



borrowed heart

book one of the evie sanders series

**a novel by
linda lamberson**

BORROWED HEART

by

Linda Lamberson

Borrowed Heart.

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prologue

“Eve, how much of the accident do you remember?” Peter began.

“Not much.” I strained to remember anything about it, but I couldn’t. The chain of events was all so hazy. I looked down at the floor as if it could provide me with the clarity I sought.

“I was driving ... there was another car—two cars, I think. One of the drivers was ... drunk. But there was someone else ... something else happened.” I was mumbling, trying to talk myself through the accident. And then a memory flashed through my mind; I saw two bright lights barreling towards me as I was standing in the middle of the highway. Instantly, the accident, or at least the very last part of it, became crystal clear.

No one could have survived that, I told myself. I gasped and looked at Peter in terror.

“How ... how long have I been ... dead?” My words were barely audible, choked back by the fear and anguish of my horrifying realization. Peter glanced down at his watch.

“Nearly five days,” he said apologetically.

Nearly five days. I repeated Peter’s words in my head, not really knowing how to process this information.

“Am ... am I in Heaven?” I asked in shock.

“It’s a little complicated,” Peter answered.

1. starstruck

“I’ve never seen an aura like this before,” she said in her thick Eastern-European accent, shifting her gaze from my hands to my eyes. “It’s so strange ...”

“I don’t understand. What’s so strange?” I asked. I had been there for all of two minutes and already thought this was some sort of a scam. I tried to pull my hands away from the woman sitting across the table from me, but she only tightened her grip. Her almond-shaped black eyes looked almost sinister with the thick layers of black eyeliner and mascara around them. She pulled me in closer.

“It seems as though your fate is shifting—*changing*—right before my very eyes.” She looked down at my hands again and began mumbling to herself in her native language. Then she glanced back up at me in alarm.

“Listen to me very carefully. What I’m about to say is important,” she warned gravely. “Bad things always happen in threes. You will have two near-death experiences, and then the third ... I’m sorry ...” Her voice trailed off.

Wait a minute—did she really just tell me that I was going to die? I was beyond shocked. I was beyond offended. I was downright pissed off. This was supposed to be some fun, harmless psychic reading. Some “oh-you-have-a-boyfriend-who-loves-you-and-will-be-with-you-forever” type of crap—not some “I-hate-to-be-the-one-to-tell-you-but-you’re-on-death’s-door” cryptic voodoo message from beyond. Who was she anyway? A psychic? Yeah, right! More like a *psycho*—a twisted, sick fraud who got off dressing like a gypsy and preying on the fears of others.

“Look,” I began, “I don’t know who the hell you think you are or what you think you’re doing, but if you think I believe one word of this psychic *babble*, you’re crazy.” I tried to stand up, but I couldn’t. Her long fingers were still clutched around my wrists like a hawk’s talons around its next meal.

“Psychic babble, hmm? Let’s see.” Still grasping both of my wrists, she closed her eyes and began spewing out various facts about me.

“My dear, you traveled from Michigan to be here today. Your parents—they are lawyers. In fact, the two of them met in law school and are still together. And you—you’re very smart,” she opened her eyes and studied my face, “but skeptical. And you trust your own judgment above everyone else’s, even that of your parents.”

Okay, so she was dead on, I thought. But I was still convinced the psychic was a fraud. Emma could’ve told her this stuff about me. It was my best friend’s idea to come here today, and she had met with the psychic first.

“You could have pumped my friend for most of that information,” I said suspiciously. “And judging from my reaction to your *reading*, you easily could have guessed the rest.”

“You have been through a lot in your young life,” the psychic continued, ignoring me. “When you were younger, someone close to you was very sick.” She suddenly looked at me like she knew my deepest, darkest secrets. “Your mother ... she almost died.”

“What? How ... how did you know about that?” Now I genuinely was surprised. Very few people, of whom Emma was not one, had known about my mom’s battle with cancer. It was the main reason why my dad retired from practicing law in Chicago to do legal consulting. It was also why we moved to Sawyer, Michigan when I was nine to spend more time together as a family.

“Trust me, dear,” the psychic responded, “I know more about you than I would like to. And I’m very sorry to tell you this, but you have been marked with the Curse of Three. I’ve only ever heard of the Curse. I have never before met anyone who was stricken with it.” She paused, inhaling deeply. “I’m sorry, my dear ... but you will not see your nineteenth birthday.”

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My mind, my soul, my entire body exploded with rage. I tore my hands away from the psychic's grip only to lurch forward in my bed startled and confused. Beads of sweat formed on my brow as a wave of panic swept over me. I looked around and laughed nervously. I was in my dorm room. It was just a dream. It was only a bad dream.

I took a deep breath and sighed in relief before groaning and falling back into bed. My face was buried under a blanket of my long brown hair, which helped block out some of the morning light beaming through my dorm windows. I knew I had to get up, but I was exhausted. My hand blindly wandered over to my bedside table, grabbed my alarm clock, and brought it inches from my face. Eight fifteen. *Crap!* It was later than I thought.

A new type of panic washed over me; I was going to be late for my psychology class—again. I grabbed my glasses and flew out of bed. The winter chill hit me as soon as I stood up. I groaned once more. It was nearly a month into the second semester of my freshman year at Indiana University, and Bloomington was a pretty cold and miserable place to be in the dead of winter.

My roommate, Lisa, was nowhere to be found. She was probably already eating breakfast. Shivering, I scanned the floor on my side of the room for anything that resembled clean clothes. I spotted my favorite grey IU sweatshirt, already worn through around the neck and sleeves from over-use, and quickly threw it over the T-shirt I had slept in the previous night. On the other side of my bed, I found a pair of jeans and my boots and pulled them on. Usually I wouldn't be caught dead wearing my glasses out in public, but I was running so late I didn't have time to mess with my contacts. I gathered my hair into a makeshift bun at the nape of my neck and hid the rest of it under an off-white knit hat. No make-up other than a little bit of clear lip gloss, but that was standard protocol for me. I only wore makeup when I went out at night. I popped a stick of gum in my mouth and threw on my

winter coat. Then I grabbed my backpack, my mittens, and my roommate's scarf, which I absolutely adored, and bolted out the door praying I could still catch the campus bus.

Not a chance. I ran out of my dorm building just in time to watch the bus pull away from the stop. *Great.*

I really hated Wednesdays. It was bad enough that I had four classes and my biology lab today, but on Wednesdays my psychology class started at eight thirty in the morning. Apparently, Professor Swain already had some prior commitment this weekday morning. And rather than reschedule the entire three-day-a-week class, he forced his students to show up an hour earlier than the regularly scheduled lecture once a week. Unfortunately, Swain's seminar was a prerequisite for my major, so I sucked it up and registered for it anyway, knowing I would regret it someday.

As luck would have it, today would be the day of several regrets, including this class. Out of breath, I ran into the lecture hall later than usual. Swain stopped mid-sentence and glared at me. The room fell completely silent; I could feel every pair of eyes on me. Blood started rushing to my face, and I was thankful that my cheeks were already flushed from the brisk walk to class in below freezing temperatures.

"I'm glad you decided to grace us with your presence this morning," Swain said condescendingly while he peered at me over the top rims of his bifocals.

"Um, sorry ... rough morning." Mortified, I slinked into the first open chair I spotted and removed my jacket and mittens as quickly and inconspicuously as possible.

Swain's lecture was on Erikson's developmental stages of the human psyche, but I couldn't pay attention to a word he was saying. I was still rattled by my nightmare. It had been a while since I had even thought about the psychic. So why now? As I sat there in class, I mentally rehashed the day I met Madame Sasha.

It was nearly two years ago during my junior year of high school that Emma had overheard one of her mom's friends

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talking about a “truly gifted” psychic in Chicago that everyone should see at least once in their lives. Emma loved that sort of stuff. The next thing I knew, we were ditching school and driving the hour-and-a-half to Chicago so we could pay this woman to tell us about our futures.

I remembered standing outside the small wood-sided house built next to the El tracks, which loomed above. The two-story structure was painted a pale, buttercup yellow with white trim. A rusted-chain link fence surrounded the house, separating it from its grim surroundings. It was a charming little home in a not-so-charming urban neighborhood. Emma and I giggled anxiously as we slowly made our way up the stairs of the house to the small front porch. Before we even had a chance to ring the bell, however, a middle-aged woman opened the door.

“Good afternoon,” she said in her thick accent. “I am Madame Sasha.”

Emma and I giggled again like little kids. Emma was excited to be there. I, on the other hand, felt downright foolish. I didn’t believe in any of this nonsense, but Emma swore up and down that this woman was the real deal. And as Emma’s best friend, it was my duty to be her partner in crime that day to go see this so-called real deal. Besides, it had been a beautiful spring day in April, and I didn’t feel like wasting it away sitting in class.

I remembered cringing at the thought of how my boyfriend Ryan would react if he knew I had ditched school to go see a psychic. He would have been disappointed to say the least. It was the one time I was glad we had gone to separate schools. For the most part, I was a good student. I certainly hadn’t made a habit of skipping class. But Ryan had taken high school much more seriously than I had. No doubt, he would graduate near the top of his class. He’d never ditch, especially for something this asinine. No, I wouldn’t ever tell him about this little adventure. In fact, if I had my say, this

trip would be one of life's little moments I wouldn't recount to anyone.

"Come in, come in." Madame Sasha smiled as she waved us into her home. Her long dark hair was pulled severely away from her face and tied back with a multi-colored silk sash. She had dark, olive-toned skin, which I suspected would have looked more youthful and attractive if she hadn't used so much makeup. She wore a garnet-colored button-down silk blouse tucked into a billowy, black skirt that ended just above her ankles. She was barefoot; her toenails were painted a dark plum color, the same color as on her long, manicured fingernails. Large, gold hoops hung from her ears, and several gold bangles were stacked on each wrist. Her fingers were adorned with gold rings inset with oversized, semi-precious stones of every color—amethysts, yellow and blue topazes, garnets, and a huge black onyx. Around her neck, however, she wore an understated, small, silver charm on a thin, silver chain; it looked out of place compared to the rest of her ornate jewelry.

I remembered the smell of Madame Sasha's strong, musky perfume as Emma and I followed the psychic into her living room. The room's décor seemed to be at odds with the exotic-looking woman standing in the middle of it. The overwhelming scent of sweet floral incense and Pine-Sol soon filled my nose. The room itself was surprisingly pink—the carpet, the drapes—even the armchairs were all a dusty rose color. Only the sofa differed in motif; it was covered in white, satin polyester that was ambushed by an explosion of bold pink and green floral patterns. What was even more remarkable was that *all* of the upholstered furniture was protected underneath thick, translucent plastic sheaths. Plastic runners also covered large sections of the carpet. The room could only be described as tacky-retro-granny-chic run amuck.

"Okay, I see that Erikson's infant and toddler stages are not moving us this morning," Professor Swain barked loudly and abruptly. His voice jolted me back into reality. Was he

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singling me out again? Anxiety began creeping up the back of my throat, making it difficult for me to breathe. I peered up at Swain out of the corner of my eye and then quickly scanned the lecture hall. Thankfully, I was far from the only person whose head seemed to be in the clouds this morning. Relieved, I looked down at my notebook and tried not to call any additional attention to myself.

“Let’s end class early today,” Swain announced in frustration. “We’ll pick up on Friday where we left off today. And everyone, please bring a little more enthusiasm with you to the next class. This information could appear on your mid-term exam.” He gathered his lecture notes and walked swiftly out the door.

Thank you, Professor Swain, I said to myself. Now I didn’t have to race across campus to make my bio lab. Still somewhat preoccupied with my dream, I absentmindedly began packing up my stuff.

“Hey, would you mind giving me your notes from last Friday’s class?”

Startled, I looked up to see who was asking. My jaw dropped open. It was *him*.

“That is if you were here last Friday,” he added.

Painfully aware of how ridiculous I must have looked, I snapped my mouth shut, stood up, and put on my jacket. I had noticed him the first day of class. In fact, I was pretty sure that every girl in the class had noticed him. He was stunning. Standing next to me, he towered over my five-foot-seven-inch frame. His thick, black, wavy hair ended just below his ears. He had the deepest blue eyes I’d ever seen; they looked like dark blue sapphires against his golden skin. His black parka was unzipped, and I could see traces of his chest and stomach muscles beneath his white T-shirt.

I must have been standing there for a while, utterly star-struck, because he leaned down towards me and picked up my backpack. As he did, his right shoulder brushed up against my arm and my skin tingled at the point of contact. I gasped.

Get a grip, I told myself. I took a deep breath to calm myself and was hit by the smell of mint, citrus, and a hint of something else—what was it? Chlorine? Whatever the combination, he smelled amazing. I felt a wave of heat begin to creep up my face. Knowing full well that my cheeks were turning red, I turned my head away from him slightly.

My reaction to him surprised me. Yes, he was hot as hell; but it wasn't like he was the only attractive guy I had met at IU. So why was I acting like a complete idiot around him? It was probably because I was still flustered from the unwanted attention I'd received when I walked into class so late. The fact that I looked like something the cat had dragged in from the back woods certainly didn't help matters any. Of all the days this guy had to ask me for my notes, why *this* one? I suddenly was annoyed with myself for not even putting in my contacts that morning.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you. I guess I should've introduced myself before I tried to snag your notes. I'm Quinn." His voice was soft, velvety, and deep; it was like music to my ears, but it still paled in comparison to his appearance. There was no need for introductions. I definitely knew who Quinn was—just not by name ... not until now anyway. Trying to regain my composure, I glanced over at his two friends waiting for him in the wings.

"What, Larry and Curly don't come to class either?" I asked. I desperately wanted to run out of the lecture hall—away from Quinn and his friends—before I made an even bigger fool of myself. I zipped up my jacket, adjusted the scarf around my neck, and grabbed my mittens before motioning towards the front door of class. But Quinn just stood there, unfazed by my gesture.

"Would you trust the likes of them for class notes?" He smiled at me, and I felt more heat surge through my face. Quinn's smile was captivating; it made him even more attractive and charming, if that were at all possible. Even if he hadn't been blocking my escape route, I would have been

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afraid to move for fear that my knees would buckle under me with my first step.

This is totally ridiculous, I snapped at myself. *Stop acting like a bumbling idiot; grab your stuff and walk out of here.* I took a deep breath and looked directly into Quinn's eyes.

"And you would trust me? A perfect stranger that you randomly picked out of the class?"

"You tell me. Should I not trust you? I mean, you certainly look smarter than those two heathens ... and a bit more attractive I might add," Quinn said without missing a beat.

"Great, so I'm a step above a heathen. Thanks," I responded, taking another mental inventory of my appearance and shuddering. Totally cute guy talking to a seriously gnarly-looking girl—and he knew it. *Could this morning get any worse?*

"Let me ask you something," I continued. "Do you always make a point of being so nice to someone you're asking for help?" The flippant edge in my voice was not overlooked by Quinn's friends. I swore I heard "Mayday" calls coming from their general direction as they tried to stifle their laughter.

"Let me ask *you* something." His voice remained calm as he ignored his friends. "Do you always make a point of being so difficult when someone asks for your help? Hmm ... I bet Professor Swain would have something to say about that." He flashed me a playful little grin.

Heat surged into my face again. It wasn't like me to be this rude. A twinge of guilt rippled through me for acting so callously towards Quinn. I just couldn't remember the last time a guy made me feel so self-conscious, and it bothered me. In fact, I couldn't remember the last time I even cared about what some random guy thought about me. I momentarily set aside my foul mood and forced myself to return Quinn's smile.

"Didn't he already say enough about me this morning?" I asked as I rolled my eyes.

Quinn laughed. The sound of his laughter drew me in further. I wanted to hear it again, but he simply handed me my backpack instead.

“Oh, thanks.” I took my bag from his outstretched hand and threw it over my shoulder. “Look, I’m sorry. It’s just that good moods and early mornings don’t really go hand-in-hand with me—especially when I’m running late for my next class. Speaking of which,” I looked down at my watch, “I really have to run. Excuse me.” I gently pushed by Quinn and walked out the lecture hall.

I opened the double doors of the psychology building, keenly aware that Quinn was right behind me. A rush of cold winter air hit my face. I welcomed it. I took a deep breath, letting the frosty air fill my lungs. Exhaling slowly, I watched as a thick cloud of steam escaped my mouth and quickly dissipated before my eyes. I had to admit, there was something beautiful about the fresh-fallen snow on this sunny winter’s morning. Everything was white and pure, covered in a blanket of snow. Every limb of every tree looked like it had been frosted with a layer of vanilla buttercream at least an inch or two thick. Icicles were glistening like crystals in the sunlight, hanging from the branches like Christmas ornaments. Even the crisp air smelled fresh and inviting.

As if my feet were on autopilot, I started walking towards my next class, being careful to avoid patches of ice. Quinn walked alongside me, talking the entire way. *Maybe his next class is across campus, too*, I thought.

As we walked, I couldn’t help but wonder what everyone we passed was thinking when they saw what an odd pair he and I made.

Quinn mentioned he was from somewhere just outside of Chicago. He also mentioned he was a sophomore and was attending IU on a swim scholarship.

Figures, I said to myself.

“So what about you? What’s your story?” Quinn asked, just as we arrived in front of the building that housed my bi-

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ology lab. I honestly couldn't figure out why this guy was suddenly so interested in getting to know me—or why I was suddenly so interested in getting to know him.

“Ah, just in the nick of time.” I let out a quick sigh of relief followed by a little laugh. “Here's my next stop ... I guess I'll see you in class on Friday.”

“Yeah, um, speaking of this Friday ... what are you doing that night?” Quinn took a step forward, closing the distance between us. I could feel the warmth of his breath kiss my face.

“Friday night? Why?” I asked hesitantly. *He* couldn't possibly be asking *me* out.

“Well, there's going to be this huge party at a friend's fraternity—invitation only. I could get you on the list if you wanted to stop by—you know, to show my appreciation for letting me borrow your notes.”

Not a date, I told myself.

“Oh thanks, but that's not really necessary.” Did I detect a hint of disappointment in my voice? What was going on with me?

“I know, but it'll be fun—lots of people, live music, the whole deal. You really should come. Bring some friends if you want.”

“Sounds great,” I blurted out without thinking. *Why did I just say that?* I lashed out at myself. “But ... uh, I'm not sure I can go.” I was backtracking. “My friends and I already have plans that night.” I tried to sound nonchalant, but my words were forced and my throat was parched, making my voice sound raspy. I felt the blood rushing to my cheeks, no doubt turning them deep crimson. My body was betraying me, and I was sure that Quinn could see it. I dropped my head slightly, masking my embarrassment by paying an undue amount of attention to the task of taking off my mittens.

Quinn lifted my face up towards his and held it there for a moment until my eyes reluctantly caught up. When our eyes met, he gently brushed the tip of my nose with his finger.

“You should come.” He smiled at me. His perfect full lips parted so that I could see his pearly white teeth. His smile was so seductive; it was like a secret weapon, rendering me utterly defenseless against his charms. I felt my heart skip a beat.

“Thanks again for your notes,” he added as he turned and walked away. Unable to move, I just stood there and watched him leave.

It dawned on me that I hadn’t even agreed to give Quinn my psych notes. He just presumed I would hand them over. And he was right—I would. Nevertheless, that still didn’t excuse his arrogance. Irritated, I frowned.

Quinn suddenly turned towards me again, catching me off guard. *Crap!* He probably thought my expression was due to his leaving.

“That’s just great, Evie. Just great,” I mumbled under my breath. “Way to look like even more of an idiot.”

“Hey,” Quinn called out to me. “What’s your name?”

“Eve—but most people call me Evie,” I managed.

“Well, *Ee-vee*,” he said, drawing out each syllable of my name, “I hope to see you Friday night.” He winked at me, turned back around, and continued to walk away.

It wasn’t until Quinn was almost out of sight that my heart jumpstarted itself and began pounding in my ears. This was nothing—nothing at all, I assured myself. I wasn’t acting like myself today. My reaction to Quinn was just par for the course for the strange morning I was having. It was just bad timing that he chose today of all days to flirt with me to get his hands on my psych notes. I’m sure he used his God-given “talents” all the time to get what he wanted. He probably suspected I was still rattled by walking into class late, and he used it to his advantage, knowing exactly how I’d react to his little performance. And I was sure I did not disappoint. I cringed, realizing what a predictable and easy target I’d been.

Out of nowhere, Ryan’s face popped into my head. He hadn’t crossed my mind once since Quinn had approached

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me after class. I cringed again, even more disgusted with myself. *What in the world was wrong with me today?* I pulled out my cell phone and called Ryan, only to get his voice mail.

“Hey there, it’s me,” I said. “I was just thinking of you.” *Ugh.* I prayed Ryan couldn’t hear the guilt in my voice. “I wanted to tell you that I love you and I miss you. Talk to you later.” I ended the call wishing more than ever that Ryan and I attended the same school.

I looked at my watch and realized that my lab had already begun. I was late to yet another class.

Great. Just great, I said to myself as I bolted up the steps and inside the building.

* * *



Linda Lamberson is a Chicago-area native, an author, and a devoted mother and wife. After studying at Indiana University in Bloomington, she attended graduate school at The University of Chicago, where she received her Master's degree in Social Service Administration and then her Juris Doctor degree, and worked as an intellectual property attorney.

In 2009, Linda was inspired to create the Evie Sanders series while on a flight home. A conversation with a neighboring passenger made Linda think about a car accident she'd been in while a freshman in college—an accident she was lucky enough to walk away from unscathed, much to the surprise and shock of witnesses. For the remainder of the flight she couldn't shake the thought, "What if I hadn't survived? Would that have been the end of my story?" That same night, Linda started writing.

Read *Peace of Mind* and *Soul to Shepherd*, the second & third installments of the Evie Sanders series, now available.

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