

NINA BANGS



AN ORIGINAL SIN

A REAL MAN

Panic whispered in her ear. Where was she? Who was he? What was he?

"If ye think to keep me here by spiriting away my plaid, ye've made a mistake." Climbing from the sleeping pad, he towered above her in all his naked glory.

A jagged scar ran from the top of his thigh to within several inches of humanity's salvation. Staring up at him, she admitted the unthinkable, the truth her instincts had immediately recognized. No fake could have so many imperfections and yet feel so . . . perfect.

He was *real*.

For the moment, it didn't matter who he was or where he'd come from. His untainted sperm could bring males back to a dying human race. She blinked away sudden tears.

Me first. Me first. She shoved aside the selfish thought. "Who are you?" Her whispered question carried all the hushed awe due the most important human on earth.

AN ORIGINAL SIN

NINA BANGS

LOVE SPELL BOOKS



NEW YORK CITY

*To Gerry Bartlett, Donna Maloy, and Kimberly Raye
Rangel. Thanks for keeping the dream alive.*

LOVE SPELL®

July 1999

Published by

**Dorchester Publishing Co., Inc.
276 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10001**

If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as “unsold and destroyed” to the publisher and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this “stripped book.”

Copyright © 1999 by Nina Bangs

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the written permission of the Publisher, except where permitted by law.

ISBN 0-505-52324-8

The name “Love Spell” and its logo are trademarks of Dorchester Publishing Co., Inc.

Printed in the United States of America.

AN ORIGINAL SIN

Prologue

War. Been there.

Famine. Done that.

Pestilence. Ho hum.

Drought. Boring, boring.

Life's the pits when you're the best damn cosmic troublemaker in the universe. You scratch and claw your way up the ladder, think you're top dog, and then what? You have to maintain quality, never relax because someone's always lookin' to bring you down.

The best, that's me. But after a couple of thousand years it starts gettin' old. Know what I mean? One more flood and I'll puke.

I can't quit, though. Lifetime contract. I quit, zap, I'm gone. Let's be honest, I've sorta gotten used to existing.

But I've gotta think of something. Ten thousand

Nina Bangs

more years of the same old, same old and I'll slit my throat. Figuratively speaking, of course.

Problem is, I'm too good. We're talking talent here. The universe's numero uno pain in the butt. Can't get better than that.

So what's the big deal, you say? The big deal is . . . there's nothing left. Would you believe? Not one new sin.

OK, so I've done them all. But I'm not ready for the big Crockpot Down Under yet. There's gotta be one more. One more sin.

Look, I'm a creative kinda guy. There was that time in . . . Guess you don't wanna hear about that. But take my word, if anyone can think of a dirty deed, it's me.

So why not go small, you say? Why always mass chaos, devastating destruction? Good question. This is tough to admit, but . . . I've got a weak stomach.

Big is easy. I go in, whip up a hurricane, then get out and watch from far away. No blood. No gore. No Maalox.

Small is harder. I can't see things from far away. Hey, I'm a professional. I gotta stick around to make sure every detail's perfect. Close up is, well . . . not a pretty sight. Major Maalox moment.

So what in heaven's name—Did I say that? Sorry. What the hell can I do that hasn't been done?

Got it! Am I inspired or what? I'll whip up a disaster of the heart. All emotional catastrophe, no upset tummy. Something small, intimate, with room for growth. First, I'll choose two of the least compatible people on earth, guaranteed to hate each other's guts. Now it really gets good. I'll cleverly encourage them to fall in love; then when they're pant-

An Original Sin

ing for each other, I'll rip them apart forever. Brilliant.

Since I'm a sporting kinda guy, I'll give myself a time limit. Three's a cosmic sorta number. Let's say three weeks. That'll give me until midnight on October 31 to wreck their lives. Halloween. I like it. Great symbolism.

One's gotta be a real babe, though. What can I say, I love women. Hey, a guy's gonna be a guy.

Final detail. I need a form. Something they'll trust. Something that'll get me close so I can watch, manipulate.

Then I can relax, do my thing, and see what shakes out.

Ah, young love. Just call me the great cosmic Cupid.

Chapter One

Man-maker conventions were hell.

First, Four-Two-N woke to find that her sleeping pad had drifted to the floor during the night. Scientists could build a floating city on Mars, but they couldn't make a sleeping pad that would stay suspended three feet in the air. Of course, scientists had screwed things up for centuries, so she shouldn't be surprised.

Next, there was the far wall she'd stared at for the last five minutes. *Strange*. Had she gone to sleep in a museum? An antiquated picture of the galaxy hung above a bureau. A *wooden* bureau. With the scarcity of trees, no one had used wood for at least a hundred years. A fake? Maybe. People had become masters of imitation. She could attest to that.

Finally, there was the small matter of something

An Original Sin

sharing her sleeping pad. Something large. She could feel it move against her back, hear it breathe. Which was why she'd stayed frozen for five minutes, staring at the stupid wall.

Added to everything else, she couldn't feel her cross at her neck. Peering over the edge of the sleeping pad as far as she could without moving, she spotted the silver chain, with her Celtic cross still safely attached, lying on the floor.

Four-Two-N heaved a sigh of relief. Grandma Two-Z had given her the antique piece, and she treasured it.

Now what? She could turn over, face what lay at her back, and order it off her sleeping pad. *Problem.* She had a vivid imagination. She needed imagination in her line of work, but not for facing unidentified sleeping partners.

Maybe she'd wandered into the wrong rest-over room last night after the party. Maybe a large car-nitak had followed her in and curled up beside her. Maybe she was a galaxy-size wimp and should just turn over.

Unfortunately, her imagination reminded her the rest-over was close to NASA, and NASA frequently entertained unusual visitors. With her luck, a Saralian poison pig had escaped and chosen her out of all humankind to cozy up to.

Her thoughts scuttled in every direction. What to do? She didn't know where she was, or what horror happily slept at her back. If she screamed, she'd wake it. *Scrap that idea.*

That left . . . Holding her breath, she slowly turned over.

Nina Bangs

She would've preferred the pig. At least then she'd know she wasn't hallucinating.

A human male. A man. Just like her Dark and Dangerous Dick model, only better. She let her breath out on a puff of disbelief. A fake? She'd never seen one this perfect. Even *she* couldn't create something so lifelike.

Of course, he had to be a fake. Men had gone the way of the Dexovil rock burrower, extinct for fifty years or more. Another scientific screwup.

Studying the man, she couldn't squelch a small stab of professional jealousy. A master creation.

What kind of a party had she gone to last night, if she didn't remember *him*? One of her friends, probably Three-Six-H, must've put the man next to her as a joke.

What a joke! Long, dark hair lay in a tangled mass across incredibly broad shoulders that had a perfectly tanned skin tone. Hmm, the hair looked like the real thing. Reaching out, she stroked it. Raw silk. She allowed herself a sensual shiver.

His face was molded perfection—knife-edge cheekbones, straight nose, full lips, long lashes. His eyes? She longed to know their color.

She had to speak with his creator. Never had she been able to make a face look so real, as though warm blood pulsed beneath the skin—soft, touchable. *Wonderful!* She almost hated the woman responsible for him.

But was he anatomically correct? A lot of cheap models weren't very detailed. She'd check.

Scooting down, she ducked under the cover. Warmth and essence of male surrounded her. She frowned. How did his maker get that scent of de-

An Original Sin

sire and dark erotic nights? It left her heart pounding, her mouth dry. She'd never experimented much with aromas. Maybe she should.

Running her fingertips across his chest, she marveled at the textures—smooth flesh over muscle, hair-roughened areas, and nipples that actually pebbled beneath her touch. Amazing.

A shudder ran through the body. Must be a short somewhere.

When her fingers touched his stomach, his muscles contracted and rippled. Unbelievable technology.

She finally reached her destination. This was what separated true artistry from assembly-line cheapies.

Utter brilliance. She couldn't suppress a small coo of admiration. Large, round, firm. Long, thick, hard . . . *Hard*? She didn't remember anything hard down here when she'd first ducked under the cover. *Hmm*. Must be a clever use of sensors.

Unable to resist, she ran her fingers lightly along his length, then clasped him. Liquid heat flooded her, then settled heavily into a bubbling pool of want in an area that had never experienced any kind of bubbling.

She choked back a surprised gasp and closed her eyes in shocked horror. *Impossible!* She'd created customized men for years and never once had a sexual reaction to any of them. They were fakes—a mass of Toglor fibers and electrical impulses. She prided herself on never forgetting that.

She teased her friends when they panted after her great-looking Hot and Horny Hal or Stud Muffin Stuart models. Now who'd have the last laugh?

Nina Bangs

Three-Six-H would never let her forget this if she ever found out. Nervously, Four-Two-N searched her memory. Had she seen any sign of a scan-glow? No. She relaxed slightly. Even if her friend had set this up, she wouldn't defy privacy rules by watching. No one would ever know.

She'd know. She had to admit it. Her sex drive was on automatic pilot and begging for permission to land.

So close, so warm, so convenient. She closed her fingers more tightly around him. Sex. She'd seen the disks, knew the basics of the ancient ritual. All she'd have to do was . . .

Appropriate muscles spasmed at the thought of him filling her, touching every dark, wet, yearning space. Reflexively, she kneaded him like a cat with eyes half-closed in feline bliss, while she imagined a joining she'd never know. Warm flesh sheathed in satin-smooth skin that slid slickly into—

With a discipline forged from her society's expectations, she ruthlessly clamped down on her useless fantasy. She might as well accept it. Men were gone, so she'd never experience that particular pleasure. And she'd never get so desperate that she'd lose herself in a fake. A make-believe man.

She opened her eyes. *Liar*. She could with *this* fake.

Suddenly the body jerked. *Oops*. Had she broken him?

"God's teeth, woman, I dinna know how much more I can stand. Cease cooing like a mating dove and show yerself."

She froze. *Dinna? Cease?* What a strange dialect. And his voice—harsh, arrogant. This didn't sound

An Original Sin

like any programmed response tone she'd ever heard.

Possibility sprouted and grew with the speed of a Pelmar choke-weed. It curled inside her stomach, making her feel the way she did each time she started a new creation. Putting out feelers, it touched her heart. Not satisfied with the mad pounding it left behind, the possibility wound around her lungs and squeezed. She gasped for breath. Her brain tried to fend off the invader, but to no avail.

Real? Could this be a real man?

No way. Nah . . . Maybe? She shot from beneath the cover, flinging it aside as she emerged.

"Easy, lass. Dinna look so daft. Have ye ne'er seen a man before?" His deep chuckle made light of the suggestion.

"No." *Green*. He had eyes the color of jade, spectacular with their frame of thick, sooty lashes. "Not a real one."

His slashing white smile disappeared, but she'd already noticed one slightly crooked tooth. Customers never asked for flawed men. OK, they *did* want men with oversize—

"Nay, I'll not believe ye were raised in a nunnery." He smiled again. "Not when I wake to find ye rooting beneath the cover like a wee pig."

"Wee pig!" She never programmed anything but polite chitchat and a few orgasmic groans into her creations. But fine, she could fling a few insults of her own. "I don't know who you are, but I've made men better than you." A lie, of course.

"Made men better?" He narrowed his gaze, and she noticed a small scar above one dark brow.

Nina Bangs

“Aye, I can well believe yer touch would cure a man of what ails him. Ye’ve talented hands, ones I’d lief feel again.” His gaze turned hot, aggressive.

Fakes were never aggressive. She felt a trickle of sweat slide between her breasts, a reminder that she wore no clothes. Pulling the cover and her anger around her, she tried to ignore her body’s embarrassing demands. Amazing he didn’t notice them.

“I was *not* under the cover rooting around like a ‘wee pig.’ I was . . . checking out the competition. I’ll tell you something, too. I’ve made a lot *bigger* men.” OK, she’d admit they were a tad too big—big enough to double as rocket nose cones. But that was what her customers paid for.

“Ye *make* men?” The corner of his expressive mouth turned up. “With yer hands? Like a man would fashion a sword?”

A sword? She frowned, trying to ignore the sexual implication in his words. *Forget it. Everything* about him shouted sex. “Customized models. Very expensive.”

“Aye.” One dark brow rose to match his mouth. “And I’m King William.”

As he nodded, a strand of hair fell forward, and he raised his hand to push it aside. Fascinated, she followed the motion. Male bodies were her business, but this one interested her more than usual. He had broad hands with long, lean fingers. Strong hands used to hard work, yet hands that would be gentle on a woman’s body. Where had that thought come from? Only one thing should interest her—real or ultimate imitation?

Mentally, she shook herself. He couldn’t be real.