



The Beautiful Ashes (A Broken Destiny Novel Book 1)

By Jeaniene Frost

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Sometimes, falling in love really is the end of the world...

Ivy has always seen things that she cannot explain. Strange things. Otherworldly things. But when her sister goes missing, Ivy discovers the truth is far worse--her hallucinations are real, and her sister is imprisoned in a realm beyond Ivy's reach. The one person who can help her is the dangerously attractive rebel who's bound by an ancient legacy to betray her.

The fate Adrian has fought to escape is here - but he never expected the burning need he feels for Ivy. With destiny on one side and desire on the other, Adrian must help Ivy search for the powerful relic that can save her sister. Yet he knows what Ivy doesn't: the truth about her own destiny, and a war that could destroy the world. Sooner or later, it will be Ivy on one side, Adrian on the other, and nothing but ashes in between...

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Editorial Review

Review

"Frost's fast-paced paranormal romantic thriller is a pure stunner...Frost skillfully balances passion and peril in an attention-grabbing story that's exciting from the first page. The mythos is intriguing and inventive. Readers will hungrily anticipate the next installment." - Publishers Weekly (starred review)

About the Author

Jeaniene Frost is the New York Times, USA Today, and international bestselling author of the Night Huntress series, the Night Prince series, and the Broken Destiny series. To date, foreign rights for her novels have sold to twenty different countries.

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I'm twenty, and already, I've got nothing left to lose. That's why I didn't care that Bennington, Vermont, looked like a postcard for autumn in the country. The two-story bed-and-breakfast I pulled up to was no different. It even had a white picket fence and a steady swirl of sunset-colored leaves drifting down from the many trees in the yard.

My picturesque surroundings were in stark contrast to how *I* looked. If I hadn't been exhausted from grief and stress, I might've cared that my brown hair now resembled greasy mud. Or that my breath was in desperate need of a Mentos, and don't get me started on the coffee stains decorating my WMU shirt. Since I had more important things to worry about, I didn't even bother to cover my head against the downpour as I left my car and ran into the bed-and-breakfast.

"One moment!" a cheery voice called out from farther inside. Then a heavyset older woman with graying red hair came down the hallway.

"Hello, dear. I'm Mrs. Paulson. Are you— Oh, my, you're soaked!"

"It's nothing," I said, but she hustled out of sight, returning moments later with a towel.

"You sit down and dry yourself off," she ordered in the same *tsking* tone my mother had used a million times before. A surge of grief had me dropping into the chair she waved at. The things you didn't realize you'd miss until they were gone...

"Thanks," I said, determined not to cry in front of a total stranger. Then I pulled out the Ziploc bag I'd carried around for most of the day. "I'm looking for two people who might've stayed here the weekend before last."

As I spoke, I pulled out a picture of my sister, Jasmine, and her boyfriend, Tommy.

Mrs. Paulson got a pair of glasses from her apron pocket. Then she sat behind a large antique desk and accepted the picture. I sat, as well, not wanting to appear rude.

"Oh, what a pretty girl," she said, adding kindly, "just like you. But I've never seen either of them before, sorry."

"Thanks," I said, although I wanted to scream.

I'd spent the day showing Jasmine's picture to every hotel, motel and inn in Bennington, yet no one had recognized my sister. She'd been here, though. The last texts she'd sent came from Bennington, but the police already hinted that they thought she'd sent them while driving through. To them, Jasmine was an impulsive eighteen-year-old who'd gone on a road trip with her boyfriend. My sister might be impulsive, but she wouldn't have disappeared for over a week unless she was in real trouble.

I stuffed her picture back into the plastic bag and rose, so upset that I barely registered what Mrs. Paulson was saying.

"...can't let you go back out in that, dear. Wait here until the rain stops."

I blinked in surprise at her unexpected kindness. Every other proprietor had been anxious for me to leave once they knew why I was there, as if losing a family member could somehow be contagious. My eyes stung with a sudden rush of tears. *Maybe it was.* My parents' funeral was the day after tomorrow. "Thank you, but I can't," I said, voice husky from emotions I couldn't let myself feel yet. The shock helped with that. Ten days ago, my biggest concern was making a bad impression on my Comparative Revolutions professor after my text message alerts kept going off in his class. Then I'd read Jasmine's texts, and everything changed.

Mrs. Paulson gave me another sympathetic smile. "At least let me make you a hot cup of tea—"

A dark, hazy double image suddenly appeared over the reception lounge, making it look as though it had aged over a hundred years in an instant. I stifled a groan. Not *this* again.

The pricey antiques vanished, replaced by broken-down furniture or nothing at all. The temperature also plummeted, making me shiver before movement in the hallway caught my eye.

A blonde girl walked past the decrepit-looking reception lounge. Her face was smudged with dirt and she was bundled up in a tattered blanket, but I didn't need a second glance to recognize her.

"Jasmine," I whispered.

Mrs. Paulson came around the desk and grabbed me, coiling shadows suddenly darting across her face as if she had snakes trapped beneath her flesh. Jasmine continued to walk by as if she wasn't aware that we were there. If not for the innkeeper's surprisingly strong grip, I could have reached out and touched my sister.

"Wait!" I cried out.

The house blinked back into elegant furnishings and warm, cozy temperatures. Just as quickly, Jasmine disappeared. Mrs. Paulson still held me in a tight grip, although the shadows on her face had vanished. I finally managed to shove her away, heading down the hallway where I'd glimpsed my sister.

Before I made it three steps, pain exploded in the back of my head. It must've briefly knocked me out, because the next thing I knew, I was on my knees and Mrs. Paulson was about to hit me with a heavy picture frame again.

Get out! The single, emphatic thought was all my mind was capable of producing. My body must've agreed. I don't know how, but I was suddenly outside and slamming the door shut on my Cherokee. Then I sped

away, wondering what hell had made Mrs. Paulson turn from a kindly old lady into a skull-smashing maniac.

I drove back to my hotel as though on autopilot. After I parked, I sat in the car with the engine off, trying to fight back nausea while I figured out my next mood. I could call 911, but I didn't want to admit that I'd had another weird hallucination right before Mrs. Paulson attacked me. If I told anyone *that*, I'd be signing up for a stay in a padded room. Again. Second, the cops in Bennington already didn't like me. As soon as I'd arrived this morning, I'd bitched them out for not doing enough to find Jasmine. They'd probably take Mrs. Paulson's side and assume I'd done something to provoke her.

I paused outside my door. Had I? I didn't remember getting away from Mrs. Paulson. What if I'd done something else I didn't remember? Maybe something that had scared her so much, she'd hit me in self-defense? The idea that I might be having blackouts in addition to hallucinations soured my already-bleak mood. I got out of the car and went to my hotel room. Once inside, I dropped my purse as though it were a fifty pound anchor, then flicked on the light.

Everything in me stiffened. The couch should've been empty, but a guy with hair the color of dark honey sat there, his large frame taking up most of the space. Strong brows, a straight nose, high cheekbones and a sensual mouth made up a face that was striking enough to adorn billboards. He didn't look startled by my appearance, either. In fact, if I didn't know better, I'd swear he'd been expecting me.

Gorgeous guys do not spend their evenings waiting around for me. That's why I thought he was another hallucination until he spoke. My hallucinations had never spoken to me before.

"Hi," the stranger said, his deep voice tinged with an accent I couldn't place. "Sorry to tell you, but you're about to have a really bad night."

I knew I should turn around, open the door and run, preferably while screaming. That was the only logical response; but I stood there, somehow unafraid of my intruder. Great. My survival instincts must've secretly made a suicide pact.

"If you knew the week I'd had, you'd realize that whatever you had planned could only make it better," I heard myself reply, proving my vocal cords were in on the death wish.

Then again, I wasn't wrong. My sister? Missing without a trace after texting me help and trapped! last Monday. Parents? Died in a car accident two days after they arrived in Bennington trying to retrace Jasmine's steps. Me? In addition to losing my whole family, I'd just nearly gotten my head bashed in. By comparison, being robbed sounded like a vacation.

A grin cocked the side of my intruder's mouth. Whatever response he'd been expecting, it hadn't been that.

"If I win? Probably. If I lose, things are about to get much, much worse," he assured me.

"What's the contest?" I asked, wondering why I was having a conversation with my intruder. Brain damage from the head wound?

He rose. Despite my baffling lack of fear, I flinched as he came nearer. He had to be a foot taller than my five-six height, with shoulders that would fill a door frame and muscles no bulky overcoat could hide. The only thing more striking was his eyes: a deep blue rimmed with gray so light it almost gleamed.

"The contest is to see who walks out of here with you," he replied, that silver-and-sapphire gaze sliding over me.

"What if I don't want to go anywhere?" I countered.

"It's too late for that," he said softly, reaching out and drawing my attention to the fact that he wore leather gloves.

I darted away. For some reason, I still wasn't consumed with terror—wake up, survival instincts!—but I wasn't about to let him grab me. He didn't try to stop me as I ran past him into the bedroom. Then again, I realized with an inner groan, why would he? Now he stood between me and the room's only door.

He came toward me, and my heart started to hammer. Why hadn't I left when I had the chance? And *why* wasn't I screaming for help right now?

Three hard raps on the door startled me. Then I couldn't believe it when I recognized the voice.

"Miss Jenkins, could you let me in? It's Detective Kroger. We met this morning at the police station."

A cop when I needed one? Miracles *did* happen!

To my shock, my intruder turned around and opened the door. The two men stared at each other, and though the intruder had his back to me, I saw Detective Kroger size him up.

"He broke into my room," I said, making a "do something" gesture.

Kroger's brow went up. "Is that so, mister?"

"Guess you'd better take me in," my intruder drawled.

I expected Kroger to reach for his handcuffs. Instead, he came inside, shut the door and turned off the lights.

"What are you doing?" I gasped.

"Move over to the couch," Kroger said, and I didn't know if he was talking to me or my enigmatic intruder.

I wasn't going to remain in the dark to find out. I felt around the bedroom until I reached the nightstand, then turned on the lamp. Light flooded the room, showing that my intruder was still in the mini lounge area with Kroger. In fact, it didn't look like either man had moved an inch. What was going on?

"Why aren't you arresting me, Detective?" the intruder asked in his silky, accented voice.

"Good question," I added.

"Shut up, bitch," Kroger said harshly.

My jaw dropped. Before I could respond, Kroger's fist shot out, punching the bigger man in the shoulder. Then he frowned, as if surprised that it had no effect. The intruder caught Kroger's fist when he swung at him again.

Kroger stared, disbelief creasing his features as he tried to yank free and couldn't. Then, understanding seemed to dawn.

"You must be Adrian," Kroger spat. "In the flesh," my intruder responded lightly. I was about to ask what the hell was going on when shots rang out. I dropped down right as one of the men hurtled toward me, too fast to see who. I managed to leap away without getting flattened, though I took out the nightstand in my wild lunge.

The room went dark as the lamp broke. My heart pounded at the instant blindness. I hadn't been afraid before, but I was now, trapped in a room with two men who clearly wanted to kill each other. I began to feel my way around the bed again, and this time, stumbled on something big. That something grabbed me, and I freaked out, kicking, punching and clawing to get free.

Then I was yanked away and shoved viciously into the wall. Pain exploded over me, and when I swallowed, I tasted blood. I started to fall, dazed, when a rough grip hauled me up.

A beam of moonlight landed on my attacker's face, and I recoiled. Shadows flicked like snake tongues across Kroger's skin, turning his features into a sickening mask of evil. Worse, I knew I wasn't hallucinating. The pain I felt was too real.

"You want to know what happened to your sister?" Kroger's voice was harsh. Guttural. "You're about to find out."

Without thinking about it, I punched him as hard as I could. He looked surprised, but the blow didn't even make him flinch.

Suddenly, he was snatched backward and then flung straight up. As Kroger fell back down, Adrian kicked him hard enough to send him crashing through the bedroom window. Before I could even scream, Adrian leaped after him. Then all I heard were thumping noises and groans before a distinct snapping sound made something primal tense inside me.

One of them had just died, I knew it. But which one?

A dark form rose in the gaping hole where the window had been. I began to back away, every movement painful, when I saw something silvery gleam in the moonlight.

Adrian's eyes.

"Looks like you're coming with me, after all," he said while vaulting through the window.

I wasn't bothered by his casual tone or the fact that he'd just killed someone. I was too busy trying to absorb what I'd seen on Detective Kroger's face, let alone what he'd said.

You want to know what happened to your sister? You're about to find out.

Hope clawed through my reeling emotions. If the snakelike shadows on Kroger's face were real, then maybe so was my vision of Jasmine at the bed-and-breakfast!

"We need to...get Jasmine," I managed to gasp, feeling something wet where I clutched my abdomen.

Adrian pried my hands away and sighed.

"You're hurt. Sorry, he was one of Demetrius's dogs, so he was harder to kill."

He picked me up. Despite Adrian's touch being far gentler than Kroger's, I couldn't stop my pained moan.

"Don't worry, you'll be better soon," he said, carrying me toward the door.

We need to get Jasmine! I wanted to insist, but my tongue seemed to have gone on strike. The tingling in my limbs and buzzing in my ears probably wasn't a good sign, either.

"What's your name, anyway?" I heard Adrian ask, his voice now sounding very far away.

I managed one word before everything went dark.

"Ivy."

Users Review

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Diane Adams:

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