

The background features a faint, light gray illustration of a hand holding a diamond ring. The ring has a large, faceted diamond set in a band. A chain with square links is draped across the bottom of the hand. The entire scene is set against a light, textured background that resembles a stone or mineral surface.

MINE

RACHAEL TAMAYO

———— TANGLED TREE PUBLISHING ————

MINE

A DEADLY SINS NOVEL

RACHAEL TAMAYO

TANGLED TREE PUBLISHING

ALSO BY RACHAEL TAMAYO

DEADLY SINS

BREAK MY BONES

CARNAL KNOWLEDGE

MINE

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*To anyone who was ever just crazy enough to stand
up and refuse to give up. Don't hide that crazy. Let
that flag fly.*

THE SIN OF GREED

“Avarice begets more vices than Priam did children and like Priam survives them all. It starves its keeper to surfeit those who wish him dead and makes him submit to more mortifications to lose heaven than the martyr undergoes to gain it.” —Charles Caleb Colton

PART I

PROLOGUE

I HANG UP THE PHONE, CLICKING THE END button with a finger that leaves a red smudge on my screen. *They'll be here soon.*

I look around, just to be sure it's all where it needs to be. Everything seems to be in its place. An organized chaos of sorts, I suppose.

Knowing I don't have much time, I start to work the buttons on my shirt with steady fingers, then slide it off my shoulders, taking it into the kitchen. Standing in my bra and jeans, I use the wet dishcloth I find in the sink to scrub the stain, groaning at my stupidity as I struggle to clean the satin top. I should have known. I wasn't thinking straight. The water runs red, just like it did when I washed my hands moments ago. I used the Dawn dish soap on the sink,

thick blue liquid mixing with the red as I soaped and lathered, using a veggie scrubber from the counter for my nails. The stain won't come out. I whimper, remembering how expensive the blouse was. I contemplate using the brush on my shirt, but it will ruin the delicate fabric. I bought this blouse special for tonight. It was our anniversary, after all.

I hold the shirt up. It's dripping. The deep purple top is now marred. Mocking me, bright and red, now simply smeared by the soap, deepened into the delicate fabric by the scrubbing. Ruined. I frown.

I should have taken it off. But they would have known if I did that, so maybe I should have worn something else. I roll my eyes, squeezing the top out, then leaving it hanging over the counter. Oh well, I'll buy another one. I head to the bedroom and find an old T-shirt, slipping it over my head. I look down at my jeans. The stains there aren't so bad that I need to change. Surely it's in my hair too. I frown, needing to shower. But there's no time, and it'll cause too many questions.

In the living room, I find him where I left him, lying on the couch. I bend and kiss full, damp lips. Still warm. I wipe the blood from my lips with the back of my hand.

There's a knock on the door: the police, the

ambulance. I start to cry again before I move, unlocking and opening it.

“Thank God you’re here.” I sniffle, a sob breaking from my lips as I glance over my shoulder at the aftermath. “I... he...” I’m on the verge of hyperventilation.

Three officers look past me, seeming to calmly observe the scene behind me on the couch from their vantage point just outside the front door.

“Are you hurt?” The older female officer reaches for me. “Is this your blood?”

I shake my head and am detained immediately. Dragged aside, cold metal clipped around my wrists behind my back as I sob. “I had to get him off me. He was going to kill me. I didn’t mean to. I just wanted him to stop. Can you help him?”

I watch the other two officers. One moves to the body on the couch, carefully bending over him. A gloved hand reaches for his neck to check for a pulse. The other turns, taking in the room, glancing at me as I stare back with wide, wet eyes.

The officer holding me leads me out the door in silence, leaving the others inside. The ambulance pulls up, red and blue lighting up the area as the officer closes the door.

Now standing just outside the front door, I break

away and rush to the entry, only to be pulled back. I release a wail. “Is he going to live? I didn’t mean to. I was just so afraid.” I try to shake free of the handcuffs that have me detained, from the strong hands that gently squeeze my arm. “I didn’t want to kill him. He just wouldn’t get off me. You have to save him. Please don’t let him die,” I beg. “It’s my fault. I should have known better. I should have backed off, but I’d caught him with that woman, and—”

I’m pulled gently yet forcefully away, down the steps and across the driveway, then placed in the back of a police cruiser. I meet the eyes of a woman, big and brown. She feels sorry for me. She does a poor job of hiding her sympathy.

“Can you help him? He’s really not so bad.” I sniffle. “It was all my fault. I didn’t mean to make him so angry. He told me to leave him alone, and I didn’t listen. Please. You have to understand.”

“I’ll see what can be done. Just sit tight.”

She shuts the door, but she doesn’t go far. I can’t be left alone, you know. Suspect in a murder and all that.