

Full Circle

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eISBN 9781682522462
Editor: Christy Lockhart
Cover Artist: Dar Albert
Published in the United States of America

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Chapter One

Seth Foster stared at the monster from the safety of the rusted iron gate guarding its front portal. No wonder parents forbid their children to go into the place. The house was an accident waiting to happen. A one-hundred-year-old monstrosity held together more by luck than nails. Doric columns rammed the edges of the wraparound porch into place, determined to keep the structure from falling. They were probably the only thing sturdy about the house. Yet the porch still sagged in defiance, a perfect match to the rest of the three-story structure.

The Victorian house was as gray and drab as Seth remembered. Scary in its own right, it didn't need the embellishment of tales woven in the dark where the only illumination came from a flashlight held under the storyteller's chin. Shutters guarded the windows. Barely. He could tell they'd once been painted dark green—the paint had soaked into the wood. But the last fleck of white paint on the rest of the house was long gone...picked away by trespassers, bored kids, or Mother Nature.

Weeds cluttered the lawn as they always had. Today they were shin high. Oddly, morning glories twined around the iron fence rails, adding the only color to the place—pinks and purples.

Someone probably dumped some seeds along the edge.

Seth could appreciate the attempt. He'd been a kid once. The house had been his playground then—his and all the other kids' in the area—despite parental decree to stay away. Seth wished he'd listened back then.

"They say it's haunted."

Seth started at the voice behind him. *Close* behind him. Too close. His heart raced. His body tightened despite his internal fight to stay cool, calm, and collected. Clearly

his dick had a mind of its own. Odd how the years that separated them hadn't wiped away the memory of that voice, or the other memories with it.

Before Seth could answer, Jason Gentry stepped up next to him. Seth refused to glance his way, not even surreptitiously from the corner of his eye. He knew what the man looked like. It was hard to miss when his photo hit the pages at least once a year. Vanity made Seth wonder if Jason had noticed Seth's image also flashed through the media.

Seth wrapped his hands around the top rail of the rusted iron fence and kept his gaze forward.

"Yep, that's what they say," he finally replied.

"Its legends grow every year." Jason's chuckle wiggled through Seth, setting off tremors Seth wished he could deny. "Now it's our generation warning their children to stay away from the old Jefferson house."

"They should stay away. It's a safety hazard. A lawsuit waiting to happen for the owner." But Seth knew its allure was too great to resist.

"Which is now you," Jason said.

"Yes...me." Word traveled fast in a town this size, but then community was community. Although, Seth would bet Jason had as many and varied connections as he did.

"I was surprised to find you were the other bidder."

Not nearly as surprised as Seth was to learn it was Jason who'd forced him to up his bid. Didn't matter. Seth was willing to pay whatever he had to in order to buy the house.

Jason turned Seth's way. This time Seth couldn't resist a quick side glance. Want was carried to him on the wings of Jason's scent. He still used Irish Spring.

"Why'd you buy it?" Jason asked.

"Why'd *you want* to buy it?" Seth countered.

"Memories?"

Was that a shrug?

Seth sighed and nodded. "Yeah...memories."

Seconds passed, time when Seth was all too aware of Jason's perusal. It sent prickles down his spine. Memories of another time when Jason had slowly peeled Seth's shirt from his shoulders, caressed his skin like ancient treasure, dotted kisses down—

"I noticed you went bald a while back."

So...Jason *had* been following Seth's media coverage. He resisted the urge to rub his hand over his head. "I was losing it anyway. Makes it easier to play."

"Oh? Are you still in the game? Word out says you're thinking of retiring, that you referred to your last injury as a wake-up call. How are you doing with that, by the way?"

No sense denying it. Seth wasn't in town to make points with anyone or show off. "Knee hurts like hell when it rains. Hip aches when I sit too long. Ribs are good to go, but I have my chiropractor on speed dial. As for my head. Migraines are a bitch and sneak up on me when I least expect it. So, yes, I'm retiring."

"Good. I know your parents have been worried. The glory faded for them the first time you took a hard hit."

He'd been talking to Seth's parents? When? And why hadn't they mentioned it? God...if they knew...

Forcing a bravado he didn't feel, Seth did rub his head. "But I'm keeping the head like it is. The ladies seem to like it."

"So I've noticed. I hardly recognized you today without the latest starlet slash ingénue slash socialite dripping from your arm."

Jason's sarcasm cut through Seth's facade. He shot the man a full glare and the impact of seeing Jason face-to-face finished the job. Seth's heart was exposed, pounding,

aching, damning him to hell once more. An erection those aforementioned ladies lusted after swelled his Jackson Tate trousers.

Smile lines crinkled the corners of Jason's brown eyes and mouth. Brackets that emphasized his kissable lips. Seth longed to trace his finger down Jason's pointed nose, then dot a kiss to the tip. He was clean-shaven and tanned, teeth blindingly white in that hint of a smile. Brown hair curled around his ears and down his neck, not too long, not too short. And probably just as soft as Seth remembered.

Jason wore a long-sleeved dusty-rose shirt with the cuffs rolled up to expose strong forearms. The open collar tempted Seth to delve his tongue into the well of Jason's throat and taste. Light-gray trousers hugged his trim hips, and Seth longed for a rear view to see if Jason's ass was as tight as he remembered.

Seth took a small step back, needing to put some distance between them. Jason represented everything Seth had fought to deny, and here he was, undoing all the efforts he'd taken to prove it was wrong, a mistake, a lie.

He found a smirk in his bag of tricks and unleashed it. "What can I say? They know a good thing when they see it."

Jason's eyebrow lifted. "Indeed."

How could one word have so much damn power? Mean so many different things?

"The look fits you," he added. "I can appreciate the allure."

Jason turned away, leaning forearms on the fence rail. The snub hit below the belt. Seth longed to grab his arm and force Jason to look at him again. An image of him standing behind Jason leaped into his head, their trousers around their ankles and —

"What are your plans for it?" Jason's question cut through Seth's fantasy and yanked him back to reality where he belonged.

"I'm going to tear the son of a bitch down."

"So much for memories."

"Some aren't meant to be savored." Seth let his anger build, hoping it would chase away the other feelings and the temptation that went with it.

"Ohhh...I see. You blame the house." He sniffed and turned his head Seth's way. "That house didn't make you gay. You're gay because—"

"I am *not* gay." Fists at his sides, Seth closed the distance between them, hovering over Jason. "I have scores of women who can swear otherwise."

Jason was far from intimidated. In fact, he didn't budge. "Okay, I'll give you that one. The media is awash with the list of women you've fucked. You're *bisexual*."

"It was one time!" He jerked his index finger up, right in front of Jason's oh-so-perfect nose. "It was the night. The storm. The fear. One time!"

"Technically, I believe it was five times that night."

"Shut the fuck up!"

Jason merely grinned and lifted that dark eyebrow. "Yes, we certainly can't risk someone overhearing that one of NFL's all-time great running backs is gay. Excuse me. *Bisexual*. Oops, there's that word again. Imagine the ripple of fear that would send through locker rooms everywhere. Clenched butt cheeks and cupped genitals all around. Perhaps a little envy and disappointment a few of them didn't know that back in the day."

"I'm not going to stand here and listen to your shit." No matter how he wanted to deny it, Seth wanted to yank those hips to his groin and dry hump Jason until they both came.

"Go ahead and run, Seth. After all, it is what you do best," Jason said calmly. "But you can fuck a thousand women 24/7 and it still won't change a thing. It is what it is. Reject it all you want, but don't blame that house. A house that's over a hundred years old, has withstood earthquakes, the elements, and time. A house with a rich history before it fell into neglect and became neighborhood fodder for ghost stories and a forbidden playground for kids."

Seth meant to keep walking. His feet were glued to the sidewalk, trapped by Jason's words and his smooth, rich voice.

"You're Seth Foster. Do something with all that purported money that came your way instead of using it as a weapon. What greater gift to the community you came from than to restore one of its historical homes?"

"And I suppose you're going to tell me that you bid on the house to do just that."

The silence lasted so long Seth looked around to make sure Jason was still there. "Well?"

Jason leaned his elbows on the fence rail. "I bid on it because you did."

Confusion screwed up Seth's face. "What?"

Jason shrugged one shoulder. "You're not the only one capable of petty acts of revenge. You wanted the house, and I wanted to make you pay for it."

Another shrug and then he pushed away from the fence and stalked toward Seth. "You act like you're the only one who was affected that night. Did you even stop to think about what you did to me afterward? How you hurt me? Shut me out? *Left* me? After all our years together, everything we did, and you just walked away without another word."

He circled Seth now, and Seth felt very much like prey. A mate being targeted. Heart pounding in time with his heavy cock, he stood statue-still waiting for something. Anything. Everything.

"I must've killed you a dozen times over in my books," Jason told him. "Made you the lackey, the villain, the imbecile. Then the lover, the hero." These last words whispered over Seth's ear, so close the heat from Jason's breath slithered down Seth's collar right to his spine and lower.

"Isn't it time we put the past behind us?" he asked. "Turn this place into something good and purge the night that changed us both?"

Seth's gaze wandered toward the behemoth. Jason was still so close Seth could almost taste him. "White elephant. Money pit."

"True enough." Jason pressed against his back. Seth longed to lean into him, feel those arms around him, give in to what he'd denied himself all this time.

"I'm between books," Jason said. "You're apparently a free agent, if what the news media says of you is correct. Since you're here and not training, I'm guessing it is. Maybe we could do some of the work ourselves. Put to use those rusty skills we used to have working with my dad on construction."

"Yeah." Seth snickered. "We'll just be a couple of working stiffs."

"Stiff indeed."

The words gave Seth the hard-on from hell.

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