

“The realized nightmare of every parent, written in a strong, unique voice with a striking use of black humor to soften the unspeakable. Heather James is definitely a suspense author to add to your must-read list. Is there honor in revenge? You’ll have to read to find out.”

—**Jordyn Redwood**

author of *The Bloodline Trilogy*

“Crafted with the poetic precision of a master, *Unholy Hunger* will keep readers turning pages into the wee hours of the night. Not only has Heather James delivered a deeply emotional story, she has included plot twists and well-researched details that will ring true for those who have endured the tragic loss of a loved one. No doubt, a legion of new fans will be eager to read more from this stellar debut author.”

—**Julie Cantrell**

New York Times and *USA Today* best-selling author of *Into the Free*

“Heather James’s incredible writing strikes the heart, chills the bones, and brings triumph to the spirit. A page-turner to the end!”

—**Cindy Martinusen Coloma**

best-selling author of twelve novels including *Orchid House*
and *Winter Passing*

LURE of the SERPENT • BOOK 1

Unholy Hunger

A Novel

Heather
James

 Kregel
Publications

Unholy Hunger: A Novel
© 2013 by Heather James

Published by Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel, Inc.,
P.O. Box 2607, Grand Rapids, MI 49501.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by
any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or
otherwise—without written permission of the publisher, except
for brief quotations in printed reviews.

The persons and events portrayed in this work are the creations
of the author, and any resemblance to persons living or dead is
purely coincidental.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

ISBN 978-0-8254-4291-9

Printed in the United States of America

13 14 15 16 17 / 5 4 3 2 1

*For Charles,
Ethan,
and Aidan*

Prologue

Yes, I wanted to die. As long as my daughter's murderer died with me, I was ready to go. I was already three quarters of the way there after the blow he had given to my head.

Everything turned black for a moment as the sudden, slicing pain radiated into numbness. Black then gave way to a white, heavenly blur, and I strained to see past the world closing in on me. I saw a brown shirt, faded jeans, blackened eyes . . . oh, there he was; there slouched the monster against a kitchen counter. He was clutching one side of his chest, futilely trying to seal the singed bullet hole and cupping his warmed blood before it all bubbled out to the cheap linoleum below.

I fought to see more, to take it all in deeper and beyond the fuzziness of my depleting consciousness, but something oozed over my left eye. More blood. My blood. I blinked, but that made it worse, further welcoming the dark, sticky stuff to seep in from my open wound.

His mouth moved; his lips puckered in and out trying to say something. He looked like a fish plucked from the ocean and left to die on a pier caked with bait and spilled guts. I wondered what he was trying to say, or maybe even ask. Perhaps the question of the day for him would have been a big fat, "Why?"

If he had managed to ask that, I knew how I'd respond: "You want the *Why?* Join the club, you dying carp."

Blame the Darkness

It all started with Eve and a piece of fruit. They call her deed Original sin for a reason. Besides, I think the world is used to blaming others, and I'm no exception. I might as well go back to that first finger pointing before I try to explain why a God-fearing girl such as myself thought nothing of chasing down a bad man for what I thought were good reasons.

At the dawn of time, there stood Adam and Eve in that perfect little number God called Eden. God said to them, and I'm paraphrasing, "Here's the line you two can't cross. You just stand right there and come no farther. You have vastness and plenty to your left, to your right, and even behind you. But you can go no farther. Do not touch that tree."

Of course, Eve touched the tree.

She did it first, and God would have punished her first, too, but Eve wised up and pinned it on that sneaky little serpent who had come slithering out of that tree. And that's fair. He was the one who tricked her; he was the one who lured her.

God doled out the first punishment to that belly crawler, and he took it. He took it because even he knew he was the one to blame. Then, God cursed Eve because it doesn't matter who put the idea into play, the only pair of pants we can wipe our dirty little hands off on is our own.

Suffice it to say, I am a daughter of Eve, and I didn't hesitate all that much when it was my turn to take a bite of that apple—partake in the forbidden when I heard the right words and felt the right sort of entitlement. The one thing I didn't do as Eve had, at least not until it was too late, was point the finger at that stinking serpent and shift the blame where the blame was due.

My name is Evelyn Barrett and in my old life, I was an attorney. I

came of age during the advent of runaway hit legal shows on television and, believing what I saw to be an exciting and sexy career, I joined up. I can't say there was either excitement or sexiness in destroying groves of trees to flood my opponents with paperwork in the hopes of frustrating them, or tainting my once perfect 20/20 eyesight when my opponents did the same to me, but I still thought I was cool and elite. Better yet, I found the facade of what others thought my job to be like dependably amusing.

Then there's the fact that I made a bunch of money doing it. Millions to be exact, and that kind of dough is quite a perk. I struck litigation gold when a friend of a friend received a paralyzed son, along with the daily grind of changing pee bags, because said son did a flying somersault off a fishing pier and into a city-built lake.

City management's decision to minimize cost and maximize aesthetics created a shallow lake of only four feet deep, with the banister of the pier topping out at ten feet from the bottom. The boy's spine snapped against the cement bottom after he completed what his friends called an eight-pointer.

At the onset of the lawsuit, the human side of me asked myself why anyone would somersault off anything from ten feet up, especially if they don't know how deep the water is. But the lawyer in me victoriously argued—to the tune of \$68 million dollars—that the city should have put a sign up to warn adventurous and lively young men that there is imminent danger and shallow water ahead.

Live and learn I used to say. Especially to losing defense lawyers.

The verdict set me up for life, and I knew I wouldn't have to work so hard anymore. That was all right with me because, soon after, I found Eddie—a gorgeous, blond-haired, blue-eyed guy who stared at me for months before he built up the nerve to ask me out on a date. When I asked him what took so long, he answered, "Because I climb telephone poles for a living and you're wearing a six hundred dollar suit."

I had actually blown eight hundred on that particular suit, but I had no interest in correcting him.

His friends had told him that I wasn't the right type of girl to marry if he coveted keeping his family jewels—metaphorically speaking, of course. But what I do for play and what I do for work are two different things. Eddie knew that, and I treated him right. He was always the man in our family because he was the right kind of man to begin with.

After we married, he insisted on keeping the job that asked him to

climb telephone poles but succumbed to letting me provide him with the lifestyle to which I had become accustomed. That involved a fancy SUV with tinted windows and a house on the seventh fairway of the Copper River Golf Course, family jewels intact.

I may have been the type of lawyer who ripped open a paper cut to spill a pint of my enemy's blood on the floor, but I was a woman first and foremost who enjoyed being his wife and the mother of the little girl we had together, a little girl who looked just like her daddy.

Corinne took a sweet pride in the fact she looked just like Eddie. She used to run around and tell anyone who would listen to her that she had *lellow* hair, like her daddy.

Lellow. It's hard to say, even now.

It was one of Robert Bailey's triggers. He'd sit on a park bench and when a cute little blonde thing came skipping by, he'd ask her, "What color is your hair, darling?"

If she said *lellow*, then she was a winner. A winner for him and no one else.

Not for my Corinne. Not for Eddie. Not for me.

If you ever wonder if anything good can survive after the murder of your child, well forget it. Just blame the darkness, blame the serpent . . . just like Eve did. It's what I should have done.