

The House on Heath Hill

Episode 1 – Judi Phillips

“Damn,” Vanessa Sprague muttered for the umpteenth time as the car slid on the snow-packed road. She clamped her fingers around the steering wheel. How had she gotten into this mess?

Needing to eat. Her unemployment had run out, and when she’d interviewed with Chapman Heath in his office in Portland, he’d seemed like a pleasant guy. Attractive, with dark brown eyes and high cheekbones. A bit on the quiet side, but she chalked that up to his being a recent widower.

When he’d offered her the job, she’d accepted the position as live-in nanny for his pre-school daughter, figuring babysitting her niece gave her the necessary experience. How hard could it be dealing with a four-year old? Surely she’d have enough time to start working on the novel she’d dreamed of writing.

Vanessa had hauled the last of her belongings to the storage unit, dropped the key to her apartment off at her landlord’s and headed out on her new adventure. As usual, she’d left behind schedule, and it was late afternoon before she was on her way. Too busy packing up her apartment, she hadn’t looked at the directions to Heath’s house until she pulled away from the storage facility. North Lovell was way the hell and gone from Portland. If she hustled, she hope to make it without being too late.

She hadn’t figured on a storm today, the first day of her new job. The snow that had been spitting all morning was coming down in earnest. She negotiated an uphill, winding road through a tunnel of trees, branches drooping with the weight of falling snow. She hoped she hadn’t made the biggest mistake of her life.

Episode 2 - Lori Libby

Once again her beat up gray Nissan slid as she rounded what she hoped was the last curve before the driveway. Gloved hands wrapped tighter around the wheel as her foot lifted off the gas and the skid halted. Vanessa blew out a nervous breath and glanced at the Mickey Mouse watch on her right wrist.

“Damn.” she muttered. “Late isn’t the way to start.”

“Turn left.” The GPS announced.

“Finally.”

She turned into the drive only to find it a narrower version of the road. Snow covered pine trees towered both sides. Even with treacherous driving, Vanessa knew this is why she moved to Maine the minute she graduated from NYU. Beautiful and awe inspiring, she knew her muse would take flight and the next New York Times best seller would fly from her thoughts to the paper. Her muse, however, had taken Vacationland to heart and disappeared along with her lying cheating bastard of a boyfriend.

Lost in thought, the house seemed to jump put in front of her. The large Victorian sat in a field ringed with trees looked for all the world like the house they used to film Stephen King movies. A chill spilled down her spine. She pulled up to the end of the empty driveway. No other cars, dark windows, empty. No one was home.

Vanessa sat back in her seat. She had no choice but to wait until someone got home. A few minutes in silence, she turned the radio on to her favorite country station. She tried to relax, slow her breathing, and be thankful she made it in one piece.

The pounding on the window woke her with a start. Staring through the window was a small blonde head. Big deep blue eyes stared at her. A red mittened hand banged on the window.

“Are you Nanny ‘cause if you’re not Daddy’s gonna be mad.” She used both hands to pull the door open. “We were lookin for you ‘cause we thought you was stuck in the ditch!”

“Step back, Sadie. She’ll open the door.” Chapman Heath called out as he reached the car and scooped his daughter up and over his head. “Let’s go inside.”

Vanessa pushed the door open and gets out of the Nissan. “Where should I put my stuff?”

“Leave it.” He called over his shoulder, “You’re not staying. You’re late and didn’t call.”

Episode 3 - Corinna Goentzel

“Well, in case you hadn’t noticed, there’s a bit of a storm brewing and oh, yeah, the roads are crap!” She clamped her mouth shut. Probably not the best greeting she could’ve used, but hey, he was the one being an ass, not her.

Chapman kept walking. Sadie laughed as she bounced on his shoulder.

“You can’t expect me to turn around now.” No answer. Not even a pause in his step as he climbed the stairs to the huge front door. “At least I showed up. The least you could do is let me stay the night.”

He hushed his daughter inside and with lightning speed came back to stand in front of her, his hulking figure looming. And she thought the storm was bad.

“I asked you to be here at a certain time. You’re late. You didn’t even have the decency to call.”

“I was busy driving. I---.”

He cut her off with a sharp wave of his hand. “We were worried. The weather’s bad. You could’ve been injured and stuck in a drift somewhere.”

Stephen King invaded her thoughts. Sounded a lot like ‘Misery’ to her. She held up her own hand in response.

“I’m really sorry. I was just trying to concentrate on the road. You’re right. I should’ve called. It was unthoughtful of my part.” The hard line of his shoulders gave just a tiny bit with her apology. “Please, I understand if you don’t want to hire me. But don’t send me out in the storm again. I’ll leave first thing in the morning.”

“Fine. But I want you to be gone before Sadie wakes up in the morning. I don’t want her to get attached to another person only to have them disappear too.”

Episode 4 - Luanna Nau

Vanessa knew better than to continue the argument. Particularly since the snow was melting on her head, and her toes were freezing. She waited until Chapman had returned to the house before pulling her smallest suitcase from the backseat. She may not be a welcome guest, but she sure as hell would be comfortable. And she never went to bed without completing her skin care regime.

She trudged through the ankle deep snow, up the stone steps and into the front hall. Elegant didn't even begin to describe the décor. How did a little girl manage to live here and feel comfortable?

Leaving her case at the foot of the stairs, she followed the sound of voices toward the back of the house. A large, bright kitchen led to a huge great room. This was more like it. One entire corner was clearly devoted to the little girl. And that's where Chapman and Sadie were engrossed in what looked like a craft project. Multi-colored glitter was clearly a major component.

"Um...where should I put my wet coat?" Vanessa eyed the warm fire crackling in the woodstove. Curling up next to that would be so nice.

Chapman pointed to a door off the kitchen. "You'll find some hooks on the wall in there."

"You have a lovely home." She slipped off her coat and hung it in the laundry room. Even this utilitarian room had been touched by a designer.

"Do you want to do glitter with us?" Sadie held up a picture and an avalanche of fairy dust fell onto the work table. Her large blue eyes confirmed the invitation was sincere. But a quick glance at Chapman's stern face warned Vanessa that she shouldn't make herself at home.

"I'd love to," Vanessa began. "But I need to take my wet shoes off and find my slippers first."

"Can you show me to my room?" The last she directed to her new boss, now her former boss.

"Take the first room on the left at the top of the stairs." He met her gaze. "Do not go into any other rooms."

Episode 5 - C.V. Beane

Do not go into any other rooms. “Hmmm. How dare he talk to me like I’m some sort of a child.” Vanessa mumbled, grabbing up her bag and taking the stairs two at a time. At the designated door, she pushed the door open and stepped in, only to freeze where she stood. “Wow.” Turning slowly around, she was amazed at the size.

To her right between two soft brown tables, sat a king size bed that could sleep at least four people. At the foot of the bed was a beautiful Victorian sitting bench, which matched the bureau along the wall by the bathroom entrance. Vanessa walked into the room and was drawn to the window and the beautiful sitting area which in the back of her mind would be a great place to write. *Yes, but you have to leave tomorrow,* she reminded herself as she placed her bag on the bench. Then she walked towards the window, where she found a lovely Victorian vanity. “Oh my, how beautiful.”

“Yes it is.”

Vanessa jumped and whipped around at the strange voice, belonging to a very tall, gray haired man.

“Oh, miss I didn’t mean to startle you.” At Vanessa’s expression of fear, the man continued. “Allow me to introduce myself, I’m Miles Winterbourne, but please call me Miles.”

Vanessa tilted her head and watched the distinguished man. He had to be six feet if not more. What she thought was gray hair, actually was silver and he had eyes that could only be described as a dark jade.

“Miss, are you all right?”

“Oh, yes. I was just admiring your lovely eyes. They remind me of a jade necklace my mother had.” There was something else about his eyes that she just couldn’t put her finger on.

“Thank you Ms...”

“Oh please call me Vane....” pausing as she realized where she had seen those eyes. They had been staring back at her as Chapman told her she wasn’t staying.

“Miss.” “Sorry, please call me Vanessa.” “Well then, Vanessa is there anything I can do for you?”

“Yes, can you tell me how you as a gentleman could have fathered a man like Chapman Heath? I mean you are his father?”

Episode 6 – Nina Pierce

“Okay, we decided one butterfly and you’d be off to bed.” Chapman smoothed his hand over his daughter’s blonde curls, so much like her mother’s. After all these years, emotion still clogged his throat when he thought of her. Even a heart full of love hadn’t been enough to support his late wife’s dreams.

“But you said there was no kindergarten tomorrow.” Sadie’s musical lilt made him smile.

He leaned over and rubbed his nose against his daughter’s, her oreo breath feathering across his mustache. “Which is why you got to stay up extra late.”

“And have an extra snack.” She sandwiched his cheeks in her pudgy hands and planted a sticky kiss on his lips. “I love you, Daddy.”

“I love you too, Baby Girl.” He picked her up and snuggled Sadie in the crook of his elbow, glitter and glue covering his flannel shirt. He bounced her through the foyer and up the wide stairs, letting her laughter cascade over his broken heart. It was wrong for a girl to be without her mama.

Who would have thought a Kentucky beauty queen couldn’t be happy in the deep woods of Maine? Six years ago when he’d married Constance, they’d struck out on their own. Chapman believed his computer design company and his wife’s freelancing writing would fit perfectly with the simple life he planned to carve out for them here on his grandfather’s estate. The old codger’s will had been read only a month before their nuptials, leaving Chapman a mansion on forty acres in western Maine. Hell of a wedding gift.

But Connie had never settled in.

Restless and bored, she began working on her Master’s degree in English Literature. Through her professor’s contacts, she reached further, seeking overnight trips and weekend classes from Portland to Pittsburgh. Until a week-long screen writing class in California turned into a three month internship and by the time it was over, Constance had decided being barefoot and pregnant in Maine didn’t fit her worldly aspirations. She’d moved to the west coast stealing his unborn child and his happiness.

The ink wasn’t even dry on the divorce papers when he’d flown out to California five months later to identify Constance, watch his daughter come into this world through a c-section and stop the life support on her mother.

Yeah, sometimes life was a sucker punch that left you breathless.

Chapman set Sadie down in her bedroom and playfully swatted her bottom, sending her into the adjoining bathroom. He pulled pajamas from her drawer and settled between the

mountains of stuffed animals on her bed. “Brush your teeth extra good tonight, Sadie. I wouldn’t want the tooth fairy to put back any of those loose teeth because—”

“Oh, Mr. Heath, I’m sorry.” Vanessa came through the door, the color washed from her heart shaped face. “But I...” She turned around and looked out in the hall and then back at Chapman, her blue eyes widening. “Didn’t he...”

Chapman wasn’t quite sure what had pissed him off more, the fact that this beautiful woman had driven through a blizzard or the fact that he’d been relieved beyond reason when she’d gotten out of her car in one piece. “Do you need something?”

“No, but I thought...” She looked behind her again.

Chapman knew very little about Vanessa Sprague and that pissed him off even more. Her resume had been vague, her qualifications as a nanny non-existent and yet he’d hired her. Now here she was, standing in his daughter’s bedroom acting like a crazy woman, and he wasn’t at all sure he could trust her with Sadie. “Spit it out, woman.”

She turned again. “There was a man.”

Sadie skipped out of the bathroom, giggling and wiping the toothpaste off her chin with her shirtsleeve. “Grampa Joe is so funny. He told me he’d bring me a mommy to take care of Daddy and me.” She walked over and took Vanessa’s hand, pulling her toward Chapman. “And now he has.”

Episode 7 – Deb Noone

Chapman Heath looked like he'd seen a ghost, as his glance shifted from his daughter's hand in hers to beyond Vanessa's right shoulder. Hell, she was pretty sure she'd just seen an apparition in the form of one stately gentleman, with smoldering jade eyes, lurking in her room.

Then just as quickly, Chapman's glare locked on her face, like he was blaming her for all that had happened—the snow storm—as if she could've made it here any faster. And the ghost?

Vanessa sighed. Probably just as well she wouldn't have to stay. Except the small, warm hand, grasping her own, said otherwise. In less than an hour, she'd already developed a soft spot for the kid.

Vanessa swallowed hard. She hated to admit it, but she liked Chapman too. Despite the fact he'd read her the riot act when she'd arrived late. She'd liked him at the interview. And tonight as she watched him interact with Sadie, she sensed a gentle manner. Could his anger be a cover-up? For what? She realized she knew zilch about this guy.

Sadie pulled Vanessa by the hand past her father and toward her lavender-covered bed. Still talking faster than a racing gazelle, she said, "Grampa Joe always tells me if you wish hard enough, then you'll get what you want. And..." Sadie tugged on her hand for attention and looked up at Vanessa with what could only be described as adoring eyes.

Vanessa shook her head. She'd totally blanked out the child's stream of chatter, until Sadie started talking about Grampa Joe—Miles *Joseph* Winterborne. Had to be one and the same. *Dead* Grampa Joe. Dead Grampa Joe who seemed to be a regular around this old place.

Only Chapman really looked startled, as if this was the first time he'd set eyes on the old, *dead* gent.

"I wished for you."

Vanessa snapped to attention. What did Sadie just say? Her declaration was so matter-of-fact, as if it was a given that Vanessa should have known all along what her role would be once she arrived at the mansion. A mommy? No way. She'd signed on for nanny duty, but a mommy—

Vanessa glanced at Chapman. His mouth was set straight and his eyes narrowed. At least he wasn't staring over her shoulder any more. Obviously, Chapman wasn't too keen on his daughter's declaration either. Enough so that he was now distracted from Grampa Joe.

Somehow she had to set matters straight ... with both of them.

“Mr. Heath, I’m not certain what you wish me to do at this point, except grovel. I’ve apologized for being late. I’ve explained how difficult it is to dial a cell phone with fingers gripping a steering wheel while driving through blinding snow.” She was being sarcastic. She couldn’t help it. It was as if she were talking to four-year old Sadie rather than a prominent Portland attorney. She wanted—no needed—to make her case. After meeting Miles a.k.a. Grampa Joe, and hearing Sadie talk as if Vanessa was meant to be here at Heath House, she realized that fate must have played a huge part in getting her this job. But a mommy?

Changing her tactic, she squeezed Sadie’s hand before letting go. “Why did you hire me? I have no experience.”

Chapman’s gaze shifted to over her shoulder again. “I—I don’t know. It seemed right at the time. Now I know it isn’t—right, that is.”

“Maybe it is.” Vanessa needed this job too damned much to let it go without a fight. Where would she go? How the hell would she eat? She was down to nothing in her bank account and not enough gas to make it back to town. Plus, she’d given up her apartment.

Ignoring Vanessa’s comment, Chapman turned and lifted Sadie high in the air. “Time for bed, princess.” Despite his veiled features, which had revealed nothing since she’d arrived, the depth of emotion radiating from his eyes spoke volumes. He couldn’t hide his love for his kid.

“But, Daddy—my story.”

“We’ve had enough fun for tonight. Straight to bed.”

Sadie pouted her best I’m-your-princess-and-if-I-beg look and turned on the guilt. “You promised, every night we’d have a story no matter how tired I am. And now Ms. Sprague is here and it’s her turn to read me a story.”

The kid had chutzpah.

“Baby girl—.”

“But daddy, if she leaves tomorrow like you said she has to, I’ll *never* get to hear her read a story.”

Oh brother. She knows how to milk every ounce of her daddy’s guilt.

Chapman’s shoulders slumped, resigned to giving in to his daughter. He turned to Vanessa. “Do you mind?”

“How could I, when she reminds me of how I used to con my daddy.” Vanessa worked up a sweet but effective pout of her own.

She was surprised when Chapman laughed. “Are you ladies all alike? Able to wrap daddies around your fingers?”

She and Sadie nodded at the same time.

Chapman sank down in defeat on the end of the bed. Vanessa sat at the head of the bed, resting against a pile of pink and lavender covered pillows, and started the story. “Once upon a time....” Sadie leaned into her, heat radiating off her tiny body. Maybe being a pretend mommy for one night wouldn’t be so bad.

About three pages into the fairy tale, cool fingers tickled Vanessa’s neck. She glanced down at a sleeping Sadie, now burrowed into her pile of pillows. One check at the end of the bed showed Chapman hadn’t moved a muscle.

A breeze, cold and brisk, raised goose bumps up and down her arms. Damn. Grampa Joe strutted by to stand at the foot of the bed, inches behind Chapman.

Joe winked, then disappeared.

Episode 8 - Michelle Libby

Carefully Vanessa untangled herself from the sleeping child and stood. Chapman was breathing deeply at the end of the bed. He too, was asleep. She smiled at the creases around his eyes as his face relaxed. He was handsome in a rugged sort of way. His dark hair fell over his forehead and he let out a deep sigh.

Vanessa hated to wake him. As grouchy as he was, he probably didn't get a lot of sleep, she thought. She scanned the room for something to cover him with. A quilt hung on the back of the rocking chair in the corner, which she retrieved and unfolded to place over her sleeping boss.

His hands grabbed hold of her arms and she let out a quick, squeaky shriek.

“What are you doing?” he growled, his eyes still full of sleep.

“You were asleep. I was covering you. You act like you need more sleep.”

His hands lessened their grip, but didn't release her. He rose up to standing without letting go or using her for leverage. He must have time to workout, she thought, wondering what his abs would feel like to her cold hands.

She clutched the quilt between them like a shield. His nearness caused her pulse to spike and she felt flush.

“Out,” he said, pushing her toward the door.

“Listen, I know you hired me to work for you, but that does not give you the right to man-handle – ”

He cut her off mid-sentence with his mouth covering hers, his arms reaching around her back to pull her toward him.

The kiss was demanding, warm and decidedly toe-curling. She wanted more and more as she responded to this virtual stranger. She opened her mouth as his tongue sought entrance, letting out a gasp and a sigh as he continued to kiss her senseless.

After a minute, he pulled away and looked deep into her eyes. His dark eyes blazed with a passion that hadn't been there before. She shook from the impact of his gaze.

“Do you know what I was dreaming about?” he asked, his voice husky, very different from the gruff man who had greeted her earlier today.

“No.”

“You. Ever since I saw you get out of that car, I’ve wanted to see what kissing you would be like.”

“I’d have never guessed.”

He ran his finger down her cheek. “I was angry because you could have been killed on the roads during a storm like this. Sadie’s mom was killed in a car accident.”

“I didn’t know. I’m so sorry. Is it still painful?”

He gave a disgusted snort. “She never loved me or living here. She wanted fame and fortune.”

He lowered his head to hers again and let his lips hover above hers for a few seconds, their breath mingling. Anticipation sent waves of pleasure to her neither regions, and when he closed the last centimeters and their mouths met, he kissed her like he was a drowning victim and she was the life raft.

“I want you,” he said, plainly. “I need you like I’ve needed no one else.”

Vanessa nodded and took his hand.

Chapman led her down the hall to the last door, turned the knob, swung the door open, waiting for her to enter.

The room didn’t give much of a clue as to who this man was. The dark mahogany wood and masculine comforter and curtains made her feel small and frilly. Had his wife done the decorating?

“I had a decorator re-do the room after Connie...left.”

“It’s impressive,” Vanessa said, walking into the room and sitting on his bed.

His eyes lit again with passion and he flexed his fingers at his side. “It’s been a long time for me.”

“Me too,” she said with a smile.

He slowly walked to her and sat next to her on his bed. “You are beautiful.”

“Thanks.”

“I don’t want you to leave.”

“Good. I don’t want to leave.”

He turned to her and gently laid her back on the abundant pillows at the head of the bed. He slid up her body, so they were laying his front against her side. Everywhere they touched she felt tingles.

He touched her face, his finger tracing the outline of her lips, then down her neck to the the vee in her shirt. He dipped his finger under the fabric, caressing the swells of her breasts. She couldn't lay still and started squirming under his touch, wanting more.

She wrapped her arm around his neck and pulled him to her. Kissing him desperately as her body snuggled harder against him. He rose above her holding himself on top of her and she continued kissing him, using her free hands to unbutton his shirt and then pants. Sliding the shirt, off his shoulders, she smiled at him.

“What?” he asked, defensive.

“I thought maybe you'd have great abs.” She stroked across the defined muscle lightly sprinkled with dark hair. Hard and warm.

He groaned.

“You like that?” she asked.

He rolled to the left, bringing her with him, until she sat straddled above him. “I want to see you,” he said, stripping her shirt and bra off, exposing her to him.

He used his abs to sit up, taking one nipple into his mouth, then the other.

What happened after that was a blur to Vanessa. They were taking everything slow and easy, but once he put his mouth on her breast it was like a match to tinder. There was ripping of clothes, and melding bodies, panting and moaning. She'd never felt pleasure like that before and when her orgasm over took her body, she thought she might never get enough of this satisfaction, this man.

Sometime in the early morning, she woke up, dressed in what she could find of her clothes and went back to her room. From her window she could see the full moon on the snow. Now was the time, if she was going to leave as requested, she had to do it now, before he woke up. Once she saw him again, she wouldn't be able to go. She knew he only told her to stay because he wanted her in his bed and she wasn't fool enough to fall for her boss...or was she?

She took one look back at the upstairs balcony, her heart heavy, her breasts and lady bits, still achy from their lovemaking, and left, closing the door behind her.

Episode 9 - C.V. Beane

Vanessa gripped her steering wheel so tight the knuckles on both hands turned white, and her veins looked as blue as the ocean. The snowstorm that had made driving so difficult earlier was now a heavy rain, but to make matters worse, in the distance, the night sky started to rumble. Way to go, you're out here in this weather instead of in a nice warm bed, oh and a hot guy, that seems to want you, she thought as the rumblings turned into thunder.

Vanessa took her foot off the gas and braked slowly for the turn that was coming. The car moved around the turn, as a clap of thunder filled the air and then a flash of lightning whipped across the window of the car. A second later another flash of lightning hit and Vanessa heard a crack and then a tree fell across the road. Slamming on the brakes the car slid right into the tree.

"Oh, this is just great," Vanessa said unbuckling her seatbelt, getting out of the car and looking back towards the house she just left. "You've really messed this up." Sighing, she grabbed her purse, computer bag and suitcase.

Taking her time on the slushy road, she worked her way back towards the house. Just as she made it to the end of the driveway, another clap of thunder filled the air. Then a flash of lightning hit the lamp post, blowing out the light and darkness descended upon Vanessa.

"Oh come on, you have got to be kidding." Shaking her head, she looked up at the dark sky. "If this is some sort of punishment for leaving the most wonderful man I've met in a long time, I'm sorry."

Her answer was more thunder and another flash of lightning. But it was what she saw in that flash that had her gasping. She tried to move, but found herself frozen where she stood. In the next flash of lightning an arm snaked out and then a hand snapped around her arm. In that moment the night around her was filled with an ear splitting scream.

Episode 10 - Pam Champagne

Vanessa dropped her computer, suitcase and purse to claw at the hands on her throat.

“You’ll pay for running, Van,” a voice she’d hoped never to hear again rasped against her ear. “What part of ‘you’re mine’ don’t you understand?”

Stars exploded in front of her eyes. Did he plan to kill her? Earl, her no-good former boyfriend, must have realized she couldn’t breathe, because the pressure on her throat lessened. Vanessa gasped in the icy air. “We’re over, Earl. You always were a little on the not so bright side.”

“It’s not over until I say so.” His burly hand connected with her cheek, knocking her to the wet ground. She had to control her errant tongue and not provoke him. Although she had early on in the relationship figured out Earl had been a liar and a cheat, she’d never seen his cruel side. How had he tracked her down? And why? She cursed her impulsiveness for leaving the house in the first place. If not for her pride, she’d be in Chapman’s arms under a warm, down duvet. “Get up,” Earl barked. “We’re going for a ride.”

Vanessa stayed put. “You must be insane if you think I’ll go anywhere with you. “Ouch! Stop that!” she yelled when he yanked her upright by her hair.

“Get in the car. Now!”

Vanessa dug her heels into the slippery grass, determined to fight him off.

“May I be of assistance, Miss Vanessa?”

Earl let go of her hair and swung around. “Who are you?”

Vanessa’s hope skyrocketed at Grampa Joe’s appearance, and just as fast plummeted. How could an elderly gentleman, a ghost to boot, stop a crazy man intent on kidnapping her?

“Disappear old man,” Earl warned. “What the—” Earl whispered when Grampa Joe did exactly that.

“Over here punk.” Earl staggered backwards when Joe reappeared next to Vanessa. She wanted to giggle at the fear on the scum-bag’s face.

Earl charged Joe, who dematerialized, and the lunatic ran head-first into a large hemlock. “Over here, Mr. Bully,” Joe hollered. Earl shook his head as if to clear his muddled mind and stared at Joe reclining on the hood of the Toyota Ravi. He then focused on Vanessa who’d had the sense to move out of harm’s way.

“You win, bitch. I’ve got no idea what’s going on here, but I don’t want any part of it. He started for his SUV and slid to halt as the engine started. After a second frenzied glance at Vanessa, he scrambled into the vehicle. Mud flew in all directions as he backed-up at a breakneck speed.

Vanessa watched the red tail lights fade from sight. “Good riddance, jerk,” she muttered.

“Amen to that.” She smiled at Joe, now standing at her side. “I’m glad you came back, young lady. Sadie needs you. My son does, too, although he’s a stubborn mule.” He chuckled. “I can’t imagine where he got that from.”

“Are there bad feelings between you and Chapman? I don’t mean to pry,” she rushed on at the frown on Joe’s forehead, “but he showed little emotion last night when he saw you.”

“We’re both pigheaded, and we seldom agreed on anything, including the weather.” Joe paused for long moments, making Vanessa wonder if she’d broached a topic better left alone. “My guess is that Chapman carries guilt in his heart for not making things right between us before I died. I certainly do.”

A blinding light suddenly flooded the yard. “Who’s out there?” Chapman’s voice boomed in the still night.

“We’ve been caught in the act, my dear. We’d best go face the music.” Joe smiled, and he gestured to Vanessa to precede him.

Episode 11 - Pam Champagne

“I’ll call the police.” Chapman paced the floor. Once Joe told the story, Chapman had become a mad man.

Vanessa ogled the muscles rippling his abs with each step. Half-dressed with his hair tousled from sleep, he’d never looked yummier. “Don’t bother. I guarantee he’ll never come back. Your father made sure of that.”

Chapman halted in front of Joe and tried to give him a hug, stepping back when his arms passed through his father’s body. “Thank you, Dad. If I’d lost—” he broke off, his eyes narrowing. “Why were you outside, Vanessa? His gaze drifted to the luggage creating a puddle on the floor. “You were leaving?”

Vanessa’s guilt must have shown on her face, because Chapman’s worried expression transformed to one of disbelief with a touch of hurt.

“I’ll leave you two alone to sort it all out.” Joe said, heading for the stairs.

“Why, Vanessa? After last night, I thought…”

Vanessa’s heart crumbled at the emotions flashing across his face. “I thought…” She cleared her throat. “Chapman, you have to understand.” Edging close, she held his hands. They remained limp in hers. “I didn’t want to stay here to be a nanny for Sadie during the day and warm your bed at night.”

Chapman pulled away. “That’s what you think of me? That I’d use you for sex and a…a babysitter?”

Vanessa held her ground. “I didn’t know what to think. We hardly know each other.”

Air whooshed from his lungs, and he enfolded her in his arms. His chin rested on top of her curls. “I am a fool. The moment you stepped out of the car, I wanted you, and it scared the hell out of me. That’s why I wanted you gone.” He drew back to search her eyes. “Can you forgive me for being an idiot and give me another chance? We can go as slow or as fast as you want. Just don’t leave me before you know me.”

His hardness pressing her stomach turned Vanessa’s knees to Jell-O. The need to have him naked next to her body made her giddy. She dug her fingers into his back. “Fast. I want to know you fast,” she moaned. “Like right now.”

Chapman forced her hand out of his pants. “You’re drenched. A shower first and then we have a few hours until morning.”

Ten minutes later, Vanessa feasted her eyes on Chapman sprawled on his king sized bed. She began to slide the robe down her shoulders, and heard the pitter patter of tiny feet.

“Vanessa!” Sadie screeched, running across the hardwood floor. “Are you going to be my mommy?”

Vanessa stroked the little girl’s hair. “We’ll see, sweetie. Daddy and I will talk to you tomorrow. It’s too early to be awake.” Vanessa’s passion for Chapman waned with his daughter clinging to her legs.

“Back to bed, Sadie. Now.” Chapman’s weak words belied his attempt at firmness.

“A story first, daddy!” Sadie launched herself onto the mattress.

“No. Stories are for bedtime.”

Vanessa chuckled at Sadie’s pout. “Tell you what, princess. Go to your room and I’ll come tell you a short one.”

“I’ll do it.” Chapman groaned at Joe’s sudden appearance in the room. “Can I have no privacy in my own bedroom?”

“I’m doing you a favor, son,” Joe said with a sly look. “If I’m intruding, I’ll disappear.”

Vanessa answered before Chapman said something hurtful. “Of course we do, Joe.”

Sadie beamed at her Grampa and followed him out of the room.

“Thanks, Dad,” Chapman said to the retreating two, “but--”

Vanessa jumped on the bed and stopped Chapman’s words with a kiss. “No more butting heads with your father. You’re one of lucky ones, my love. You have a second chance to make things right with someone you’ve lost. Don’t screw it up.”

In one swift move Chapman rolled and covered her with his body. “You’re right, sweetheart. It’s just that I’m so hungry for you, I have no patience.”

His next kiss wiped all thoughts from Vanessa’s mind. Chapman’s hands on her breasts drove her over the edge.

The slam of the bedroom door ruined the moment. Startled they broke apart. “Remember, there is a child in this house.” Joe’s voice was loud in the room.

They burst into laughter. “At least we’ll have some privacy now. Life will never be dull in Heath House, my love.” Chapman’s whisper feathered across her breasts right before he drew her nipple into his mouth.

The truth hit Vanessa at that very moment. She'd found her place in life and she'd never been happier. With a sigh she surrendered to Chapman's wandering mouth and hands.

THE END