

Night Sins/Guilty as Sin

By Tami Hoag

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“ONE OF THE MOST INTENSE SUSPENSE WRITERS AROUND.”
—*CHICAGO TRIBUNE*

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Tami Hoag delivers a double shot of suspense in these two adrenaline-charged classic thrillers offered together in one powerful volume.

NIGHT SINS

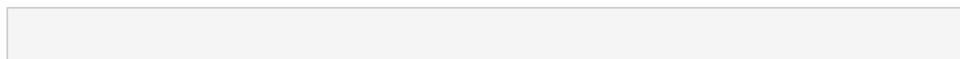
A peaceful Minnesota town is about to face its worst nightmare. A young boy disappears and the only clue is a note—taunting and casually cruel. Has a cold-blooded kidnapper struck? Or is this the reawakening of a long-quiet serial killer? For a tough-minded investigator, it's her first make-or-break case. For a local cop, it's the fear that big-city evil has come to stalk his small-town home. Together they'll hunt a madman who knows no bounds and for whom no sin is forbidden.

“Nerve-shattering, explosive entertainment, and should not be missed by anyone who reads for the thrill of it.” —Michael Palmer

GUILTY AS SIN

A psychopath has been playing a twisted game with a terrified Minnesota town. Now a respected member of the community stands accused of a chilling act of evil. But when a second boy vanishes, a frightened public demands to know if the police have caught the wrong man. Is the nightmare continuing...or just beginning? Prosecutor Ellen North believes she has the right man—but that he has an accomplice in the shadows. Ellen suddenly finds herself swept into a cruel contest of wits, a dark game of life and death... with an evil mind as guilty as sin.

“A chilling study of evil that holds the reader until the shocking surprise ending.”
—Phillip Margolin



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Editorial Review

About the Author

Tami Hoag's novels have appeared regularly on national bestseller lists since the publication of her first book in 1988. She lives in Los Angeles.

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Chapter One

January 12, 1994. Day 1

5:26 p.m. 22;

Josh Kirkwood and his two best buddies burst out of the locker room, flying into the cold, dark late afternoon, hollering at the tops of their lungs. Their breath billowed out in rolling clouds of steam. They flung themselves off the steps like mountain goat kids leaping from ledge to ledge and landed hip-deep in the snow on the side of the hill. Hockey sticks skittered down, gear bags sliding after. Then came the Three Amigos, squealing and giggling, tucked into balls of wild-colored ski jackets and bright stocking caps.

The Three Amigos. That was what Brian's dad called them. Brian's family had moved to Deer Lake, Minnesota, from Denver, Colorado, and his dad was still a big Broncos fan. He said the Broncos used to have some wide receivers called the Three Amigos and they were really good. Josh was a Vikings fan. As far as he was concerned, every other team was just a bunch of wusses, except maybe the Raiders, 'cause their uniforms were cool. He didn't like the Broncos, but he liked the nickname—the Three Amigos.

"We are the Three Amigos!" Matt yelled as they landed in a heap at the bottom of the hill. He threw back his head and howled like a wolf. Brian and Josh joined in, and the racket was so terrible it made Josh's ears ring.

Brian fell into a fit of uncontrollable giggles. Matt flopped onto his back and started making a snow angel, swinging his arms and legs in wide arcs, looking as if he were trying to swim back up the hill. Josh pushed himself to his feet and shook like a dog as Coach Olsen came out of the ice arena.

Coach was old—at least forty-five—kind of fat and mostly bald, but he was a good coach. He yelled a lot, but he laughed a lot, too. He told them at the beginning of hockey season that if he got too cranky they were to remind him they were only eight years old. The team had picked Josh for that job. He was one of the co-captains, a responsibility that pleased him a lot even though he would never say so. Nobody liked a bragger, Mom said. If you did your job well, there wasn't any reason to brag. A good job would speak for itself.

Coach Olsen started down the steps, tugging down the earflaps of his hunting cap. The end of his nose was red from the cold. His breath came out of his mouth and went up around his head like smoke from a chimney. "You guys have rides home tonight?"

They answered all at once, vying for the coach's attention by being loud and silly. He laughed and held his gloved hands up in surrender. "All right, all right! The rink's open if you get cold waiting. Olie's inside if you need to use the phone."

Then Coach jumped into his girlfriend's car, the way he did every Wednesday, and off they went to have

dinner at Grandma's Attic downtown. Wednesday was Grandma's famous meat loaf night. All-U-Can-Eat, it said on the menu. Josh imagined Coach Olsen could eat a lot.

Cars rumbled around the circular drive in front of the Gordie Knutson Memorial Arena, a parade of minivans and station wagons, doors banging, exhaust pipes coughing. Kids from the various Squirt League teams chucked their sticks and equipment in trunks and hatches and climbed into the cars with their moms or dads, talking a mile a minute about the plays and drills they had worked on in practice.

Matt's mom pulled up in their new Transport, a wedge-shaped thing that to Josh looked like something from Star Trek. Matt scrambled for his gear and dashed across the sidewalk, calling a good-bye over his shoulder. His mother, wearing a bright red stocking cap, buzzed down the passenger window.

"Josh, Brian—you guys have rides?"

"My mom's coming," Josh answered, suddenly feeling eager to see her. She would pick him up on her way home from the hospital and they would stop at the Leaning Tower of Pizza to get supper and she would want to hear all about practice. Really want to hear. Not like Dad. Lately, Dad just pretended to listen. Sometimes he even snapped at Josh to be quiet. He always apologized later, but it still made Josh feel bad.

"My sister's coming," Brian called. "My sister, Beth Butt-head," he added under his breath as Mrs. Connor drove away.

"You're the butt-head," Josh teased, shoving him.

Brian shoved back, laughing, three big gaps showing in his mouth where teeth had been. "Butt-head!"

"Butt-breath!"

"Butt-face!"

Brian scooped up a mitten full of snow and tossed it in Josh's face, then turned and ran up the snow-packed sidewalk, bounded up the steps, and dashed around the side of the brick building. Josh let out a war whoop and bolted after him. Immediately they were so involved in their game of Attack, the rest of the world ceased to exist. One boy hunted the other to deliver a snowball up close in the face, in the back, down the neck of the jacket. After a successful attack the roles reversed and the hunter became the hunted. If the hunter couldn't find the hunted in a count of a hundred, the hunted scored a point.

Josh was good at hiding. He was small for his age and he was smart, a combination that served him well in games like Attack. He smashed Brian in the back of the head with a snowball, whirled and ran. Before Brian had shaken the snow off his coat, Josh was safely tucked behind the air-conditioning units that squatted beside the building. The cylinders were covered with canvas for the winter months and blocked the wind. They sat well back along the side of the building, where the streetlights didn't quite reach. Josh watched as Brian ventured cautiously around a Dumpster, snowball in hand, pouncing at a shadow, then drawing back. Josh smiled to himself. He had found the all-time best hiding place. He licked the tip of a gloved forefinger and drew himself a point in the air.

Brian homed in on one of the overgrown bushes that lined the edge of the parking lot and separated the ice rink grounds from the fairgrounds. Tongue sticking out the side of his mouth, he crept toward it. He hoped Josh hadn't gone farther than the hedges. The fairgrounds was the creepiest place in the world this time of

year, when all the old buildings stood dark and empty and the wind howled around them.

A car horn blared and Brian swung around, heart pounding. He groaned in disappointment as his sister's Rabbit pulled up around the curve.

"Come on, hurry up, Brian! I've got pageant practice tonight!"

"But—"

"But nothing, twerp!" Beth Hiatt snapped. The wind whipped a strand of long blond hair across her face and she snagged it back behind her ear with a bare hand white with cold. "Get your little butt in the car!"

Brian heaved a sigh and dropped his snowball, then trudged toward his gear bag and hockey stick. Beth the Bitch raced the Rabbit's motor, put the car in gear, and let it lurch ahead on the drive, as if she might just leave him behind. She had done that once before and they had both gotten hollered at, but Brian had gotten the worst of it because Beth blamed him for getting her in trouble and spent four days tormenting him for it. Instantly forgetting his game and the remaining amigo, he grabbed his stuff and ran for the car, already plotting ways to get his sister back for being such a snot.

Behind the air-conditioning units, Josh heard Beth Hiatt's voice. He heard the car doors slam and he heard the Rabbit roar around the circle drive. So much for the game.

He crawled out of his hiding spot and went back around the front of the building. The parking lot was empty except for Olie's old rusted-out Chevy van. The next practice didn't start for an hour. The circular drive was empty. Packed over the asphalt by countless tires, the snow gleamed in the glow of the streetlights, as hard and shiny as milky-white marble. Josh tugged off his left glove and shoved up the sleeve of his ski jacket to peer at the watch Uncle Tim had sent him for Christmas. Big and black with lots of dials and buttons, it looked like something a scuba diver might wear—or a commando. Sometimes Josh pretended that he was a commando, a man on a mission, waiting to meet with the world's most dangerous spy. The numbers on the watch face glowed green in the dark: 5:45.

Josh looked down the street, expecting to see headlights, expecting to see the minivan with his mom at the wheel. But the street was dark. The only lights glowed dimly out the windows of houses that lined the block. Inside those houses, people were having supper and watching the news and talking about their day. Outside, the only sound was the buzz of the street lamps and the cold wind rattling the dry, bare branches of winter-dead trees. The sky was black.

He was alone.

5:17 p.m. 22;

She nearly escaped. She had her coat halfway on, purse slung over her shoulder, gloves and car keys clutched in one hand. She hurried down the hall toward the west side door of the hospital, staring straight ahead, telling herself if she didn't make eye contact, she wouldn't be caught, she would be invisible, she would escape.

I sound like Josh. That's the kind of game he likes—what if we could make ourselves invisible?

A smile curved Hannah's lips. Josh and his imagination. Last night she'd found him in Lily's room, telling his sister an adventure story about Zeek the Meek and Super Duper, characters Hannah had made up in stories for Josh when he was a toddler. He was passing on the tradition, telling the tale with great enthusiasm while Lily sat in her crib and sucked her thumb, her blue eyes wide with astonishment, hanging on her brother's every word.

I've got two great kids. Two for the plus column. I'll take what I can get these days.

The smile faded and tension tightened in Hannah's stomach. She blinked hard and realized she was just standing there at the end of the hall with her coat half on. Rand Bekker, head of maintenance, s...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Theresa Diaz:

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