

Python Place 3: Rose and Thorn

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Synopsis:

Concerned that her sister might be held against her will at Python Place, Abigail enters the infamous house and finds her strict moral code endangered by irresistibly sexy Tyrus Terence.

The moment Tyrus meets Abigail, he knows the prim spinster is his soulmate. He can scarcely believe the fates would be cruel enough to bind him to a haughty woman with bad fashion sense.

Yet beneath her cool exterior lives a deeply passionate seductress, one who matches him in lust and stirs the handsome daemon's protective instincts. Tyrus will stop at nothing to keep Abigail safe from his dreaded mother, the evil spirit Eris, even if it means tapping into the darkness inside himself.

Excerpt:

The day after her father was taken to the madhouse for trying to kill her brother-in-law, Abigail realized something wasn't right with her sister. Abigail couldn't fathom a decent, upstanding woman like Hailey taking up with the likes of a Terence.

Mere days after their father had shot Adrien Terence, a servant from Python Place arrived with a large sum of money and a note from Hailey. Had Adrien kidnapped Hailey, forced his will upon her? Did he hope to avoid further suspicion by paying off the only relative left to care for Hailey's welfare?

Perhaps Abigail had been sneaking too many peeks at the horrid adventure novels Hailey had so loved to read. Still, she couldn't rid herself of the nagging suspicion her sister was in terrible danger. The very idea of setting foot in that filthy house made Abigail shudder, yet she couldn't simply abandon Hailey to a life with Adrien.

Abigail donned her cloak and set out for Python Place.

Even in broad daylight the house seemed shrouded in a darkness all its own. With its stone walls and many gables, it looked like a house owned by Satan. A shudder rippled down Abigail's spine. Many believed the Terence brothers themselves were spawns of the devil. In spite of the rather warm day she pulled her cloak more tightly around her.

It was strangely silent for early morning and then she recalled that Python Place was most active at night. Using the brass doorknocker in the shape of a devil-eyed ram, she tapped then waited several moments. When no one appeared, she tapped again.

A sleepy-looking servant finally opened the door. "May I help you?"

“Yes. I’m Abigail Watson. I’m here to see my sister, Hailey.”

The servant stared at her, his brow furrowed.

“Lord Adrien Terence’s wife,” she explained, thinking it curious that a servant at Python Place didn’t know of whom she spoke. “Surely you know your Lord’s wife?”

“Lord Terence and his wife will not rise until this evening. You may return then.”

Frustrated, Abigail nearly demanded to see her sister, then thought better of it. She didn’t want to risk angering Lord Terence and ruining the chance to see Hailey. She turned away from the door, all sorts of terrible thoughts darting through her mind. What sort of man had Hailey bound herself to that he slept by day and walked by night, like a monster in a legend? Even worse, he had drafted Hailey into his morbid, evil lifestyle.

Her thoughts filled with all sorts of horrors, Abigail turned and headed down the walk, her gaze cast down. She didn’t notice the man until she smashed into him. Her hat flew off and she nearly crashed to the ground when one of his large tan and brown dogs jumped on her, its muddy paws on her shoulders.

“Nero, down!” The dog immediately dropped to the ground beside two other equally large beasts, its stubby tail wagging.

“Oh, my dress!” Abigail used an embroidered handkerchief to blot away some of the mud. While not especially fashionable, the dress was the best she owned. Now the pale blue fabric was most likely ruined.

“Your hat.” The man offered her the simple blue and white headpiece with one of his black-gloved hands.

Her teeth gritting, she snatched it and faced him, prepared to give him a proper dressing down for allowing his untrained beast to attack innocent bystanders. Instead she simply stared, rendered momentarily speechless by the sight of him.

Abigail had never been impressed by the male sex. From her cruel father to most of the dull-witted, self-absorbed fools who had shown mild interest in her and Hailey over the years, men were little more than a necessity to keep the human race alive.

Long ago she’d dreamed of finding the proverbial “knight in shining armor” to sweep her off her feet and carry her away from her life of drudgery, but that dream had quickly faded. Even if her father had allowed her to marry, she cringed to think of the sort of mate he’d have selected for her. She’d seen the men he’d considered for Hailey.

It wasn’t a mere man who stood before her, however, but some flesh and blood rendering of a Greek god. Tall, with long black hair hanging loose about his broad shoulders, he stared at her with eyes of such vivid blue she felt as if she were wading in a crystalline pool. He wore black breeches, boots to the knee, and a white linen shirt, the ties open and exposing a good deal of his lean, sleekly muscled chest covered with a dusting of curly black hair.

A strange, sharp yet delightful feeling struck deep in her belly and while she couldn’t quite put a name to it, the sensation surpassed any she’d ever felt before. Beneath the cover of clothes, her nipples tightened and tingled, and her heart leapt.

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

Recovering quickly, she cleared her throat. “I’m Abigail Watson and I came to see my sister, Hailey.”

His lovely, almond-shaped eyes narrowed and he paused a moment, his gaze sweeping her from head to toe in a manner that made her feel naked. “I see. Did no one answer the door?”

“Yes. The servant sent me away.”

“He sent you *away*?” Now he looked irritated. “Come with me.”

He and the dogs stalked past her and headed for the door.

“Sir, I understand Lord Terence has retired for the day and I have no wish to get you in trouble with your master for disturbing --”

He paused and offered her a rather forced smile. “Forgive me. I’m Tyrus Terence, one of the masters of Python Place, and if anyone deserves to be disturbed by his new relations, it’s my brother Adrien. Please come inside.”

Feeling a bit foolish for her mistake, she did as he asked. Still, how could she have known who he was? She’d never met Tyrus Terence and he was dressed like a ruffian rather than master of a home such as this.

Inside, Tyrus rang for a servant and the same sleepy looking young man entered the room. Upon seeing Tyrus he snapped to attention. “Yes, sir?”

“This is Abigail Watson. Did you send her away?”

“I... asked her to return later, when Lord Terence and his wife are prepared to receive guests.”

“She’s not a guest. She’s family and welcome here at any time. Is that understood?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Bring her tea in the parlor of the common wing. I’ll inform Adrien of her presence.”

The servant hurried to carry out Tyrus’ orders.

“This way.” Tyrus gestured toward Abigail and she followed him into a richly decorated parlor. “Please have a seat.”

“I didn’t mean to cause any problems.”

“You haven’t.”

Again they locked gazes and more of those wonderfully strange feelings shot through her. She had the mad urge to remove her corset. She couldn’t seem to force enough air into her lungs while facing him. She ached pleasurably in places that made her blush to think about. And that chest of his! If only she could run her hands over it, just to see if it felt as hard and powerful as it looked.

The tip of his tongue flickered across his lips and she realized he looked like a ravenous man staring at a steak dinner. The temperature in the room seemed to rise and she

resisted the urge to fan herself with the mud-stained handkerchief.

“Please excuse my dog for ruining your dress. I’ll be glad to pay for the damages.”

“That won’t be necessary. I’m sure with a bit of scrubbing the mud will wash out.”

He looked about to speak but instead nodded and left the room. Abigail couldn’t keep from staring at his taut backside and steely legs outlined perfectly in the black breeches. She’d never seen any of the Terence brothers up close. If Adrien possessed half the appeal of his brother, Abigail could understand Hailey’s attraction.

A short time later, a maid brought tea for Abigail, who sipped it, hoping to calm her nerves. Not only was she anxious to see Hailey, but her thoughts kept drifting back to Tyrus.

The man raised emotions in her she’d never imagined -- or perhaps that wasn’t true. There had been times when she’d experienced desire, but she tried to thrust such thoughts from her mind. Occasionally, late at night, her passions overcame her. She would raise her nightgown and tease the damp flesh between her legs until she exploded in waves of physical delight. The experience always left her feeling ashamed, soiled, and almost evil. Most of the guilt derived from her father’s teachings, that anything other than prayer and duty were temptations of the devil.

Though in her heart she didn’t believe him, it was difficult to completely turn her back on the values she’d been raised with. Now, in this house of ill repute, all she could think about was Tyrus’ hands on that wet, tender, secret place, stroking, rubbing, teasing...