away from Hannah. She pushed her tongue forward in her mouth and rolled it around the inside.

“What are you thinking about?” Gran inquired.

Hannah shook her head, drawing herself back from her wandering thoughts. “Thinking about?”

Gran made a circling motion around her own mouth with her finger to exemplify the action. “Your tongue. That thing you do when you’re contemplating. You were just doing it. You know I can tell.”

Hannah drew her hand to her mouth. The rolling was a tic, one of the many quirks that acted as clues to her personality. Along with this, she upon occasion wiggled her upper lip and nose. These two actions acted as indicators to the level of concentration taking place. Gran, ever nosy and observant, caught onto Hannah’s present inner pondering. And what she was thinking about would impact the elder lady in ways that Hannah was uncertain of at present. She decided to divert the conversation after first acknowledging to what Gran referred.

“Yes, Gran, I get it, grandbabies.”

“Well, I’m not getting any younger you know. Get bouncy.”

“Gran!”

“Woman, leave Sweetness be. What they do ain’t no concern of ours.” Papa Jay looked to his granddaughter. “Congratulations, Sweetness. I’m proud for you. You’ve wanted it since you were a child.”

I have, Hannah thought. She had dreamed of owning the stunning structure since childhood. Now that wish was a reality.

Resting on a corner in downtown Twilight, the building

originated in 1896. At that time, the city was in its first boom. Over the years, it had housed a variety of businesses. It was a jewelry shipping operation, a clothing store, and a wine store. However, most important to Hannah was that the original owner built it for two purposes. Leonard Price built it to house a diner that covered for a speakeasy during prohibition. Second, the upper floor served as his personal residence until his death in 1927. It was something she planned on restoring. She and Hymn had already met with an architect about the renovation of the entire building. This included a home on the same said floor.

"There is something else," Hannah offered.

Gran's interest peaked. "Oh?"

Hannah bobbed her head. "I talked it over with Hymn and I've decided to open a restaurant on the lower floor."

Papa Jay beamed. "Now were talking. Classic eatery or fancy smancy?"

"Classic street corner diner, just like The Starvling."

Gran produced a disappointed face. "Oh, now dear, that's a tough road to haul. You and Hymn haven't been married that long. When will you have time to start a family?"

"Woman, I swear," Papa Jay huffed. "We managed and Mikael Jay turned out alright." He glanced over to Hannah. "Well, sort of, anyway. Just over brainy is all."

Gran popped her husband on the arm. "Oh, hush you old fuddy duddy. That's our boy and her father. Just 'cause he's three times smarter than the two of us put together don't give you no right to badmouth him. Besides, I'm still working on getting some great grandbabies."

"All right, you two, do I need to put the both of you in time out?"

Papa Jay crossed his arms and made a "humph" sound. Gran stuck her tongue out at her husband.

"If you're gonna show it, might as well use it," Papa Jay

said. He leaned in and Gran did the same. They gave each other a light kiss.

The action caused Hannah to suppress a laugh. Her grandparent's antics always amused her, even when they were tormenting each other. After 59 years of marriage, they remained in love and dedicated to each other. Yet, one might argue otherwise from the plethora of verbal jabs they tossed at one another. The feisty elder Starvlings were two of the most important people in Hannah's life. Both helped mold the individual she became, something she reminded herself of often.

"Are we all good now?" Hannah asked.

"Right as rain," Papa Jay declared. Gran looped her arm around her husband's while nodding in agreement.

"Great. So I was wondering if you'd like to take a look inside? Maybe make some suggestions about how to lay it out?"

"For real?"

Gran became almost giddy. Hannah noted it was almost as much so as the thought of her getting pregnant.

Hannah could tell Papa Jay was also eager, but he worked hard to contain his excitement.

"Are you sure, Sweetness? You're the one who graduated from that fancy cooking school. I'm just an old burger and tater slinger."

"Maybe so, but you're the best burger and tater slinger that I know."

"And you're not that old." Gran grinned mischievously. "If anyone knows, I do."

"Oh, come here, you."

Another round of grandparent kisses ensued.

After the two elder Starvlings finished their smooches, Hannah turned back toward the building. She prepared to lead them across the way. Before the cross light changed, a

SUV pulled up in front and stopped. Three young individuals stepped from the vehicle. Hannah immediately analyzed the trio. The two females appeared as almost mirror images to one another. *Slight of frame. Maybe twenty. 5'4" Auburn hair. One close cropped and one long.* Hannah's nose twitched a bit. *For individuality,* she considered, and added *pretty.* Their movements, though singular, still had a unified quality about them. *Natural synchronization. Identical twins. Strong connection.*

The third member of the group was a male. *Black hair. Slightly older. Maybe twenty-two or twenty-three. Well over 6 feet. 6'3" or 6'4", athletic and muscular. Perhaps of Hispanic or Native American descent. Ruggedly handsome.* He pulled out a mid-sized motion camera mounted with a light and microphone. Even from her present distance, Hannah assessed it as professional grade. She also noted that as the young women talked back and forth, the young man said little. Yet, his focus appeared to be on the twin with the short cropped hair. *Girlfriend?* Hannah considered the young woman for a moment more. Though the twins acted as equals, the one with the shorter hair appeared to be in charge. *The older of the two,* Hannah inferred. By how much, she had no idea.

The trio headed to the front entrance of the building. They took refuge below the rounded torrent tower that made up the corner.

"Who is that, Sweetness?" Papa Jay inquired.

"The Dantes."

"Who?" Gran inquired.

"Some students from Serling. They want to talk to me about the building and maybe record it. That's the other reason we're here. Come on."

With that, Hannah and her grandparents headed across the street.

When the Starvings and Hannah approached, the trio

straightened up. As Hannah expected, the one she took to be in charge was the first to make contact. With a broad smile, the short haired twin stepped forward and offered her a gloved hand. Hannah immediately noticed as the girl took in her top hat and matching goggles that graced the brim.

“Hi, you must be Ms. Miles. Love the hat by the way.”

Hannah shook the hand offered. “Thank you, and it’s Hannah. These are my grandparents, Jayland and Sindee Starvling.”

“Call me Gran.” The elder Starvling motioned to her husband. “Call him Old Grampus.”

Papa Jay frowned. “Call her not funny. I’m Papa Jay.”

Hands were offered all around.

“Lorelei Dante.” She gestured back to the other twin. “This is my twin sister, Bella.” She motioned toward the young man. “And this is Marcus Portella, my cameraman.” Lorelei turned back to Hannah. “We were hoping to get your permission to record inside your building, and maybe answer some questions about its history and the...” The young woman made air quotes. “Happenings.”

Hannah assumed as best a friendly smile as she could manage. “Well, you’re welcome inside of course. Record as you wish, but I’m afraid I’m a bit confused. What do you mean by happenings?”

The sister’s eyed each other. Again, Lorelei took the lead. “Oh, we’re sorry. I assumed you knew.”

“Knew what, dear?” Gran interceded.

Lorelei gestured to the building. “The Price Building. It’s haunted.”

The notion was of no surprise to Hannah. She had heard of the supposed spirits inside the structure, but the degree of those legends was unknown to her until now. As Lorelei and Bella explained, Hannah was both amazed and amused. The rapidity in which the two sisters switched off from one

another astounded her. One would talk, as the other would listen. Then, without any prompting, they would take over for the other with great fluidity. Hannah took in the process with some difficulty. However, she was more than entertained watching Gran and Papa Jay as they tried to keep up. Their eyes darted back and forth as their heads turned to and fro to catch the change in talker. *Like watching a tennis match.* Hannah chuckled quietly.

From what Hannah could gather, the twins were part of a self-produced, online show called “Dante’s P.I.T.”, the latter part standing for Paranormal Investigation Team. Those present were the primary members of the show. Others came and went as needed or interest waxed or waned.

Bella looked to her sister and nodded. “So, is it still okay if we...”

“Yes, of course, but as far as events in the building, my husband and I just purchased it. We haven’t even renovated yet, so I really don’t have much in the way of answers on that front. I’ve yet to experience anything. You might want to contact the previous owner about that.”

A half scowl crossed the Dantes’ faces. Lorelei shook her head. “Mr. Cleveland? We have already been down that road.”

The tone in the young woman’s voice took Hannah by surprise as she thought back to the man. Murray Cleveland was the man from whom Hymn had purchased the building. According to Cleveland, he had owned the property for over fifteen years, at one point with a partner. However, neither were able to make any marketable return on the investment. Murray had openly disclosed everything he knew about the property to Hymn before purchase. He even pointed out more of its negatives than potential. As such, Hannah mentally filed him as *trustworthy*. This, despite their interactions having only been through attorneys, representatives, and phone interactions. She had yet to meet the man physi-

cally. She and Hymn did have a meeting set with him later in the week. Part of the sale included a storage container. Murray said it contained artifacts that had accumulated in the building over the years. Now, Hannah wondered about her assessment. She determined the need for more information. "He wasn't helpful?"

Both girls shrugged, though Bella was the one who answered. "He wasn't... unhelpful. We spoke briefly to him once and he mentioned the building's history. He even told us a few things we weren't aware of, but after that, we just could never get a straight answer from him. It was as if he was gun shy or something. Finally, we got a hand delivered note thanking us for our interest but denying us entry."

Lorelei stepped in. "We've wanted to do a segment on this place since we started the show. People around here even request it. So when we heard he sold the place, we thought we'd give you a try."

"It'll be an honest shoot," Bella interjected, hopefully adding, "I promise."

"We even have NDA agreement forms. You get final say on what goes up on the show," Lorelei offered.

Both twins assumed near identical expressions of optimistic eagerness and puppy dog eyed begging.

Papa Jay took on his usual skeptical stance, widening his footing a bit and crossing his arms. He peered at the Dantes. To Hannah, it was as if he were sizing up a bull at the county fair and he was the presiding competition judge. "So it's haints and hootenannies you're looking for?"

Hannah watched, saying nothing as the Dantes' interest peaked on Papa Jay.

"Yes, sir," the twins answered in a respectful manner, "and any insights into its history."

The interaction amused Hannah. A smile came creeping up on her. She understood that the twins were genuinely

interested in what they were asking. However, they also were working her grandfather. *Master assessors*, she mentally labelled the young women. *Polite. Smiling. Playing the pretty card.* She chuckled remembering how Gran had taught her this same age-old detective tool. *Master investigators already*, she added.

"We might be of some assistance," he motioned back to Gran, "the missus and me. I've lived in Twilight all my life. Together, we spent a good deal of our married life here, so we know our history. Price died around 1927. Left no children." He glanced around before his eyes scanned up the face of the building. "Left nothing but this building and a whole lot of hooey about missing treasure." He twisted his mouth up and scratched the side of his head. "And something about some eyes."

"The Eyes of Abigale," Gran let out. "You remember."

"Think I do." Papa Jay nodded toward his wife. "You tell it though. You've a mind for that sort of thing."

Gran kissed him on the cheek before explaining. "The Eyes were legend around Twilight and parts hereabouts. Story goes that Leonard Price met a young woman by the name of Abigale Harrington in 1921. He fell instantly in love with her. He was older, she much younger, but he wanted her. Promised her anything she wanted. She refused his advances. For months, he moped about depressed, but then things changed. A man, the local witch man by all accounts, approached him with two rings, both set in a silver band with gems. According to all accounts, they were massive ones. Somehow, this man convinced Price that with the set, he could win Abigale's heart."

Papa Jay let out a chuckle. "Fool in love'll buy the moon from a stranger if he thinks it'll get him into a lady's..."

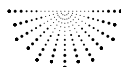
"Papa Jay!" Hannah decried.

“Heart, Sweetness, get him into her heart.” The elder Starvling gave his granddaughter a wink.

Hannah smirked. Gran eyed him with a raised eyebrow. “Uh huh.”

Papa Jay rolled his eyes. “Just tell your story, woman.”

CHAPTER TWO



“As I was saying, the man spun a story wherein the rings had unearthly powers. If a lady wore one, she would find her true love. If she wore both, she would have astounding health to be with the love of her life until death. Price was convinced he was Abigale’s true love. She just didn’t know it. He was desperate so he paid a small fortune to get them. He presented Abigale with one half of the set at a party one night. Shortly thereafter, the two were engaged. When he married her in 1921, he gave her the other ring for the other finger. Together, people began calling them the Eyes of Abigale. Legend holds it’s because the color of the gems matched her eyes.” She pulled her face in a bit. “Kind of romantic.”

“Would be if it were real,” Papa Jay interrupted, “but didn’t quite work out that way, did it?” He produced a grumpy scowl. Gran gave a scurrilous look as he took over.

“Around 1917, Abigale ran off with Price’s business partner, Roman James. Seems she found her true love and it wasn’t Price. They were never heard from again. Some say

they escaped to South 'Merica because Price was the jealous, vindictive sort. But the more popular tale holds that Price found out about their little hootchy kootchy. He killed them both, took the rings back and they became part of the legend. The Eyes of Abigale." Papa Jay again scanned the building. "They say he hid them somewhere in that there building." He turned back to the group. "Everyone and his brother's monkey's uncle looked over the years. No one's found them." He shrugged. "Or if they did, didn't let on," Papa Jay added.

Hannah saw that Lorelei was ready to question the statement. However, Marcus oddly beat her to the punch with the utterance of a single name.

"Leonard..."

Everyone quieted with the voice of the almost invisible young man. Hannah found his entry into the conversation intriguing. It was not so much his sudden interjection but the manner in which it was stated. *As if he knew him*, Hannah thought. *Personally*.

"Price..." Marcus corrected himself. "He also had a vast treasure. Gems and such. They were separate from the Eyes, or that's how the story plays out. It's changed somewhat over the years, as myths are wont to do. The Eyes are part of the treasure, or the Eyes are the treasure. Depends on your level of desire."

"Or gullibility," Papa Jay tossed out.

"Oh hush, you old grampus. I looked for them myself back in the day."

"Like I said..."

Gran punched her husband in the arm.

"Ow, woman!"

"What?"

"Harrumph."

"Oh, just give me a kiss and get over it."

Papa Jay obliged, much to the amusement of the Dantes, Marcus, and Hannah.

"Well, let's get on with it, shall we? It's getting kind of nippy out here."

Everyone agreed.

Hannah pulled a set of keys from the small bag she carried and unlocked the front door. She then let everyone in ahead of herself. As she stepped inside, she immediately noticed everyone's face squinted up. Suddenly, she assumed the same expression.

"Oh dear," Gran exclaimed, waving her hand in front of her face. She leaned over and smacked Papa Jay on the arm. He gave her a sharp look.

"Weren't me," the elder Starvling protested. "Bit ripe even after asparagus."

Bella pinched her nose, causing her voice to sound deep and nasally. "Something's definitely dead here."

Hannah noticed Marcus seemed unaffected, as he looked deeper into the building. "Probably a rat. I'll go check it out. Is there power?"

Hannah moved to the light switch and flipped it. Several lights flickered to life. Marcus picked up his camera and headed down the hall.

"Maybe we could wait outside," Hannah offered. No one refused. Once out, she propped the door open and stepped away. Papa Jay placed his hands firmly on his hips and peered back into the building. His concerned expression drew Hannah's attention.

"Papa Jay? Something wrong?"

"Well, Sweetness, I'm not one to speculate, but I've been around a while. Raised on a farm near the woods, and smelled dead things before. All kinds of things." He looked over to Hannah, brow pulled in hard. "That weren't no small thing. No rat, cat, possum, or raccoon. Not even a dog."

All eyes turned to the old man. Hannah drew her head slightly sideways to take him in.

“Are you saying...”

“Guys, there’s a body in here,” Marcus called from the door.