

An excerpt from *Sinner's Grove*:

She turned back toward the door and reached for the handle, feeling strangely awkward. The door wouldn't open. "Um, do you have a key?" she asked over her shoulder.

From behind, Brit reached around as if he were going to embrace her. Heart flickering, she sucked in her breath, but let it out a second later when she realized he was just reaching beyond her for the door. He pressed the small lever above the knob that lifted the latch and pushed the door open.

"Ah," she said in a small voice. She entered the room and Brit followed. He turned on the light and looked around the cozy sitting room before turning back and handing her a skeleton key for the antique door knob.

"It's small, but nice," he said. "Ethan thought you'd find it comfortable ... in case you plan to stay awhile."

Jenna kept her voice cool. "Like I told you at the reception, I'm helping my grandfather, for as long as I can, regardless of what you have to say about it."

Brit gazed at her for a moment, then turned to go. "Sleep tight," he said.

Jenna shut the door and surveyed the delightful little suite. The living area had a velvet-covered settee and two deeply cushioned armchairs set around a rosewood coffee table. Someone had placed a vase filled with yellow roses on top of it. A large, ornately carved wardrobe adorned one wall; inside was a small flat screen television. Next to it sat a dainty parquet desk that displayed a framed antique photo. The woman in the photo, she knew, was Amelia Starling Wolff. "At least you and I share a love of art," she whispered.

She continued her tour, smiling at the quaint claw foot tub and elaborate tiling in the bathroom. The bedroom was another treat for the senses, with a romantic four-poster adorned

with a plush white down comforter. Of their own accord, her thoughts turned to Brit and what he might look like stretched out on that bed. She remembered his body, every inch of it, and wondered shamelessly if it would still look and feel the same.

She heard a soft knock on the outer door and momentarily froze. She and Brit were the only ones in this huge house, right? Had she conjured him from her imagination? The knock came again, louder this time, and Jenna chastised herself for being so skittish.

“Coming,” she called. She opened the door to see Brit standing there, shirtless with a towel slung across his wide, muscular shoulders. He was also barefoot. He’d obviously just run down the stairs. Jenna almost moaned with lust.

“Sorry, I forgot to give this to you,” he said. “It’s a master key to the downstairs door. We’ll be installing electronic security here in the next few weeks, which you may or may not be around for. In the meantime, don’t lose it, because it fits a number of locks around the estate.”

“Yes, sir,” she said, giving him a mock salute as he turned to go back to his rooms. When he reached the stairs, he turned around.

“Jenna?” he called.

“Yes?”

“I meant it about today. You were great. It was unexpected and for that reason all the more appreciated. So thanks again ... and lock your door.”

Jenna used the skeleton key to lock the door from her side and leaned against it, waiting for her heartbeat to return to normal. Seven years ago she’d denied her heart out of fear that she would never belong, and that denial had cost her dearly. If she had a second chance, would she let the same fear stand in her way? She smiled ruefully. Who was she kidding, anyway? This time around the man only tolerated her because of her grandfather, and he was involved with

someone else to boot. Following her heart this time around could be an even bigger mistake than before.

Yeah, *that* went well, Brit thought as he headed back up to his own suite. He had left the windows open and through them he could hear the muted sound of the sea far below. He could also smell the scent of laurel trees mixed with night blooming jasmine. Bad idea, he decided. It smelled like woman.

Women, he admitted, had their uses. But not since “The Jenna Interlude,” as he called their long-ago hook up, had any woman gotten anywhere near his core.

Until now.

He’d expected a self-absorbed prima donna, a New York City elitist bemoaning her come-down in society. But Jenna had surprised him. She was the same down-to-earth woman he remembered, but with more depth. More character. Apparently the tragedy she’d been through with her parents’ deaths had toughened but not broken her. Today she’d rolled up her sleeves and done what was necessary, whatever he needed her to do, no questions asked. She was game to help finish the job, too. Compared to the many high-maintenance women Brit had encountered in his lifetime, Jenna was an incredible breath of fresh air—not to mention sexy as all get out.

Maybe Ethan was right. Maybe Jenna cared more than Brit thought. But then, why had it taken her so long to help her grandfather out? God knows he’d been asking her to return to The Grove off and on for years. Even now she hadn’t truly committed; she could leave the professor stranded in a heartbeat, as well Brit knew.

He walked through the suite to the bedroom beyond. Once inside he chucked his shorts and stepped into the spacious bathroom that held a shower—big enough for two, he noted

grimly. As the water sluiced over him, his thoughts remained on the woman below him. That long, lean, sun-drenched look had always made him hot, and hers had only improved over time, damn it.

Pouring shampoo into his palm, Brit vigorously lathered up, then stuck his scalp under the showerhead.

Wish I could rinse away these feelings as easily.