



The Killing Edge

By Heather Graham

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Ten years later, as a psychologist consulting with the cops, she gets drawn in to the disappearance of a swimsuit model. Everyone assumes the girl ran off for some fun in the sun—everyone but Chloe, who's been visited by the model's ghost.

Someone else is interested in the dead girl: Luke Cane, a P.I. investigating the disappearance for her father. Chloe and Luke barely trust one another, but they agree on the important things—they will bend the law to catch these killers, and there is an undeniable attraction between them.

When another mass murder occurs, Chloe's beginning to think her presence is no longer a coincidence....

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The Killing Edge By Heather Graham Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #17833 in eBooks
- Published on: 2011-03-01
- Released on: 2011-03-01
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this captivating novel of paranormal romantic suspense from bestseller Graham (*Deadly Gift*), part-time model and psychologist Chloe Marin, a traumatized survivor of what was billed as the Teen Massacre at a Florida beach house 10 years earlier, has new reason to be afraid. Colleen Rodriguez, one of the models at Chloe's Miami Beach agency, has gone missing while on a shoot in the Florida Keys. Investigating Colleen's disappearance is PI Luke Cane, whose tortured past makes him a perfect match for Chloe, and the pair soon give in to their mutual attraction. Complementing the sensual love scenes are Chloe's chilling visions of ghosts of the victims of her horrific brush with death as a high school senior. Just when Chloe thinks she can look happily to the future, eerie similarities surface between a crime in New Orleans and the massacre.

Romance fans will have no reason to complain. (Apr.)

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About the Author

New York Times and USA Today bestselling author Heather Graham has written more than one hundred novels, many of which have been featured by the Doubleday Book Club and the Literary Guild. An avid scuba diver, ballroom dancer and mother of five, she still enjoys her south Florida home, but loves to travel as well, from locations such as Cairo, Egypt, to her own backyard, the Florida Keys. Reading, however, is the pastime she still loves best, and she is a member of many writing groups. She's currently the vice president of the Horror Writers' Association, and she's also an active member of International Thriller Writers. She is very proud to be a Killerette in the Killer Thriller Band, along with many fellow novelists she greatly admires.

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Silver.

It was the color of the night, of the light of the full moon seeping in through the open drapes in the living room.

As he entered carefully, mentally calculating the floor plan of the house, he marveled at the brightness of the night.

He stopped and stood over a sleeping young man, then hunkered down and studied the boy's face. So young, bathed in a buttermilk glow, the silver of the night muted, warm and gentle.

He placed a powerful gloved hand over the young man's mouth, then slit his throat, his sharply honed knife moving as smoothly through flesh as the fastest Donzi speeding through a calm sea. It wasn't half as easy as it appeared in movies to slash a throat. Even with a knife as sharp as his, it took effort. And talent.

He had the strength, and he had the talent.

The boy made a slight gurgling sound, but that was it. Two feet away, crashed out on the floor, a young woman slept with her hands curled around a throw pillow. She hadn't heard a thing.

He stepped closer to her.

His overwhelming impression as he stood there was of gold, the color of her hair.

He dispatched her to a more glorious world with swift, cold calculation, then paused to take a good look at her face. He held still for a split second, then told himself to move on. He had not yet achieved his objective. Of course, he wasn't working alone, but still....

He couldn't trust anyone else not to screw things up. Not to mention that *he* was the one with a mission.

He paused again, going dead still. Silence. The house was filled with silence. It was time to make his point before finishing the mission. He dipped his gloved finger in the dead girl's blood, then walked over to the wall, writing quickly so he could finish while the blood was still wet and glistening. There was still so much to be done.

A cloud slid over the moon, bringing pitch darkness in its wake, a blackness that ruled for a few breaths of time.

Black.

How apropos.

Because black was the color of his soul.

* * *

Red.

Dark, rich crimson.

The color spilled, deep and thick, over the white marble flooring.

At first, hidden beneath the king-size bed in the master bedroom, Chloe Marin was aware only of the richness of the color.

She was so frozen with terror that she couldn't comprehend the meaning behind the flow, only the fact that it was red.

Time had no meaning, either. She didn't know if she had wakened just a few seconds ago, or if a dozen minutes had ticked away. She'd heard something, some sound, as she slept in the beachfront mansion, and though it was enough to wake her up, it hadn't scared her in the least. After all, the housekeeper was sleeping somewhere on the property, as were the two live-in maids, and there were at least twenty young people scattered around the house, ranging in age from sixteen to twenty-one.

David Grant, a big, burly football star, had passed out on the sofa downstairs, she knew. And Kit Ames, his girlfriend, had claimed the floor nearby. Even if it meant sleeping on the floor, Kit wouldn't go far from David. She protected her turf with more ferocity than most of the players demonstrated on the field.

But then something, something too elusive to identify, had alerted her, as if her every sense had been attuned

to the night. She'd sensed movement somewhere in the house.

Not the natural movement of those who belonged, those who had been invited in. It was subtle, as if she had heard the slithering of a snake moving through distant grass.

She was sharing a room with two of the other girls, and at first both of them had appeared to be sleeping peacefully. But then she'd realized something was wrong, though she couldn't explain how she'd known it. She'd tried to wake Jen Petersen, but Jen had been so deeply asleep that she hadn't responded to her urgent whispers. She'd had more success with Victoria Preston, who'd just begun to rouse, when she had seen the man enter the room. He'd been all in black, wearing what looked like a black dive suit, including a tight hood that covered everything but his eyes and mouth. He hadn't seen her or Victoria but had gone straight to Jen and stared down at her for a moment. Then, before Chloe could move, he struck.

She tried not to scream and clamped a hand over Victoria's mouth. Jen's bed was close to the door, so to get away they had to make it to the bathroom connecting their room to the bedroom next door. Amazed by how quickly her mind was working in the midst of panic, she grabbed Victoria's arm and dragged her into the bathroom, slamming the door behind them.

Victoria started screaming then, and Chloe shoved her out into the hall. As Chloe started to follow, someone closed the door from the outside, leaving her no choice but to retreat to the other bedroom.

There was more than one stranger in the house, she realized.

More than one killer.

The bedroom door started to open as someone began dragging a body in. A big body.

Chloe quickly plunged under the bed.

The full moon suddenly burst through the clouds, spilling oyster-shell white light across the room through the gaps in the drapes.

That was when she saw red.

Crimson. Spilling across the floor.

Dripping from above her. From a body on the bed.

She tried not to scream and waited, listening. They were barely discernible, but she could hear footsteps. She stared into the room from her hiding place and saw that the killer wore clear plastic freezer bags over his feet. And his dive skin, appropriate for the balmy waters of Florida and the Caribbean, was sold by the thousands in the area.

Two killers, one in this room and one next door. Or were there more? Had Victoria made it down the stairs?

She watched his feet moving stealthily across the floor and into the bathroom.

He would find her there beneath the bed. He was bound to.

Knowing she had no choice, she rolled out from beneath the bed, and carefully, silently, on bare feet, hurried to the door to the hallway. She looked out and saw no one, so she slipped out, hoping to find someone else alive, hoping to find something with which to save herself.

Nothing. No one. She raced along the hall to the stairway. Ochre light filled the living room at the foot of the grand stairway.

Red spilled out across the marble there, too.

Red spelled a message on the wall.

Death to defilers!

There was a picture in red, as well....

A strangely shaped hand drawn in blood.

She sensed movement behind her and turned to look. Brad Angsley, Victoria's college-age cousin, was staggering out from one of the other bedrooms, holding his head. She rushed toward him.

"He's right behind us!" he cried

"Move!" she insisted, and helped him stagger down the stairs. As they reached the great entry with its double doors, she dared a quick look back.

Someone was coming after them, another man in black, with some kind of knapsack or canvas bag over his shoulder.

Which killer was he?

Were there more ahead? What would happen when she opened the door? Would another killer be waiting there?

She had no choice but to find out. She struggled briefly with the lock, then threw open the doors and raced out, with Brad clinging to her shoulder. They made it down the long gravel path to the driveway and had almost lost themselves amidst the collection of BMWs, Audis and beat-up cars that belonged to the average kids who had made their way here.

Behind them, closing in on them, she could hear pounding footsteps.

They turned together, and she could see the knife gleaming in the moonlight, the blade dripping blood.

She leaned Brad against a car and grabbed a statue of Poseidon. It was heavy, but she barely noticed its weight as she wrenched it from the ground and swung it with both arms.

She caught their pursuer on the side of the head. He staggered back, and she let out a scream that seemed to last forever, until she realized that Brad had broken into the car, setting off its alarm.

Lights suddenly blazed, illuminating the driveway. Chloe saw Victoria stagger from the trees bordering the

drive, holding tight to Jared Walker, who appeared to be unharmed, though his face was ashen.

Victoria was waving a cell phone as she yelled, "Hang on! Help is coming!"

Thank God for technology, Chloe thought.

The lights were coming from the cop cars that were swarming onto the property.

Chloe stared at her attacker, praying that he would fall, that he wouldn't come after them again before the cops could take aim and fire.

The man stared back at her, his mask torn where the statue had caught it, and she felt as if she was staring into the face of pure evil.

Her heart stopped, and she prayed.

But he didn't come closer; instead, he took one look at the approaching cops, then turned and ran.

As if on cue, the moon slipped behind a cloud, and the killer was lost in the deep shadows beside the house.

Cops and paramedics began rushing onto the property.

Someone took Brad; someone else grabbed Chloe, and she opened her mouth to scream.

"It's all right," a man's voice assured her, and she found herself staring at a policeman. "You're hurt. You need help."

"I'm not hurt," she said, then lifted her hands and realized that they were bathed in blood.

Crimson with blood.

Red-shot darkness descended on her, and she slipped into oblivion.

It was over, and yet not over.

In the days and months that followed, she saw them all again. Her friends, with their good traits and their bad, who never had a chance to mature and become good people or selfish assholes.

They haunted her dreams.

She saw them dead, where they had lain on the floor in spreading pools of red.

Yes, she saw them in her dreams. Or were they dreams? She would simply open her eyes to see them there, surrounding her bed, looking at her.

Asking her for help. *Begging* her for help.

"How can I help you...? Tell me," she asked aloud more than once.

But they never answered.

Of course not. They weren't real. They were symptoms of her own psychological stress and trauma.

They were dreams. Bad dreams. Nightmares.

And in the therapy that followed, she was convinced at last that she didn't see them, that they were symptoms of survivor's guilt that haunted her heart and soul, and that only time could ever begin to heal such a wound.

Finally, like mist, silver and gray they slipped away, and she learned to live.

Ten years later

The old Branoff mansion on the beach was exquisite. Built at the dawn of the area's first age of sophistication, it was over eighty years old and elegant in the Mediterranean-slash-Spanish style of the mid-1920s. It wasn't far from a similar house where, not so many years before, Gianni Versace had been gunned down, and tourists often passed on their way to gawk at the murder scene, establishing their right to say they had been there.

The less notorious mansion, now the local HQ and informal models' dorm for the famed Bryson Agency, sat on an acre of land, with a formidable front lawn, now alight in a rainbow of colors.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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