

THE
BURDEN
OF
HATE

FOR REVIEW
PURPOSES ONLY

TITLES BY HELEN STARBUCK:

THE ANNIE COLLINS SERIES

The Mad Hatter's Son

No Pity In Death

STAND-ALONE NOVELS

Legacy of Secrets

THE
BURDEN
OF
HATE

An Annie Collins Mystery

HELEN STARBUCK



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The Burden of Hate: An Annie Collins Mystery

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From the deepest desires often comes the deadliest hate

—Socrates

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 PROLOGUE

I HAVE FRIENDS WHO believe that what you think creates your reality, that thoughts and beliefs are powerful and have life and energy. They believe that the universe, whatever that means, cannot tell the difference between a positive or negative thought and will turn whatever you think, believe, or worry about into your reality.

In my worst nightmares, I remember being nearly put to sleep permanently by an overdose pumped into me by someone I thought I loved. I jolt awake and lie in the dark, trying to reassure myself that it was a dream. I am safe. I survived, and he is in prison, unable to get to me.

No logic or reassurance, though, could dispel the fear he'd find a way to escape from prison, find me, and, as he had threatened, "*settle the score*" between us.

I've lived with that fear for more than two years. Apparently, my friends knew what they were talking about.

 ONE

I STOOD IN OUR bedroom looking at the two suitcases lying on the bed and the clothes in stacks that surrounded both. I had agreed to marry assistant district attorney Angel Cisneros eight months ago, which in itself seemed insane, but here we were.

Here we were, I thought, and shook my head as I added folded clothes to each suitcase.

We had a wedding staring us in the face and the prospect that Ian Patterson, who had killed my friend Libby, her lover, another person, and then tried his best to kill me, would find a way to hurt both Angel and me as payback for putting him in prison. Frost, the homicide detective who had become like a substitute father to me, called me the day I'd been at the bridal shop getting alterations on my wedding dress. He wasn't calling to congratulate me, but rather to tell me that Ian had escaped.

"What do you mean he escaped?"

"The prison just called. There was an altercation and Ian got beaten up pretty badly. They had to take him to the hospital in Cañon City. He'd been there a couple days, because of a head injury, a fractured arm, and superficial stab wound. They had to operate on the stab wound and set the arm. He talked the police guard, who was new to the job, into un-cuffing him and helping him sit up so he could use the urinal and he managed to grab the guard's gun. He beat the guard unconscious. The noise alerted the

guard outside the room, and when that guard came in to investigate, Ian did the same to him. He took a gun and the guards' wallets, changed into one of the uniforms, left the hospital in their cruiser, and he's on the run."

"You told me he wouldn't get out! *Everybody told me he wouldn't get out!*" I shouted at him. "He'll come for me, Frost."

And he would, I knew that, it was just a matter of when. Frost had tried to reassure Angel and me with all the efforts being made to find Ian, but the reality was he had so far evaded capture for almost a month and no one knew whether he was alive or just biding his time somewhere. Frost put us in a safe house for ten days. The anxiety coupled with trying to comply with Angel's mother's wedding plans and activities, which the escape hadn't halted, made me insist on returning home.

Currently, cops monitored things from what had been Angel's apartment and played watchdogs. And so far, nothing had happened. That, combined with Angel's mother's wedding insanity, had nearly driven both of us over the edge. She intended to get her firstborn married come hell or high water. A killer on the loose hadn't dissuaded her from her mission.

So here I was, packing suitcases for our honeymoon. Angel's mother had insisted he stay at his parents' house the night before the wedding to avoid us seeing one another until the big day, which was tomorrow. That had made me laugh, but Sophia was adamant that it was bad luck for us to see each other before the ceremony. As with everything else connected to the big Catholic wedding she had engineered, we just nodded our heads and complied. The result was a wedding to rival that of recent royal weddings.



THE DAY of the wedding as I sat having my hair done by Angel's sister Gabriela, my phone rang.

"Hey, babe, the older priest from the church just called me. He's going to do the ceremony, and he wants us to show up a bit earlier than planned so he can go over things."

"Why is he doing it?"

"Father Andrew apparently got called away on some emergency and wasn't sure if he'd be back in time."

“Seriously? What happened?”

“I didn’t ask, just something urgent, I guess.”

“That’s too bad, I really liked him.” I had liked him. He was kind and funny and very reassuring to a non-Catholic. “What’s your mother going to say when we see each other before the ceremony?”

“The priest asked for the meeting. Apparently, according to *Mamá*, that cancels the bad luck.” I could almost hear him rolling his eyes in exasperation. “The other priest is in his seventies, so it’s hard to say how the ceremony will go. But at this point, I don’t care as long as it’s over and done, and we’re married, and I don’t have to live in the same house as *Mamá*. She’s driving me insane.”

“We should have gone to the courthouse and gotten quietly married. Then you could have told your grandmother about it, and she could have given you her ring after it was all said and done, and your mother couldn’t have produced this extravaganza.”

“Hindsight, *chica*. I didn’t think about that. She’d have never forgiven me. It’s a no-win situation either way.”

“I guess. You’re being safe, right? I don’t want your mother driving you nuts enough to do something that would get you hurt.” Meaning Ian, of course. We both seemed wary of mentioning his name.

“Reynolds is here and I can barely take a piss without him standing outside the door,” he said, referring to Steve Reynolds, another cop with whom I was friends. “Are you going to make it through all this?”

“Yep, if I can deal with Ian’s escape, I think I can survive your mother’s wedding.”

“It’s our wedding, technically,” he said sounding annoyed before he disconnected.



THE BIG Catholic wedding was pretty much what I expected. Frost walked me down the aisle and, blushing, kissed my cheek and placed my hand in Angel’s. The ceremony was a blur and my main concern was making sure I didn’t screw up any of the unfamiliar rituals. We got through it without incident, but I regretted that the younger priest hadn’t officiated.

I liked him. He'd made the required classes easy and explained a lot of the rituals and what was expected. He eased some of my qualms about what would take place. In the private premarital counseling sessions, he'd been humorous and patient. Although it still struck me as weird that a celibate priest would be counseling anyone about marriage, he made the whole experience at least pleasant.

Much to Angel's annoyance, the priest and I had gotten into a number of discussions about life in general. It seemed to me that something sad lived underneath his pleasant, humorous exterior. But with his guidance, we'd completed the required gauntlet and survived.

The older priest had been fine, just a little stuffy for my taste. He'd refused, in our brief meeting with him before the ceremony, to leave the "obey" out of the vows.

As we returned to our respective dressing areas Angel whispered to me, "You never obey me anyway, why worry about the vow?"

I gave him a jab in the ribs and, when the time came, we proceeded with the ceremony, promising to obey and everything else.

In the limo that would take us to the reception, Angel laid his head on the headrest. "God, I'm glad that's over. You hanging in there, *chica*?" he asked, taking my hand to stop me picking birdseed out of the bodice of my dress. He kissed the back of my hand. I let go of his hand and brushed a few seeds out of his curls. He looked as if he'd stepped out of *GQ Magazine* in his black tux, crisp white shirt, bow tie, and boutonniere. The man could make sackcloth and ashes look sexy but when he dressed up, it was heart stopping.

I hadn't quite gotten used to the sensation of his grandmother's gold wedding band channel set with diamonds that now lived on my fourth finger. He'd had it engraved with the phrase, *Yo soy tuyo para siempre—Angel*. "I am yours forever." One of the things he'd said to me in Spanish the first time we made love. And it was odd, yet strangely satisfying, to see the gold band on his left hand.

"Yeah, I'm hanging in there. At least Ian didn't show up."

He frowned. "Don't talk about him, please. Frost has got things covered with all the damn cops crawling all over the place. All we have to get

through now is the reception and then we can leave tomorrow morning and be gone for two weeks. Maybe they'll have caught him by then."

We sat quietly, lost in thought. Two years previously we'd helped convict and send Ian Patterson to prison. I had stumbled on evidence that Ian was responsible for the death of my friend Libby, her paramour, and the man responsible for his beating. That discovery had resulted in Ian attempting to overdose me, as he'd put it, "*to clean up a problem*"—the "*problem*" being me. And now he'd escaped. If he was still alive, Angel and I were next on his agenda.

"At least the reception should be more fun. Then this extravaganza will be over," Angel said, bringing me out of my thoughts. "Then my mother can start engineering the arrival of our first child."

That took me by surprise. "Oh, please, don't start. You almost gave me heart failure when you told me you wanted four or five after Father Andrew made us promise to raise any kids Catholic. That wasn't funny even if you thought it was. If your mother is going to start pressuring us for grandkids, then we're moving far away."

Angel laughed. "Just saying. She's a force to contend with. Look how she engineered the wedding. We barely had any say in the matter."

"If I'd known she was going to take over like that, I'd never have agreed to let your parents pay for everything. Who knew she'd turn it into such a production?"

I had ended up with four bridesmaids, a maid of honor, and a dress that had cost nearly four grand. Sophia vetoed the wedding venue I'd wanted, and the wedding had taken place at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Denver where she and the rest of the family attended.

I sighed. "Well, one event down, one to go I guess."

Angel sat up and turned to me. "You're so beautiful in your dress. I saw you coming down the aisle and it took my breath away."

"Are you happy? This is a big change for both of us."

"Very. How about you, *chica*?"

"I am. Never thought I'd find anyone and never in my wildest dreams did I think it'd be you, but I'm glad it is."

He reached for me, pulled me to him, and kissed me softly, then more insistently and continued kissing me until the limo pulled up in front of the event center where the reception would be.

It would be nice to be home right now, I thought as we broke away from the kiss when the limo stopped. The stab of arousal from his kisses had left me with a familiar ache that could be soothed only by him. *A little privacy to explore conjugal rights would really hit the spot*. The cop driving the limo parked and came around to open the door for us, all the while scanning the area.

His mother was waiting under the hotel's portico, flanked by two plainclothes cops and descended on us as we exited the limo.

"Hurry you two, we have to greet people as they come." She pulled us into the foyer of the hotel. "Angelito, why is your hair so messed up?" she asked, looking at him critically. She fished in her purse and pulled out a comb. "Here, let me smooth it out. Bend down."

I half expected her to pull out a hanky, spit on it, and wipe his face off, but she didn't go quite that far. When she had his hair somewhat under control she looked at me critically and without a word she reached over and ran her thumb under my lower lip, making a tisking noise and shaking her head as she removed what I assumed from the frown on her face, was smeared lipstick. Angel shot me a look of amusement and took my arm in his.

Ever onward little soldier, I thought as we followed her into the reception hall and the cops tailed behind us.

The plainclothes cops Frost had insisted on weren't an obvious presence in the reception hall, and the uniforms, while visible, weren't intrusive. I never knew how much members of Angel's extended family were aware of, but the story for consumption by the mass of invited guests was that the police were there to keep an eye on the gifts and prevent party crashers.

There had been no breaks in finding Ian and things had been quiet. It seemed he had vanished into thin air. It was clear to me that finding him was not going to be easy, and I feared he would hang over us like a dark cloud whether he was at large or in prison. Mostly I hoped they would find him and kill him.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



COLORADO NATIVE, OR nurse, and award-winning author of the Annie Collins mystery series, Helen Starbuck lives in Arvada, Colorado. Following the adage to “write what you know,” she writes her mysteries from the perspective of Annie Collins, an OR nurse. Her debut novel was the National Indie Excellence Award-winning *The Mad Hatter’s Son*. The second novel in the series is *No Pity In Death*. For more information visit her web site www.helenstarbuck.com.