

# TYING THE KNOT by E.C. Bell

## EXCERPT

WHEN I RESEARCHED Crystal Desmoines and found out she was running a booming little psychic business in Vegas, I expected to find her living in a house in the suburbs or something. But that was not where the GPS took us.

James pulled the vehicle into the parking lot of what looked like a rent-by-the-hour motel. We parked beside a swimming pool covered in algae blooms, with a couple of people asleep on deck chairs by it. It looked like they'd slept there all night.

"Are you sure this is the right place?" I asked.

"What were you expecting?" he asked.

"Something better than this."

We walked up the cheap carpet-covered stairs to the second storey and searched for Crystal's apartment.

"Why would she live here?" I asked. "Maybe it's all she can afford," James replied.

"I thought she'd be doing better than me," I said. "After all, this is Vegas."

"Not everybody hits it big here, Marie," he said.

We walked through a door to an open hallway that looked down on the back alley. Through the apartment doors I could hear TVs and music blaring, and from somewhere, a child cried.

"This is depressing as hell," I said.

He didn't answer me, just walked the hallway, looking for 204. Found it, and stood, staring at the scarred wooden door for a long moment. Then he rapped on the door twice. Hard.

We could hear noises behind the door, but no one answered. "It's James Lavall," he said, and knocked again. "We have an appointment." More noise, and I realized we were hearing cats meowing. Sounded like lots of them, and then a woman's voice.

"Move your little fuzzy asses," the voice said. "I gotta get the door."

"She's a cat lady," I whispered.