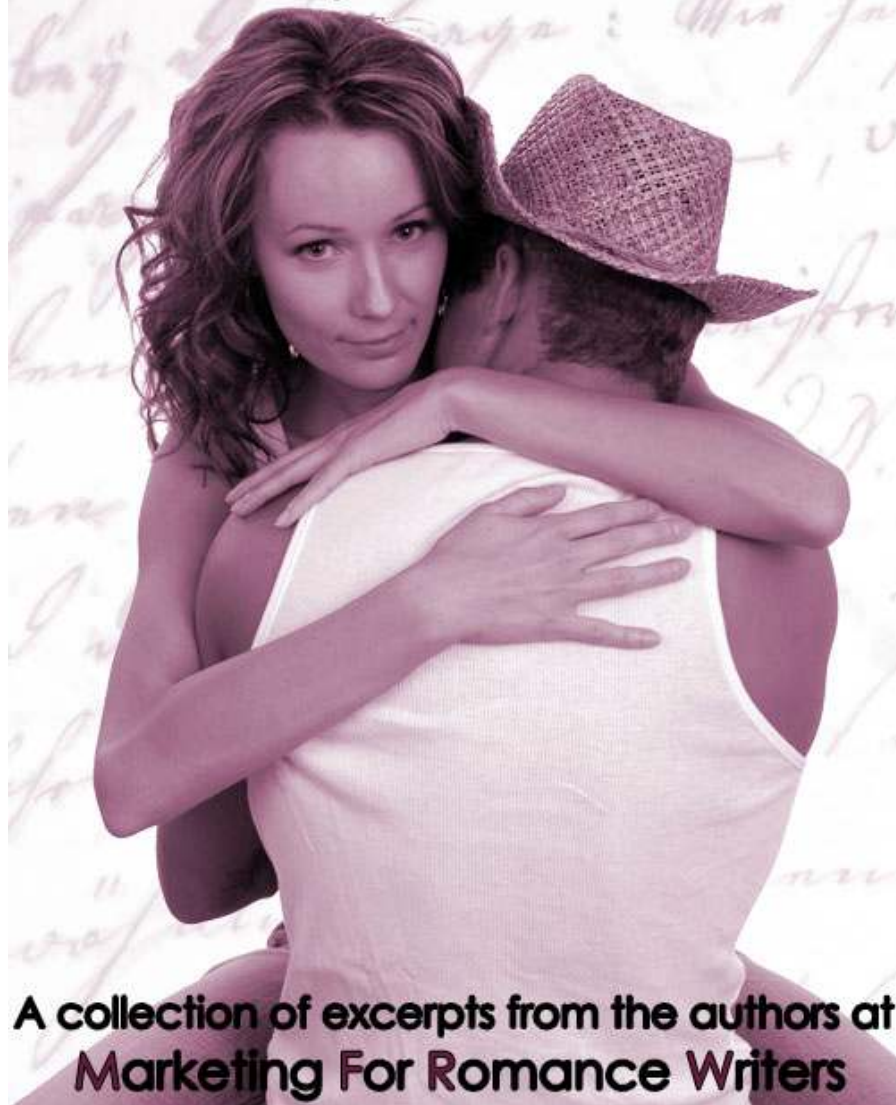


MFRW VOLUME 4

Care for a Tease?



**A collection of excerpts from the authors at
Marketing For Romance Writers**

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Edited by Jena Galifany
Assembled by Marty Rayne
Cover design by Celia Kyle

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Tasty Heat Levels

Vanilla –

Sensual romance, not so explicit sex scenes, non-romantic mystery/suspense, non-romantic science fiction

Neapolitan –

Explicit sex scenes, mild toy play, daring situation, mild violence

Rocky Road –

GLBT fiction

Light Nuts – Mild to explicit sex scenes between same sex couples

Heavy Nuts – Graphic sex scenes, BDSM, anal, toys, ménage trio or more

Hot Fudge –

Ménage trio, BDSM, anal, toys, graphic sex scenes

Anything Goes –

Fetishes, ménage trio and more, heavy BDSM, very graphic sex scenes

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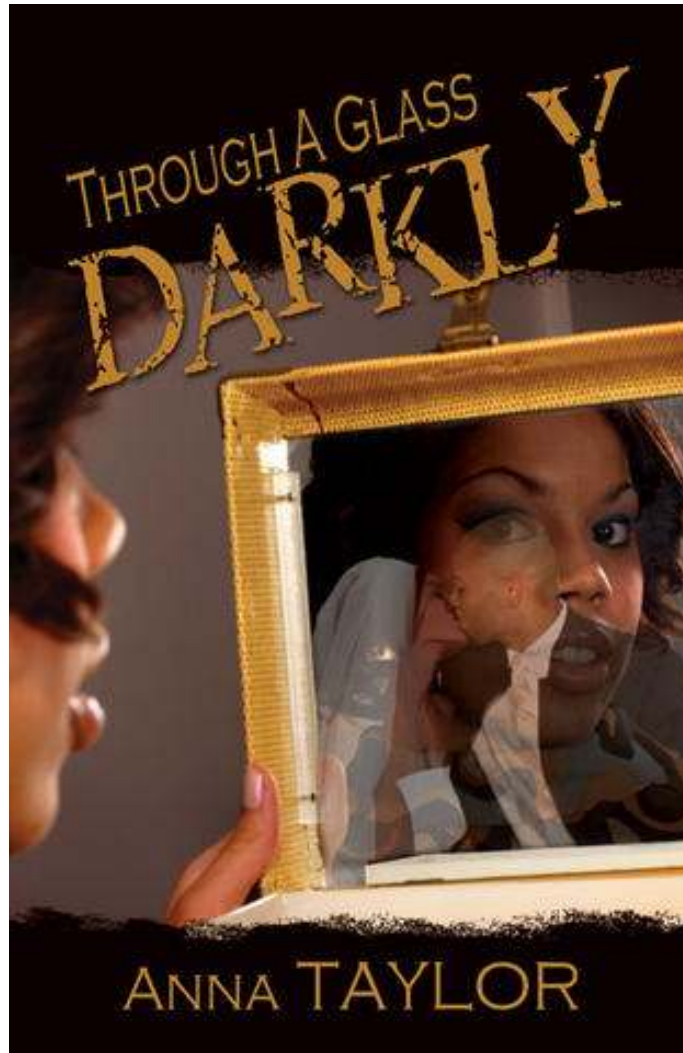
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Title: Through a Glass Darkly

Author: Anna Taylor

Genre: Contemporary Gothic Inspirational

Rating: Vanilla

Format: e-book and print

Buy link:

http://www.thewildrosepress.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=776

Blurb:

How do you prove the face in the mirror is you when everyone insists it's someone else? No one believes Roxanna Mitchell isn't Claire Denby, a millionaire's mentally unstable runaway wife. Dr. William McCoy, her only potential ally, certainly doesn't and doesn't intend to. Playing Good Samaritan cost him his medical license and his faith. He refuses to step in now, especially when a wedding album full of photos shows she's lying.

Roxanna's only defense? God called her by name when she gave her life to Christ. That name was Roxanna. No matter what those photos show, she insists she's not Claire. William remains unconvinced, and Roxanna almost gives up...until events force them into an alliance that will lead either to the truth or to their deaths.

Excerpt:**Chapter One**

“Home again, home again, jiggy jog.” With a glad sigh and a tired smile, Roxanna Mitchell recited the children's rhyme and unlocked the double oak doors to the Victorian she had remodeled into her home and office.

She ran her fingers over the Ayas etched in the front doors' glass panes. Pride warmed her heart each time she touched them. The fern-like Adinkra symbol stood for endurance and resourcefulness. She chose the design herself as a reminder of what she was, not what her past said she had to be.

Her keys clinked as she dropped them into an aqua and turquoise South African basket. Straightening the Kente cloth upon which it rested, she smiled.

Perfect.

Her glass panes. Her basket. Her Kente cloth. Her home. The first real home she'd had since...

She stopped the thought, inhaled deeply and chided herself.

“Don't go there. That was then. This is now.” She looked with pride at what she saw reflected in the hall mirror: Roxanna Mitchell, child of God, surviving and thriving by grace. Woe to anyone who dared imply this wasn't true.

A rogue gray hair sprung out from her otherwise neatly trimmed Afro. Now twenty-eight she had begun graying at thirteen. She frowned and reached for it, but a memory stopped her.

Pull out one and two'll grow back.

A loving rebuke from her mother. She took another deep breath and slammed the door on melancholy. Fighting the pull of the past was always harder when she was tired. What she needed was a quiet evening with her head back, her feet up and her soul soothed by Ellington and Strayhorn.

She patted the hair back into place, went into the living room and flipped the light switch. The room remained dark.

“Oh, not again. I just changed this bulb.”

Before she could flip the switch again, a blow sent her spinning. Her temple thwacked against the floor. Someone straddled her. Fingers dug into her hair and yanked her head back.

From out of the darkness, a male voice laughed. “Oh yeah. You’ll do just fine. Won’t you, sweetheart?”

Roxanna groped behind her, trying to free her hair.

“Who are you? What do you want?”

A woman laughed, imitating Roxanna’s distress. “Who are you? What do you want? You’ll find out soon enough, honey.”

Roxanna squinted, trying to make her out, but pain and darkness sheltered the woman’s anonymity.

“Shut up and get the tape,” the man ordered. He clamped his hand across Roxanna’s mouth. “We haven’t got all night.”

The woman laughed again. “Oooo. Papa spank.”

Roxanna’s heart stuttered at the sound of tape ripping. She twisted her head left then right, but couldn’t prevent them from sealing her lips with a piece of the foul smelling adhesive. She clawed at the gag. Her muffled screams joined the panic screaming in her head.

A pair of hands captured both her wrists and jerked her to a sitting position. The man’s arms surrounded her, immobilizing her arms while holding her wrists criss-crossed before her. Her forehead throbbed in a frantic cadence: “get up,” “get away,” “get up,” “get away.” She struggled to break the sticky bond wrapping around her wrists.

“Hold still,” the man hissed in her ear.

Something pierced her right upper arm. Paralysis radiated in waves over her body. She crumpled against the hard body propping her up. Caught in a kaleidoscope of sensation, her mind went limp, too.

The pressure pinning her arms to her body disappeared and she collapsed onto her side. Slender fingers positioned her head so she could see to her right. Her cheek pillowed against the hardwood floor.

“I want her to watch,” the woman whispered, her voice, thick with menace and desire. A pair of warm lips pressed a cold kiss against Roxanna’s cheek.

She closed her eyes to whatever they wanted her to witness, willing unconsciousness to come to her rescue.

Mercifully, it did.

* * * *

Roxanna couldn’t open her eyes. Something soft, but unyielding pulled taut against her eyelids. She flexed her arms, but couldn’t raise her hands to remove it; a restraint forced her hands to her lap. Her knees hit cold rough surfaces no matter how she shifted. The smell of mold and the aroma of freshly baked bread wafted on the draft swirling around her. A noise, like stone dragging against stone, broke the silence of the darkness and made her stomach tighten. It meant he had returned.

Light seeped through her blindfold, but she still couldn’t see. Fingertips, round and rough, brushed her cheek, pried the tape away. Pain burned around the edges of her mouth. She shrank back from the feel of glass touching her lips. An acrid medicinal smell made her clench her teeth.

“Drink.”

“What—?” She paused, summoned courage to staunch the fear surging forward. “What do you want?”

“I want you to stop asking questions.”

The cold voice made her tremble, but she refused to be cowed. “Why are you doing this to me?”

“I said drink.”

His shouted words filled the space around her, crowded out her resolve. She closed her mind to the panic sweeping through her, fought the urge to plead: don’t hurt me. Please don’t hurt me.

“Don’t give me a reason and I won’t have to.”

She blanched, certain she had only thought the words.

Oh God, please help me.

The glass pressed against her teeth with a dull click. She shook her head to avoid it.

His hand squeezed her jaw, forcing her lips to part. “Swallow.”

Bitter liquid burned her tongue and throat. She held the liquid in her mouth until it began to seep down her chin.

“You can fight me all you like, but in the end you’re going to do what I want.” His awful laugh scratched her ear.

Her bound limbs stiffened with anger. She turned her face in the direction of his voice and spewed the liquid at her captor.

“Why you little—”

She took a deep breath and tried to scream but her vocal chords constricted. Her scream echoed only in her mind.

Pain spread across her scalp where his fingers gripped her hair. He pulled her head back, forcing her mouth open.

“Okay. Play time’s over.”

Nothing stopped the liquid pouring down her throat. She had to swallow to keep from gagging. A cloth pushed past her lips and settled behind her teeth. She moaned against the tape being stretched across her lips.

Enough of whatever he forced on her worked its way into her system. A prayer from her childhood soothed her slow descent into oblivion.

Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Lord, in your mercy, take my soul.

* * * *

Nausea crept up Roxanna’s throat when she woke. Or at least she thought she was awake. She counted backwards from ten with her eyes shut. When she reached two, she peeked to her left. Rain cascaded down arched leaded glass windowpanes. Their surfaces shimmered and glistened, reflecting the room’s interior against the night sky outside.

She was lying in an elegant four-poster bed propped up by large fluffy pillows covered in Battenberg lace. A wingback chair stood a few feet away from the foot of the bed. A fire popped and sizzled in a stone fireplace.

“Where am I? What’s happened to me?”

She pressed her hand against her forehead, wincing when her fingers hit the tender spot above her right eye. She remembered now. The light in her living room didn’t work. Someone had attacked her. She’d been bound, blindfolded, gagged and held in some cold cramped space. Now she was free. How had she gotten away? Who had helped her?

A paneled door opened to her right and two men walked in. She recognized the first. Bradley Denby. He had hired her to audit his company’s books a month ago. The other man was larger than Bradley. The same high cheekbones and light skin tones hinted they were related. A mane of short black dreads framed his square face while Bradley wore his sandy brown hair in a closely cropped Afro. The same almond colored irises looked at her from both faces, but where Bradley’s eyes were clear and happy, the other man had an intense, controlling gaze. Her stomach fluttered with fear when his eyes met hers. She’d have sworn she didn’t know him, but the trembling she felt in her gut contradicted that thought.

She leaned back against the mound of pillows and, in spite of the pain in her head, smiled at Bradley Denby.

“Mr. Denby, where am I?”

He sat beside her and patted her knee.

“Claire, when are you going to stop calling me Mr. Denby?”

She frowned. The throbbing in her head increased. “Did—did you call me ‘Claire?’”

His smile broadened. “I know we’ve only just met, but can’t a brother-in-law call his sister-in-law by her first name?”

Her mouth gaped open. “Your sister-in-law? I’m Roxanna Mitchell, the accountant you hired to do Denby Antiques’s books.”

The second man stepped closer. His huge frame blocked the fireplace and its reassuring heat. Once again their eyes met and once again unease clawed at her gut.

“Okay Brad, explain how a fall can result in a delusion like this?”

She stared at him, focused on his voice. Something familiar about it gnawed at her memory.

“Delusion?” She looked from one to the other.

“Henry, you heard what Dr. Bennett said. She didn’t just fall.” Bradley reached toward her forehead. “That blow she took was quite jarring.”

Roxanna pulled back, more quickly than was good for her equilibrium. She kept her eyes closed until the vertigo subsided. Squinting, she peered at Bradley Denby.

“What have you done to me?”

The man named Henry surged forward and stood behind Bradley. His hands clenched and unclenched. His gaze burned hotter than the fire behind him. Roxanna’s stomach flinched again.

“We haven’t done anything to you,” he answered. “You’re the one who took that overdose of pills.”

She cringed, shaking her head no.

Bradley Denby stood and forced the man to step back. “Stop it, Henry. She doesn’t remember. Confronting her like this does no good. Dr. Bennett told you it would take time.”

Roxanna gritted her teeth, forcing fear and confusion to withdraw. “I would never try to kill myself. Never.”

“Of course you wouldn’t, dear,” Bradley said. Something oily flowed beneath his words, mitigating the soothing quality of his voice. “You were confused. Henry told me often enough you wouldn’t do what your mother did.”

Her gasp clogged her throat, cut off her air. She pressed her hands against her mouth, commanding the nausea to stay in her stomach. “How do you know about my mother?”

Henry rolled his eyes. “Enough of this. Play time’s over.”

“You,” she gasped, at last recognizing the voice of her abductor. Panic pulled at her with the force of a vacuum. She clutched her throat, unable to get enough air in her lungs.

“Claire?” Bradley Denby leaned toward her. His hand cupped her cheek. “Claire, say something.”

The feel of his hand sent a chill coursing through her. He held her transfixed with a gaze that pierced her soul. Did he really believe she was his sister-in-law? She searched his eyes for some sign of the truth.

“Claire? Claire, please answer me.”

“Move out of the way, Brad.” Henry exchanged places with Bradley. “She’s my wife. If anyone’s going to comfort her, it’ll be me.”

Confusion pounded in her head. “Mr. Denby, what are you saying? You know who I am.”

Henry towered over her. “He knows who you said you were. Now, thanks to me, he knows who you really are.”

Anger skyrocketed within her. She threw back the covers and stood. A surge of vertigo forced her to hold onto one of the bedposts. She turned and pointed at Henry while speaking to Bradley.

“Whatever he told you, he’s lying.”

Bradley held out his hands to her. “Claire, please. You shouldn’t be up.”

Roxanna clenched her hands together to stay in control. “God called me by name when I gave my life to Christ last year. That name was Roxanna, not Claire.”

“Certainly He did, dear,” Bradley Denby cooed. “God knows all of us by name.”

Roxanna cringed at the disbelief she heard in his tone. “What’s the matter with you people? Are you insane?”

Bradley held up his hands in surrender. “Calm down, Claire. Calm down.”

“Yes.” Henry came around to her side of the bed. “You’re overwrought.” He kept his eyes on her but spoke to his brother over his shoulder. “Go bring Dr. Bennett up here. Tell him Claire is hysterical.”

“I’m not hysterical, and I’m not Claire,” Roxanna shouted after Bradley’s retreating figure.

“Do you need me to help you into bed, Claire?”

She glared at the smirk controlling Henry’s lips.

“You’re the one who’ll need help if you put one finger on me. You don’t have me tied up in some closet now.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. You were never bound or gagged in any closet.” He stepped toward her. “Now get in that bed and stay there.”

Over his shoulder she saw the door to the room stood open. She could escape if she could get past him.

She stepped backwards. “I’m not staying there or anywhere.”

Her hand brushed against the top of the night table. Glancing behind her, she saw a glass water carafe. She grabbed it and threw it at his head.

He ducked. Glass shattered against the wall behind him, and the water slid down. She leapt for the door, but he caught her around the waist. She screamed, her arms and legs flailing as he dragged her back to the bed.

He held her down. His laugh set her teeth chattering.

“Why do you keep fighting? You’ve lost. I’ve won. Give up.”

A man carrying a wallet sized black case rushed into the room, followed by Bradley.

“Help,” she screamed. “Mr. Denby, help me.”

She wrenched an arm free and reached for Bradley. “Don’t believe him. I’m not his wife.”

Denby’s brother flipped her onto her face. He grabbed her wrists and kept them pinned at the small of her back. She arched up to throw him off, but couldn’t budge him. “Give her the shot, Doctor.”

Her eyes widened, horrified at the sight of the liquid squirting from the needle. She jerked her head from side to side. “No. No.”

“Don’t be afraid,” the doctor said. “This won’t hurt.” He swiped an alcohol pad against her arm. “Hold her still, Henry.”

Henry’s huge palm immobilized her head against the pillow.

At the needle’s pinch, heat rushed through her. Her limbs liquefied. Her resistance melted. All the light and oxygen left the room. Her vision blurred. She sobbed, unwilling to surrender, but unable to do anything else.

Bradley Denby’s face floated above her. “Poor Claire. You’ll be all right. Won’t she, Doctor?”

His words wavered, as if spoken through water. Bees swarmed inside her head, obliterating all sounds, even her own voice.

“Oh God, please tell them,” she whispered, unable to keep her eyes open any longer.

“I’m Roxanna. Not Claire.”

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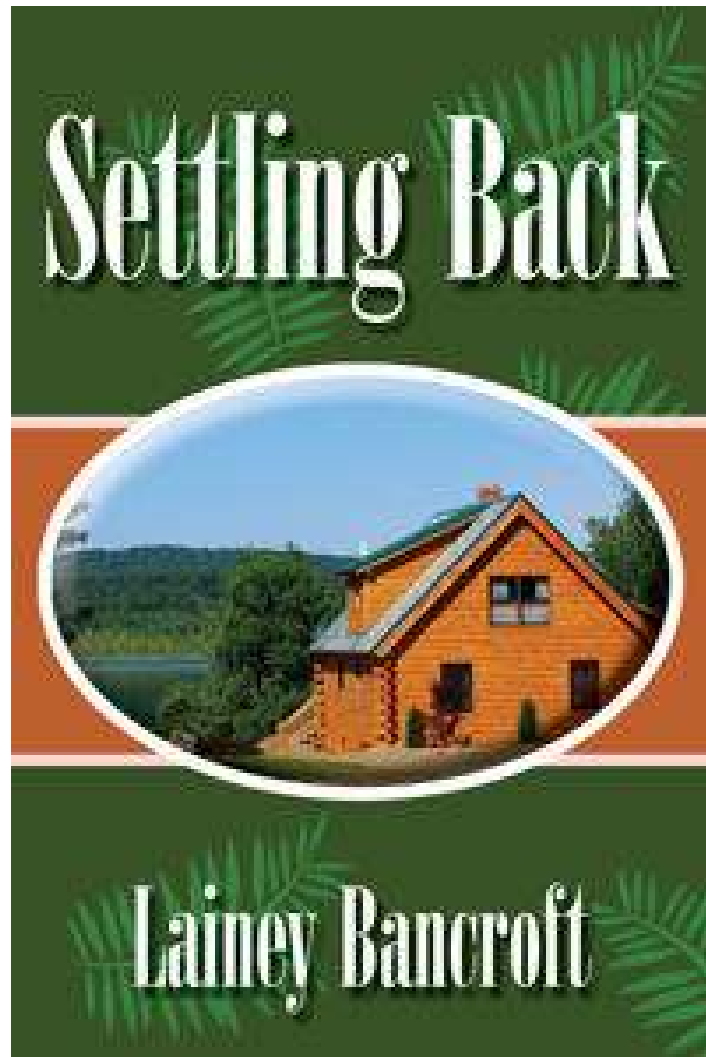
Anna Taylor

Writing under her maiden name, Anna Taylor was born, bred and wed in New York City. The 52-year-old native New Yorker lives in Brooklyn with Michael, her husband of 19 years, cat Scully and black lab, Ruby. An online X-Files fanfic challenge re-ignited her love for writing and after listening to a This American Life segment on Romance Writer's of America Anna joined Romance Writers of America in 2004 and prepared to make her childhood dream of becoming an author a reality. Anna holds membership in four of their online chapters: Passionate Ink, Kiss of Death, Faith, Hope, Love and Gothic Romance Writers.

A United Church of Christ clergywoman, she presently serves a Presbyterian church in Jamaica NY as the Associate Pastor for Pastoral Care and Small Group ministry. Through A Glass Darkly is her debut novel with the Wild Rose Press and she is presently working on an erotic cowboy romance novella.

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Title: Settling Back

Author: Lainey Bancroft

Genre: Contemporary Romance

Rating: Vanilla

Format: e-book and print

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Blurb:

Angelina Jordan has lived up to her late mother's wish that she never settle for an ordinary life and it's left her feeling—unsettled. When the grandmother who raised her breaks a hip, she returns to the tiny northern Ontario town she couldn't wait to escape and is surprised to discover it feels like home for the first time in years. She is also amazed to discover she still shares an incredible connection with Billy, her high school sweetheart. It's just too bad he's the same carefree and utterly lacking in ambition man she left behind. How can she be so attracted to who he is, when she finds what he is distasteful?

Excerpt:

Angelina visited with her grandmother for a while, learned the details of the planned surgery, and then said she'd better get to the house and check on the animals.

“Those critters will be fine. Not to worry. William promised to look in on them.”

“I'd like to get settled and take a shower. Anything I can bring you when I come back tomorrow?”

“You don't have to trail all the way into town again tomorrow just to see me.”

“*All* the way into town only takes twenty minutes, and it's you I came here to see. Now, is there anything you need?”

“I suppose if you're coming anyway, you could bring me a jar of my own strawberry jam. I hate that rubbery slop they've been smearing on my toast here.”

“Sleep well. I'll see you in the morning.” She bent to brush the papery smooth cheek with a quick kiss. Ida had never been big on affection, or communication.

Her grandmother's prevalent strengths were discipline and organization: Angelina's worst traits. With a fresh surge of guilt, she realized that was another facet of their strained relationship that had kept her away so long. Although she suspected her grandmother didn't mean to seem so harsh, she often felt as though Ida disapproved of every decision she'd ever made.

She'd never communicated that with words, but Angelina heard it in every veiled look and unspoken comment. She had all of her life. Her grandfather had been a kind man with an easy laugh. He'd always made her feel welcome, but Ida was another story. From the first day she'd moved in with them, Angelina sensed that the disdain her mother had felt toward her parents was returned in disapproval toward her, and by extension toward Angelina.

She needed to get a grip. She'd made a success of her chosen career and been supporting herself, and her grandmother for a long time. There was no need for a trip home to make her feel as though she was a disruptive teen. Surely she was secure enough that she and Ida could learn to communicate like adults. After she settled in and had a good night's rest she would approach her grandmother with a new attitude and accomplish just that.

The long drive had been harder on her than she thought, leaving the hospital her legs felt stiff and rubbery. Travelers' aches, combined with a restless night and the late

afternoon heat left her wiped out.

Focusing on her Toyota, she made a beeline across the parking lot city-style—head down, long fast stride. She didn't see Billy until she barreled right into him.

He caught her by the upper arms, steadied her, and then stepped away as though surprised it was actually her. "Angel? Wow! How are you?"

Angelina stared at him. Just stared, unable to formulate an answer to the simple question. At twenty-one, Billy had been a dashing devil, but still a boy. She'd known him for so long she'd seldom thought about his looks. Age and maturity had turned him into a masculine mountain of a man.

She felt her eyes roving over him, trying to take in the changes all at once. When he smiled, her roaming vision paused, automatically focusing on his bittersweet chocolate eyes as they crinkled slightly at the corners. Nothing had changed about that smile, she felt as overwhelmed as ever to be on the receiving end of it. It was a slow, crooked curve upward that ended in deep dimples high on each darkly stubbled cheek. A smile that could have looked awkward or contrived on anyone else, but it was just so Billy the kid, so open and spontaneous, you'd have to be made of stone to not smile back.

She was definitely not made of stone. As a matter of fact, she was beginning to feel as though she were made of jelly. She continued to gaze at him, and felt her dumb grin freeze on her flushed face.

Billy was definitely not beer bellied. His white t-shirt clung to shoulders that looked impossibly big and slid over abdominal muscles solid enough to bounce a rock off. Embarrassed at her boldness for checking him out so thoroughly, Angelina jerked her eyes upward. Her gaze traveled beyond his heart-stopping smile, and she immediately noticed the way the sun glinted on his dark curls, which were bleached to a burnt caramel color from the time he spent outdoors. She couldn't help automatically comparing Billy's natural highlights to the salon ones that tipped Philip's golden hair.

She knew it was probably sexist of her to admit, but she found something mildly effeminate about Philip sitting in a cape with his hair poked through a cap. The perfumed scent of the gel he used irked her too. She noticed Billy's hair was as unkempt as always and long enough to curl on his darkly tanned neck.

She wiped her sweating palms on the wrinkled skirt of her tan linen suit, and wondered why she'd chosen to wear the outfit in the first place. Considering the four-hour car ride, the day's heat and her destination, it was a ridiculous pick.

"Jeez, Angel, you're skinny. Don't they eat in Toronto?"

Skinny! How dare he call her skinny? She'd endured hours of aerobics and brutal Pilate's classes to tame her figure. She ate a diet so restrictive the pleasure associated with eating had disappeared. She rarely thought in terms of taste or personal choice, only of imbibing the proper amounts of protein and fiber, and avoiding the dreaded carbohydrates.

Not that she'd ever been fat really, only a little rounder than was stylish. Oddly enough, her round rump had never bothered her when Billy rested his hands on it. Back then she'd loved every chubby inch he'd touched. But somehow in the city of emaciation where styles were straight fitted and spandex abounded, she'd become discontent and fought a constant battle to keep off the pounds that wanted to creep back on.

Why, after ten years, was she thinking of how Billy's hands felt on her rear end anyway?

“Angel? Are you okay? You look worn out.”

“No one calls me Angel anymore.” The words came out stiff and stuck up. She thought she’d mentally prepared herself for this inevitable meeting, but in the first five minutes she’d gone from speechless zombie to snobbish city bitch without being able to exchange simple pleasantries. She closed her eyes for a second and battled the childish urge to run back into the hospital and then out again to see if she could restart their encounter. She was behaving like a juvenile ass!

Billy seemed undisturbed by her attitude. “I’m sorry, Angelina. I guess I was surprised, seeing you after all this time.”

She took a steadying breath, and pasted on a smile she hoped was as cheerful and unconcerned as his. Somehow she managed to coherently inquire about his family.

“Everybody’s fine. Same old, same old. Mom and Dad are taking things easier. They spent two months in Florida last winter. Both my sisters stayed in Briar. Liz is still teaching, and all Maggie’s kids are in school now.”

So it was all still just the same. She felt a jolt of disappointment. Billy, for as bright and ambitious as he’d once been, had settled for a life of labor. He did odd jobs for the summer cottage crowd, and hauled firewood the rest of the year. He hadn’t mentioned a home life or whether he had children. She didn’t want to ask. Somehow, seeing him as unchanged as he appeared, only made her want to continue thinking of him as *her* Billy.

He reached forward and tweaked a lock of hair along her cheek. “I like your new style. It makes you look younger than when you left.”

The slight touch had gooseflesh breaking out on her heated skin. Angelina felt the warmth of a flush creeping up her neckline.

“You still blush easy too. That’s cute. I guess the city hasn’t changed you as much as you hoped it would.”

Once again she was speechless. How in the merest touch and a few joking words, had he managed to elicit this tongue-tied stupor and awaken all the teenage lust she was sure she’d outgrown?

Billy slapped his hands on his thighs a few times. It was an old gesture of discomfort she immediately recognized. It made her heartsick to realize he was little more than an awkward stranger now. They had once interacted so well, even words hadn’t been necessary.

She couldn’t seem to pull her gaze away from his full bottom lip, and vividly recalled how easy it had been to sink into an endless kiss with him. *Oh, God, you idiot! Do you suppose this is helping?* “I...um...” She couldn’t recollect what he’d said last. Was there a question she should have answered?

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Lainey Bancroft

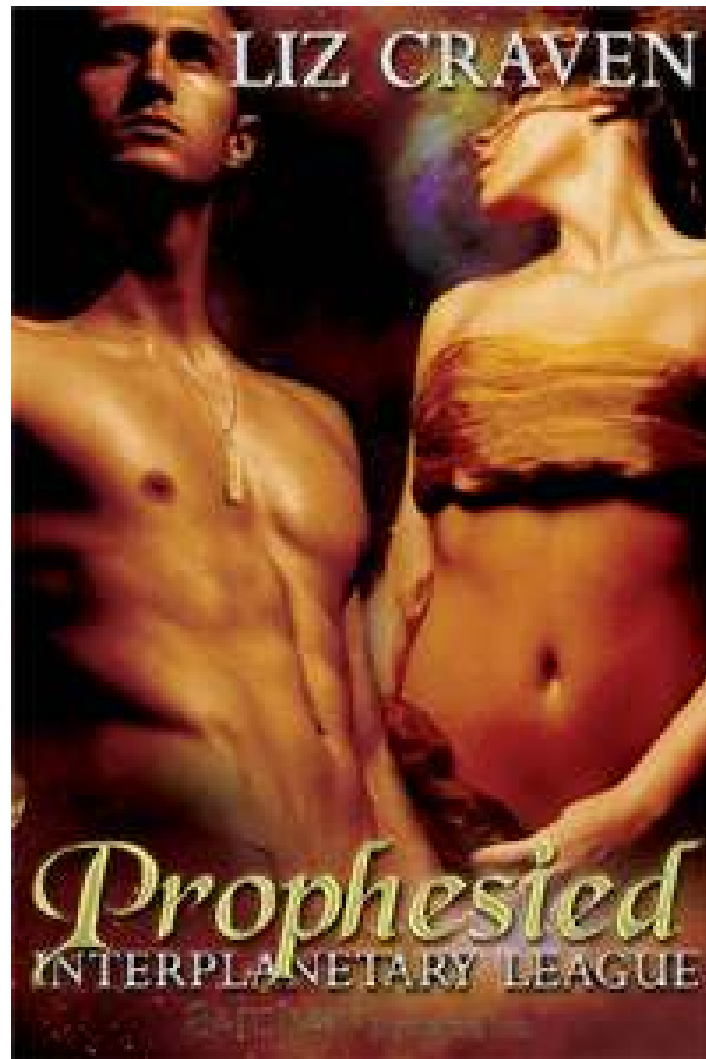
Lainey Bancroft lives just outside of scenic Niagara Falls, Ontario. As a mother to a teenaged daughter and son, pet wrangler of two spoiled labs and one ornery cat, part time bookkeeper, chief cook, bottle washer, and writer, she leads an active, fun filled life. She has won or placed in numerous writing contests and likes to mix things up by indulging her muse with stories that range from serious to sensuous to silly, but always ending on a satisfying note. Drop by her blog at <http://www.elaineforlife.com/myBloggie/> where she gabs and giggles about everything from the path to publication, to gardening, groceries, and Gas, who she's been married to for eighteen years.

She can also be found at <http://www.elaineforlife.com>
MySpace <http://www.myspace.com/laineybancroft>
Manic Readers <http://manicreaders.com/LaineyMBancroft/?promo=1>

Published Works:

The Wild Rose Press <http://www.thewildrosepress.com>
Settling Back January 2008
The 3-D Club Trilogy:
Dare to Dance, Ready to Reel, Waiting to Waltz
The Music of Marcus March 2007

Amira Press: <http://www.amirapress.com>
Mixed Blessings May 2008



Title: Prophesied

Author: Liz Craven

Genre: SciFi Romance

Rating: Vanilla

Format: e-book

Buy link:

<http://samhainpublishing.com/romance/prophesied>

Blurb:

On the day of her birth, Lia fulfilled a prophecy that ended a 5,000-year war, and became a wife. But being the fulfillment of a sacred prophecy makes for a stifling childhood—not to mention a dangerous one. When an assassination attempt goes wrong, Lia takes the opportunity and runs from her destiny—as well as from her absent husband.

Talon isn't sure what to expect when he rescues his bride from a mining colony on a barren moon. What he doesn't anticipate is her lack of gratitude and her repeated escape attempts. Determined to convince his wife to accept her duties, Talon knows he also needs to keep her safe, even if he has to lock her up in his own quarters to do it.

As they get closer to their planet and Lia's coronation, the danger around them increases, and so does the tension between them. For their growing attraction to turn into something more, they need to stay alive and learn to trust each other—a tall order when Lia's experience in life has taught her that trusting people can get you killed.

Excerpt:

Lia's eyes, accustomed to the dark mines, burned under the harsh office light. Blinking the tears back, the face of the speaking soldier wavered briefly, before coming into focus.

Her heart stuttered, and she managed to keep her jaw from dropping. Just when she thought things couldn't get any worse—or any better, she wasn't sure which.

His face was leaner than she remembered, giving his cheekbones a sharp edge. He had lost the soft features of a young man. The roundness of his cheeks had faded, making his square jaw more pronounced and giving him a determined look. He regarded the rep with gray eyes, the color of melted xyreon ore when light struck it. Unlike the ore, however, his flinty eyes were ice cold. The world “ruthless” flitted across her mind and a shiver danced down her spine.

His body had been long and lanky when she had last seen him, but the man before her was not the awkward boy she once knew. His chest had filled out, making him easily three times her width. His upper torso tapered to a lean waist. Body armor hugged trim hips and strong legs. The red emblem of an elected planetary official gleamed on his shoulders.

He barely glanced at her, and the feeling of disappointment that swept over Lia surprised her. She hadn't wanted him to recognize her and had no business feeling hurt because she had gotten her wish.

As she studied him, he glanced at a soldier behind him and jerked his chin in her direction. A man with blond hair and the flush of youth still in his cheeks stepped

towards her. He smiled at her—the first courtesy ever offered to her in the rep’s office—and extended his arm.

“This will only take a moment,” the young soldier assured her.

Staring at the device he was holding, Lia took a cautious step back. The rep still had a death grip on her arm—her fingers were going numb—so the step was small, but it was enough for the soldier to hesitate.

“What is that?” she demanded, relieved she sounded angry rather than panicked.

“It won’t hurt.” His tone was polite, if condescending, but he didn’t lower the device.

“What ‘won’t hurt’?” Lia snapped out.

The young man actually blushed. “It’s a simple DNA scan. It will take less than five seconds, and you won’t feel a thing.”

This time Lia wrenched her arm free from the rep as she leaped backwards. “Absolutely not.”

“I promise it won’t hurt,” the youth reassured her.

“I said no.”

Then he spoke, and he had the audacity to sound amused. “Madam, we are looking for someone. The DNA scan will help narrow our search by eliminating you. We will compensate you for your time.”

She snorted. Even if they gave her money, the rep would be the one “compensated” for her time. “I still refuse.”

“We must insist.”

Ignoring the furious glare of the rep, she stood her ground. “Under League privacy laws, a DNA scan cannot be compelled unless an individual is under arrest. Am I under arrest?”

He lifted an eyebrow. She resisted the urge to reach up and yank it back down.

“You are not under arrest—” he conceded.

“Then I am free to refuse the scan.”

“Neither are you in League territory,” he continued. He gestured towards the youth. “Caden.”

Lia’s stomach sank. They had her. League laws meant nothing on Tmesis. The only thing she could do was endure the scan with dignity.

The young soldier stepped forward, pointing the scanner at her.

Dignity be damned. With fury fueled by fear, Lia kicked out, knocking the scanner from the unsuspecting soldier’s hand. She spun and darted for the door.

She didn’t make it three meters, before slamming into another one of the soldiers who had circled around to block her path with inhuman speed. Her breathing hitched when she took in his glowing red eyes, widespread jaw, and sharp pointed teeth. An Inderian. A proud and fierce race of warriors steeped in tradition, blood feuds, and honor. If their inherent skills weren’t enough to inspire fear in those they met, the rumors of ritual sacrifice and cannibalism were. They rarely left their home system, but those who did usually hired out as assassins.

Were the soldiers seeking her out to ensure her death?

The Inderian turned Lia to face the others, lifting her completely off her feet to do so, and she hated that her face was flushed. The impromptu flight embarrassed her. Where did she think she was going? There weren’t a lot of hiding places on a barren moon. Especially when you needed pesky little luxuries like water. Fortunately, the dirt and grime smearing her face hid her blush. At least she hoped they did.

He stood in the same place, his arms crossed and that infuriating eyebrow still cocked, making no effort to hide his amusement.

Caden held the scanner again, his gaze flicking back and forth between Lia and his commander who met Lia’s narrowed eyes for a brief moment before nodding.

Caden approached her cautiously, like drawing near a nest of vipers. Lia felt a crazy urge to laugh. The Inderian held her immobilized. She could barely turn her head, much less attack a trained soldier. She wasn’t fooling herself. The only reason she’d succeeded in kicking him before was the element of surprise.

No miner in their right mind would attack a League soldier. Lia supposed that meant she was no longer in her right mind. Not that it mattered, seeing how they were probably going to kill her.

She had feared for her life for as long as she could remember and had half-expected to feel relief at finally facing death. She didn’t. She was pissed-off, plain and simple. And under the anger, her heart ached that the one good thing she remembered from childhood—this cold and amused man—was an illusion.

An illusion that was probably going to kill her.

Caden pressed a button and a beam of orange light moved over her. The crucial procedure took mere seconds. The light disappeared, and Caden began inputting data into the scanner.

Scrapping together what little dignity she had left, Lia addressed the Inderian. “You can release me now.”

A nod from their leader, and she found herself standing on her own two feet. The Inderian shifted behind her and she knew he prepared to catch her if she bolted. He needn’t have bothered. With the scan completed, she felt oddly resigned and drained of energy. With her anger gone, the long day, the cave-in and her injury finally caught up with her. Not to mention the strain of the last five minutes. She wanted to sit down. Actually, she wanted to curl into fetal position. She did neither.

A pair of boots stepped into her field of vision and she looked up into the face of the man from her past.

“That wasn’t so bad, was it?” The brisk tone lacked warmth, but Lia sensed he was trying to be kind. Her anger had amused him. She wondered if her dejection bothered him.

She decided to answer his question honestly. “Yes, it was.”

He blinked, and she realized she had surprised him. Instinctively, she knew very little surprised this man.

He inclined his head politely. “I apologize for the inconvenience.” He hesitated before dropping his voice to prevent the rep from overhearing. “We only seek to find a missing person. The scan will be used to eliminate your DNA as a match for hers. Once done, you will be free to go. We will not be passing scan results on to authorities or storing them in any public database. Your privacy and secrets will remain intact.”

He thought her a criminal afraid of being caught. She was about to surprise him again.

He turned away from her, dismissing her. “Caden, I believe we have taken up enough of this young lady’s time. Record her as a non-match and reset the scanner for the next subject.”

“I can’t,” Caden sounded nervous.

“You can’t? The scanner is malfunctioning?”

“No, sir. I just ran and reran a diagnostic on it. I also ran the results four times,” Caden rushed to assure him.

“Then what seems to be the problem?”

“There’s no problem. It’s just that...” He hesitated.

“That what?” the commander barked.

“I’m a match,” Lia said wearily. “I’m your wife.”

Buy link:

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Author Bio

Liz Craven

Hi. My name's Liz, and I am a recovering lawyer. For as long as I can remember, I've entertained myself by creating stories in my mind. Some made me laugh. Some made me cry. All made me appear emotionally disturbed to the people around me.

After practicing law for a couple of years, I returned to school to pursue yet another degree (I didn't feel I was deep enough in debt). There, I rediscovered the joy of being bored to tears in class. One day, instead of taking notes on thermohaline circulation, I jotted down some dialogue running through my head. (My mid-term results were not pretty.) I haven't stopped writing since.

LINKS

www.lizcraven.com

www.myspace.com/lizcraven

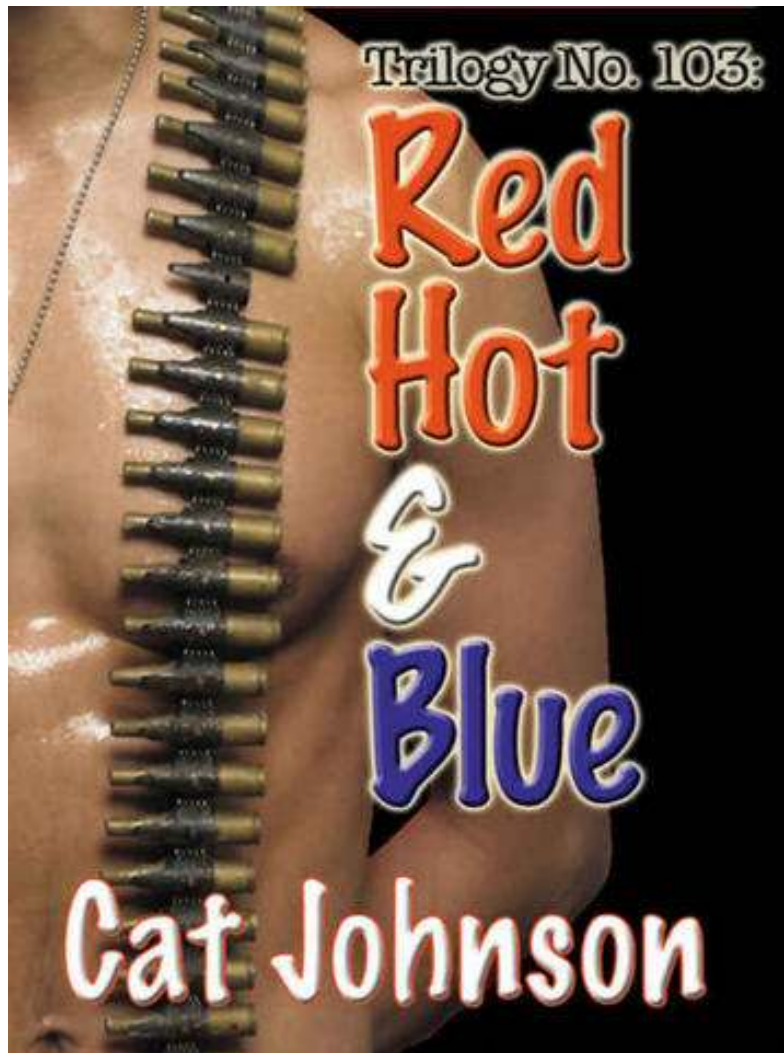
Published Works:

Carjacked (<http://www.newconceptspublishing.com/carjacked.htm>)

The Tiger's Eye (<http://www.newconceptspublishing.com/carjacked.htm>)

Tiger's Tail (<http://www.newconceptspublishing.com/tigerstail.htm>)

Prophesied (<http://samhainpublishing.com/romance/prophesied>)



Title: Trilogy No. 103: Red Hot & Blue

Author: Cat Johnson

Genre: Contemporary

Rating: Neapolitan

Format: e-book

Buy link: <http://www.lindenbayromance.com/product-trilogyno103redhotblue-94-183.html?oid=4>

Blurb:

Meet the men of Special Task Force Zeta...

Trey: Special operative Trey Williams doesn't want a girlfriend, nor does he need one in his life. A distracted soldier is a dead soldier, that's his motto. The problem is, the woman who has been recruited to pose as his wife on a special assignment is proving to be more of a distraction than Trey can handle. What's a soldier to do?

Jack: Ordered by his superiors to take time off for his \"mental health\", Jack Gordon heads back to his hometown for two weeks of R&R. But then he meets Nicki Camp, the new hand his brother has just hired to help out at the family farm. Is Nicki playing hard to get, or is she hiding something? Jack knows one thing...he isn't going to rest until he finds out!

Jimmy: Jimmy Gordon has learned during his career in the Special Forces that he can handle pretty much anything, including pretending to be everything from a banquet waiter to a terrorist, while undercover. But there is one thing he finds he's having a bit of difficulty handling, and that's the governor's hot red-headed daughter, Amelia Monroe-Carrington. Maybe the time for pretending is over?

Excerpt:

“Excuse me, but could you clarify, sir? We have to do what?” Jimmy Gordon raised his hand and asked the team commander.

The commander stood next to a rolling rack that held black trousers, white button-down shirts, short black jackets, and bow ties, six of each, and all on hangers under clear plastic. “You heard me, Gordon. Tonight, you will all be waiters. Except for Coleman, who'll be manning the communications equipment. And your brother, who'll be at the bar.”

“Why do you get to tend bar?” Jimmy hissed at his little brother Jack, who was seated next to him.

“Because I'm so pretty, I need to be behind the bar to keep the women off me?” Jack suggested.

Jimmy screwed his face up at his brother's high opinion of himself.

The commander continued. “This party is being attended by some big shit VIPs, both domestic and foreign, government and civilian. The chatter on the lines indicates there could possibly be an attempted attack. I say *attempted* because we will be there replacing the wait staff. Anything goes down, we'll be ready for it.”

“Um, but sir. I don’t know how to be a waiter, sir.” BB, short for Billy Bob, raised his hand hesitantly. Now BB was pretty, not that Jimmy thought of men in those terms. BB’d actually modeled before joining the team. But you’d never hear him calling himself pretty, unlike Jack.

Bull, who had earned his nickname through sheer size, snorted sarcastically. “Yeah, and *I* know how to be a waiter?”

Matt Coleman, computer genius, chimed in. “It’s easy! I did it all through high school. Just don’t spill on anybody and you’ll be fine.”

Jimmy got a mental image of Bull in a china shop and figured that was pretty much what it was going to be like tonight, except Bull would be carrying a silver tray in his big mitt-sized hands and wearing a bowtie.

Bull looked doubtful, too. “Then why aren’t *you* being a waiter, Coleman, if you know so much?”

“*You* learn how to do what *I* do by tonight, Bull, and I will!” Coleman shot back, cocky. He had every right to act that way. No one could perform the magic Matt did with a computer.

“Bull’s fingers wouldn’t even fit on the keys!” Trey Williams said from beside Jack.

Jimmy had to agree. They were all safer with Matt on the console, even if it meant Bull spilling things on the rich guys.

Watching the exchange with a look of amused patience, the commander finally held up one hand. “OK. If we’re done bickering, ladies, grab your uniforms and weapons, leg holsters only, and let’s go. I want you all as familiar with this place tonight as you are with your own dicks.”

Jack smirked and whispered, “That will be pretty familiar for you, big brother, considerin’ I haven’t seen any women around lately volunteerin’ to hold yours for you!”

Jimmy got laid plenty. He was just discreet. Although, he had been experiencing a bit of a dry spell lately. Jimmy raised a brow. “They’re not exactly lined up for you either, little brother.”

“That’s because I’m holdin’ out for the love of my life. That cute little thing that tends bar down the street,” Jack informed him.

He knew the one Jack was talking about. She didn’t date military guys. “If that’s

true, then I think you'll be holdin' your own for quite some time yet," Jimmy teased.

"Twenty bucks says I get a date with her before summer," Jack said, sticking his hand out to shake on the bet.

"You're on!" Jimmy shook with pleasure. Easiest twenty bucks he'd ever make, he thought to himself. Then he grabbed his 'uniform' (*gag*) and headed out.

Just a few hours later, Jimmy ran a finger under the collar of his stiff white shirt and winced. There was a reason he'd joined the Special Forces instead of taking a corporate job. It was so he wouldn't have to wear a shirt and tie. And here he was, not only in an overly starched shirt, but in a bow tie, no less! Although he figured the loaded .45 caliber handgun strapped to his leg balanced out the sissy bow tie on the testosterone scale.

Matt Coleman's voice came through the communicator implanted in his ear. "Don't all you boys look cute! I've got eyes and ears up and running. Talk to me."

"Gordon, Jimmy." Jimmy checked in, confirming receipt of Matt's communication, such as it was, about having audio and visual surveillance in place.

"Gordon, Jack."

"Williams."

"Bull."

"BB"

Through his earpiece, Jimmy heard Matt ask, "Commander?"

Jimmy could see the commander across the room in his own penguin suit, looking just as uncomfortable. He heard him say, "Yeah, I'm here, Coleman. Damn it. Let's get this show on the road. This tie is killing me."

Jimmy smiled. At least even rank didn't have its privileges on this op.

"You guys better go into the kitchen and find out what you'll be passing," Matt warned.

"Besides gas?" Jack joked. Jimmy heard the round of snickers through his earpiece.

"Ha, ha, Jack. You're all lucky. Tonight is butler service, just passed hors d'oeuvres. But, I'm serious. People are going to ask what's on your tray. Take it from me, they'll make you feel like an idiot if you don't know," Matt continued.

Jimmy had a feeling they might be better off with Bull on the communications

console and Matt out here. Matt really was the only one who knew what the hell he was doing as a waiter. All of their training for Special Task Force Zeta didn't prepare them for 'butler service'.

Damn, did people even have butlers nowadays? He saw the first guest arrive and judging from the look of him, these people did.

"Guests are arriving," Jimmy announced.

"I'm ready!" He heard Jack's voice and a champagne cork pop simultaneously.

Jimmy and the rest of the team, minus Jack and Matt, hurried into the kitchen for their big silver trays of tiny food. The chef shoved a tray at each one of them.

Shove. "Herb encrusted goat cheese." BB picked it up with both hands and walked, carrying the tray as if it was a nuclear bomb, out of the kitchen door.

Shove. "Bruschetta."

"Bru-whatta?" Trey Williams stood there frowning.

The look the chef gave him could have wilted the green leafy thing garnishing Trey's tray. *Trey's tray*, that was funny. Jimmy laughed to himself at his own little joke. He'd have to find a way to use that later.

"It's chopped tomatoes with basil on garlic toast points," the chef explained none too patiently.

Trey grabbed the tray with an, "Oh."

Matt's voice in his ear warned them all. "Don't piss off the chef, whatever you do. I had one throw a butcher knife at me once."

Great. Now Jimmy had to worry about the chef throwing things at him on top of terrorists blowing up the rich guys who were going to be mean to him for not knowing what bruschetta was.

Shove. "Wild mushrooms and brie on sourdough toast."

Hmm. Who knew toast was so highbrow? It was in two of these things already. Jimmy had been eating toast all his life. He hadn't known he was so classy!

Bull took the mushroom toast things and looked like a giant Gulliver carrying a miniscule doll-sized tray out of the kitchen.

Uh, oh. Jimmy was up next. He stepped up to the stainless steel table.

Shove. “Hot parsnip soup.”

Uh, oh again. His silver and very slippery looking tray contained about twenty tall shot glasses filled with a whitish liquid that Jimmy thought looked too much like semen to even contemplate drinking, or eating, or whatever. But that was the least of it. How was he supposed to carry this without those shot glasses slipping all over the place?

The commander was behind him, so he stepped aside to magnanimously allow him to go first. “Sir.”

“Oh, no, Gordon. That one’s all yours. And don’t call me sir.”

Jimmy cringed a bit and picked up the tray with two slightly unsteady hands. He could shoot the bull’s-eye out of a target with a hand so steady he could perform brain surgery with it, but carry a train full of Cum Soup-filled shot glasses and he was—well—shot.

He somehow got himself out the door without spilling, although the whole lot of glasses shifted slightly to the left, along with the white lace doily which may look nice, but did dick to help him keep from spilling. He scoped out the situation and nearly got knocked into by a guest as he did.

That was it. He couldn’t keep his eye peeled for the bad guys if he was staring at this gross soup. Jimmy gingerly walked over to his brother at the bar. “I’m leaving this tray on the bar before I spill it.”

Jack glanced at the tray and cringed. “What the hell is it?”

“Parsnip soup.”

Jack winced. “Well, it looks like...”

Jimmy stopped him before he got any further. “I know what it looks like. Just tell the guests what it is if they ask. I’m goin’ to do a walk through and see what’s up.”

“All right. But nobody’s going to drink that shi...I mean stuff.” Jimmy watched Jack catch himself just as a couple walked up to the bar and into earshot.

He smiled to himself. This gig might not be too bad. He’d just keep dumping his trays on the bar.

Jimmy was very proud of himself for thinking of it and was still congratulating himself when he saw one hot number walk into the room on the arm of some old dude he sincerely hoped was not her date. That would be a shame, since she was hotter than that

soup he'd ditched and a hell of a lot more attractive, too.

Red hair pulled up to reveal the sexiest porcelain white neck and shoulders he'd ever seen. Legs up to her armpits and a black strapless dress slit up the side nearly as high. And big eyes he could see from across the room that were as blue as the cool pond on his mama's farm.

Wow. Good thing he'd ditched that tray. Otherwise, he definitely would have dropped it when he saw her. She was gorgeous and she knew it. Head held high, she waved off BB and his tray with a flick of her wrist without even glancing at him.

Jimmy watched the commander sidle up to her. It looked as if he had teeny tiny lamb chops on his tray. That figures. The commander not only got something easy to carry, but it was something the hot chick actually wanted. She grabbed a chop and a tiny napkin and turned back to listen to something her companion was saying to another old guy in a tux.

Jimmy swallowed. His mouth started to water, not only because the lamb looked really good, but also because he was picturing her doing something else, as he watched her suck on the tiny lamb bone. Mmm, mmm!

"Gordon!" Jimmy jumped at the sound of the commander's voice through his earpiece.

Jimmy heard Jack hiss, "What?"

"Not you, Jack. The other Gordon." The commander's voice sounded annoyed. Jimmy turned toward the wall so no one would wonder why he was talking to himself and whispered, "Sir?"

"Stop drooling over the redhead and do a sweep, damn it. And don't think I didn't notice you *forget* your tray at the bar. Good job on that one!"

Jimmy turned and saw the commander smiling across the room. At least he wasn't in trouble over the soup, he thought.

Buy link: <http://www.lindenbayromance.com/product-trilogyno103redhotblue-94-183.html?oid=4>

Author Bio

Cat Johnson

Writing with Cattitude--It's not your mama's romance

When Cat Johnson first decided to write a military romance, she knew nothing except that she enjoyed reading books in that genre. Not being military herself, lots of research followed. She read everything she could find on the Internet, but more valuable was interacting with active military on troop support sites. Now, Cat communicates daily with troops and their families, some halfway around the world. They provide real-life military details, which she wraps in her fictionalized romance tales. With the friendships she has built, she hopes to continue penning books about alpha males in camo and combat boots inspired by her real-life muses.

Cat also writes contemporary romantic comedy featuring everyone from firemen, to computer geeks, to best girlfriends in search of love. In her spare time, she is active in her local Junior League, and is a professional harpist.

Important Links

www.catjohnson.net

www.myspace.com/authorcatjohnson

Published Works:

Linden Bay Romance, LLC

www.lindenbayromance.com

Trilogy No. 102: Opposites Attract

Trilogy No. 103: Red Hot & Blue

Trilogy No. 105: Smalltown, USA

“Black Cat” in the Witches Night Anthology

Trilogy No. 106: Nice & Naughty

“Under the Covers” in the Heroes Unwrapped Print Anthology

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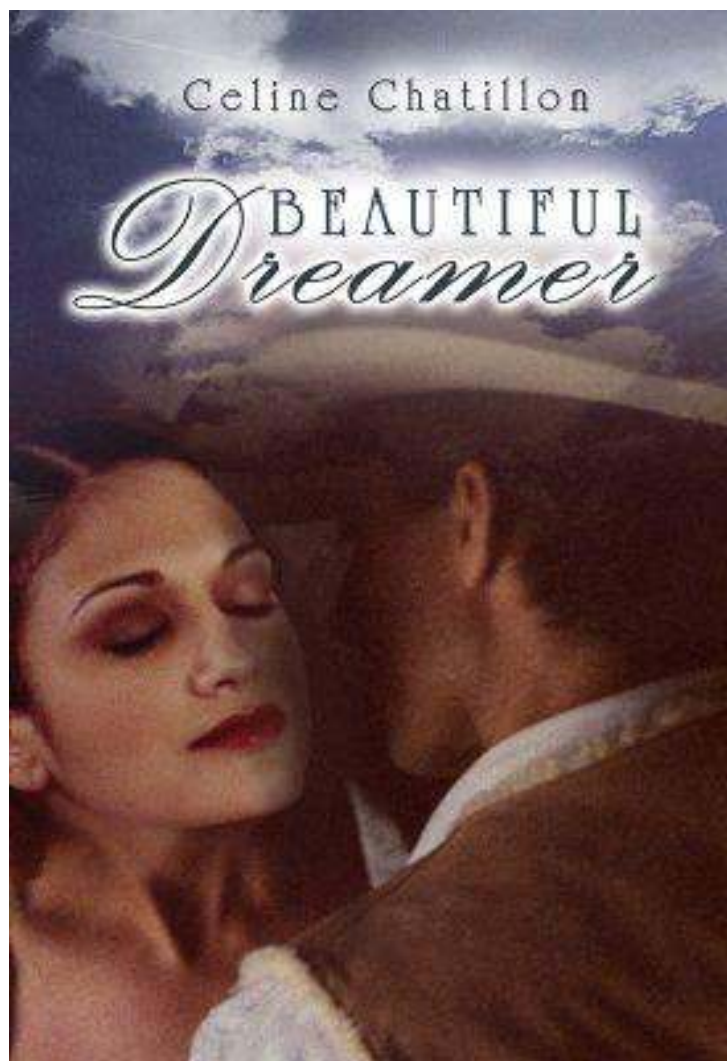
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He Came Upon a Midnight Clear

“Beneath the Surface” in the Fantasies IV Anthology



Title: Beautiful Dreamer

Author: Celine Chatillon

Genre: Contemporary Erotic Romance

Rating: Neapolitan

Format: e-book

Buy link : <http://www.liquidsilverbooks.com/books/beautifuldreamer.htm>

Blurb:

Can a sexy, sleepwalking librarian corral a commitment-shy sheriff during the mayhem of rodeo week? When Marianne the Librarian sleepwalks into the brawny arms of handsome Sheriff Cody Greene sparks fly and an erotic night of pleasure ensues. A confirmed bachelor, Cody realizes Marianne isn't really the "love 'em and leave 'em" type of woman he's used to entertaining in bed, and he's worried. But by the end of the week--and after surviving a series of livestock-related calls and some "sleepless" nights--Cody is able to conquer both his fear of stampeding cattle and his fear of commitment.

Excerpt:**Chapter One**

Starling County Sheriff Cody Greene felt more than curious, more than concerned. He was downright worried. It wasn't like Marianne Chalmers to be active all hours of the night.

The phone call had awakened him from a fitful sleep. He slumped against the headboard and rubbed his eyes as he put down the receiver. It had been a long time since he enjoyed a full night's sleep--about as long as it had been since he had enjoyed the warm-bodied companionship of a female occupant in his bed. But wallowing in his sorry personal problems wasn't important now. Marianne was.

He untangled himself from a mass of twisted sheets and headed straight for the shower. The tepid West Texas well water rinsed the sleep from his eyes, rolling down the taut muscles of his chest and past his hips, washing away at least part of the ache that seemed to perpetually linger in his groin.

Ten minutes previous, Dulcie Garcia--Marianne's neighbor and assistant at the library--had phoned her son, Benny. Benny, Cody's right hand man, knew what to do. He immediately called his boss with the news about Marianne's lights being on at two o'clock in the morning.

"Mom's been awfully worried about her." Benny stifled a yawn. "Yesterday she actually took Marianne over to that crazy quack of a healer in Crane. You know, the one who claims there's an herb for just about every ill that pains you."

Cody's heart struck up a quicker tempo. He swallowed hard. "Marianne's been sick? I hadn't heard."

"Not *sick* sick, you know, but sort of finding it hard to sleep from what I understand," Benny explained. "That's why when Mom spotted the lights on at Marianne's place--while she was up enjoying her late night snack--she sort of wondered what was happening over there. She really got all worked up about it, too. You'd think the aliens had kidnapped our county librarian the way Mom was going on."

"Well, if the aliens had kidnapped her then her lights wouldn't be on, now would they?" Cody snapped. A frown creased his forehead. "Keep away from the 'Marfa Lights' on weekends, will ya Benny? The FBI will never take you on if you keep on listing your hobby as 'Roswell Crash Incident Investigator.'"

"Thanks for the vote of confidence." There was a smile in the young deputy's voice as he added, "Sorry for waking you up, *Old Man*."

Ouch. Cody winced. That hurt. Being thirty-five wasn't exactly over-the-hill by any means. Or was it? His parents had been on his case about settling down and getting married only for the last five years or so, ever since they retired and moved on down to the gulf to do a little fishing.

"*No problema, mi amigo,*" Cody said, rubbing his temples. "I apologize for being short with you there. This headache of mine doesn't seem to be going away."

Benny chuckled. "Are you sure the ache isn't a little lower than your head? I mean, it's been at least four months since Joleen left town. Maybe that medicine woman's got an herb to fix those kinds of problems as well. "

Now there's a thought. Cody considered it for two whole seconds then pushed the idea aside. Cold showers and late nights working hard was all he needed to deal with his ... *tenseness* problem.

"All right, wise guy. Try to keep your eyes open for a few more hours until I relieve you, okay?"

"Roger on that. 'Night, boss."

"'Night, Benny."

For the most part, Cody really didn't mind being roused from his bed when it came to the Starling County's head librarian. After all, he was the area's chief law enforcement official and had every right to know just what was happening and why in his jurisdiction.

Besides, he and Marianne went back, way back. All the way back to Starling County High. She had been valedictorian of the class behind him, and he the star quarterback of the six-man football team, the state champion Starling Mustangs. Marianne had been as quiet as a library during finals week and as fragile as a piece of Taos black pottery back then, too.

Cody jumped out of the shower, quickly toweled off, pulled on his khaki police duds, stepped into his boots and sleepily raked his fingers through his dampened, sun-streaked blond hair. Strapping on his holster, he re-checked his weapon, then attached the ubiquitous mobile phone to his belt.

It was a whole different world from the one his father, Colton Senior, had called home when he was sheriff back in the seventies. Now, if Cody or Benny ever got into trouble a quick phone call could summon law enforcement from miles around. But this was still Starling County, population more or less one thousand souls in a fifty square mile radius. There were more prairie dogs than people in the county. Somehow, though, people still caused the majority of the problems.

Cody parked his four-wheel drive cruiser opposite of Marianne's sandstone bungalow with weathered white shutters and switched off the engine. An unusual chill filled the dry desert air, making the pale-blue glow of a near-to-bursting full moon seem even eerier.

The high plains of the Oil Patch weren't known for their cool nights in June near rodeo week, but, at two-twenty in the morning with the hint of a thunderstorm brewing in the Davis Mountains to the south, the weather was taking a much needed break from the broiling heat of early summer. Squinting, Cody could make out the petite librarian's form ambling back and forth behind the sheer draperies of her front window.

Should he knock and politely say he had happened to be passing by on patrol and wanted to check why her lights were on? It was bad enough Marianne's husband had been killed a little over a year ago in a freak oil rig accident. She didn't need any more trouble to contend with these days.

For all her delicate, dark-haired beauty, Marianne seemed a very proud and fiercely independent woman. She had more than proven that to everyone in the small county seat of Starling City by bravely staying put after Buddy's death. Many a young Oil Patch widow would have packed her bags and headed toward the bright lights of Midland-Odessa or possibly Dallas-Fort Worth but not Marianne. Her passion was to encourage the children of the Starling Independent School District to read. She had stated on numerous occasions she wasn't about to walk away from her job and her mission in life that easily. He couldn't help but admire her tenacity.

Marianne Rodriguez Chalmers might very well be small in stature, but she was a giant at heart. And even a giant needed help every now and then.

"Marianne, are you all right?" Cody called out, rapping on the screen door.

"Marianne?"

No answer--except the sound of a door slowly squeaking open and shutting with a hollow *clap*.

As the ominous sound echoed in the quiet, the hairs on the back of Cody's neck bristled. He hunched his shoulders and quickly scanned the area with sharp eyes. Something wasn't right. He pulled his weapon and stealthily skirted around the side of the house, pausing at the rickety chain-link fence as the full implications of the vision he encountered clicked in his brain.

"I'll be damned," he whispered, holstering his weapon and quickening his step to follow.

In the gentle radiance of the full moon a most tantalizing apparition greeted him. Marianne Chalmers, clad only in a thin, white cotton shift and slippers, her thick, dark hair flowing like a waterfall to the small of her back, walked as if she were still asleep. Correction--she must be *sleepwalking*. She solemnly strolled from her back door, crossed her box-like yard and exited through the fence's alley entrance. Crossing the dirt track she proceeded toward the rear entrance of the Victorian-era home that housed the Starling County library.

A little night book shelving? Cody quietly followed ten paces behind the curious figure in white. If Marianne wanted to get ahead on some work projects, he sure wished she would have put some decent clothes on first. The least she could have done was to put on a bathrobe so the peaks of her full breasts weren't so achingly apparent through the sheer material of her gown as she twirled and danced about now in the silvery moonlight. Cody momentarily averted his eyes and concentrated hard on trying to help a fellow citizen, not mentally undress her.

Marianne paused at the bottom step of the back stoop. She bent slowly to pick up a hand-sized rock from the soil of a potted plant. Turning it over in her palm, she extricated a small, piece of metal from its underside.

Damn! Why didn't folks ever listen to him? Hiding a key outside of a building just wasn't safe, not even in a town the size of Starling. Too late to do anything about it now, one by one Marianne silently mounted the steps, put the key in the lock, opened the door and stepped inside. Cody quickly followed.

"What the hell does she think she's doing prancing about the library in her nightie at two o'clock in the morning?" He switched on one row of small spotlights lining the back wall for safety's sake, shutting and locking the door behind them.

Marianne weaved in and out of the shelves as graceful as a ballerina, as lissome as a fairy-tale sprite. Cody parked himself at the information desk and closely observed the ghostlike dancer floating among the shelves of her daylight workplace.

"Marianne?" he said, breaking the silence after several minutes. "Can you tell me what on God's green earth you're up to?"

After a lengthy pause, a small, scurrying sound from behind the shelving alerted Cody to her presence.

"What is it, good sir knight?" came a breathy, high-pitched tone that didn't sound at all like the Marianne Chalmers everyone knew and loved. "Pray tell, come hither sire and repeat thy request. Or canst thou not find thy way through the dark of the woods?"

Cody's eyes widened. Something was definitely wrong with this situation. Marianne could be a bit on the egghead, eccentric, bookworm side, but she had never been caught running around the library half-naked while spouting Shakespearean dialogue before. And did sleepwalkers actually *talk* while in the middle of a dream? A rather interesting phenomenon he had to admit.

All that was immaterial now. Marianne's safety was more important. Springing from his seat, Cody headed into the shadowy stacks.

A left and a left again and there she stood, perched daintily atop a small footstool, a violet colored veil draped dramatically over her face. She appeared to be fiddling about with a shelf display containing several medieval-themed novels complete with a cone-shaped hat and a child's plastic broad sword.

"So, that's why you came in here." Cody heaved a long sigh. Placing his hands on his hips, he relaxed his stance. "You wanted to work some more on your book displays, right? I don't know much about art, but I have to admit they're rather good. Folks from all over the county have commented positively about them. They've been checking out and actually reading all kinds of books that they never would have before you came along. But, Marianne, why can't this wait until morning?"

"The morrow?" Her voice rose. Marianne grabbed the pretend sword from the shelf and offered the weapon to him hilt first. "Wilst thou not defend my honor now, good sir knight? Wilst thou leave this lonely maiden lost in the woods forever?"

This is getting too weird. Cody felt a shiver of apprehension tingling down his spine, his palms dampening. Yep, something was definitely wrong here. He rocked back and forth on his boot heels several times, trying to jar the log jam in his brain before reacting too hastily. At length, he cleared his throat and looked steadily into her eyes.

"Uh, yeah... Um, Marianne? By chance did that witch doctor Dulcie took you to over in Crane give you anything vaguely resembling a wild mushroom?"

"Oh, good sir knight!" Marianne flew off the footstool, flinging herself full force into the surprised sheriff's arms. "I may have been poisoned by a wicked witch. Wilst thou be my protector and save me from all manner of evil?"

Soulful, coffee-colored eyes glistened with unshed tears in her upturned face. Cody was breathless. He inhaled the sweet perfume of her floral cologne followed by the musky fragrance of her own feminine scent. His hungry body greedily feasted on the warmly seductive curves pressed tight against the perpetual ache in his groin and drank in the comely visage before him.

"Well, I guess you could say that I'm honor bound to protect all who call upon my aid," he said hoarsely, play-acting along with her in a vain attempt to bring her back to her senses.

"I thank thee, good sir knight. You are indeed a brave and admirable man."

And with that, Marianne gracefully stood on tip-toe and gently pressed her rose petal mouth against Cody's full, unsuspecting lips.

A jolt of electricity immediately passed between the lawman and the librarian, and, in that split second, the sterling Sheriff of Starling County began to quake in his boots. The teasing tremor traveled along his legs, up his spine, around his ample chest, and down his arms to rest at the very tips of his fingers, sparkling with delicious anticipation the entire length of its journey. His whole frame fairly tingled with excitement, increasing the tenseness he felt so much he feared he'd detonate in a mind-bending explosion of ecstasy on the spot.

Who would have ever thought Marianne Librarian could kiss like that? I know I didn't think so before tonight.

Cody quickly overcame his state of shock, and his common sense soon got the better of him. He took a deep breath and slowly backed away, praying the distance would lessen the attraction of Marianne's charms.

"Now look, I'm only doing my job here and..."

"Come!" She grabbed Cody's hand and playfully tapped him on his backside with the sword, leading him toward the west wing of the building. "Let us leave the dark woods and go hither to thy encampment."

Grinning seductively like a centerfold, Marianne tugged a compliant Cody along, halting at last in front of the secluded reading enclosure behind the shorter shelves of the children's section. A sunken rectangular area full of bean bag chairs, large stuffed animals and over-sized pillows, the "pit" was a favorite hang-out for readers of all ages.

"Come, come, let us rest here for the night for soon it will be morrow," Marianne purred.

"Now see here, I've got to get you home before--agh!"

Without warning, Marianne jumped into the pile of pillows, pulling Cody in after her. With one last hard yank he lost his balance, toppling head over heels into the reading pit where he landed squarely beside the wildly erratic, wildly erotic Marianne Chalmers, the newly nocturnal nymph of the library.

She gasped. "Why, good sir knight, what a broad sword you have."

"I..."

She tossed the toy weapon aside and massaged the growing bulge in the front of Cody's khakis with her palm as her other arm encircled his neck and drew his lips ever closer to her own.

Cody closed his eyes and willed his aching groin to go to sleep. "Marianne, I'm on duty and it's obvious even to a blind, deaf and dumb armadillo that you're not quite yourself tonight."

His plea went unheeded. "Do not deny your lady this pleasure or else she will surely die."
He swallowed hard. "We're friends and have always been just that, remember?"

She nibbled tantalizingly at his lower lip. "But friends can become lovers, canst they not?" she whispered. "And what dost thou mean I am not myself? How dost thou know what I am like when the tapestries are drawn in my bed chamber?"

She had him there. Cody had admired Marianne's bravery, intelligence and natural beauty from afar over the years, but he had never once dreamed about how passionate the strong-willed woman poised on top of him at this moment could be when the lights were turned down low. Buddy truly had been a lucky man.

"I don't feel right taking advantage of you like this," Cody gently parted her lithe form from his own and laid her down beside him in the sea of pillows. "After all, you're still grieving over Buddy."

A silent tear trickled down her cheek. "Yes, the heinous, fire-breathing dragon did slay my beloved before he could even draw his sword."

"If you mean the rig blow-out, yes, that's what did it." Cody turned to his side and tenderly wiped her tear-stained face dry with the back of his hand. "I'm sorry to bring up a painful memory, but I think you're under the influence of a chemical and not quite yourself and--Marianne!"

Quicker than Robin Hood could shoot an arrow, she rolled him over to his back and straddled him, seductively positioning her small frame against his rock hard erection.

"I will grieve all the more if you do not unsheathe your sword, good sir knight." A sensual smile spread across her small features. "It has been too long since I have felt the warmth of manly flesh against my own. Does not my heart's beating tell you so?"

Taking his hand in hers, she guided his touch to the pulse at the base of her graceful neck, trailing it slowly to the pounding pulse between her more than generous breasts.

A low moan erupted from Cody's throat. "Lord help me, I don't have the strength to resist you."

Marianne masterfully lead his palms across the gossamer material stretched tightly across her budding nipples, down the flat planes of her stomach toward the hot and hungry dampness between her legs. Cody moaned again. His cries seemed loud enough to wake the entire town. Her expert lips cruised the length of his cheek, chin and neck. Her teeth nibbled gently at his throat.

"If thou will unsheathe thy sword, I will gladly remove my own garment," she murmured, catching an earlobe between her teeth. Nimble fingers began unbuttoning his shirt. "Thy lady cannot wait any longer."

Neither can I. Cody swallowed hard, silently condemning himself for his own weakness as she unbuckled his belt and tugged at his zipper. *This isn't right,* his conscience nagged. *She's not even awake.*

He cleared his throat and sat up. "Marianne, I don't think we should. Listen, we..." Marianne yanked her gauzy gown over her head and flung it aside with a playful flourish, revealing her total lack of undergarments. Cody had to face the awful truth: He was lost, lost forever in the sensuous spell of the most imaginative lover he had ever known.

Shimmering moonlight slanted through the window blinds, bathing the exquisite dark-eyed beauty above him in an iridescent glow. The hypnotizing dance of light and shadows gracefully accentuated the roundness of her breasts and the pertness of her dark pink nipples. She obliged him by bending lower to kiss his forehead, offering her twin charms to his hungry lips to taste and tease until she cried for more pleasures from his roving hands. She guided his palms from her breasts down to the moist heat between her thighs, aching for a more intimate touch.

Miraculously, Cody's shirt and holster melted away, leaving his bare torso free to Marianne's curious tongue as she playfully teased his nipples into hard peaks, sliding ever lower toward the waistband of his cotton boxers peeking through his open zipper.

Cody's eyes snapped opened. Sitting up, he cupped her firm buttocks in his capable hands and scooted her face nearer to his own, trapping her enchanting eyes in his somber gaze.

"We'd better stop right here before we regret our actions later. I think it's better if we..."

The words died on his lips as she smothered his protest with a kiss, a long and demanding kiss, a kiss that sent his senses rocketing, intensifying his tenseness until he was certain his whole body would blow up on the launch pad. Just when he thought she'd come up for air she probed deeper. Tongues intertwining in a lover's tango of passion and promise, Cody knew he had never experienced a kiss quite like it before. This in spite of the fact in high school he'd once dated the entire Starling County High School varsity cheerleading squad within a period of one week.

"Ah, hell," he muttered when at last her lips released his. Without further regret, he kicked his boots off faster than a mule in a rage. His trousers soon followed suit. Nothing more than his now-wet-with-excitement boxers separated them from consummating their mutual desire.

Still, his sense of decency told him he had to resist.

"Marianne, you're tempting me beyond the brink, but you know we can't." Cody took a deep breath, steadying his nerves. Somehow he had to talk her out of this situation without hurting her feelings or losing anymore of his clothing. "We have to think about your health and reputation. I don't have anything on me for, uh, you know, protection." Marianne paused in her litany of kisses upon his neck and brow. She drew back, blinking rapidly as she stared into his serious hazel-green eyes.

"The brave and handsome knight travels without the sheath to his sword?"

He exhaled a painful sigh. "Yes, yes, that's right. I left it along with my white horse back at the castle."

Her eyes slanted. She quickly reached behind herself and picked up his trousers, plucking his billfold out of the pocket.

"My good lord always carried his sheath in his moneybag just in case." A wicked grin graced her love-swollen lips as she withdrew the forgotten condom from his billfold and waved it inches from his nose. "It appears ye do likewise."

Cody blinked, then blinked again. His square jaw widened to the size of the Palo Duro Canyon. How had *that* gotten in his wallet? Then it dawned on him. He had picked up a pair of condoms off the ground outside the gymnasium after making his obligatory visit to the senior prom a few weeks back. They were brand-spanking new and in good shape, and he had thought he'd keep them just in case anyone ever needed any for just such an emergency.

"Uh, yeah, it appears I do, too." He cleared his cracking voice. "But it doesn't mean we have to..."

Covering his lips with hers, Marianne effectively silenced any further objections. Her butterfly fingers fluttered across his shoulders and down his sides, coming to a comfortable rest at his tight buns. Caressing him with unrestrained passion, she struggled to remove their remaining barrier.

"Allow me," Cody said, giving up the fight. He rolled his temptress to the side before carefully sliding his shorts down over his saluting cock.

Marianne's eyes widened. "My lord has indeed been blessed with a very *broad* sword."

Her knuckles whitened in their grip around the purple condom wrapper, her small hands trembling ever so slightly.

This has gone far enough. Cody reached out and gently cradled Marianne's delicate face in his big hands and waited for her rapidly shifting focus to settle fully on his face. "Marianne, it's okay if you want to stop now," he said slowly, deliberately. "I'll understand. I promise."

The sound of tearing echoed through out the dark, silent library. Her lascivious smile said it all.

"Once the horse has escaped from his stall, it would be a sin not to allow him to gallop forth. Would it not, my lord?"

The look of pure wantonness in her eyes dissolved Cody's last iota of restraint. Marianne cried joyously as he scooped her up and placed her astride him, gently guiding her hands to sheath his member. He wound his own hands into her thick tresses, bringing her face to meet his in order to partake of a deep and lingering kiss. With exquisite slowness he eased himself inside her in the most intimate of embraces.

Her tightness enveloped him totally, driving him almost immediately over the edge. Breathing deeply, he struck up a strong and steady rhythm of thrusts. She arched her back and responded with a tantalizing twist of her hips, pulling him deeper into herself then deeper still.

They squealed and groaned and bucked and bounced through the sea of cushions, locked in a rollicking dance of desire. His mouth tasted of her sweet breasts once again as he repeatedly stroked her clit. She cried out in rapturous delight, begging him to come along with her.

A knight can't very well refuse his lady. Cody obliged his comely companion with a series of hard, quick thrusts. Marianne threw back her head, screaming as their joining came to its mutual climax. Plunging together over the passion's edge, they drifted calmly back toward earth and collapsed, sated, into each other's arms.

"Marianne? You all right?" Cody whispered into her tangled locks. He gently withdrew himself then held her close to his chest.

"Good night, sweet prince," she murmured. The sound of her steady breathing gave evidence that their intense love-making had, at last, blessed her with sleep.

Cody scratched his head and frowned. "You don't even have a clue as to what you've been up to, do you?"

She answered with a soft snore.

"Probably not."

He sighed and gazed admiringly upon the sleeping beauty beside him. She looked so peaceful, so innocent--if that was a word he could use to describe her anymore. His memories of little Marianne back in sixth grade wearing big glasses with her nose permanently stuck in a book were completely shattered after tonight's experience. He stroked her silky, brown-black hair and tenderly kissed her part. "What are we going to do now, the two of us?" A quick glance at his wristwatch revealed dawn still a ways off. It wouldn't do for Dulcie to open the doors at nine o'clock and find the two of them entangled in the reading pit minus everything except what God graced them with upon their births.

Cody chuckled to himself. "Hell, I'd hate to run for re-election if wind of this escapade ever gets out."

Sighing, he reluctantly disengaged himself from Marianne's embrace and stood. He quickly gathered their strewn clothing and dressed himself first. Bunching up the cotton night gown, he gently inserted Marianne's arms in the arm holes and lowered it over her sleeping form. He scanned the reading pit area, his cheeks reddening slightly as he pocketed the torn condom wrapper. Kids didn't need to be finding such things lying around.

"There. I hope I've fluffed up the pillows enough and put this place back into some semblance of order." He bent down on one knee and caressed his lover's warm cheek with a finger. "Marianne?" he whispered softly. She dozed deeper than a bear in hibernation. Scooping her up into his arms, he headed toward the exit.

Luckily no one saw them as he carried Marianne from the library to her home. Cody knelt down beside her after tucking her in bed. Caressing her small hand in his, he chastely kissed it before placing it under the covers.

"Now what?" he asked himself. Should he wait beside her bed until she awakened, then simply confess to the crime--how he took advantage of her loneliness in the wee hours of the morning?

Well, you see, Marianne, it was like this: You were drugged and didn't know what you were doing. You started ripping your clothes off, then mine, and I just couldn't help myself...

Ah, hell! He couldn't say it quite like that. She just might come after him with a cast-iron skillet, and rightly so. If he were in her boots, he'd take more than a skillet to his noggin. He'd take a shotgun, and it would be aimed much lower than his head. He'd never sing bass in the First Baptist Church choir ever again.

Cody swallowed hard, studying Marianne's delicate features in repose. So beautiful, so very beautiful, both inside and out. It was the main reason why he hadn't chased after her like some folks had suggested. He knew she deserved better than him, the original "not-quite-ready-to-settle-down type."

Maybe that's why he had held onto Joleen as long as he had? They really were two of a kind. Joleen had perfectly demonstrated their similarity of character a few months back when she exercised her freedom to pack up and leave town for a more exciting life with no commitments, no regrets.

Regrets. Yep, Cody was now the proud owner of quite a few in regards to his new relationship with the county librarian. Marianne was the farthest thing from a love 'em and leave 'em type of gal to ever grace the face of the earth. She deserved better. She was a decent, hard-working, compassionate woman. She definitely wasn't a "Joleen."

Cody knew he really only had one choice. He'd have to tell Marianne about what happened tonight as gently and as honestly as he could. Then on bended knee he'd humbly beg her forgiveness.

A sudden sweat broke out across his forehead. *What else do women expect men to do on bended knee? You'd better watch out or else she'll think you're promising something you ain't.*

Cody quickly grabbed a tissue from the nightstand and patted his damp face and neck. He knew deep down he wasn't the marrying kind. Yet something in Marianne Chalmers' gentle but passionate nature had touched him in a way that made their physical coupling seem secondary in importance.

Cody couldn't deny it any longer. He had always admired Marianne from afar, but could he make a--*gulp!*--commitment to remain faithful to her and her alone? If there was only one thing in the whole world that scared the Sheriff of Sterling County more than a herd of stampeding cattle, it was the idea of finding himself involved in anything related to the state of holy matrimony.

Cody took a deep breath and held it to the count of ten before blowing it out slowly. *Marriage? Nah, don't go there.* Besides when the sun came up and the light dawned in Marianne's head as to what had transpired between the two of them, she might not feel in the marrying mood toward him. She might just despise him, never want to lay eyes on him ever again. And, for some reason, the thought she might reject him caused the biggest twinge in his heart.

The mobile phone's shrill ring at his hip woke Cody from his reverie.

"What's up now?" he barked, quickly striding from Marianne's bedroom and lowering his voice.

"Just checking up on you, Boss," Benny replied with mock concern. "Is everything okay with you and Marianne Librarian?"

"Don't call her that. You know how much she hates that nickname." Cody cleared his throat and tried his best to sound in control. "Everything's fine here. Marianne had some sleepwalking problems, but I got her tucked in bed now. I'll see you in a few hours and fill out the paperwork on the incident then, okay?"

"Roger on that, Bossman," Benny replied, stifling a yawn. "Oh yeah, I almost forgot to tell you we just now got a call from our man at the Patrol."

"Sheldon? What's up?"

"It seems Gilbert Saldado's bull has gotten out of his pasture again and is terrorizing motorists along our stretch of Highway 87."

Cody's head dropped wearily into his hand. *Lord above! First, I'm facing potential wedding bells, and the next, a longhorn on the lam. There's nothing like facing your worse phobias head on all at once.*

"I thought I told Gil to fix that blasted gate of his two weeks ago, or else Bruno was going to be made into barbecue," Cody replied brusquely.

"Those were your exact words, I do believe."

"Does Sheldon want me to go over there and wrastle the ol' geezer out of bed now to take care of the beast?"

"That's about the size of it. You're the only lawman Gil respects and will listen to according to Sheldon."

Cody rolled his eyes. "All right. I'm on my way. Benny, next time you're on day shift remind me to wake you up every hour or so all night long, will ya?"

"Will do Boss, will do."

Cody flipped the mobile phone shut and shoved it back in its carrying case before quietly entering Marianne's bedroom for one last look. She appeared to be sleeping soundly, her tousled hair cascading over her face and pillow like a satin river, her chest rising and falling steadily as a gentle wave on a tranquil ocean.

"I hate to leave, but duty calls."

His lips lingered on Marianne's cheek for a brief moment. Sighing, Cody stepped away from the enticing figure lying supine before him and headed for the door. After he

finished corralling that ornery bovine back into his pen, he swore to himself that he would return to her side, apologize for his ungentlemanly behavior, and then do whatever he could to help straighten out this impulsive mess the two of them had gotten themselves into.

Climbing behind the steering wheel, Cody discovered the pesky, persistent headache he'd been nursing for the past few weeks had simply vanished. He laughed as he started the engine and headed north.

"Just what the doctor ordered, I guess."

Smiling, he began humming an old familiar tune.

Beautiful dreamer... Queen of my dreams.

"Sweet dreams, my beautiful dreamer. And may all your dreams likewise come true."

Buy link: <http://www.liquidsilverbooks.com/books/beautifuldreamer.htm>

Author Bio

Celine Chatillon/Cynthianna Some like it hotter

Celine Chatillon is the alter ego of multi-published contemporary romance novelist, Cynthianna (Appel). Her erotic-romance tales with eXtasy Books include the ongoing serialized novel *Brandi Whyne and Her Incredibly Erotic Adventures*. Liquid Silver Books publishes her “Paranormal Lovers of St. Louis series” that began with *Help! I’m Falling for the Vampire Next Door*. Her science fiction erotica story collection, *Heavenly Bodies*, was released by Mojocastle Press.

Celine’s web site: <http://www.celinechatillon.com>

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Join her occasional e-newsletter at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/celinesdreams>

Published Works:

The Loves of Her Life (Two of Wands)—erotic/fantasy novella

Beautiful Dreamer—contemporary sex romp set in Texas

Of Flesh and Blood (novella—“Blood Betrayal” in the Paranormal Lovers of St. Louis series)

Help! I’m Falling for the Vampire Next Door (novel-- Paranormal Lovers of St. Louis series)

Hanging with a Time Surfer (novel-- Paranormal Lovers of St. Louis series)

A Middle Class Existence (contemporary erotic women’s fiction)

Heavenly Bodies (SF tales with an erotic edge)

Santa’s Big Little Helper

Gifts Well-Timed (novella--Seven Deadly Sins and Virtues series)

Yes, Virginia...Here Comes Santa Claus

Brandi Whyne and Her Incredibly Erotic Adventures (serialized sf/comedy/erotic-romance novel)

Coming very soon: *The Loves of Her Life* (fantasy erotic-romance)

Coming very soon: *Beautiful Dreamer* (revised re-release – contemporary/paranormal erotic-romance)

Coming soon: *Seven Ways to Seduce a Martian* (revised re-release)

Cynthianna (Appel) is a multi-published author who enjoys writing contemporary romantic fiction. Her contemporary-romances *The Fixer-Uppers* and *Preachin’ to the Choir* were released by Moonlit Romance. She recently has branched out into fantasy romantic-comedy in *Loving Who* (coming soon from Mojocastle Press). You can read excerpts at Cynthianna’s web site: <http://www.cynthianna.com> Her blog is “Confessions

of a Blonde Writer” at <http://momsday.blogspot.com> and you can join her monthly e-newsletter at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cindyappelnewsletter>

Backlist of Cynthianna titles:

Country Boy, City Girl

The Fixer-Uppers

Preachin' to the Choir

Amazon short: *Hurricane Alley*

Coming soon: *Loving Who*

Coming soon: *Scrambled Eggs* (re-release)



Title: The Tarot Prince

Author: Ellen Ashe

Genre: Paranormal

Rating: Neapolitan

Format: e-book

Buy link: http://www.total-e-bound.com/product.asp?s=917v5g400918&strParents=&CAT_ID=&P_ID=255

Blurb:

“Echoes never end when the night begins to whisper.”

Since childhood Annalise has listened to the mystifying songs that float over the Devon Moors to her cottage window. Suddenly its lulling gentleness changes into an urgent plea - a glorious Queen has stepped from the mystical world of the Tarot - showing Annalise the figure of a cloaked man, his head bowed to a crippling despair of loss and regret, blinded to the imminent threat of a blood thirsty enemy. He is her chosen and instantly Annalise understands her destiny is entwined with this tortured Nobleman. Only she can touch him...and warn him.

But how could this be? She is a poor peasant girl with humble dreams of being a lace maker like her Aunt Sadie. Yet when she explains the vision to her aunt, Annalise learns of a dark and powerful Venetian Soothsayer who was rumoured throughout Europe to be immortal, a godless soul, lost to roam the earth without love or hope. His name: Medardo de Vale.

The name alone unlocks her inner passion, produces memories of a past life that are not her own, and a love so profound its echo has survived the centuries. Annalise has no other choice but to find him and warn of an impending evil that draws ever closer, an evil that will stop at nothing to procure the secret elixir of Immortality. Will he believe what she says even though it makes no sense to her? And what perilous path might he take her if he does believe? It is a chance she must make.

Medardo de Vale is The Tarot Prince, and the love of a simple peasant girl is his only hope for survival.

Excerpt:

The night whispered.

It always had. Soft, gentle, incomprehensible pleas drifted on an endless wind that swept the outer edges of the purple, heather-covered moor. On nights when the moon slept beneath the horizon, the voice ventured across the stream, across the garden, rising and falling within the darkness. And when the moon lifted, the droning song bled, begging to be heard. Never had the call been defined, never urgent or severe. Never.

Until now.

“Annalise. Help him.”

She sat up, lighting the candle beside her bed. The flame did little but deepen the shadows within the small room. A twinge of fear touched her breast, for she had only known the voice to be a lulling hum. Clearly her name had been spoken, her aid called

upon, but why? For whom was this urgency needed? The shadows remained muted and motionless. She clasped her hands and waited.

Only the beat of her heart marked the passing seconds.

The shutter tapped. Once, twice, three times, then four, methodically uncommon for nature. She would not deny the invitation to investigate. She could not. The hint of destiny had strengthened her resolve.

This night was different. The call had been clear.

She approached the window. The voice had never frightened her, yet her fingers trembled because of the unknown. Beyond the shutters awaited providence. The urgency was contagious. She worried that it might cause her great pain.”

Then the worry was gone.

“I am here,” she said quietly, surprised at her tone of confidence. “I have always been here.”

In response the shutter rattled, the violent quake robbing her breath. Quickly, she reached out, unlatched the hook and submitted to what must be.

The candle went out. Walls fell to the ground like black wrinkled cloth. The night sky opened. So, too, did the expanse of moor.

Depression descended through her like a wave. Not hers. His.

He stood, chin bowed, staring at three delicately carved goblets, all tipped, the contents soiling the earth crimson. A breeze curled the edges of the heavy dark cloak he pulled tightly around his neck. A waterfall of thick black hair coiled to his waist, several curled strands obstructing the features of his face. His gaze never faltered. He saw nothing except what was lost, and she dared not speak, so oppressive was his meditation.

“The wine of life has been spilled, Annalise. Do you see how he mourns?”

“The familiar voice, no longer a chant, floated under her ear, the sweetness wracked with pain. “Yes,” Annalise answered. “I see.”

“He is lost and alone. The disease of despair has begun to soil his soul.”

The shoulders beneath the mantle shivered. Silent sobs vibrated through the emptiness. “He wishes that Death’s chariot would ride close and take him away from this suffering.”

“Yes, you understand. You have the sight.”

“The horseman never comes for him. His suffering never ends.”

“No. Immortality courses through his veins. Yet he has lost the will to live.”

“What can I do?”

A feathery touch on her cheek broke her mournful gaze. The whisper lightened.
“Behold, Annalise.”

Her eyes were instantly drawn to the two goblets, upright and full, near the heels of his boots.

“The malaise has blinded him. He is too weak to turn, but all is not lost. Promise waits. Yet he cannot see. He cannot turn. Help him, Annalise.”

Fatigue bore down on her. Mixed with it was hopelessness. Both wielded mighty swords.

“Who is he?”

“Our Prince. Your chosen.”

The words were uttered with such exaltation that Annalise finally found the ability to shift her gaze. The cold inside her breast melted, for the tall elegant woman who stood beside her glowed. The hazel eyes that returned Annalise’s silent questions were filled with compassion, happiness, and dreams of pleasure. The crown adorning the woman’s mass of blonde hair twinkled with jewels. Annalise had the sudden compulsion to bow and worship this daunting figure of sheer nobility...and virtue.

“Your Majesty,” Annalise said, finally catching her elusive thoughts. “I think you hold great love for this man.”

The image smiled. *“I love him, yes, but I am unable to please him. My body is of the water. Yours is of flesh as his is of flesh. Only you can help him. Only your spirit can show him what is not lost. Your love is stronger.”*

“How can I help him? He hears nothing. He doesn’t even turn to look at us.”

“You have the sight, Annalise. You will find the way. You have the strength to heal. Your soul alone holds this gift.”

Annalise curtsied, the burden at such a daunting task almost too great for her to bear. “You have sung to me for over twenty years. I have heard you in the garden, on the moors and at my window at night. Why is it that on this night you reveal his pain so clearly?”

“He no longer seeks companionship of either spirit or mortal. Despair is seducing him with the poisoned kiss of insanity. And an enemy approaches.”

The impact of the warning panicked Annalise. The man was mourning, weakened and vulnerable. Releasing him from the web of depression would become her only goal.

“A mighty and evil woman,” she said, not knowing why she knew.

The crowned figure nodded. *“Wet his lips with wine of renewal. Dance with him. Flesh on flesh. Bathe him with pleasures. Speak to him of the history you share. Remind him of the dangers that follow. Then he will turn to see the goblets. Then he will know all is not lost. Then he will fight.”*

“Where is he? How will I know?”

The crown grew transparent and light sparkled. Myriad miniature stars, yellow and gold dissolved into the air, and the woman’s gown flowed as a thin stream through stone crevices.

“Don’t go,” Annalise cried. “I can’t be alone.” She reached out just as the light vanished. A borderless shadow crawled along the earth beneath her bare feet. Cold curled around her ankles like gnarled fingers. She tried to scream, but her throat was dry and tight. She couldn’t move. Both ankles had been swallowed by the putrid bog.

“Help me.” The scream came from inside her head. Outside, the air was thin, and she struggled for breath, her breast stinging. Weakening quickly, she lifted her eyes to the cloaked figure as he continued to mourn his loss, selfish self-pity, but her plight was real. “Help me!”

She struggled impulsively, not knowing what would happen next. She could not run, only watch as something inside her leaped to life. The need for help was instantly forgotten. Held fast to this one place, her gaze transfixed on his shadowed face as he slowly turned towards her. The cloak shifted, folds of black within black. His hand rose, stretching out. Without realising, she reflected the gesture. A penetrating devotion, as eternal as the night sky above them, encased her being. She desired to touch the extended hand, but she could not move. A strange empathy increased rapidly within her, becoming more and more complete with every non-existent second. Her excitement wildly pushed for freedom.

“I am here,” she whispered. “I have always been here.”

A cry of forlorn agony vibrated through him. His arm shivered, still held out to her while he collapsed to the earth, the dark robe ballooning around him where he knelt. A mass of hair shrouded indistinguishable features, yet she witnessed the deep contortion of pain twisting his whole body. She had to reach him. Her weight doubled as she too, fell on bended knees. Fighting fatigue, she inched forward slowly, one palm after another

on the wet earth. Desire fed every burning muscle. She blinked, clearing the tears of her own pain, so she could keep his extended hand within her sight. The chasm between them narrowed. His fingertips were a mere breath away.

“I am here,” she cried, her heart expanding in success. She clutched his hand, shivering in her weakened state of exertion.

A warmth of rejuvenation flowed up her arm, cascading through her like a river of warm water. The weight dissolved. If he let go of her, she might float heavenward and be forever lost amongst the stars. But he did not let go. He opened the robe, as though it was the wide wing of a great bird, and she was pulled inside to the safety of his muscular embrace.

No thought swept through her mind, nothing other than the sheer ecstasy of being held so tightly, so tenderly. Fingers wound into her hair, pressing her cheek into his wide shoulder, every gesture motivated by affection she had never known. Her palms explored the solid mass of his body. Velvet skin, a thin coating over the rock rippling beneath. His masculine sensuality exploited by his nakedness. Hard shoulders, a solid waist, the curve of each firm buttock. He was a statue created by a Master, yet living.

Wild abandonment seized her. Inhibitions lost. Her palm arched over his hip. He shifted slightly, welcoming her touch and inviting it lower. The breath against her hair was saturated with hunger. Delicately she wrapped her fingers around his erection, her palm slowly caressing the velvet skin, back and forth. He shuddered, pulling her hair as his fingers held her captive. And he swayed in rhythm with her stroking.

The strange murmurings whispered in her ear were incomprehensible—either in a language she didn’t understand or so saturated with emotion her reasoning blurred. Not that it mattered. She prepared to give herself to him, as a woman does for the man she has chosen to love for eternity. Her soft sigh gave him permission to occupy her body, because she cherished him and the kiss upon her neck told her his love was honoured with sincerity.

She felt his twisted cry before it escaped his throat. It ricocheted within his chest, and in a sharp panic, she clung to him with as much strength as she could wield. To no avail. He dissolved, as quickly as a room dissolves when the last candle is extinguished in the dead of night.

She screamed, her own anguish a flash of crippling despondency.

“Anna, my poor sweet girl, wake up!”

The scent of heather, damp earth, and cleansing rain filled the air. Annalise staggered, falling into her aunt’s consoling arms. “Sadie,” she whispered, so exhausted she could barely think.

“All right now, flower. It was just a dream. Just another bad dream.”

“This was different,” she sobbed, wracked by a tumultuous storm of emotions she couldn’t put into words. “This was different from all the others.”

Sadie wrapped a shawl around Annalise’s shoulder. “Hush now child. Come back inside. I’ll make us some tea.”

Annalise hesitated, glancing once more to the place where the cloaked figure had stood with her in his arms then to where the majestic woman had floated. Morning light eased its way over the craggy moor, white sheep dotting the paths, bleating a welcome to the new day. The familiarity of the scene was a comfort but not enough to ease her trepidation.

The call had come.

And she knew she had no other choice than to follow.

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Author Bio

Ellen Ashe

Ellen grew up in a haunted house in Nova Scotia, Canada. Unexplained footsteps and late night whisperings were a normal occurrence so her fascination with the paranormal has had a long history. After receiving degrees in English Literature and History at Acadia University, Ellen travelled- teaching in Thailand and England- collecting stories and memories which would later weave through the fabric of her books. She now resides in Alberta with her Celtic husband, Stuart.

<http://www.ellenashe.net/>

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http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Minds_Eye_of_Dark_Fantasy/

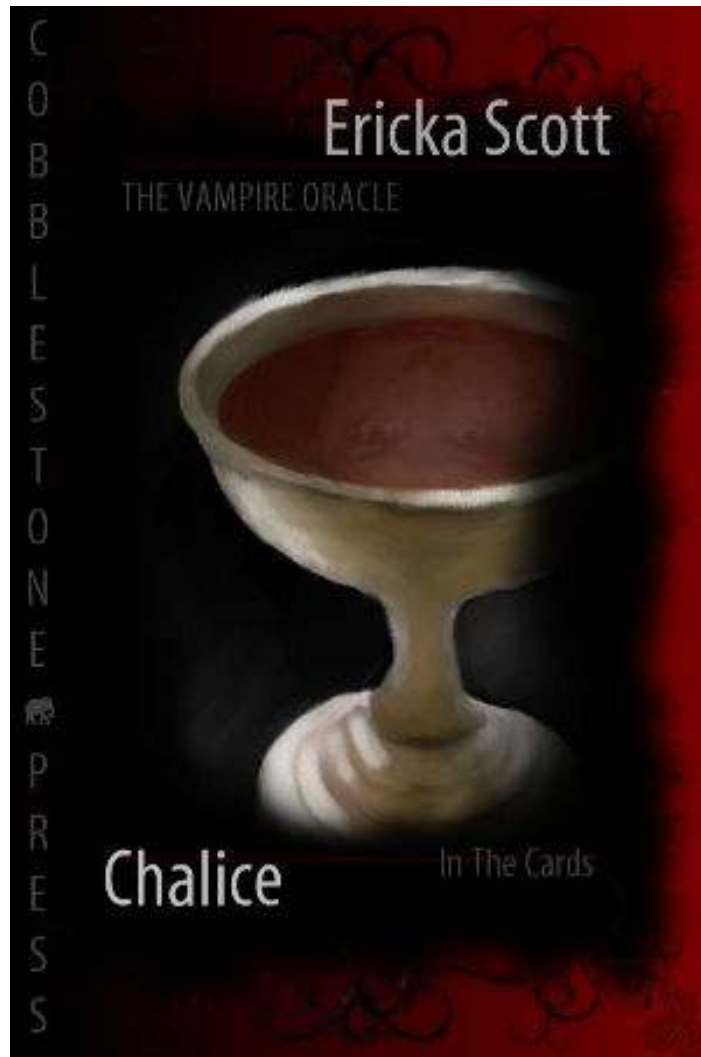
Published Works:

Forbidden Publications: <http://www.forbiddenpublications.com/>

No Ordinary Affair
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Misery Loves Company



Title: The Vampire Oracle: Chalice

Author: Ericka Scott

Genre: Contemporary Paranormal Romance

Rating: Neopolitan

Format: e-book

Buy link

<http://www.cobblestone-press.com/catalog/books/chalice.htm>

Blurb:

Reclusive vampire Sapphire McKenzie lives in her penthouse apartment with fortress-like security run by her AI computer, Van. She's been hailed as the greatest armchair detective since Mycroft Holmes and has solved every case she's ever been asked to investigate – and even some she hasn't.

Her ex-lover, Drake Chastain, is a retired basketball star living off his fame and fortune until women he's dated begin disappearing, then reappearing...dead.. With Drake framed for murder, Sapphire has to leave behind the safety of her home to save the man she loves...or die trying.

Excerpt:

Fighting back a swell of nausea, Sapphire watched the shadow under the door recede. Whoever had attacked her apparently wanted her alive, and not dead. She pressed a hand to her temple and shuddered when it came away sticky with blood. Or perhaps he just wanted her to die slowly. She hadn't lost a lot of blood, but being unable to manufacture more of the precious life force put a crimp in her situation. She needed to feed.

She knew she had recovered from the blow to her head much faster than her attacker had anticipated. Then she'd hidden in her closet. Now, if she could just get him to open the door...

She rested her ear against the thick wooden panel, hoping to get a clue as to his location. Closing her eyes, she concentrated on picking up the tiniest of sounds, and was rewarded when she heard a flurry of noise. Running footsteps, a slamming door, and then...silence. Had her attacker been disturbed? Or had he just left her to die? She slowly twisted the door knob and pushed, but the door remained stubbornly closed.

It was insane. No doors in her penthouse locked of their own accord. Access to all rooms, heating, air-conditioning, and security—indeed, absolutely everything inside the apartment was controlled by her assistant, Van Helsing. She had always known people were not a good security risk. Someone downstairs had to have let the intruder onto her floor and disabled the alarm when the security system was breached. That's why she'd created Van.

He was the perfect assistant, simply because he wasn't human. Van was an artificially intelligent computer program she'd designed five years ago. No way would he ever turn against her. Perhaps he thought that by keeping her locked away, he was keeping her safe.

She raised her fists to start banging and shouting for help, when the small amount of light seeping under the door dimmed.

Damn it. The intruder hadn't left after all.

Her first moan was unintentional. But the intruder paused, as if he were listening. So she moaned again.

"Come closer, you bastard, and open the door. I'll give you a taste of pain," she murmured under her breath. Then she moaned again, theatrically.

This time, she clearly heard someone approach the door.

She put her hand on the knob and felt it turn. Whoever was on the other side was strong; the door shuddered. But it obstinately stayed shut.

"Well then, don't open, damn it." A male voice cursed.

Sapphire went still. She knew that voice. Drake Chastain? If Drake had broken into her apartment and hit her on the head with a baseball bat, then he was surely responsible for the disappearances and deaths of all those other women. The world spun dizzily for a moment. But if he were responsible, then she was wrong about everything. In which case, being locked up was the safest place for her for the time being.

The door shuddered under her hand again.

"Oh, please," Sapphire murmured. "*Don't* open."

To her surprise and chagrin, the door swung wide and sunlight flashed in, blinding her.

Although she couldn't see, she did the only thing that came to mind. She lunged out, fangs bared, and prepared to dispense with her attacker before he killed her first.

A spitting wildcat was Drake's only thought as he held the tall, thin redhead at arm's length. Once again, he was glad for his height and long reach. A hurricane brewed

in the depths of Sapphire's sea-green eyes, and with each toss of her head a sinister hiss slid through her gleaming fangs. She kicked out at him with her long legs and managed to land a few blows dangerously close to his balls.

He didn't want to risk her disabling him, so he tossed her into the middle of the bed.

"Damn it woman, I'm here to rescue you."

He braced himself for impact when she pulled up into a crouch. She stared at him, her breath coming in harsh gasps. That's when he saw blood and a fast-coloring bruise on the side of her beautiful face. Instinctively, he reached out to push her long curly hair aside and take a closer look at her injuries.

She flinched, as if she expected him to hit her.

"What happened?" he whispered. "You're hurt."

"As if you don't know. You broke in and attacked me."

"No, I didn't." Drake shook his head. "Your apartment security had already been breached when I arrived. You can ask Chester; he'll back me up." Drake hoped so, anyway.

"Chester? Management fired him six months ago."

"What? But—I—" Caught off guard, Drake motioned behind him, as if he could miraculously conjure up the doorman to substantiate his story. When he looked back at Sapphire, she was smiling. "What?"

"Nothing."

It might have been nothing, but her smile changed her entire demeanor. To his relief, he realized she was no longer afraid of him.

"Well, if you didn't break in, who did?"

“You didn’t see who attacked you?”

“Nope.” Sapphire shook her head, and then grimaced with pain. “I only heard the whoosh of air right before something hit me. I take it you didn’t see anyone, either?”

“I wasted the opportunity. When I first came in, I thought there might be someone in the kitchen, but I came to the bedroom instead. As soon as my back was turned, I heard someone running. Then the front door slammed.”

“You didn’t go after them?” Sapphire’s voice sounded odd, and Drake shot a sharp look in her direction.

“Are you okay?”

She raised her hand to her forehead, and before Drake could cross the room, she fell, hitting her head on the footboard of the bed.

He lifted her off the floor and placed her in the center of her bed. Then he ran a hand across the back of his neck. He recognized her symptoms and knew what she needed. *Blood*. She’d obviously lost just enough to make her weak. She’d need to feed...and soon.

His cock hardened as he looked at her. She was dressed for bed in a filmy white nightgown that showed off more than it hid from view. He could see her nipples through the fabric, and at the junction of her thighs was a mound of darkness he knew hid the pink lips of her sex. The soft curve of her breasts rose and fell with each breath she took. It had been over two years, but he could still remember the feel of their weight in his hands. He ached to touch her, to taste her. To fuck her. All he had to do was climb onto the bed with her. She needed him.

No. He shoved his hands into his pockets and turned away. She didn’t need *him*. She needed blood. Anyone’s blood. She had a stable of young studs on whom she fed regularly. It was also a given that her nightly feeding was probably accompanied by a generous dessert of sex. Yet the thought of her being with someone else, even if there were no feelings involved, sickened him.

She had left him. He was the one who had called her, sent flowers, and tried everything to win her back. But she had spurned all his efforts. So what made him think she'd want him now? Hell, just a few minutes ago, she'd seemed convinced he was the one who'd attacked her.

Yet...he glanced back over at her thin build, and his heart tugged painfully in his chest. He still loved her. It would only take one word from her, and he'd offer up his neck and his heart.

Sapphire stirred and moaned, her hand fluttering to her head. Then she opened her eyes and looked at him.

Hell, it didn't even take a word.

Buy link:

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Author Bio

Ericka Scott Seductive Suspense

Ericka Scott is a multi-published best-selling author of seductive suspense. She's written stories for as long as she can remember and reads anything under the sun (including, in a pinch, the back of cereal boxes). She got hooked on romantic suspense in her college days, when reading anything but a textbook was a guilty pleasure. Now, when she's not chauffeuring children around, wishing she had a maid, or lurking at the library, she's spinning her own web of fantasy and penning tales of seduction and suspense. She currently lives in Southern California with her husband and three children. You can find out more about her at www.erickascott.com.

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Published Works:

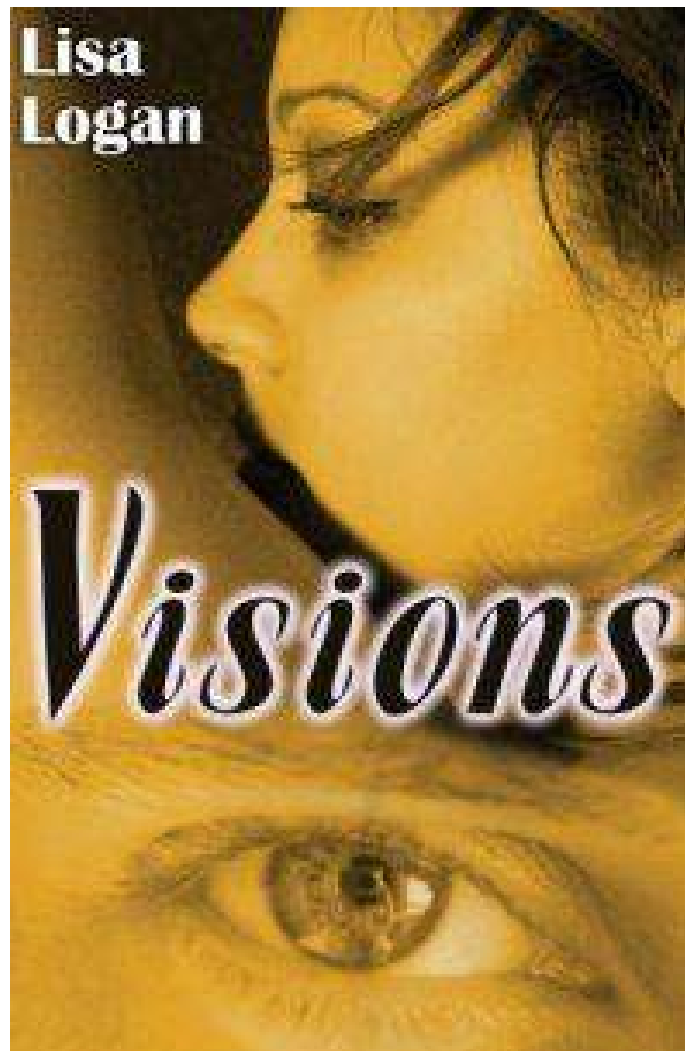
[Crystal Clear](#), Cobblestone Press, May 2007

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[Tinsel Time](#), Cobblestone Press, December 2007

[Fool's Gold](#), Cobblestone Press, January 2008

[To Catch a Casanova](#), Total E-bound, February 2008



Title: Visions

Author: Lisa Logan

Genre: Paranormal Romance

Rating: Neopolitan

Format: e-book and print

Buy link:

http://www.draumrpublishing.com/store/cart.php?target=category&category_id=335

Blurb:

Actor Trenton Dane is researching his next role when he bumps into a beautiful stranger...and suddenly develops psychic powers. Glory Windsor is a psychic intent on losing her "gift"--and the traumatic consequences her abilities have caused. When his enchanting benefactor disappears before he can so much as learn her name, Trenton must come to grips with his growing new power, and launch a search for the sultry woman who haunts his dreams. Will he succeed in time to fulfill steamy premonitions of a passionate encounter--and to save Glory and her child from certain danger?

What if you bumped into a stranger...and suddenly became psychic? A movie star turns real-life hero when he finds out in VISIONS.

Excerpt:

The feel of his eyes drew her attention back to the table.

“Dance with me.”

Her gaze wandered across the room to the dance floor. A small band of photographers had gathered around its parquet edge like animals around a watering hole, snapping shots of Kylie Kate Rossi, James Fine, and other big names who were undulating in graceful movements only the Beautiful People could master.

“But it seems so...public out there.”

He threw his head back in a belly-warming whoop of laughter and she smiled at the sound of it, despite herself. “That’s the trouble with public places, isn’t it? The public’s often in them.” With that, he slid himself off the chair, grabbing her by the hand as he did so.

Before she could protest, he pulled her up against him, beginning a slow swaying dance despite the up tempo beat. Whereas she might have talked her way out of a dance while still seated, once they were pressed together she lost the will to do anything other than melt against him. The contact was electrifying, causing them both to suck in a breath as she swept into his arms. The music pounding in her ears--or was that her heartbeat?--the feel of his hips swaying back and forth, and the proximity of other parts of him through the thin material of her skirt produced a hypnotic effect. She felt mesmerized, like a snake bobbing and weaving under the sway of its charmer. Beyond the river of attraction flowing through her veins rushed that undercurrent of...connection between them, a sense of intuiting his feelings, emotions, desires. Her mind tuned into his with slow revelation, until she heard every sinew of his being cry out for her, and hers sigh back in response. She felt their pulses join, unifying in a primal beat.

Feeling powerless to break contact and step out of the moment, she swirled inside this realm of shared need, allowing it to fill her. The more she swayed inside the trance, the deeper inside his emotions she could see, until she knew he somehow saw inside hers, too.

Madonna's song tumbled along, declaring that Glory had found a piece of heaven. Not that this required explanation.

"Glory." His voice was suffused with breathless wonder. "This is...you are..."

He paused, the fervent whisper tickling her mouth alerting her to the fact that their lips were now only a hair's breadth apart. Just when her knees were about to crumble from the powerful sorcery weaving between them, he increased it tenfold by doing the unthinkable.

He kissed her.

Buy link:

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Author Bio

Lisa Logan Writing in My Wildest Dreams

Porn is hot sex with no real story. Erotica is a real story with hot sex. --Lisa Logan

I began Writing in My Wildest Dreams ten years ago, when the love of a good story drove me beyond the pages of other books to delve into some of my own. Writing is another form of reading, where characters propel authors into mysterious, sensual, and often frightening worlds where the line between fantasy and fantastic reality blur like an ink splotch on a silk sheet.

Short stories were my first forays into this magical mystery world, and several publications and one or two award-winning nods later I found my ideas expanding beyond the edges of 8,000 words or less. Seven full-length titles have followed, two published, three under consideration, and two current works in progress.

Writing from a desk planted halfway between Palm Springs and Los Angeles, I pound out romantic and erotic fiction in a variety of settings from paranormal to mystery and contemporary. Life with my longhaired hunk of an actor husband never leaves me wanting...including for ideas for some hot and unique intimate settings.

Check me out on the web at:

Website: <http://lisalogan.net>

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Blog: <http://authorlisalogan.blogspot.com>

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Twitter: <http://twitter.com/authorlisalogan>

Green Writing Challenge: <http://squidoo.com/greenwriter>

Published Works:

Visions

Psychic Romance

Print/eBook

January 2007 Draumr Publishing

<http://www.draumrpublishing.com>

A Grand Seduction

Contemporary Intrigue/Mystery

eBook
April 2008 Eternal Press
<http://eternalpress.ca>



Title: Touch Of Fire

Author: Maria Zannini

Genre: Futuristic Fantasy

Rating: Neapolitan

Format: e-book

Buy link:

<http://www.mybookstoreandmore.com/shop/product.da/touch-of-fire>

Blurb:

1200 years from now, Earth is a fusion of culture, language and religion, and technology has been replaced with Elemental magic. Society is divided between the plainfolk and fae, mages who can wield one of the four Elements: earth, water air and fire.

An ancient alchemist's bible has surfaced, a book that threatens to bring back the technology of the last age. Leda, a fire mage, has been charged with finding the book and the trail leads her to Greyhawke Tams, an ex-soldier turned scavenger who'd rather rot in jail than help one of the Elementals.

Leda tangles Grey's mind faster than any woman he's ever known but she's a puzzle he'd gladly suffer.

Falling in love with an Elemental was unthinkable. It was blasphemy. But it could be the only thing that'll save them both.

Excerpt:**Chapter One**

The Reverend Mother used to tell acolytes that if men were going to brawl, they should at least be naked and glistening with oil.

Leda's money was on the hulking brute with the Cydian blade, but right now she needed the other guy to win. That one had information she needed, and she wasn't going to get it if he got himself killed. She was just about to intercede when her quarry tripped on his feet and knocked himself out cold.

Idiot.

The Cydian giant punched the air, knowing he'd be declared champion. The innkeeper waddled over to the center of the bar, grunting on every breath. Local custom dictated that the loser pay for damages, but this one didn't look like he had the coin to pay for ale, let alone broken furniture.

The tavern smelled of smoke and sweat. Leda stood up on tiptoes, bobbing her head above the shoulders of fetid drunkards, all trying to get a better view of the coming settlement.

From a corner table, the home magistrate watched the fracas through bleary eyes, indifferent to the outcome. His spine crackled in a series of pops before he ambled over to the wreck of a man still sprawled out on the floor. He rustled through the man's pockets, finding nothing but a dented copper piece. The judge flipped the coin to the innkeeper. "There's not enough here to cover your damages, Gos. Looks like you've ended up with another indentured servant."

“Bah! I’ve enough drunken fools working for me now. I don’t need another. Throw him into—”

Leda pushed her way to the front. “How long would you have kept him in iron?”

“What?” the innkeeper barked, cupping his ear so he could hear her better.

“How long?” she repeated. “To pay his debt.”

The innkeeper squinted at her with pig eyes, then spat toward a nearby earthenware jug, missing it completely. He waved his arms about him. “Look at my place! He owes me at least two month’s worth of work.”

“More like three.” A portly woman with an ample bosom pushed her way under the innkeeper’s arm.

Gos nodded, squeezing the woman’s shoulder with a meaty hand. “True that, Dodie. Three months.” He turned back to Leda. “Why do you ask? Does he belong to you?”

“No,” Leda said. “But I need a manservant and I’ll pay for his damages if you’ll consign him to me.”

“Done!” the rosy-faced matron shouted. She wiggled from beneath her man’s arm and stuck the flat of her hand out to Leda.

Leda suppressed a snicker and dug into her coin purse. She placed three squares of silver in the woman’s pudgy hand.

The woman kept her hand out. “He did more damage than that, priestess.”

Leda quirked a brow at her. “If you know I am a mage, you’d know better than to bargain with our kind.”

The broad-faced woman tilted her nose with a sniff. “I only want what’s owed, priestess. We want no magic trouble here. You can see for yourself the damage the oaf has caused.”

Leda nodded, not because she agreed with the plucky woman, but because she admired guile. It wasn’t everyone who was willing to haggle a price from a blood mage. The fae-kind weren’t exactly known for their benevolence with the plainfolk.

She handed Dodie another square of silver and closed the woman’s palm over it. “For the damage,” she said. “And for a night’s lodging for me...” she hesitated, certain this heathen was going to be more trouble than he was worth, “...and my manservant.”

Dodie bit into the last piece of silver, then slipped them all into the cleft between her bosoms. “Agreed. But you get only one room. Meego will haul him up there for you.”

She motioned to a bruiser of a servant with a crooked nose and shoulders as wide as an ox-yoke. The oaf nodded dumbly, grabbing a black iron collar and a pair of pincers from behind the bar before shuffling over to the sleeping man. He crouched down and snapped the metal band around the loser’s neck, pinching it closed with a folded rivet as a lock. He heaved him up over his shoulder with a grunt and a trumpeting fart.

Leda winced. Could plainfolk get any cruder? Sometimes it seemed the fae-kind employed the only semblance of propriety left in decent civilization. She hoisted her traveling bags in one hand and grabbed a lantern with the other then followed the smelly lout up the stairs. At the landing they turned left and tramped down a long corridor. Meego jerked to a stop in front of an unlatched door, butting it opened with the head of the unconscious man.

Leda set the lantern down on a candle stand by the door. The room was stingy but clean, the scent of tallow oil permeating the floorboards. A small bed hugged one wall. Next to it was a table with a pitcher full of water and a basin. The servant trudged toward the bed to dump his load.

Oh, I don’t think so. Leda snapped her fingers. “Hey, genius. On the floor. There is no way in two hells he’s sharing my bed.”

The man did what he was told and chucked the graceless fool to the rough-hewn floor like a side of beef. A groan escaped her new bondsman, but he remained asleep.

She nodded to the exit, silently ordering Meego out. The servant bowed in obeisance, fat fingers tapping his lips and each shoulder in the sign of the Trinity, then shut the heavy door behind him.

Leda put the lamp on the floor and studied her new charge. He was out cold, but the sweat forming on his brow made her nervous.

She knelt beside him and felt for a pulse. It was slow and weak. *Not good.* She lifted his top lip, sliding a finger across his gums. His flesh was soaked with sweat, but the inside of his mouth was dry and pale.

Her hands patted down his chest, then around each of his legs, relieving him of a long knife and two throwing stars in the process. A thin dart, nearly invisible in the poorly lit room was embedded in his leather britches. She pulled it out and sniffed it.

Damn her luck! He’d been poisoned. Someone had rigged the fight.

Leda rushed to her medicine bag and pulled out two vials. One was a tincture of red sorrel and the other a derivative of adonis. With a steady hand, she poured three drops of each potion into a narrow flask. She pulled out a fresh needle and fed the oily blend down its narrow throat, then pushed the iron collar down and stabbed him in the jugular with the dart.

He moaned softly, still too drugged from the poison.

Leda went to the door and listened for any sound. Only the raucous merriment of drunks and minstrels carried from the tavern below. Flattening her palms across her chest, she chanted a mantra that cast a protection spell on the door and window. Energy swirled around the doorway and window frame, wrapping the room like a second skin. It would be enough to keep the savage in, and hopefully keep whoever had tried to kill him out.

She returned to her patient and felt his skin. His color was returning and his pupils were now normal size. Whatever he'd been shot with hadn't gone too far in his system. Her antidote was enough to waylay the toxin.

The savage was comely for a plainfolk, with a well-chiseled face and the rippled muscles of an athlete. A man a few summers older than she, he was old enough to have fought in the fae wars ten turns earlier. Under normal circumstances, she would have chalked up his poisoning to revenge. But there had been no other fae in the crowd—none that she noticed. Yet only one of her kind could have delivered such a toxin.

Someone wanted him dead and most likely for the same reason she needed him alive. For now, she'd keep that information to herself. There was no need to alarm him. But she'd need to keep a wary eye. If a rival was looking to kill this man, he would try again.

Her bondsman's breathing grew normal, but he had yet to open his eyes. Leda rose and picked up the pitcher of water. She poured some of it into the basin then flung the cold water at his face.

He woke with a start, his hand slapping at an empty thigh sheath.

Leda pounded the flat of her hand on the tabletop to get his attention. "Over here, *Grace*."

The man rubbed the back of his head, a scowl reflecting his mood. "If you're trying to swindle me out of coin, you're way too late." He patted his pockets.

Leda laughed. "Oh no, my fine dandy. I'm not here for your money, or your pleasant personality. You belong to me." She tapped on the hollow of her throat. "Notice any new jewelry on you?"

His hands felt around his neck, finding the iron band snapped tight. “What the bloody hells! What kind of trick are you playing, whore? I’m a freeman.”

“You’re my bondsman, fool. At least for three months. I bought your debt for that nice bit of redecorating you did downstairs in the pub.”

“I was winning!”

“Ha! You tripped and knocked yourself out. As loser you are bound by law to pay for damages.” She tossed him a careless glance. “Judging by all your finery, the magistrate ruled that you were to pay off your debt in service. The innkeeper didn’t want you, so I paid for your writ instead.” Her mouth curled upwards. “You belong to me.”

“The hells I do,” he growled and stumbled to his feet.

He was a full foot taller than she and broad enough to wield an arming sword. She wet her lips, her gaze tracing the lines of his bare, muscular arms. Her attention traveled down to his waist and thighs, and a pair of black leather britches that looked like they were painted on those long sinewy legs. He was quarry, but at least he was pleasant to look at. She’d had much worse.

Now that he was stable she also noticed he smelled. Her eyes watered and she tried to hold her breath. “Holy Trinity! When was the last time you took a bath?” She poked a finger at him and pushed herself away.

“My grooming habits are none of your business. And I can pay for any damage. I have funds in Corredo. That’s only two days ride.”

“Keep your funds, bondsman. I want you.”

“I’m not for sale.”

She clucked at him. “That’s no longer your decision. The magistrate has ruled.” Leda slipped off her longcoat and unbuckled her sword belt, draping it on the bedpost. She kicked the boots off her tired feet and flopped down on the bed, closing her eyes. It had been several days since her head rested on something softer than stony ground. Even a straw mattress was more inviting than sleeping in the damp cold of an open field.

Her manservant drew closer and she squinted at him in the low light of the room. “You get the floor.” She kicked a folded blanket that sat at the foot of the bed toward him. “I wake early and sleep lightly, savage. Don’t try anything stupid. There are wards surrounding the door and window and I spelled your collar with a tracking spell. You can’t run.”

“Doesn’t mean I won’t kill you while you sleep. Spells vanish when the weaver is dead, don’t they?”

Leda chuckled and wrapped her arms behind her head. *A bold one.* “Do you have a name?”

“Greyhawke Tams,” he said sourly.

Leda arched a brow at him. A Meriga tribesman. That clan liked to christen their babies with the name of whatever creature they first see out their doors. She lifted up and blew out the lamp. “My name is Leda of the Gaia Order of Mages. Sleep well, savage. Tomorrow, we will find out if you were worth the money I spent.”

Buy link:

http://www.mybookstoreandmore.com/product_info.php?products_id=973

Author Bio

Maria Zannini

Shocking, irreverent, and bold—and that's only Maria's dog. You can imagine how bad she is. Maria Zannini sweeps you into worlds of rugged men and ambitious women. Writing these characters has given her the strength to remain undomesticated. She laughs at housework and can ignore it for days without pity.

Trained as a professional artist and graphic designer, she became a writer anyway, cuz let's face it, that's where all the cool kids hang out.

Maria runs a lively blog at www.mariazannini.blogspot.com. Here there be writing news, markets and guests on a regular schedule. Stop by and visit her. And buy *Touch Of Fire*. The dog needs cookies!

If you don't believe me, go to her blog and do a word-search for "Tank". You'll see why she has to keep him in dog cookies.

Links

Maria's blog: www.mariazannini.blogspot.com

Maria's website: www.mariazannini.com

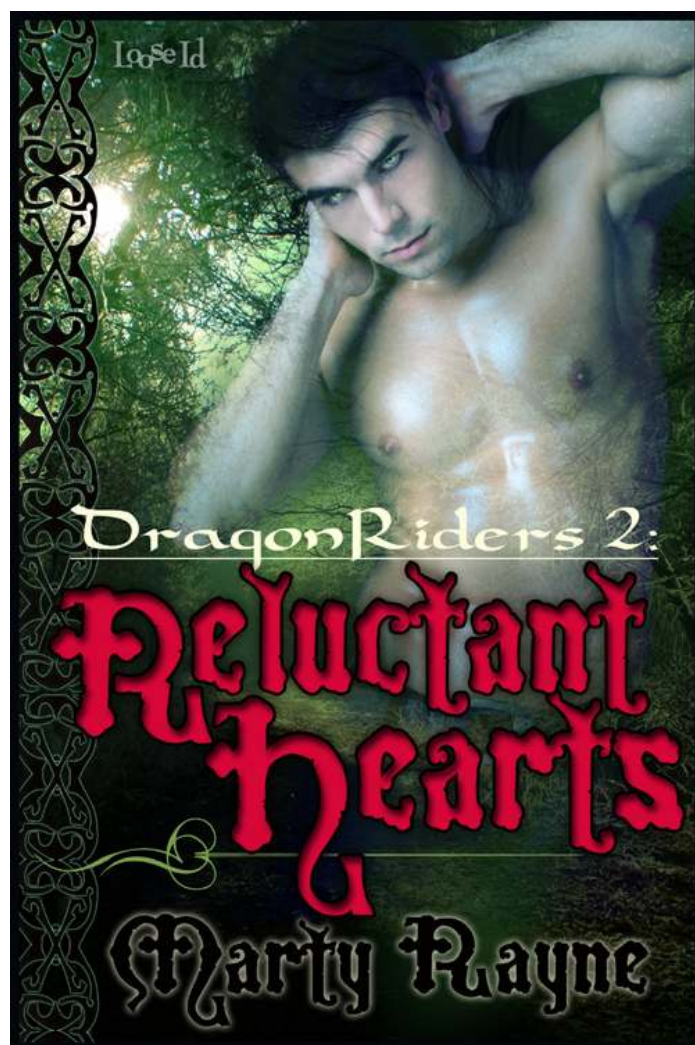
MySpace: <http://www.myspace.com/mariazannini>

Linked In: <http://www.linkedin.com/>

Published Works:

More Sand In My Bra, published by Travelers Tales

Buying Link: <http://www.amazon.com/More-Sand-My-Bra-Travelers/dp/1932361502>



Title: Dragon Riders 2: Reluctant Hearts

Author: Marty Rayne

Genre: Fantasy – Shape-shifter (dragon)

Rating: Neapolitan

Format: e-book

Buy Link: <http://www.loose-id.net/detail.aspx?ID=766>

Blurb:

A six hundred and fifty-seven year old dragon, Bane is done with the Grand Council. Tired of the endless cycle of assignments and losing Riders. He craves to live out the rest of his life in quiet solitude. The last thing he needs or wants is another Rider.

Dragons fascinate Sianna Richter. She's curious about their secluded natures, brute strength, unique looks, and graceful movements. Dragons often invade her dreams, beckoning her inner soul. Only she is a descendant of Elder blood, aristocratic blood that has never bonded with a dragon...

Until now.

One touch is all it takes to ignite their passion, but will Bane form the bond between these two reluctant hearts?

Excerpt:

Bane closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. The air filling his lungs was coated with her scent, saturating him with longing. Flames of desire licked along his nerves; his yearning grew. He let out his breath in a whoosh of smoke, yet she still clung to him.

Bane knew he shouldn't be here, but still his gaze roamed the room. His mind commanded that he run. To get as far from Central as he could. To expunge her smell from his body. To destroy the image he held in his head of her. He should rid himself of all that was connected to her. He needed to be out searching for Dargo and his rider, not dallying here, stalking.

He had flown away. Started toward the Calcus Mountains. Back toward his solitary life. It had been his intention to never look back again. But he only got as far as the edge of Central before he'd turned around. His instincts and preservation of his sanity were too strongly embedded in his genetic makeup to resist leaving without her.

Bane had encountered his next rider. He found the one fated to bond with him until she died, too. The thought of her death made his chest constrict with grief. He

didn't want to live through another loss. He didn't think he had the strength to let another rider die without him going with her. And he wasn't prepared to die just yet.

Bane couldn't help himself. He stood in the middle of her room, needing to feel close to her. Desperate to know who she was. After discreetly questioning of some acquaintances he'd formed through the years, he'd been shocked to find that this woman who would be bonded to him was the only child of Elder Richter. The prospect then became extremely appealing. What better revenge on the man who thought he was above dragon or rider? He would bond with the uppity Elder Richter's only child and bring her fully into the world of dragons. She would also be the first rider from an Elder's bloodline. The cream of the crop. After seeing Sianna, he knew why they were referred to in such a way.

He picked up a discarded scarf from the foot of the bed and lifted it to his nose to inhale her scent. Her spicy fragrance once again permeated his nostrils. It couldn't be masked by the sweet perfume and soaps that the human women of Central were determined to use. Bane had to admit that some needed it, but not his bondmate. Not Sianna Richter.

* * * * *

Sianna closed the door behind her and laid her forehead against the cool wood. What was wrong with her? She had tried to go about her day as normal, seeing to her duties once she left her father's presence. Her mind, however, had another agenda. Instead of concentrating on the tasks at hand, it kept wandering back to the man she'd encountered outside the Grand Council's chambers. Over and over, she remembered those deep green eyes. The irresistible draw of them. The eyes from her erotic dreams. How his skin had suddenly heated beneath her touch.

Becoming so frustrated by her lack of concentration, Sianna called it a day and stomped off to her rooms to sulk in private. Perhaps a long exercise session later would work out the annoyance she felt from allowing herself to be so distracted by the stranger. It was bad enough that dragons easily distracted her when she knew one was in Central, but to feel like one of the wanton wenches her father kept bringing into their home was new.

"Blasted dragon. I hope he rots in his own dung," she seethed as her hand slapped the door.

“That wouldn’t be me you’re cursing, would it?” a deep, husky voice asked.

Sianna jumped, startled by another’s presence in her room. She turned swiftly, wishing for her weapon against the intruder. Because it was hidden under her mattress, she widened her stance and held her hands in front of her, ready for battle and pissed that someone would dare enter her private rooms.

The physical attack never came. The same dragon from earlier was across the room. His lean body rested casually against one of her bedposts, posture nonchalant, completely relaxed, but she could feel the aura of strength surrounding him. It radiated throughout the room, entwining with the very air she breathed. Though he looked slender, she knew there was real power under the clothes he wore. He could move across the room in the time it took to blink her eyes. No amount of training would ever give her the advantage over one of his kind.

Sianna shivered, feeling as if his hands were slowly caressing her body when his gaze swept over her form. Her breath hitched as his eyes glowed eerily. Her knees trembled as his tongue swept over his lips, wetting them. Goddess forgive her, her underwear was soaked with the wetness seeping from between her thighs. Swallowing hard, Sianna managed to make her voice work, and was impressed that it didn’t tremble...much. “How did you get in here?”

“You should be more careful about leaving your balcony doors open.”

Sianna narrowed her eyes on him, deliberately ignoring her body’s obvious arousal by his mere presence. “We are ten floors high. Who would dare to risk that climb?”

His brow rose, the gesture making his face even more handsome. “Who said anything about climbing?”

She made a strange scoffing noise to cover a moan of arousal. Her blood felt as if it was on fire, warming with every second he stayed. “So you think it’s appropriate to fly into whatever room you feel like? Regardless that no invitation was issued?”

The man actually had the nerve to laugh at her when he pushed away from the bedpost. Her eyes followed the ripple of muscles under the tight azure-colored

shirt. Her gaze lowered to roam over his chest and abdomen, mouth drying as her body sent all fluids to her lower region. Snapping her eyes back up to his, Sianna refused to look below his waist. No matter how much she wanted to. She had been, after all, raised a lady, better than a wanton whore. At least that's what her father would say.

“I'm a dragon. I need no invitation.”

Sianna opened her mouth to disagree at his conceit, but quick as lightning, he stood in front of her, his body pressed boldly against hers. She gasped and took a step back. He followed, not letting his body part from hers. She took another step, her gaze locked with his, and a lump stuck in her throat. The brief impulse to cry for help evaporated.

Her back hit the door. Trapped. His body pinned hers. Large hands rested on the door, one on each side of her head.

She didn't need to look down to see his arousal. Sianna could feel the hardness of his erection pressing between her legs, seeking the dampness. Their clothing was the only thing preventing his entry into her slick, throbbing pussy.

A groan of pleasure erupted from Sianna's throat. She'd often envisioned feeling this wondrous pleasure when she met the man she would marry. The women of her family habitually lectured to the unattached ladies and told stories of love and attraction as if it occurred simultaneously. However, she had yet to come across a man in Central who'd made her feel even remotely aroused in all of her twenty years. She'd nearly given up on the fairy-tale visions the older women had embedded in her mind.

Now here was a dragon, bearing the eyes of her dream lover, who sent sensations beyond her imagination coursing through her virginal body. She didn't love him. Mother Frayland, she didn't even know his name. But that didn't stop the lust from growing stronger than she'd ever imagined, shocking her system.

“You can't...” Her words turned to a gasp when he ground his hips harder against her. The throb became an ache and she wanted him closer.

“I fly where I please.” He spoke quietly while his lips brushed over hers, shooting small shocks of electric current along her nerves. “I see who I please. Elder dragons such as I are not easily deterred when we want something.”

Sianna had no control over her hands as they rose from her sides and reached for his waist. From there they slid up under his shirt where her fingertips stroked every curve and ridge of his muscular form. Her breath became raspy as her hands traveled higher, taking his shirt with her progress. The glowing of his eyes intensified, nearly blinding her, but she couldn't look away. The jeweled color was mystifying.

He stood absolutely still, body tense. Was he waiting? She hadn't told him to leave. She hadn't told him not to touch her, or had even uttered the word no. Was he giving her the opportunity to do so? Did she want to?

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Author Bio

Marty Rayne **Tempt yourself with erotic adventures**

When not being a wife, mother, and grandmother, **Marty Rayne** is creating passionate worlds of fantasy. Pushing the limits and experimenting with new angles and worlds.

Books have been a huge part of her life since she can remember. Loves getting lost in new and exciting lands. Letting the characters take hold, even for just a short time. Writing just naturally came next, but she never really took it seriously until a few years ago when she gained access to the internet. With the encouragement and help of a wonderful friend and the support of her husband, Marty ventured into the world of writing.

Marty lives in Florida with her husband and twin sons. She relishes the inspiration of the beach and wondrous sunsets. And goes where her muse takes her.

Visit her website – www.martyrayne.com

Blog – <http://martyrayne.blogspot.com/>

Newsletter ~ http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Martys_Erotic_Times/

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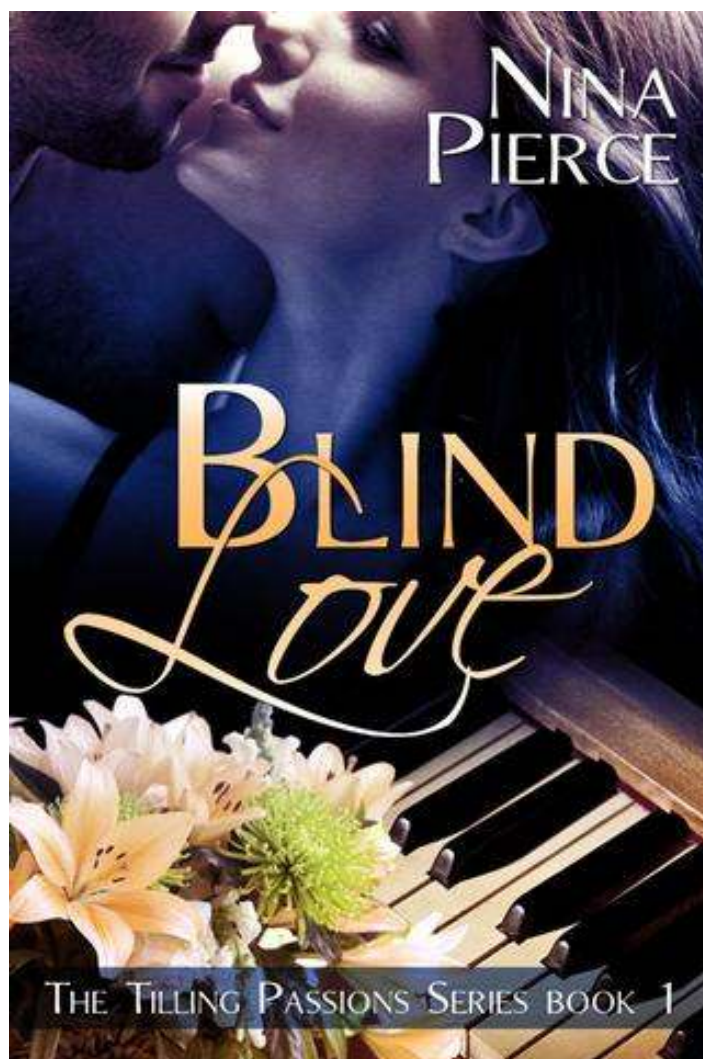
enWrapture

Journey to the Dark Side

Testing Passion

Lascivious (Print Book)

Trio of Tales: Bedtime Fantasies (Coming January 2009)



Title: Blind Love

Author: Nina Pierce

Genre: Erotic Suspense

Rating: Neopolitan

Format: e-book

Buy link <http://www.liquidsilverbooks.com/books/blindlove.htm>

Blurb:

He's a shock jock looking to reform. She's an accountant hoping to cut loose. Can love open their eyes to forever?

In **BLIND LOVE**, book 1 of the *Tilling Passions* series, uptight CPA and oldest sister, JULIE TILLING, is the glue that binds her family. Everyone, including her parents, depend on her to do the right thing. But when her friend from high school dies and Julie is the only one who believes he didn't commit suicide, she takes it upon herself to investigate his death. Her search for answers finds her flirting on the fringes of internet pornography. But Julie's desire to find a killer and experience a sexual awakening may push her moral boundaries to the breaking point.

DAMON COREY didn't come to Maine to become shock jock, Demon Jones. But when his dream career of becoming a concert pianist seems unobtainable, the radio station's offer is too good to pass up. Besides, being a radio celebrity has definite advantages with the ladies. When mysterious brunette, Jewel, hooks up with him at the nightclub run by a college frat brother their one night fling wraps around his heart and won't loosen its talons.

Julie and Damon feel the heat of passion from the moment they meet, but will their secrets unravel the tenuous threads of their relationship? Can Damon expose his inner soul without pushing Julie away or will his enigmatic Demon Jones persona become Julie's sexual undoing and reveal him as the missing piece that solves the puzzling questions surrounding her friend's death?

Excerpt:**Chapter 8**

Julie hated Thursdays. Actually, she hated every day since returning to Delmont, but Thursdays just sucked more. There was the whole payroll to do and the statements to prepare for Meghan's weddings this weekend and estimates for Deirdre to file.

"Julie, Chelsea's out front. I've got to go into Bangor to get some extra ribbon for the pew markers for the Fowler wedding." Meghan poked her head into the back office of the flower shop, but didn't meet Julie's wounded stare. It had been like this all week.

"And if you're not too busy, it's your turn to cook dinner for Mum and Daddy. Of course, if you have plans, or you're just too busy, I can go again tonight."

“That’s it.” The pencil in Julie’s hand snapped with her patience. “I’m done playing the contrite sister while you’re acting like a spoiled brat.”

“Me?” Meghan laid a limp hand over her heart. “I’m not the one who went AWOL just to screw around with a total stranger. It’s obvious where your priorities lie.”

“Oh, like I knew Daddy was going to have a heart attack. Yeah, that’s me, always running from responsibilities.” The hurt tumbled over anger, rolling into an emotional snowball that plunged headlong without regret into Meghan’s feelings.

“Why do I always have to be the one to shoulder everyone’s problems?” Tears burned Julie’s eyes. “Julie, can you water my plants while I’m on vacation? Julie, should I have fish or steak for dinner? Julie, come home and pull my business out of financial ruin. Julie, talk to Doc McCarty about Daddy’s test results. Julie, feed me, clothe me, love me. Well, Meghan, when the hell do I get to lean on anyone?”

“That’s not fair!”

“You’re right, it’s not fair! It’s not fair that I live everyone else’s life, but can’t have one of my own. And when I finally do ... I get punished for it!” Julie pushed away from the mess. “Frankly, Meghan, I’m sick of it. Sick of putting my needs on hold. Sick of trying to live up to everyone else’s expectations. Sick of...” She swiped the papers off her desk. “...sick of this crap.” She shoved past Meghan, but turned and stared down at eyes filled with tears and loathing. “And don’t worry about tonight, little sister. I realize it’s my turn. I’ll be the ever-vigilant daughter and hold back the tide--like always.”

* * * *

Damon stared at his cell phone, willing it to ring.

Julie hadn’t answered. Not her cell. Not her house phone. He’d left messages Sunday and Monday inquiring about her father--wanting to apologize, but not knowing exactly what he’d done. Then he’d just kept calling, praying she’d pick up the phone, but not bothering to leave a message when she didn’t.

“Hey, Demon, you get that promo done?” The station manager looked up from a handful of papers as they passed in the hall of WKOR.

“Heading over to record it now.”

“Don’t let your fans see you that way.”

Damon looked down at the black dress pants and tailored shirt. He ran a hand over his chin, wondering if he should do another quick shave before heading to Bangor. “No, that wouldn’t do would it?” Wouldn’t his boss be amused if he knew where Damon was headed this afternoon?

“Bad boys don’t clean up that nice,” his boss said over his shoulder.

“Yeah, thanks for the advice. I’ll keep it in mind.”

Life was too short to spend time spinning your wheels somewhere you didn’t want to be. Somehow, in her very mixed-up world of family obligations, Julie had unknowingly drilled that point home. Damon slinked into the control room.

“Hey, Randy.”

“Demon.” Randy barely looked up until he caught the outfit, then nearly fell out of his chair craning his neck into the studio. “What the fuck, man? Someone die?”

“Yeah, something like that.”

Damon went through the motions of recording the promo, his mind somewhere else. When it was finished, he slapped Randy on the back and ambled out of the radio station. What had taken him hours to perfect three months ago didn’t even cause him any concern these days. Demon’s personality, like it or not--and he didn’t--was an integral part of him. Cussing into a microphone to promote his next public appearance had become second nature. That was not good. Well, he was on his way to rectify that. Even if no one else knew--it made him happy. He would have been more pleased if he could have shared it with Julie, but somehow her father’s heart attack had been his fault.

That was a depressing thought. Settling his sunglasses in place, he stepped out into the summer sun. The season hadn’t loosened its grip, and he was grateful he’d brought the Saturn with the air conditioning instead of the bike. With the weight of blame he slogged around over keeping Julie from her family adding to the oppressive humidity, Damon didn’t think he could have handled the bike anyway.

“Damon?”

He recognized the shaky voice, but not the shell of a woman speaking. “Julie?” He wanted to believe she was standing there and not just a mirage wavering in the heat rising off the tar. The wind danced with her hair, and she pushed it out of her eyes; emerald pools glistening with unshed sadness. He walked to her, but she looked too fragile to touch.

“Julie, what is it? Is your father all right? He didn’t...” Damon bent so he could read her face. As morbid as it seemed, he’d checked the obituaries every day. No John Tilling had been among the pictures. But the sadness rippling her brow said something different.

“No, he’s fine. Doc McCarty gave him heart medication and put him on a special diet. He just needs to take it easy for awhile. He came home Monday night.”

“Then what...”

“I’m sorry...”

They spoke at the same time.

“You go.” Julie’s mouth quivered in a half smile.

“No, you first.” Damon wanted so badly to gather her in his arms, but until he knew why she’d come to him, he didn’t intend to scare her off with words or actions.

“I’m not sure why I’m here, Damon. I was just driving around and ... oh, I don’t know what I was thinking. I just need...”

“A friend?”

“Yeah.”

Julie collapsed in his embrace. He guided her to his car parked in the shade and held her while emotion poured out with the sobs wracking her body. Her tears dampened his shirt, and all he could think was how she smelled like lilacs and felt like heaven pressed against him. He silently thanked the roads of fate that destiny had delivered her back into his arms.

Twenty minutes later, after cajoling Julie into joining him in Bangor, he was maneuvering the Saturn out of the station parking lot. The woman who had filled his nights with restless thoughts of love and lust now sat in his passenger’s seat, wringing her hands.

“You promise to have me at my parents’ house by four? Four-thirty at the latest?” Julie asked.

“If it means I have to rent a jet from Bangor, I will deliver you back to Delmont in time to make dinner for your parents.”

“And I have my cell phone.” She held up the device she clutched like a life preserver.

“Thank you for coming with me.” Julie had no idea how much he needed her strength right now.

“When you said you wanted to play piano, you failed to mention you’re a trained pianist.”

“My mother taught me.”

“Another side of Damon Corey I didn’t know.”

“That’s the real me.”

“Who? Tell me about the young Damon.”

He laughed. “Hell on wheels. That’s what my father used to say. I spoke two languages and could sweet-talk the girls in both of them by the age of six.”

“Why doesn’t that surprise me?”

“My mother used to sit me on her lap when she played. I started making music on the piano before I could write my name.”

Julie traced a finger in the dimple framing his smile. “She’s a concert pianist?”

“Mama? No, she used to play the violin. The piano was my father’s instrument.”

“Used to? She gave it up?”

“My mother’s dead.”

“Damon, I’m so sorry.” Her fingers dug into his bicep.

“Don’t be.” In an instant, his pride turned to bitterness. “She died when I was teenager. I’m over it.” Actually, talking about it still cut deeply, but he couldn’t admit that.

“No one gets over their mother’s death, Damon.”

“Yeah, well, seeing as she abandoned me to my drunken father and followed her lover to Europe, her death wasn’t really too much of a loss.” He swallowed, still finding the pill bitter all these years later. “She died on the autobahn in Germany exactly the way she wanted to live--fast and free.” He wanted it not to matter, but even Julie understood it did.

“Damon, who knows why parents do the things they do.” Her palm cupped his jaw, and her thumb caressed his cheek. The action was not intended to be sensual, but his body reacted immediately. “But I might have an inkling why someone might run from familial responsibilities.” Dropping her hand in her lap, she turned to look out the window. “Sometimes they’re just overwhelming.”

He picked up her hand and kissed it.

Julie lifted a shoulder as if apologizing. “Right or wrong, I can understand it.”

“Love can sometimes overwhelm a person.” Of course, he wasn’t talking about his parents. He was talking about his heart.

“So are you close with your father?” Julie asked.

He laughed derisively. “No. Without my mother to hold him up, he fell into the bottle and drowned himself. His death certificate reads liver failure. But in reality--he died of a broken heart.”

* * * *

It was a wonder the man pouring his soul out through the piano keys didn’t simply collapse--an empty husk of a body. Surely nothing so poignant could come from anywhere other than the heart. As melodious strains of some dead composer filled the Bangor Auditorium, Julie could feel Damon’s sorrow filling her and resonating through every molecule of air.

How could the man who stood before crazed fans yelling derogatory obscenities be the same hurt little boy who had bravely withstood her barrage of questions about his family? Guilt pinched her heart and made it hard to fill her lungs. As the emotional music pulled her along its river of notes, she thought of her family. As much as they aggravated her, they also anchored her, gave her a sense of belonging. Damon was an orphan; an adult wandering aimlessly through life without any stabilizing beacon to guide him.

Silence rent her thoughts, and she had to keep herself from clapping for his performance. Even from this distance she could see the sweat glistening on his brow, the nervous tension turning down the corners of his mouth.

“Thank you, Mr. Corey.” The conductor walked to the edge of the stage and craned his neck up. “The board will be making a decision by the beginning of next week. We will let you know by then.”

“Thank you.” Damon bowed to the group of people seated in the front row and left the stage.

Julie rushed into the hall and followed the maze of corridors toward the stage entrance where she’d left Damon, nervous and fidgeting. He exploded out of the doors and grabbed her around the waist, twirling them both at a dizzying speed.

“Damn, did you feel that?” He set her down and paced. “I don’t care if they hire me.” He laughed. “Okay, I care. But did you *hear* that?” Damon took her hand and pulled her along the corridor. “Ba-da ... da-da-da-da.” The notes tripped off his tongue. “I nailed it! And it felt damn good! Liszt himself never played the Hungarian Rhapsody Number 2 with such passion. I’m sure of it. If they don’t want me, that’s their problem.” Damon pulled at the black bow tie until it hung limp around his neck. “I haven’t performed in front of an audience since college.” The collar buttons were next. “But damn, I haven’t

lost a thing.” He wiggled his fingers in the air. “These, Julie, are my ticket. I just proved they still got it.”

She took his hands in hers. “Pianos aren’t the only instruments they make sing.” Her wink settled right in his groin, the tented dress pants evidence that her comment had sent him over the edge as she intended.

“You are a wicked woman, Miss Julie Tilling. What time is it?”

“Only two-twenty.”

“Time’s a wasting.” He threw her over his shoulder. Julie squirmed and shrieked with amusement, but he didn’t put her down until they reached his car.

* * * *

He wound his way through the city streets and out into the neighboring suburbs of Bangor. Houses gave way to fields filled with lupine and then to thick stands of forest. Damon turned onto a dirt road, driving deeper toward privacy.

“I found this place a month ago.” He parked the Saturn under the shade of an oak tree. Anticipation of having Julie writhing beneath him had his cock ready and alert before they’d left the parking lot of the auditorium “Is that all you have for shoes?”

“I came from work. It’s not like I planned on going hiking in heels.”

“Oh, darling, we’re not hiking.”

“But surely you don’t think I’m going to...” She giggled and swirled the air between them with her hand. “...You know ... do it ... here where anyone can drive by and see us?”

“Umm, did you happen to see where you are? I’ve got you so far in the boonies, there’s no chance someone’s going to see that gorgeous naked body.” He swung open the door. “I never did learn to share.” He jumped out and turned only long enough to stare at her amused expression. “I’ve got running shoes in the trunk. I’ll carry you piggyback.”

“Damon Corey, you are not carrying me through the woods.” She stomped out of the car, her luscious breasts bouncing with each step. The sooner they reached the waterfall, the sooner he could bury himself deep in her hot depths.

“Then I will be doing you right here.” He yanked her tight against his erection. “Because you’ve whipped me into a frenzy, and I will not be denied.”

“Is that a threat?” The desire shining in her eyes contradicted the fear the question implied.

Damon slipped into his sneakers. “Oh, you better believe it.”

Julie screamed and ran from him, but he caught her around the waist. “Now, you can ride, or I can carry you. I’m good either way.”

She jumped on his back, her legs straddling his hips, her breasts pressed into his shoulders. Damn, he was horny.

“Don’t you dare drop me.”

“I wouldn’t think of it.” He leaned forward, pretending to throw her off.

Her scream echoed off the trees, and her fist landed solidly on his shoulder. “You jerk.”

He laughed and carried her through the trees. Though he’d only been here once, he’d honed his sense of direction in the army and found the isolated waterfall without having to retrace his steps.

“Damon, it’s beautiful.”

“So are you.” He slanted his mouth over hers, swallowing her gasp of pleasure. He’d only been away from her less than four days, but he feasted greedily on the taste as if he hadn’t seen her in years. “Julie. I missed you.”

“Damon, don’t talk. Just be with me.”

He took off his shirt and laid her down on it, covering her body with his. Clothes ripped as desperate hands sought skin. Her teeth grazed his chin and shoulder, and her nails bit into his flesh, and all he could think about as emotions snapped along his nerves and blood pounded in his ears was how alive this woman made him feel.

He pushed into her, surrounding his throbbing cock with her silken heat. She whispered in his ear, and her hot breath sent ribbons of divine pleasure down his spine. He rocked against her, his hips pistoning in time with hers. There was nothing in his world, save for this woman spread wide in acceptance of whomever he chose to be.

Her muscles pulled him, taunted him to let go. And when he felt Julie arch and stiffen beneath him, her own climax moments away, he surrendered to the bliss. The world convulsed around him. Fireworks of ecstasy exploded from his groin, filling every cell with pleasure. “I love you, Julie.” The words slipped quietly from his lips even as her orgasm shook the very foundation of his life.

Buy link: <http://www.liquidsilverbooks.com/books/blindlove.htm>

Author Bio

Nina Pierce

Romance so hot ... it melts your Heart

Nina Pierce began writing as a lark when her health forced her retirement from a twenty-year teaching career. As someone who always loved hot stories and happy endings, she sat down to write her first romance in 2005. Her part-time love of words blossomed into a full-time writing career, and she hasn't looked back. Now her characters wake her in the night, clamoring to have their stories told.

A native of Maine, Nina resides in what she affectionately calls “the great white North” with her true love of twenty-four years, their three grown children and a menagerie of pets.

You can keep up with her hottest releases at <http://www.NinaPierce.com> or contact her directly at Nina@NinaPierce.com.

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Published Works:

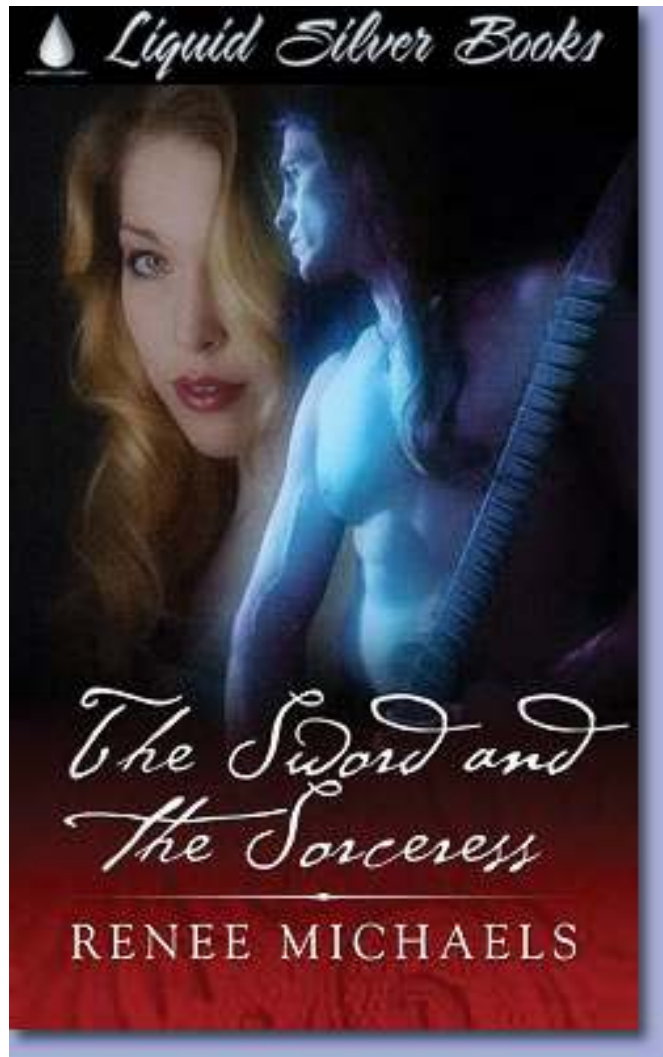
The Healer's Garden (Direct buy link:

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Other books in the Tilling Passions Series:

Love's Bounty (<http://www.liquidsilverbooks.com/books/lovesbounty.htm>)

Arranging Love (<http://www.liquidsilverbooks.com/books/arranginglove.htm>)



Title: The Sword and the Sorceress

Author: Renee Michaels

Genre: Fantasy

Rating: Neapolitan

Format: e-book

Buy link:

http://www.king-cart.com/cgi-bin/cart.cgi?store=linda018&cart_id=5043722.85836&product_name=The+Sword+And+The+Sorceress&return_page=&user-id=&password=&exchange=&exact_match=exact

Blurb:

When their world is threatened by a cruel and merciless king, sorceress Syra ap Syrren must join forces with the man destined to be her bondmate. Rhys Sorren, the powerful and driven warrior lord is reluctant to claim her, fearing it would endanger her. Their bond is forged by a searing passion and fueled by magic. Her gift of enhancement empowers him greatly to be victorious in the first skirmish in the coming war.

But then a new threat comes to their attention ... their foe seeks the fabled Sword of Sorren in an attempt to gain unrivaled magical power. Beset by betrayal as they fight to secure peace for their people, they must look into the past to find the root of their troubles. Allied with their neighbors, they prepare for a battle where they must win or lose it all

Excerpt:**Chapter One**

Syra surfaced from a deep sleep as the magical wards placed on the outer walls of the castle sounded the warning of approaching travelers. The rumble of the gates opening announced their welcome. Stretching sensuously, she purred as the silk bedding abraded her sensitive nipples. Rolling over, she burrowed into the goose-down mattress, reluctant to stir from the cocoon shielding her from the chill in the air. Her eyes snapped open as her bedroom doors were thrust open.

“Wake up, Syra, riders approach; they must bring news from the border.” Her cousin Lara announced as she rushed through the room to the balcony hanging over the inner courtyard.

“It’s probably my brothers returning from another night of carousing.” Used to the odd hours they kept, she wasn’t particularly concerned.

Fully awake now, curiosity got the better of her. Rising, she parted the sheer drapery surrounding her bed, slipping naked from its warm comfort. Donning a fur-lined robe, she stood just inside the balcony doors. Twin moons shed their eerie light on a large party of riders mounted atop prancing firesteeds.

The Sorren brothers and their personal guard. The horses snorted heated puffs of air, plowing effortlessly through knee-high drifts of snow. But it was Rhys who caught and held her attention. At six-five, he was a broad shouldered, powerfully built man whose masculinity called to the woman in her. He had consumed her thoughts for the last eighteen months, as they played a game of cat and mouse.

He dismounted in one fluid motion and tossing the reins of his fire stallion Blaze to a waiting groom huddled against the bitter cold. As he moved forward, his guard

fanned out behind him, ever watchful. Oblivious to the biting wind that tore at his hair and clothes, his power a tangible thing, he strode with feline grace toward the welcoming warmth of Castle Syrren. He paused suddenly, like a predator sensing prey nearby, and looked up to her balcony.

He stood there for what seemed an eternity, ebony hair flowing back from his chiseled features, a slight smile curving his sensuous lips. He shouldn't actually be able to see her, but he knew she was there. He was aware of her as she was of him.

Syra stood riveted; fingers pressed against the icy glass, her body heating as memories flooded through her. The images of Rhys' nude body entwined with Morag di Mari's were painfully vivid.

The preparations for her coming-of-age ceremony were driving her mad. She crept out of the castle at dawn, before her mother could find some other task for her to complete. Saddling her little mare, she galloped away from the stables, not giving the grooms a chance to insist on escorting her. Canter through the cool greenery of the woods, she loosened her hair from its confining braid. It flew behind her like a golden banner as she urged her horse on faster.

The wind in her face and the powerful straining muscles of the horse she held between her thighs made her feel freer than she had in months. Syra laughed, savoring the small amount of freedom she had snatched for herself. It would be only a matter of time before they came looking for her. Girls with her gifts were protected until bonded with a compatible male.

Syra and her cousins were especially cloistered because of the loss of their aunt many years ago. She couldn't wait for the day she could travel to other provinces; she longed to experience a life different from her own safe world.

Jumping off her horse, anticipation made her steps quicken as she imagined cold water running over her heated body. Stripping off her vest, she dropped it to the ground only to draw up short, finding the pool already occupied by Rhys Sorren and Morag di Mari.

Totally engrossed in each other, they were unaware of her presence. She stood frozen, watching Rhys' large hand move down Morag's thigh. He hitched her leg higher so her heel rested in the small of his back, allowing him to impale her deeper. The line of his back flexed, emphasizing the beautifully defined musculature of his large body. Morag lay at the edge of the pool, her body arching into each of his thrusts. Her heavy breasts heaved as Rhys rammed into her, giving in to her hoarsely worded demands for more. His head was flung back, eyes closed, teeth gritted as he lost himself in the pleasure he shared with the woman beneath him.

Syra's powers manifested in full force for the first time, her emphatic ability embracing and enhancing every sensation Morag experienced. Rhys ground his pelvic bone against Morag's clit, pushing her to a small orgasm. In tandem with Morag, Syra could only whimper as her nipples peaked and warm liquid flooded her crotch. As his large cock pumped in and out of Morag's weeping sheath, Rhys' hot ravenous mouth suckled her turgid nipples.

Syra shared every sensation with the delirious woman as the entwined couple slowly built toward something she didn't quite understand, but wanted desperately. Not having finished her training, she wasn't totally in control of her gifts, and her enhancing power shot into the unsuspecting couple, intensifying their pleasure.

Morag's eyes rolled back as she blacked out, ecstasy overloading her system. Rhys' head shot up, his eyes making contact with Syra's mortified gaze. Shuddering and fighting for control, he gathered the unconscious woman into his arms and vanished.

Syra sank to her knees, her face red with embarrassment, her body shivering in reaction to the sensual onslaught. She sat there for the longest time, gazing into the shallow depths of the pool in stunned realization. She didn't have much experience enhancing the skills of a magically gifted male outside of her family, but she knew the seamless melding with Rhys' powers could only mean one thing--he was her true mate.

She didn't know how she was ever going to face Rhys Sorren again. In that short collision of their powers, he had seen how much she had wanted to be in Morag's place.

In the last eighteen months she had grown up a lot. She had worked hard to hone her magic, and her control of her gift was sharp and sure. Never again would she thrust her powers on another person.

Her skills with the short swords had grown; she could hold her own in a fight. Rhys had been to the castle several times for meetings with her father during this time, and the only contact she had with him was in a crowd.

Each time they passed the other, she could see the tightly leashed desire in his eyes. She avoided him, telling herself she was too embarrassed to face him, and used that excuse to put off dealing with the growing sexual awareness between them. While she succeeded, it was with the knowledge that he allowed her to.

She told herself she was happy she had put off the inevitable, but a tiny part of her was piqued that he didn't pursue her. Giving in to her desire for him would have taken care of the constant yearning for fulfillment that nagged at her. But now, as she looked down at him, she sensed her time was up.

“Rhys was here not a fortnight ago, so the news can’t be good,” Lara whispered, turning worried blue eyes to Syra. Slipping a comforting arm her around her younger cousin, Syra her drew towards the warmth of the fireplace as the door was once again thrown open.

“Ladies, those delicious Sorren brothers have arrived.” Asha, Lara’s older sister, bounced into the room in a flurry of diaphanous silk. Plopping herself amongst the pillows on Syra’s chaise, she secured the warmest spot in the room for herself.

“Aren’t you cold in that gown?” Syra asked, grinning at her irrepressible cousin with raised brows.

“No, it’s just a little illusion I’ve been playing with; the gown is totally transparent but keeps me warm,” she answered airily. “The Sorrens are sure to have brought news. Maybe now our mentors and parents will allow us to do something exciting. I long for change. Enhancing other people’s skills for dull tasks is boring.” A gleam of speculation lit her eyes as she studied Syra’s face.

“Surely you’re not hoping to be an enhancer to a Sorren,” gasped Lara. “Mother said they are no better than bandits!” Taking the large armchair across from her sister, she tucked her legs beneath her, drawing a fur throw up around her shoulders to ward off the chill.

“Bandits my foot. It’s all myth and rumor spread by other clans threatened by the Sorrens growing power and influence. Don’t you wish a man like one of the Sorren brothers would just take you? With their broad shoulders, strong thighs and their leathers filled in all the right places,” Asha purred. “I’m tired of the oh-so-polite and formal courting we’re subjected to by those boys allowed anywhere near us. As if it were my lush, ready-for-the-plucking body they wanted and not the alignment of suitable powers,” Asha grumbled with scorn. “I’d toss my hat in the ring with one of the virile Sorrens, and enjoy every minute of it; especially Rhys.” She grinned, sliding a sly look at Syra.

“I wish to the Gods I had never told you about that,” Syra snapped as she climbed between the covers of her bed.

“Who else were you going tell? You know the details about all of my little escapades. One must do what one can to relieve the monotony around here. Sometimes I think I’ll die of boredom.”

“You’ll get enough excitement if Grandmother catches you walking half-naked in the corridor,” Syra pointed out.

“You should see the leers, winks and lewd propositions I get. When I pass the guards they think they’re getting a good look at my charms. The best part is their expressions of horrified embarrassment when I conjure Uncle Orren’s image behind me

out of nowhere.” Giggling impishly, Asha met Syra’s conspiratorial smile, for it was Syra who had encouraged her to use her playful gift.

“I would have loved to have seen that,” Syra laughed with her cousin.

“It’s not proper behavior for an ap Syrren. So what’s this about Rhys? Nobody tells me anything,” Lara grumbled, obviously realizing they had neglected to fill her in. “I’m grown up now, a fully trained healer and an enhancer to boot. I wish you’d stop treating like a child.”

“Are you blind?” Asha laughed, sitting up. “For the last eighteen months, Rhys and our cousin have been doing a dance around each other, and by all indications, things are coming to a head. I, for one, can’t wait. If those two are a truebond, it will open a whole world of possibilities for the rest of us. No more meeting of suitable powers, but more a meeting of bodies.” She wiggled her brows at her prim little sister.

“Her parents wouldn’t encourage such a match; the Sorrens are always fighting with the Balendrakes. I thought Uncle Orren had an understanding with Clan Barrone for Syra’s hand.”

“Wishful thinking on Lord Barrone’s part. Besides, Rhys has good reason to fight the Belandrakes. They murdered his parents and razed his castle to rubble. He’s rebuilt everything and is now a power to be reckoned with; the ambitious mamas all want him for a son-in-law.” Popping candied fruit into her mouth, Asha’s lips puckered as the tart berry filling hit her tongue. “I hope I bond with someone who looks at me like he wanted to slurp me up like jelly custard.”

“Eric Barrone would be perfect for Syra,” Lara stated stubbornly.

“Oh, for heaven’s sake, Eric is like a brother, and I don’t think Rhys thinks of me in that way. I’m not anything like the women he usually consorts with. They’re brunette and busty. He thought of me as a child before our powers collided.” Syra said dryly, glancing down at what she considered a barely adequate chest. She purposely avoided the thought that she and Rhys were true mates. Tonight, especially.

“I’d give my eyeteeth to have your skin and hair.” Asha looked enviously at Syra’s board-straight tresses, winding an unruly ringlet around her finger. “I detest my curls and there is nothing wrong with your chest, it’s the same size as mine. That incorrigible Rorii Sorren told me that my breasts reminded him of star apples.” She grinned as Syra rolled her eyes.

“Asha ap Syrren, one of these days you are going to land in hot water. Syra and I won’t always be there to save you, you forward hussy. Sometimes I can’t believe we’re sisters.”

“If I get into that kind of trouble I won’t want saving,” Asha answered, clearly irked at her sister’s lack of boldness.

Syra sat, listening to the bickering. As a child, she’d prayed for a sister, and instead been granted her completely opposite cousins. Asha, bold and daring; Lara so shy and studious.

Her mind drifted to Rhys, and the now-familiar ache coiled between her thighs.

A knock at the door broke into her reverie; it swung open to show their grandmother, dressed in long, flowing robes. Banded with rich gold embroidery and studded precious stones, they befitted her station as high mentor to the gifted.

She was a tall, regal woman, her blonde hair silvered by time. The intricate braid indicated her clan, marital status and gift. Closing the door behind her, Darreth ap Syrren regarded her three granddaughters regally. A tray laden with small cakes and four steaming mugs floated mid-air beside her. With an elegant wave of her hand, it settled on the low table by the chaise. Seating herself beside Asha, she passed her a cup.

“I thought you might like something to help you sleep. We have guests, so no walking scantily clad along the corridors.” There was a reprimand in the sharp gaze she shot Asha. “The news from the borderlands will be not good. Everyone with a gift will be needed to fight off the latest attacks. Representatives from all the other clans will be arriving during the morning hours. They will gather in the great hall tomorrow, after the noon meal. It would please me if you wore your robes of office. As befits our trying circumstances, pairing rituals will be enacted; I can’t say I fully approve of the haste in which we must proceed, but these are desperate times. I have faith in each of your abilities. I’m sure you will do your family proud.”

Syra left the security of her bed to settle at her grandmother’s feet. She took a cup from the tray to warm her suddenly chilled hands. The pairing ritual was an ancient practice used only in times of great crisis. Not as formal as the arranged marriages that solidified provincial liaisons, it was a joining of power. Mates, on the other hand, were true love matches, and often frowned upon because they rarely melded power and politics.

Darreth sipped from her cup and smiled at the girls. Putting her cup down, she waved a hand at the dying embers in the hearth. It burst into flames, heating the room. “I wanted to speak to you girls privately before the gathering. I’ve done a reading of the tapestry; it tells me we may have a traitor amongst our ranks, but haven’t I been able to pinpoint who it is. The link between the three of you is strong, so use it to your advantage. Be alert at all times and follow your instincts, because I sense the three of you will play an integral part in achieving peace for the provinces. Now I want you all to find your beds, you’ll need to be well rested, for tomorrow will be a long day.” Darreth left the room and closed the door softly behind her.

Syra looked at her cousins, seeing the conflicting emotions flitting across their faces. Lara looked apprehensive, while Asha, for once, appeared indecisive.

Excitement built within Syra. This was what she had been dreaming about for such a long time.

Buy link:

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Author Bio

Renee Michaels

Renee Michaels is the author of erotic romance fiction *The Sword and the Sorceress* and *Descent into Pleasure*. Her first love is the paranormal. Though, she has been known to dip into other genres if an idea pops into her fertile mind.

Mrs. Michaels is a stay-at-home mom who writes as a creative outlet. She resides in sunny Florida, with two active children who keep her hopping. She reads voraciously in all genres, loves to travel and is an admitted shoeaholic.

When she's not cooking up a storm in the kitchen, she's cooking up stories on her keyboard.

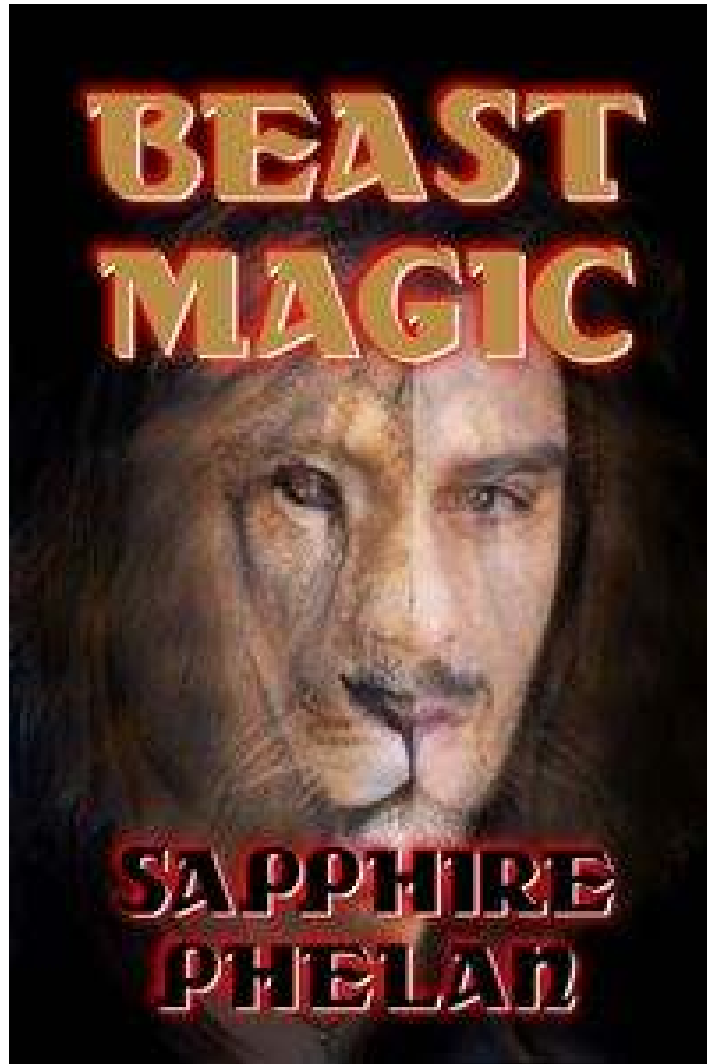
Her novel, *The Sorceresses of Syrren*, is available from Liquid Silver Books.

<http://www.LiquidSilverBooks.com>

Her short contemporary *Descent into Pleasure* is in the 'Goin Down' anthology with Aspen Mountain Press. <http://aspenmountainpress.com>

Link:

<http://www.renee-michaels.com>



Title: Beast Magic

Author: Sapphire Phelan

Genre: Paranormal Romance

Rating: Neapolitan

Format: e-book and also available in the print anthology – *Shifting Desires*

Buy link <http://www.king-cart.com/Phaze/product=Beast+Magic+by+Sapphire+Phelan>

Blurb:

They came from two different worlds.

Ramses was a werelion. Shana Tory was human. The Dreaming foretold them as soul mates.

So Ramses tracked her down in America, and when he found her, made her his and brought her back home with him to the South African Bushveld.

But others from his pride, led by one evil lioness, do not want them together. Besides their lives, will their love survive the coming war?

Excerpt:

Ramses paced one end of the cage to the other. He acknowledged the other lions briefly as they watched him with an air of fear and respect. They knew what he really was. Shapeshifter. Changer of forms. One of many that, like him, were behind the myths of werebeasts, except they weren't myths.

He stopped and smiled. It was something that a pure lion couldn't do. Sharp fangs glinted in the moonlight.

The funny thing about werewolves, werelions, weretigers, and other shapeshifting creatures of magic were that the human stories made claim to a man changing into a beast. Actually, it was the other way around. Among the animal and bird kingdom, a few were born with the magical ability to be able to become a human being. Strangely enough, it seemed only the predators could do this and not those who fed upon vegetation. Ramses could never figure out why this was. But it had always been so.

Usually a shapeshifter mated with another shapeshifter. But mostly, the Dreaming would reveal a human as the potential mate. And so, the identity of his mate had come to him. Ever since he was a cub, he had seen his anisa in dreams.

One female shapeshifter, Kaket, had tried to gain his interest, to mate with her. He refused, letting her know that he had the Dreaming, and that his true mate waited for him across the Great Water in another land called America. Angry, Kaket told him he would be sorry he had denied her.

The human woman must have dreamed of him too. For today she had come, drawn to him. Ramses had awoken, sensing her. He had left the sleeping quarters and saw her for the first time outside of his dreams.

Tall and long limbed, she had a long red golden mane that gleamed like fire when the sunlight struck it. Her eyes were beautiful green, just like the lush grass of home. That

gaze of jade had stared into his eyes, stirring him. Breasts, just the right size for a male's hands, jutted forward and tented the man-made material she wore like a second skin. His cock had hardened against his belly, pointing toward her like it was trying to reach for her woman's sex. Ramses had felt the urge to leap over the boundary that separated them and fuck her in his lion or human form, it didn't matter which. The impulse had overtaken him and he almost lost his control when she had turned tail and ran.

Time to take it to the next level.

With a thrust of his hind legs, Ramses launched through the air and sailed over both the stone boundary and metal fence. He landed on the other side of the cement ground just outside the lion enclosure. Without a backward glance at the other lions, he bounded away.

He had a mate to claim and a destiny to fulfill.

Buy link: <http://www.king-cart.com/Phaze/product=Beast+Magic+by+Sapphire+Phelan>

Author Bio

Sapphire Phelan

Sapphire Phelan is an author of erotic and sweet paranormal, fantasy, and science fiction romance. She also writes as Pamela K. Kinney, for horror, fantasy, science fiction, and a nonfiction ghost book, *Haunted Richmond, Virginia*. She lives in Virginia with her husband and two cats, Ripley and Bast. You can find out more about her and what she has or will be coming out at her website: <http://FantasticDreams.50megs.com> Check out her MySpace at <http://www.myspace.com/SapphirePhelan> and subscribe to her newsletter at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SapphirePhelansParanormalNewsletter> .

She admits she can always be found at her desk and on her computer, writing. And yes, the house and husband sometimes suffers for it!

Published Works:

"Jack"-Sinister Tales Magazine, Issue #1

"Wedded Magic"—Love You Divine

"Soul Seduction" in Forbidden Love: Bad Boys--Under the Moon

Iridescent Invasion--Lady Aibell Press-Publisher closed and rights back

"Being a Predator is a Bitch" in Forbidden Love: Wicked Women-Under the Moon

"To Save the Day"—Amazon Shorts

"Costumed Scare" and "Full Moon Lover" (Poems) in Phaze in Verse--Phaze

"The Dark Man" (m/m) in Forbidden Love: Sacred Bands-Under the Moon

Beast Magic (e-Book)-Phaze Books

"Old Friends" in December 2007 issue of Cobblestone Press Quarterly

"Shadow Lover" in Coming Together: Under Fire—Phaze Books

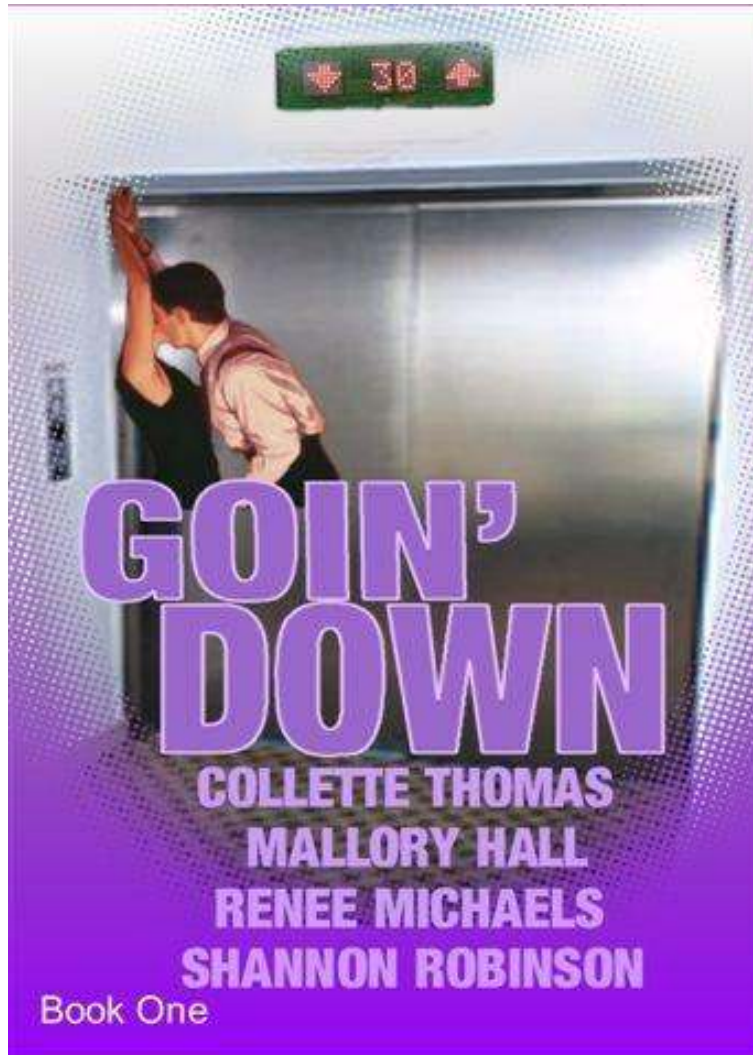
Crimson Promise—Phaze Books

"To Teach an Ancient God"—Romance All eBooks

Coming Soon:

Shifting Desires-July 28, 2008-Phaze Books-Beast Magic

Being familiar With a Witch novella-January 2009-Phaze Books



Title: Fired Or Fired Up (GOIN' Down Anthology Book 1)

Author: Shannon Robinson

Genre: Erotica

Rating: Neapolitan

Format: e-book

Buy link

http://www.aspenmountainpress.com/more-hot-reads/goin-39-down-1/prod_143.html

Blurb:

What happens when a shy secretary decides to prove to the arrogant hunk of a boss who just fired her that she's more than what he thinks? One heated encounter in an elevator, of course!

Chirene Matthey is tired of being a secretary. Making coffee and hearing complaints from her boss, Jacob Kennedy, is getting on her nerves. So when Jacob offers her a chance to show that she's able to do more than just filing, Chirene jumps at the opportunity. When the assignment goes south, Jacob unexpectedly fires her, and Chirene decides that it's time he learned exactly how she feels about his pompous attitude.

When her complaints begin to rouse Jacob's desires, Chirene decides to indulge in the pleasures she's only fantasized about before and take advantage of the new opportunity her ex-boss offers.

Excerpt:

“What do you mean I’m fired?”

Jacob leaned against the doorframe, his air of nonchalance grating on Chirene’s nerves even more than the words he’d just surprised her with.

“Chirene, I can’t keep investing in an employee who doesn’t return the worth in her work.”

“I don’t understand,” Chirene placed her hands on the desk, stabilizing herself from the dizzy, nauseous feeling that threatened to emerge from her stomach. “I’ve completed every request that you’ve ever asked. I’ve never been late. I usually work after hours so that the reports you need are ready and waiting on your desk in the morning. I presented the promos today without any notice or time to prepare. What did I do to warrant this?”

Jacob sighed as though bored of the discussion and walked over to her. “I’ve realized that this isn’t the place for you. I need someone with finesse, someone energetic and excited to move forward with the company. Today’s presentation proved to me that you don’t have those qualities.”

“But—”

“Chirene,” Jacob cut her off, holding up a hand. “Please gather your belongings.” He turned his back to her and walked into his office. Chirene watched him leave, each

step he took away from her finalizing her predicament. He rested his hand on the door and paused before turning back to her. His eyes brimmed with sympathy. "I'm sorry."

She barely caught the muttered words before he closed the door, shutting her out. Chirene leaned her head back and gazed at the white tiled ceiling. How could this have happened? Five years she'd devoted to her job, to her boss, and now she was being dismissed as casually as a summer-temp employee.

She glanced around the room, cataloguing all of the personal items she wouldn't leave behind. Trying to stifle the queasiness in her stomach and fight back the tears that lingered at the corners of her eyes, Chirene walked out of the office and down the dimly lit hallway, passed rows of gray cubicles to the mailroom where she could get two boxes to put her stuff in. It was after six o'clock and everyone had already gone home for the evening. Her high heels clapped on the tiled floor, interrupting the silence, as she walked back to her office to begin packing.

Quietly, she loaded her belongings into the boxes, lingering longer than necessary to gather everything, but she wanted to be sure she got it all. Her gaze flicked over to the closed oak door, waiting, hoping that Jacob would come out and say he'd made a mistake.

The door remained shut. She sighed and turned back to the boxes.

She filled each box and lifted one to carry down to her car. She cradled the heavy box to her chest and walked down the hall to the elevator. Shifting the box in her arms, she reached out a hand and pressed the down arrow, watching it light up. Tapping a foot, she waited for the elevator to rise to the ninth floor, anxious to be out of the building now that she knew she was no longer wanted there.

The hair on her arms prickled when she heard footsteps behind her, walking down the hall towards the elevator. There was only one other person in the building at this hour, and he was the last person she wanted to see.

Jacob's musky cologne swarmed her senses before he came to a stop behind her. Chirene stood still and looked straight at the metal doors of the elevator, willing them to open.

"Can I help you with that?"

Chirene looked over at him. "No," she said tersely. The man just fired her. She wasn't about to accept any assistance from him.

“Chirene—”

“Jacob, stop.” Chirene interrupted him, feeling free to address him by his first name now that he was no longer her boss. She turned and faced him, meeting his brown gaze straight on. “I don’t need your sympathy or explanations. You’ve said enough already.”

The elevator doors opened. She glided past him and hit the parking garage button. Jacob entered the elevator, moving to stand in the opposite corner from her. The silver doors closed behind him, locking them inside as the elevator began its crawl downward.

The air grew thick with tension. Chirene stood silent, holding the box of knickknacks and picture frames that had once littered her desk. Small remnants of the service she had provided to Advanced Micro Inc.

She didn’t deserve this. She prided herself on being a hard worker and completing every task Jacob had given her over the years as thoroughly as possible. Not once had he ever complained of a lack of competence in her ability. And not once had he ever asked her to show more enthusiasm, nor had he ever stated that she lacked it.

Enthusiasm? What did he want? A bubbly cheerleader for a secretary?

She stared at Jacob’s reflection on the metal doors and seethed. Five years of her life she’d given him, given the company. And for what? A casual explanation that she didn’t have the right attitude for the job. She’d worked hard to make the meager salary that she did, hoping that one day the overtime and effort she’d put in would pay off and take her from the world of secretaries and into something better. Maybe even a position where she would have her own secretary.

With just a few words, that dream had been shattered.

Chirene felt her skin heat up, an angry flush crept into her cheeks. She was pissed. She’d held every annoyance, every complaint about her job and the way she was treated inside, never allowing Jacob to see how inadequate he made her feel at times. There was nothing to hold back for now. She no longer worked for him and it was about time he realized what a complete asshole he was for a boss.

She bent and set the box down on the maroon carpet of the elevator floor. Determined, she straightened and without hesitating, punched the red emergency stop button.

The elevator screeched to a halt, throwing both Chirene and Jacob off balance.

“What are you doing?” Jacob asked, shock lacing his tone as he leaned a hand against the back wall mirror to steady himself from the jolt.

Chirene turned to face him and fisted her hands on her hips. “What I should have done a long time ago.” She pointed her index finger at him. “Five years I’ve put up with your shit, a lapdog to your demands. And what do I get for my hard work? Just your arrogant ass kicking me out!”

Jacob’s eyes widened, his dark brown eyebrows arching high. Chirene could have laughed at the stunned expression written across his face, if she hadn’t been so angry.

“Every day I made your coffee, with two sugars just like you asked, and every single day, you complained about it. I busted my ass getting your reports done, sometimes only getting two hours of sleep because I stayed up all night making sure they were ready for you in the morning.” Chirene took a breath, exhaled, and continued ranting at him. “I’ve been a perfect secretary for you. I’ve well exceeded the expectations listed on my job description and never once did I receive a word of appreciation from you. Not once.”

Her hands trembled, her heart racing as every bit of doubt fled her body. She finally had the guts to stand up to him, and she wasn’t about to let him off the hook. Jacob Kennedy was going to hear every damn word she had to say.

“You give me only a few hours to prepare for the meeting today and you say I fucked it up? Well, what did you expect? As a boss, it’s your job to ensure that I’m ready, that I’m prepared. You’re supposed to be my mentor, my trainer in things like this. Did you do that? No!”

“Chirene.”

“No, shut it Jacob. You’re an inconsiderate, pompous jackass who doesn’t deserve—”

She paused. The heated flare of his brown eyes stared at her so intently, her breath was stolen from her. Every fantasy she'd ever imagined with him radiated at her. Unable to withstand his intense, uninhibited gaze, Chirene glanced down and nearly gasped as the outline of a very large arousal greeted her through the polyester fabric of his trousers.

“Oh my,” Chirene blurted out, raising a hand to her mouth. She'd fantasized about Jacob's size before, but what was obviously evident within his pants was much larger than she had guessed. “I, um...”

“I have never been as turned on as I am right now.” Jacob's voice was low, hoarse as he stepped towards Chirene. “No one has ever spoken to me like you did just now and I have to say,” his lips curved up in a sexy smirk, “I definitely like it.”

He stepped closer to her and Chirene backed up until she hit the paneled wall behind her. Jacob raised his arms up and braced his hands against the wall on each side of her, encasing her inside a cage of steely muscles.

“That's exactly the kind of attitude I wanted to see from you.” He muttered, his breath warm and smelling of peppermint, before leaning in and capturing her mouth with hungry urgency.

Chirene couldn't move, frozen by the intoxicating motion of his lips devouring hers. His cologne, a dark musky fragrance, invaded her head and weakened her knees. He moved closer, his fingers gently tucking her blonde hair behind her ears and framing her face. She felt the pressure of his bulging shaft on her stomach and jumped.

“Wait,” she protested and pressed a hand against him, trying to ignore the hardness of his chest. “What are you doing?”

“What I should have done a long time ago.”

Her own words emerging from his mouth sent chills up her spine as she realized exactly what he meant. If his actions were any indication, then she could have been in this predicament a long time ago, if only she'd spoken up. But she believed in not mixing business relationships with pleasure.

However, Jacob was no longer her boss and perhaps it was time she showed him exactly who it was he'd let go.

“Then do it.”

Buy link:

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Author Bio

Shannon Robinson Romance to Rival Your Fantasies

Shannon Robinson is a newcomer to the published romance author's world, though hopes to become a veteran before too long. When she's not plugging away at her day-job, enjoying life with her two beautiful children and wonderful husband, you'll find her curled up with her laptop, creating new worlds for readers to enjoy, or indulging in a new book of her own to enjoy.

Shannon is a lover of the outdoors, fan of scrapbooks, and baking – even though she's not very good at it. Her favorite pastime is, of course, her writing. Her stories range from sweet to sensual to a bit naughty, as she loves to explore all aspects of romance. She's an avid participator at The Author's Studio Blog where her and four other published authors discuss everything from writing to reading to hot guys, so stop by and visit anytime!

She invites everyone to also visit her website to read more about her, new books coming soon, and other projects she's working on.

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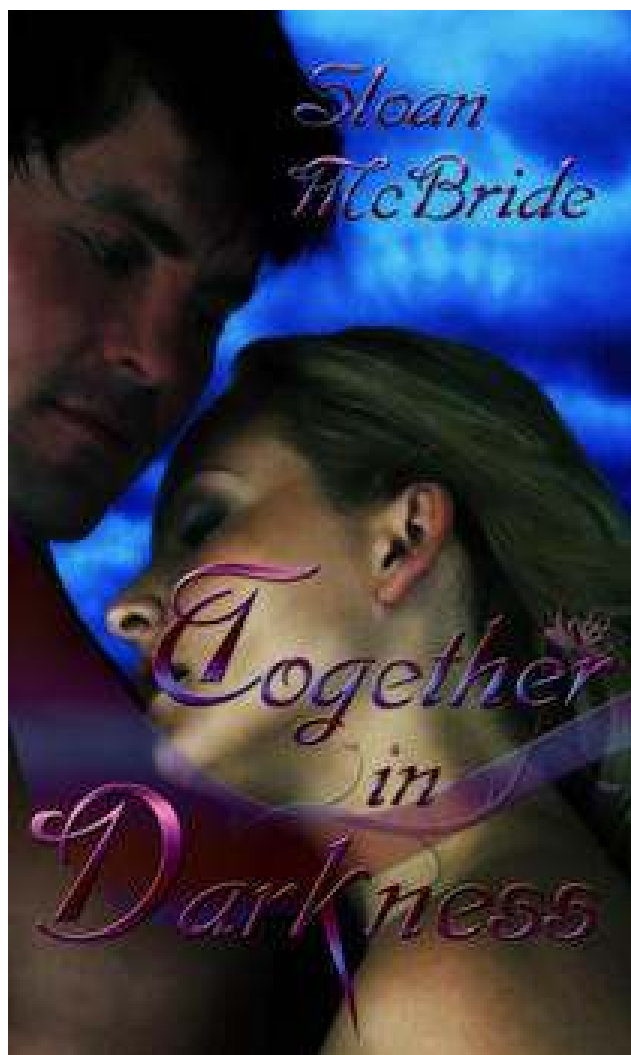
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Title: Together in Darkness

Author: Sloan McBride

Genre: Paranormal

Rating: Neapolitan

Format: e-book

Buy link

<http://www.newconceptspublishing.com/togetherindarkness.htm>

Blurb:

A killer is leaving mutilated bodies across New England. Special Agent Jake Austin is in pursuit, led by clues the killer purposely leaves behind. In Gloucester, Massachusetts, site of the latest murder, Jake meets Allison Brody, a woman who claims to see the victims through the killer's eyes.

Allison Brody is proud of her gypsy heritage, but tries to hide the *gifts* inherited from her bloodline. Through strange visions and a connection that can't be broken, Allison watches as a killer stalks and murders women. The Surgeon is obsessed with her psychic link to him and uses her fear to feed his obsession.

Excerpt:**CHAPTER ONE****Schenectady, NY**

He pressed his ear to the cool paneled door inside the dark, under-stairs closet to hear what they were saying. The scent of her out-of-season clothes surrounded him. He'd been there for hours, and only now, his legs were beginning to cramp. But the wait would be more than worth it.

Calculated. Precise. That's how his plans were laid out.

"I know it's been rough lately, but twenty-four is a good age for new beginnings," he heard an unfamiliar female voice say.

That's what she thinks.

The distant sound of a door closing indicated, he hoped, the last of the party guests leaving. The sound of the dead bolt in the front door sliding home, and the click of the foyer light switch made him close his eyes and take a deep, anticipatory breath.

It was almost time.

He heard her mount the stairs above his head and listened until running water told him he could safely leave his hiding place to watch her as she prepared for bed. The curves of her body beckoned him. He waited while she brushed her teeth, rinsed with mouthwash and wandered into her absurdly feminine bedroom, brushing her long hair.

She had her eyes closed, and he moved quickly, a silent shadow, a whisper of sound, grasping her around the waist with a hand clasped over her mouth. Throwing her on the bed, he followed her down, stretching across her prone body as she struggled. He wouldn't let her suffer long. He wrapped his fingers around her neck and squeezed. The

fight drained out of her along with the oxygen. Oh yeah, he loved the end when the prey gave up to the darkness and his body felt the rush.

"Twenty-four won't be a good year after all," he whispered.

His kiss inhaled her final gasp and he stayed there a moment longer, his lips holding hers as the warmth began to fade. Then he stood, and moving slowly down her body, he ran his hands over her breasts and flat stomach luxuriating in the softness. He straightened her long legs and tugged the cotton nightshirt lower to cover the tops of her tanned thighs. The glowing amber numbers of the bedside clock read 2:10 a.m.

He loved it when a plan went off without a hitch. Slipping his black leather jacket off, he folded it neatly over the back of her vanity chair, brushing a non-existent speck from his clean white t-shirt before heading back to the bed where she waited. Carefully, he pulled a shiny straight razor from his jean pocket; its blade freshly sharpened for just this occasion, and went to work.

He slit the flowery nightgown down the center. Flowers suited her. Now that her soft, bronzed skin was exposed, he paused to study her, and brushed a strand of auburn hair away from her face. God, she was beautiful, probably as beautiful on the inside as on the outside. So perfect for him.

The razor sliced easily through the skin and underlying tissue, but the thick muscle took a moment to carve through. The flaps of skin formed a jagged 'x' across her abdomen and, when peeled back, made it easy for the organs to be removed. Coddling each piece protectively, like a newborn infant, he laid them gently on her chest, pausing every time to inhale the sweet sickening smell of the blood coating his hands.

Standing back to admire his work, a grin itched at the corner of his mouth. *Red Rover, Red Rover, send Jakey right over.* He suppressed the laughter and dipped a forefinger into the pool of dark red blood which settled in her abdominal cavity. On the bare wall above the headboard, he meticulously spelled out his message.

Satisfied, he walked into the bathroom to rinse the blood off his skin. Looking into the mirror, he smiled. He lost more t-shirts this way. Didn't matter, it was definitely worth it.

Picking up the razor from the side of the sink, he ran the blade under the sparkling flow several times, then dried it and his hands on a fluffy pink towel before sliding it back into his pocket. Not a spot on his jeans. Damn, he was good.

Walking out through the big, airy kitchen, he snagged a piece of birthday cake from the box she'd left on the bar. "Yum. Chocolate, my favorite."

At the French doors in the back, he zipped his black leather jacket to cover the blood-stained t-shirt and slid out, moving across the lawn within the comforting shadows.

In that instant, the fine hairs on the nape of his neck stood on end. He sensed a womanly presence, sweet and...*familiar*. He stopped, just at the back gate, and inhaled, trying to draw it closer, but she was gone. He looked back at the house once more, and opened the gate. Without a doubt, his next destination would bring new, exciting developments.

Buy link:

<http://www.newconceptspublishing.com/togetherindarkness.htm>

Author Bio

Sloan McBride Love Spans All Time

Sloan McBride has been a reader and writer for most of her life. In her preteens and teenage years she read Stephen King, Ken Follett and classics. In high school, she worked in the library and fed her reading addiction with an array of books about the supernatural.

In between her regular jobs as legal secretary, mother to two kids, wife, cook, washer woman, chaperone, taxi driver, computer tech, and part-time creative designer for homework jobs and school projects, she writes full-length paranormal romance novels with happily ever after endings.

She currently lives in Illinois with two children, two dogs, and her husband of 27 years.

Read blurbs, reviews, news, read an online story, and sign up for her newsletter at:

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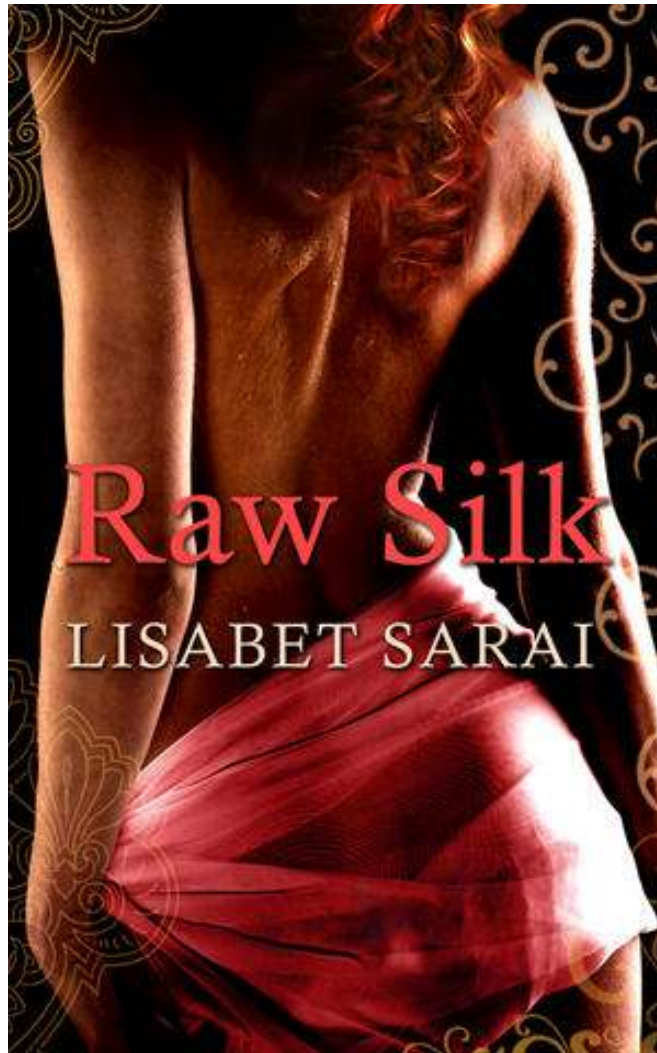
http://www.myspace.com/sloan_mcbride

Published Works:

Highland Stone, a time travel romance published by New Concepts Publishing, October 2007. Available in ebook and print.

Together in Darkness, a paranormal romantic suspense published by New Concepts Publishing, April 2008. Available in e-book format.

Coming November 2008 from Samhain Publishing, **The Fury**, Book One of the Time Walkers Series.



Title: Raw Silk

Author: Lisabet Sarai

Genre: Contemporary erotic romance

Rating: Hot Fudge- contains some menage, MM and FF scenes, also significant BDSM

Format: e-book

Buy link: http://www.total-e-bound.com/product.asp?P_ID=148

Blurb:

In a foreign land, a woman discovers exotic new realms of the senses...

When software engineer Kate O'Neill leaves her lover David to take a job in Thailand, she becomes sexually involved with two very different men: a handsome and debauched member of the Thai aristocracy, and the charismatic proprietor of a sex bar.

Each touches her in a different way; each teaches her different things about her body and her heart.

Then David comes to Bangkok, and Kate realises that, finally, she must choose one of the three men who all desire her.

Excerpt:**Chapter Two****The Prince**

The taxi took Katherine into an unfamiliar part of the city. She sat in the back seat, her hands folded in her lap, trying to distract herself by observing the sights around her: sidewalk noodle carts, surrounded by rickety metal tables and stools; gleaming display windows, showing off designer clothing and imported cars; vacant lots fenced in corrugated tin; red and orange tiles on the layered roofs of the occasional temple.

She had spent half the day worrying about what to wear. How formal should she be? Should she wear heels, or were sandals sufficient? Her basic black sheath, with its short hemline, and her pearls? The flowing blue batik she had found in the little shop around the corner from her house? Should she wear a suit, given that Khun Somtow was a business acquaintance? She wanted to look attractive, she admitted to herself, but not overly seductive; she did not want to send the wrong message. But what message did she really want to send, she asked herself privately.

She had settled for simplicity: an ankle-length, sleeveless dress of forest green Thai silk, and black patent sandals. Her good pearls set off the scooped neckline of the gown. The luscious green of the silk made her hair blaze all the more brightly; the slit skirt allowed her to walk comfortably and provided an occasional glimpse of her well-muscled thigh.

In a moment of rebelliousness that she was beginning to regret, she had decided to forgo wearing a brassiere. It was too hot, she told herself, too uncomfortable. Now, as the cab pulled in through a set of elaborate wrought-iron gates, Katherine could feel her bare nipples brush against the light silk. She gave a little shiver. What had she been thinking? Well, it was too late now.

The taxi had stopped in a circular driveway, in front of massive double doors of carved wood. As Katherine paid the fare, the doors were opened by a regal woman in a purple sarong and close-fitting gold-embroidered blouse. A sash with an intricate pattern of purple and gold crossed her breast and was held at one shoulder with a brooch like a sunburst. Her hair was piled high on her head, held in place by combs with matching sunburst designs.

The woman made a graceful wai then spoke in accented English.

“Miss Katherine, you are welcome. Please leave your shoes here and follow me. Dinner will be served in the sala in the garden.”

Katherine found herself in a semi-circular entrance hall. She slipped out of her sandals and savored savoured the cool smoothness of the polished terrazzo floor under her bare feet. The maid led her through a set of French doors to a long corridor floored with teak parquet. A subdued light came from intermittent electric sconces designed to look like candle lanterns. The corridor was lined with etched glass doors, all closed. Occasionally, she and her guide would pass a painting, a piece of sculpture, or a porcelain vase, artfully lighted so that it seemed to glow from within. Katherine particularly noted a seated Buddha image of white marble, no more than six inches high but wrought in exquisite detail.

Eventually, the corridor ended in another set of French doors. The maid threw these open, and Katherine nearly swooned at the rich floral scents that flowed from the garden beyond. She stepped from the mysterious corridor into the sweet, humid night.

Katherine found herself on winding path paved with smooth pebbles that tickled her bare feet. Occasional torches provided enough light to see the tangled vines, towering ferns, and vivid blossoms that surrounded her as she walked. From ahead, she heard the sound of flowing water, and faintly, the haunting notes of a solo flute. The path twisted around the trunk of a massive tree, and she saw before her a pavilion of unpainted wood,

with a steep pitched roof like one of the temples.

The *sala* was perched on stilts in the middle of a pool. A rough set of stairs led up to the platform, arching over the water. Her heart echoing in her ears, she slowly mounted the steps and entered the enchanting building.

Dozens of flickering candles in earthenware jars lit the porch-like platform. Bright pillows were strewn over the wooden floor, around a low table. Khun Somtow sat cross-legged on one of the cushions, a bamboo flute poised at his lips.

For a moment he did not notice her, and she could admire him. He wore a high-necked shirt and loose pants of white satin. His dark hair shone like jet in contrast. His eyes were half-closed, and a look of peaceful concentration graced his handsome features.

Some slight sound, or movement of the air, made him look up. His expression of repose was replaced with animation.

“Miss Katherine! Welcome. I did not hear you arrive. Please, come in, sit down.’ ” He rose in one fluid motion, took her hand, led her to a bank of cushions piled up against the wooden rail that surrounded the pavilion. “I ask your pardon for my amateurish playing.”

“Oh no, it was lovely! Though it was very different from anything I have heard before.”

“No, I do not have the time to give my music the devotion it deserves. Classical music requires discipline. I am no more than a dilettante, as I am in so many other things.” He sighed a little, then smiled. “But, it gives me pleasure to play, and that is perhaps enough.”

He gazed at her for a moment, with the same frankness that she had noted in the elevator. “I am so glad that you have come. May I offer you some wine?”

“Yes, please’,” said Kate, already relaxing a bit in response to his easy charm. He filled a crystal glass from a bottle that even she recognised as expensive, then picked up

his own half-full goblet from the floor next to his cushion.

“‘To new friendship’,” he said, touching glasses and looking into her eyes.

Katherine held his glance for a few moments. She felt herself beginning to blush again, and was irritated at her own weakness. “‘To new experiences, in a new land,’” she countered evenly.

The wine was delicious, with a slightly chill even though the night was warm.

“‘So,’” said Somtow, reclining a little against the cushions, “‘after a week, what are your impressions of my country?’”

“‘Beautiful, but confusing.’” Katherine took another sip, felt the wine coursing through her and loosening her tongue. “‘Full of contrasts. In some ways, the Thais are so modern, with their skyscrapers, their computers, and their mobile phones. Then, only yesterday, I was walking through the market near my house. Piles of vegetables, fruit, flowers, balanced on those circular woven baskets. Raw meat laid out in the open on beds of ice. The vendors squatting behind their wares, in sarongs and straw hats. I thought, this probably looked the same fifty years ago.’”

“‘Oh, yes’,” smiled Somtow. “‘We are a people of ancient traditions, but we have always been open to outside influences.’” Almost languidly, he leaned forward to refill her glass. “‘Do you know about Ayuthaya?’”

“‘The old capital, upriver, that was destroyed by the Burmese?’” Katherine was glad she had done some research in the month before her departure.

“‘Ayuthaya was a marvel - —a city of glittering temples and palaces, the purest expression of the Thai spirit. At the same time, the court at Ayuthaya welcomed ambassadors from all over Europe, eager to learn about their culture, trade in their riches, enjoy their pleasures.’”

Somtow drank the last of his wine. “‘I would be honorhonoured if you would allow me to show you Ayuthaya as it is today. The tumbled heaps of brick and overgrown pagodas still have a certain majesty.’”

Katherine looked into his dark eyes. “That would be wonderful. I can’t think of anyone whom I would rather have as my guide.”

A slight sound drew their attention to the stairs, where they saw the purple-garbed woman, carrying a tray filled with a bewildering assortment of food. She knelt by the table and placed the various dishes before them.

“Thank you, Orapin.” The woman rose, bowed without speaking, and left as quietly as she had come.

“Did you signal her, somehow?” asked Katherine.

“Orapin knows me very well, and can often anticipate my wishes. We have been together since childhood; her mother served my father.”

“Come, try some of these. I ordered my favorite favourite delicacies for you.” Somtow gestured toward the food; rich, tart aromas rose, making Katherine’s mouth water. She reached for one of the appetizers Somtow was indicating, whole prawns in some red sauce. The shrimp was succulent, sweet and spicy. Somtow smiled as she licked her fingers, then stretched out his elegant hand to pick up one of the crustaceans for himself.

A flicker of candlelight caught on the gold band around his middle finger. Kate suddenly felt a chill.

“You’re married?” she asked.

“Of course.” he said.

“And do you have children?”

He smiled proudly. “Oh yes. My daughter is twelve, and wants to be an engineer. My son is seven.” All at once, he grasped that she was concerned. “My wife is on holiday in Hua Hin, playing golf. One of the few passions we do not share. The children are visiting their grandmother for the weekend.”

Kate shifted uncomfortably on the soft cushions. ““Still...””

““You are wondering whether it is appropriate, for me to be entertaining you, alone, in this secluded garden, when I am a married man?””

She nodded, mute in her discomfort.

““Ah, Katherine!”” He leaned close to her, and she could smell a hint of sandalwood on his skin. ““We Thais see things differently, perhaps, than you in the West.”” He reached toward her with one long, graceful finger, and brushed her earlobe. Her pearl earring shivered as a tingle ran down her spine.

““In Thailand, we have a long tradition of polygamy.”” The finger traced a line down the side of her neck, barely touching her skin. ““The position of the mea noi - —the mistress or “little wife” - —is understood, and respected. By everyone.”” Now he was just grazing her collarbone with his touch.

““Nongseurat, my wife, knows that I invited you here this evening. She knows that I have been most eager for your arrival.””

Somtow held her eyes for a moment. His pale face was slightly flushed. Katherine felt weak, unable to speak or argue. He bent over her, and took her left nipple into his mouth, through the thin silk of her dress. His lips were dry, but his hot breath made the fabric slightly damp. The nipple swelled and blossomed under his attention.

Katherine sank back into the pillows. Somtow moved his mouth to the other nipple now, leaving the first one throbbing, aching to be touched. Katherine closed her eyes, abandoning herself and her notions of morality.

Without losing contact with her for a moment, Somtow began a trail of kisses down the length of her body, between her breasts, across her belly. He lingered just below her navel, kissing softly, breathing deeply. The silky layer that separated him from her bare flesh seemed to heighten the sensation, as if each touch had a faint, sweet echo.

Finally, he reached her sex. Now he probed with his tongue, through the silk of her dress and her light underwear, pushing the slithery fabric up between the folds, into the

crevices. Katherine moaned softly, and took his head in her hands, her fingers entangled in his thick, soft hair. Forgetting any sense of propriety, she urged his tongue deeper into her, arched her pelvis toward his eager mouth.

As his tongue continued his explorations, Katherine felt his cool hand upon her bare thigh. He reached up through the side slit of her dress, teasing her skin with just the slightest touch of a single finger as his hand traveled upward. He hooked the finger into the waistband of her bikini panties. His mouth left contact with her pubis only for the briefest moment, as he pulled her undergarment down her thighs and out of his way.

Katherine moaned with pleasure, moving her own hands to her nipples, which hummed and tingled. Somtow looked up at her for a moment; his dark eyes sparkled when he saw the look of abandon on her face.

He paused in his ministrations. With incredible swiftness and grace he drew her shift up over her head. Almost before she realised it, Katherine was lying naked before him on the cushions, wearing only her pearls, as he gazed at her intently.

““So beautiful!”,” the Asian man murmured. A fingertip touched her nipple, almost reverently, sending a delicious chill through her. His other hand brushed lightly over the auburn curls between her legs. “Katherine, you are magnificent.” She felt his finger parting her lips, entering her hungry vagina. A second finger gently and rhythmically massaged her clitoris. She lay back, closed her eyes, swam in the rich flow of sensations as he continued to pleasure her. Behind the dark of her eyelids, she imagined his glowing eyes, his half-parted lips, the fluid movements of his muscles under his silken trousers.

Somtow did not hurry. Katherine felt no pressure; she allowed the tension to build gradually, as she became more and more sensitive, more and more aroused. Her sex was wet, open, waiting. She was very close to climax.

Then, she felt new sensations: warmth, hardness, satin-smooth skin. She opened her eyes to find Somtow over her, his cock already half inside her. Somehow he had managed to remove his garments, without interrupting his attentions or distracting her from her own pleasure.

He saw that her eyes were open, and suddenly looked concerned. ““May I?”” he asked, quite seriously. Though she smiled at the obviousness of the answer, she also realised that if she said no, he would immediately withdraw. ““Yes’,” she said huskily, ““yes, please.”” She reached toward his shoulders and pulled him down onto her, into her.

They fit together perfectly, two pieces of a puzzle, lock and key; yet there was also the shock of unfamiliarity. Katherine ran her hands over his back, across his buttocks, savoring savouring the strangeness of his nearly hairless body. He was so unlike David, who had lovely curls on his chest and back, and a wiry tangle of pubic hair. This man’s skin was silky, smooth, sensuous, like the petals of a flower.

Katherine had a sudden desire to taste him. She ran her tongue delicately over the skin on his chest, then took his nipple between her lips. He moaned and twisted his pelvis against her. He tasted of salt, musk, something floral, and again, there was that faint hint of sandalwood, unfamiliar, and exciting.

As he moved in her, faster, harder, something blossomed fiercely in her heart - — wild, exotic, foreign, free. A scream of pleasure burst from her throat as she felt her flesh blooming in answer. Beyond her own voice and the pounding of her heart, she heard Somtow crying out in Thai, strange, liquid, musical. And somehow, beyond that, she thought she could discern the quiet voice of the fountain, speaking the gentle secrets of the night.

She was floating, tingling all over, little electric sparks still flaring between her legs. Somtow kissed her lingeringly on the lips, murmuring endearments. ““Ah, Katherine, sweet Katherine. Forgive me for being forward, but you are so lovely, and so delightfully sensual.”” He supported himself on his elbows, so that his weight did not oppress her. ““Too often, it seems, you Americans get trapped by your notions that sex is something shameful. You cannot seem to let go and just yourselves enjoy this gift.””

Katherine wondered, briefly, how many American women he had charmed and tried to seduce, to have formed this opinion. He nuzzled again at her nipples, tickling a little. She squirmed and laughed softly. ““I hope that I have somewhat redeemed my countrywomen in your eyes, Khun Somtow.””

““Indeed!””. He smiled. ““But I am such a poor host. Here I have invited you to

dinner, and hardly a bite has passed your lovely lips.”

He had reached behind one of the cushions, and retrieved two sarongs, one of which he offered to her to cover herself. He showed her how a Thai woman would secure it above her breasts, taking the opportunity to caress her as he did so.

“It suits you well,” he said. “But I suspect that would be true of any costume.”

She noted that he had the sarongs ready and waiting. “Did you plan this?”, she had asked, not sure whether she liked the implications.

“I did not plan,” he said, giving her one of his winning smiles. “But I will admit, I did hope this would come to pass.”

“Come, have something to eat. I hope that you enjoy spicy food.”

“Definitely,” Katherine replied with a smile. “At home they say that it is because of my red hair.”

Somtow ran his fingers affectionately through her curls. “I see. So perhaps red hair is associated also with hot blood?”

“Try this, then.” He offered her a plate of raw papaya salad. She recognised this as one of the spiciest dishes available from Thai restaurants at home, but was not prepared for the stunning effects this version had on her tongue.

“Goodness!” she said, taking a spoonful of the coconut rice that normally accompanied this dish, to dampen the fires in her mouth. “I thought that I could handle hot food!” They both laughed.

Somtow opened another bottle of wine and refilled their glasses. They continued to nibble on the exotic delicacies he had provided, sitting half-naked on the cushions in the balmy night.

Katherine found her gaze drawn again and again to his smooth, muscular chest. The folds of the sarong around his waist hid his penis from her eyes. She wondered what he

would do if she reached down to touch him, as she longed to do.

Somtow was talking about Thai cuisine, the two thousand royal dishes and the hundreds of other, ‘country-style’ recipes. Suddenly, it seemed, he noticed her looking at his body. She blushed a little. He said nothing, but reached across the table to pick up a bowl of raw chillis.

“Did you know, Katherine, that Thai chillis are considered to be among the hottest in the world?” He picked up a bright green pod between his thumb and forefinger, and raised it to his mouth. Instead of eating it, however, he ran the pepper across his lips, almost as if applying lipstick. Then he leaned forward, and kissed Katherine lightly.

The chilli oil made her own lips tingle and burn. “Mmm,” she murmured, as she returned the kiss with enthusiasm. She felt him untying her sarong, and then, his lips were on her nipples again, first the left, then the right.

She was not prepared for the sensations that assaulted her as the pungent oil touched her skin. Her nipples were still hard, sensitised from her recent arousal. They burned and throbbed, almost painful, as Somtow deliberately anointed them with the remnants of the pepper. The near-pain was overwhelmed by the pleasure, though, as a delicious warmth radiated out across her breasts.

“Oh...’,,” she sighed, closing her eyes and savoring savouring the heat. “That is incredible.”

A light touch between her legs caused her to open her eyes. Somtow had another chilli in his fingers, brilliant red this time. With one hand, he parted her lower lips gently. Then, holding her open, he began to stroke the rigid little pepper against her equally rigid clitoris.

The effects were explosive. Sensitive though her nipples might be, the delicate tissues of her sex were much more so. Her labia swelled and ached; she rubbed herself against the fingers that held her open. The little knob of flesh directly in contact with the pepper pulsed and flamed. Part of her thought she could not bear it— (and she knew he would stop immediately if she asked). Still, another part of her craved even more of this pleasure/pain, hotter, fiercer, consuming her flesh. She groaned.

Somtow made some soft sound in answer. Looking at him, she saw that he had crushed the pepper between his fingertips. Now he was rubbing the red pulp over his penis, up and down its stiff length, over the bulbous top. Katherine understood, suddenly, that his cock must be burning with the same almost unbearable intensity as her labia and clit. He looked into her eyes, without a word, and she knew he understood her wordless consent, as he plunged his fire-laden member into her vagina.

Katherine gasped and dug her nails into his shoulders. Intense sensation nearly overwhelmed her. She was still wet from their previous coupling. He moved easily within her secret cavities, spreading the incendiary chilli oil inside and out.

Her labia, clitoris, and vagina all blazed with the odd, delicious pain. His cock was a flaming candle, searing her flesh. She felt raw, saw crimson, spread her legs wider so that he could ignite her deeper still.

Then, she felt him withdraw, momentarily. Deliberately, he touched the head of his penis to the tight knot of her anus. He did not push or try to enter, merely let the fiery unguent work upon delicate flesh around that most private of places.

This, finally, loosed the conflagration within her. Katherine cried aloud, writhed and moaned. Then, in the midst of her climax, she felt cooling liquid filling her, streaming down her thighs. She opened her eyes. Somtow held the wine bottle and was deliberately pouring the remaining contents into her vagina, an almost childish delight on his face.

“Ah, my Katherine!” He leaned over and began to drink the wine from her flesh, lapping the ruby drops from her thighs. “Excellent wine, but the taste can only be improved by mixing in your delicious liqueur.”

Katherine lay back and allowed him to clean her with his eager tongue. She marvelled at his sensitivity, his inventiveness, and his generosity. She noted that his cock was still fiercely erect, though she felt wonderfully satisfied.

“Somtow,” she said. “You are so considerate, you forget your own pleasure.”

“Oh, no,” he said, “I cannot imagine any greater delight than pleasing you.”

“Nevertheless,” she said, “if you’ll allow me...” She raised herself up on her hands and knees in front of him. A little hesitant, she touched her tongue to the tip of his penis. Most of the chilli oil had rubbed off; there was only a mild tingling. But now she tasted the salty, slightly bitter flavor/flavour of her own sex, new and exciting.

She wrapped her lips around his swollen member. He moaned softly as she took him deep into her mouth, then little by little released him. Then he relaxed back into the pile of cushions and closed his eyes. She bent lower, raising her hips, spiraling her tongue down his silky rod of flesh.

Unlike many men, he allowed her to set the pace. She started slowly, teasing him, sucking hard, then withdrawing so that her lips just grazed the glans. Gradually, she picked up the rhythm. With each stroke she felt him swell larger in her mouth. Now he was breathing heavily, in time with her as she slithered her mouth up and down his penis. At the base she sometimes paused to give a quick lick to his balls. This made him groan and writhe beneath her.

He was getting close to orgasm. Katherine could feel it. All at once, she was very aware of her own body, her naked buttocks elevated and exposed, her breasts swinging with the exertion of her strokes. Her mind presented her with a vivid, intensely arousing image of how she must look, lavishing such indecent attention on his engorged member.

She felt a warm breeze stir against the skin on her inner thighs, as though someone moved nearby. Her face buried in Somtow’s crotch, she had the sudden conviction that they were being watched. The thought was disturbing, and thrilling. With one hand she grasped the base of her princely lover’s cock, squeezing hard. She thrust the other between her legs, pinching her clit between thumb and forefinger.

The rod of flesh in her mouth contracted, then swelled and overflowed. Somtow cried out in Thai. She tasted his warm, acrid fluid on her tongue, spilling out of her half-open lips. As she swallowed, she sank her fingers deep down between her lower lips, forgetting everything but the pleasure unfolding there.

It seemed that she lost consciousness for a moment, drifted off into some separate

realm of sensation. The next thing she was aware of was the tip of Somtow's tongue. He was running it delicately around her mouth, lapping up the drops of semen that lingered there.

Katherine was too blissfully exhausted to be surprised. She lay against him, her head on his shoulder. He stroked her tangled hair gently, eyes closed, relaxed and sated.

They stayed in that position, their naked bodies entwined, for what seemed like a long time. When Orapin glided up the steps and began to quietly remove the dishes, Katherine hardly noticed.

Buy link: http://www.total-e-bound.com/product.asp?P_ID=148

Author Bio

Lisabet Sarai

Imagination is the ultimate aphrodisiac

I became addicted to words at an early age. I began reading when I was four. I wrote my first story at five years old and my first poem at seven. Since then, I've written plays, tutorials, marketing brochures, software specifications, self-help books, press releases, a five-hundred page dissertation, and of course, erotica. I'm the author of four erotic novels and two short story collections. I also edited the groundbreaking anthology SACRED EXCHANGE, which explores the spiritual aspects of BDSM relationships, and the massive collection CREAM: THE BEST OF THE EROTIC READERS AND WRITERS ASSOCIATION. My short stories have appeared in more than two dozen print collections edited by erotica luminaries such as M. Christian, Maxim Jakubowski, Mitzi Szereto, Rachel Kramer Bussel, and Alison Tyler. In my so-called spare time, I also review books and films for the Erotica Readers and Writers Association (www.erotica-readers.com) and Erotica Revealed (www.eroticarevealed.com),

My lifelong interests in sex and the written word became serendipitously entwined nine years ago when I read my first Black Lace book by Portia da Costa. Her work inspired me to take my fantasies out of the closet (and the private email files) and expose them to the world. The rest, as they say, is history (although granted, no more than a minor footnote!)

I've always loved traveling; my husband seduced me in a Burmese restaurant by telling me tales of his foreign adventures. Since then I have visited every continent except Australia, although I still have a long travel wish list. Currently I live with him and our two exceptional felines in Southeast Asia, where I pursue an alternative career that is completely unrelated to my creative writing.

My website, Lisabet Sarai's Fantasy Factory - <http://www.lisabetsarai.com>

My Yahoo group, Lisabet's List – http://groups.yahoo.com/group/lisabets_list

My MySpace profile and blog – <http://www.myspace.com/lisabetsarai>

Published Works:

Novels by Lisabet Sarai

Raw Silk (Total-E-Bound)

Incognito (Total-E-Bound)

Ruby's Rules (Eternal Press)

Exposure (Phaze, coming in 2009)

Short story collections by Lisabet Sarai

Fire: Short Stories (Blue Moon)

Rough Caress: BDSM Erotica (Eternal Press)

Collections edited by Lisabet Sarai

Sacred Exchange (Blue Moon) (with S.F. Mayfair)

Cream: The Best of the Erotica Readers and Writers Association
(Thunder's Mouth)

Recent short stories in other collections (all print)

"Ruler" in Naughty Spanking Stories from A to Z Volume 2 (Pretty Things Press)

"Shades of Red" in She's On Top (Cleis)

"Incurable Romantic" in He's On Top (Cleis)

"Body Electric" in Yes, Sir: Erotic Tales of Female Submission (Cleis)

"Mad Dogs" in E is for Exotic (Cleis)

"Crowd Pleaser" in I is for Indecent (Cleis)

"Beefeater" in Crossdressing: Erotic Stories (Cleis)

"Chemistry" in Coming Together: With Pride (Phaze)

"Fire" in Coming Together: Under Fire (Phaze)

"Domestic Goddess" in Coming Together: For the Cure (Phaze)



Title: Welcome To Eden

Author: Rynne Raines

Genre: Erotic

Rating: Hot Fudge

Format: e-book

Buy link

http://www.thewildrosepress.com/wilderroses/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=86&products_id=619

Blurb:

Within the walls of Eden, temptation rules and anything goes...

Psychiatrist Caitlyn Ward never imagined setting foot inside the hottest fetish club in Los Angeles until the day a patient's concerns about sexual desires went beyond her expertise. Now, determined to uncover the answers needed to alleviate her patient's mind, Caitlyn ventures into a world of dark and forbidden pleasure beyond her wildest dreams.

Excerpt:

"Come here," Evan said from across the room.

She could think of no better time to test his limits than now. "What if I say no?"

Something in those midnight eyes sparked and sent a chill through her right before they narrowed. "No?"

"That's what I said." Defiant, she met his stare.

He arched a brow and then crossed the room to stand toe to toe with her. It still amazed her she had to look up at him. That rarely happened, especially when she wore heels, but somehow it made her feel surprisingly feminine. He lifted a hand slowly, slipped it to her nape and into her locks of blond that spilled down her back. His fist clenched and the pressure of his grip alone made her knees buckle. Regardless, she looked into his eyes, unwilling to back down. This aroused him, she could tell, and more than anything, she wanted him turned on as much as she was.

He started forward until for the second time this evening he backed her to the wall. His rock-hard cock rubbed against her lower abdomen and she imagined what it would feel like when he filled her, stretched her, pounded her....

"Let me tell you something, sweetheart." She gasped as his hands went to her shoulders and locked her in a solid hold. "In this room, I don't take no for an answer."

He spun her and she found herself trapped between his massive frame and the wall. Before she could say another word, he had her wrists pinned above her head in one hand while the other worked expertly on the zipper of her dress. The latex came down in one hard yank to expose her scantily clad body. The rush of excitement overwhelmed her as she tested his strength and tried to pull free. He didn't budge an inch. She arched against him but his knee jutted forward between her legs and held her in place. He barely had to rock his leg to earn her harsh moan of approval.

"Someone's a naughty girl. I knew you'd like that."

His arrogance only fueled her desire. How was it that this stranger knew exactly what she wanted, needed, when no other man had even come close to driving her this wild?

Buy link:

http://www.thewildrosepress.com/wilderroses/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=86&products_id=619

Author Bio

Rynne Raines

Delve Into the Darkness, Where Passion Consumes All...

Rynne was born and raised in Edmonton Alberta Canada where she resided up until a year ago. Now living in Wetaskiwin Alberta, she's grown fond of the slower pace lifestyle and has more time to focus on her one true love, writing romance. A year ago she started to pursue a writing career seriously and has been plugging away ever since.

When she's not walking her headstrong cocker spaniel or in a tub full of bubbles devouring another steamy romance novel, she's handcuffed to her keyboard. Always looking for new ways to fine tune her craft she is involved with LongRidge Writers Group and is a member with StoryCrafters. Both places are occupied by wonderful writers, many of whom have a special place reserved in her heart.

Important Links

Website: www.rynneraines.com

Blog: www.rynneraines.blogspot.com

MySpace: www.myspace.com/crimsonwaterfall

Published Works:

The Wild Rose Press- www.thewildrosepress.com

Reflections

The Wilder Rose Press- <http://www.thewildrosepress.com/wilderroses/index.php>

The Awakening



Title: Echos Odyssey

Author: Sascha Illyvich

Genre: Paranormal Erotic Romance

Rating: Hot Fudge

Format: e-book

Buy Link:

<http://shop.renebooks.com/ProductDetails.asp?ProductCode=ILLYVICH%2D09>

Blurb:

Tired of being alone for the last ten years, Serenissa has finally decided to take a husband to help her rule Faery. She has Chosen Prince Marshal as a suitor. He's okay looking, human and has a better grasp of wielding power than she does.

Upon hearing the news of his former lover's engagement, Echo becomes enraged and determined to do something about it. Storming into her chambers proves to be a mistake when he realizes who Serenissa plans to marry.

Ten years is a long time to be away from a lover, but passion knows no limits. Can Echo convince Serenissa to marry him rather than Marshal? Or will his untimely appearance be his own undoing?

Excerpt:

Patience was not a virtue in this lifetime.

Her hand cupped his bulging cock.

Air left his lungs like a rushing whirlwind at the slightest bit of contact between them.

"No, this is for you," he tried to move her hand.

She wouldn't budge.

Her lips brushed his ear. "Bring me, Echo."

Vibrations along his skin called forth something inside him, touching him.

"Bring me, Damnit!" She pressed her palm against his cock harder.

He reached down with his free hand and unzipped himself. His cock sprang forward into her hand.

She gripped him.

His body quivered beneath hers.

She pumped him hurriedly while trying to shove him inside her.

Urgency flared deep within him, fueling his need to fuck her hard and fast.

Just the way she liked it.

Taking his fingers out of her made her cry.

Power flowed around them, healing his body.

Echo looked directly at her, into her eyes. He saw the way her stare bore a hole through him. Confusion mixed with overwhelming lust registered on her face.

Her juicy red lips emphasized the flushed look of her skin.

Echo tangled a hand in the mess of vermillion curls that hung over her shoulders and down her back.

She bent forward, lifting her hips off him.

He took his cock in one hand and impaled her with it, gritting in pleasurable pain.

Her hot pussy enveloped him as though it were drinking him in. Gripping him tightly, her hips began undulating.

Echo groaned loudly, not caring that they could be heard and killed at a moment's notice. In fact, the lack of fear only fed his sense of urgency to bring his lover into her rightful place and form.

"Fuck me, Echo," she bounced on him, her ass slamming against his powerful thighs.

Panting, feeling the intensity of the coil inside his body tightening, he drove himself into her, meeting her thrusts with powerful strokes of his own.

A hand cupped her ass, slamming her down on him.

Nails dug into his flesh.

Lips locked, eyes closed, stars were seen.

A hand scraped down the smooth skin of her back, tearing the top. Her skin pulsed beneath his hand.

"Oh bring me Goddess," she cried, "please please, please," each please stressed with vigorous movements of her hips.

Her skin changed from its pale white to a darker olive color.

Echo opened his mouth, letting her claim him.

Her tongue swirled around the inside of his mouth.

Capturing her tongue with his, he stroked the velvety length of her.

Feeling every muscle in her body clench around him, he knew she was in love with him, knew lust would call forth her true nature.

Now if it could call out her heart's desire.

“Let go, Serenissa. Let it all go,” he pulled her to him, feeling her breasts crush against his chest. He couldn't wait to tear the rest of his clothes from his body and feel her slide over him like a serpent bent on devouring its prey.

Serenissa sat up, arching her body into his, driving him deeper inside her. Throwing her head back, she cried aloud. Her top ripped and flesh colored wings sprouted from her shoulder blades. Bowing her body outward, her head lowered. The wings grew larger still, turning shades of purple, brown and violet. Red lines colored sections of her wings.

Serenissa screamed atop Echo, her eyes wide open and lips parted.

His grip on her hips tightened. Her movements were bringing about his own orgasm.

Her clothes fell to the floor.

She fell forward, hands pressed to Echo's chest.

It had been awhile since he'd seen his lover's true beauty. A little over ten years, to be exact. Echo remembered just how beautiful she was in her true form.

Her hair lengthened past her ass, turning a darker shade of red. Her body became one taut, tense muscle atop his. Weight shifted slightly beneath her skin, bones cracked and reformed. Still, she did not cry out in pain.

The glow surrounding them diffused.

Lust replaced confusion on Serenissa's face.

Echo waited a beat, his cock still buried deep within her folds. Even the texture of her pussy changed, becoming softer, hotter.

Molten lava squeezed his cock. “It's your turn,” her voice took on an entirely different tone.

Sensuality had a name. It was Serenissa.

Echo grinned wickedly.

Serenissa licked her lips and began fucking him with long, slow strokes. Her hips spread over his thighs.

Echo reached for her ass, spreading her cheeks apart.

“Remember what you liked so much when we were a couple, Echo?”

“Indeed,” he licked his lips.

She reached beneath them and gripped his cock. Pulling it out, she pressed her hips tighter against his body. Sitting up, straddling him, she had his cum soaked cock in her hand.

Giving it a gentle squeeze made him sigh, breath growing shallow.

Echo reached around her luscious hips and spread her ass cheeks apart.

“Do it,” she nudged his cock with her ass.

Echo’s cock hardened painfully more than it had in many years. The heat at her anal entrance was just as hot as he remembered.

She sank herself down on him, hissing out her breath at the thickness filling her.

Echo waited for her to adjust herself.

She was so tight. So warm.

Her beautiful, large wings blocked out the world from his view.

All he could see was his gorgeous faery lover sitting atop his body, cock buried in her ass.

“Thrust Echo. Thrust for me. Let me bring you.”

Echo didn’t have to be told twice.

Growling, he cupped her curvy ass and began pounding into her.

Echo’s cries filled the room.

His heart raced, blood pumped through his veins at lightening speed. Electricity arced between them. It took another few powerful thrusts inside her, his balls slapping against her soft ass before he came, shooting his seed deep inside her.

Serenissa looked down at him, her eyes filled with amazement. “You,” she climbed off him, “brought me.”

She looked at the mirror and saw herself.

Echo sat up. Grabbing her hand in his, he pulled her over his lap. “I know. You’re beautiful.”

“But how am I going to explain this? How am I...” Her voice trailed off. She closed her eyes and slumped over? “This is all wrong. This is going to cause so many problems, Echo. Damn you! Damn you Echo!”

“What do you mean damn me? I brought you into your true form, Serenissa.”

“But you still have no clue how this realm works, do you?” Tears rolled down her cheeks.

Echo’s heart would not shatter.

“Marshal will know we’ve done this. He’ll kill us both unless I can...” she looked away.

Echo didn’t move. She was right.

“I can use glamour until we...”

“Don’t say it.”

“Echo, I...”

She stood and rushed around to the door.

“Serenissa, wait!” He shot out of bed and blocked her escape. Glaring deep into her eyes, he saw the familiarity of love and comfort that he’d missed for the last ten years. “I’m sorry.”

“Me too.” She shoved her way past him and used every ounce of magic she had within her to hide her true form until it receded.

“Serenissa,” he whispered.

She disappeared down the hall. Where was Marshal? She had to be gone long enough that someone would notice.

Echo adjusted his clothing and picked up the remains of hers. Stashing them beneath the bed, he sat at the foot of the mattress and sighed.

A little glamour magic of his own hid the scratches on his body. Hopefully, if he still had a strong connection with Serenissa, he could lend her some of his magic. It was his fault, after all.

So he felt like a failure. Every time he looked into her sad, sweet eyes, he saw failure. He saw longing for the family he'd promised her. Anger at the fact that he'd left his teenage sweetheart behind to fight in some stupid war.

Echo slumped against the wall and sank down on the floor. Where was Alexandrya?

He really needed his best friend right now. She always knew what to say. Even if it only helped heal a broken heart a little, it was still better than emptiness caused by failure.

Buy Link:

<http://shop.renebooks.com/ProductDetails.asp?ProductCode=ILLYVICH%2D09>

Author Bio

Sascha Illyvich

Sascha Illyvich writes paranormal erotic romances, erotica in many genres and an occasional contemporary erotic romance. Sascha first started writing seven years ago, first releasing poetry and an occasional short erotica story.

Taking the advice of Mistress Koi of <http://very-koi.net>, Sascha joined the Erotica Readers and Writers association. Submitting stories for critique, Sascha gained valuable feedback and sold numerous pieces to various websites including Adult Story Corner, Peacock Blue and Cyber-Mistress.

Sascha has written several paranormal erotica stories along with numerous erotica short story collections for Renaissance E-books.

Sascha continues to write for Red Rose Publishing, releasing “Lost” book one of the Opeth Pack Saga this spring. The Nights of Lust series will be re released again soon.

Readers can find Sascha Illyvich at:

<http://whitewolfwriting.blogspot.com>

<http://www.myspace.com/princesascha>

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/saschaillyvich>

<http://midnightseductionsauthors.blogspot.com>

<http://www.secretwhispers.com> – Bisexual Tales for those wanting more!

<http://saschai.literalseduction.net> – Author Homepage

Published Works:

Stuck: An Erotic Romance by Sascha Illyvich

Can Kandy show Ian that in order to grow, he has to get his priorities straight? Can he get out of his head and let go of the past long enough to see just what he has under his nose?

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Dark Traders: A vampiric love story by Alexandria Rayne

A novel of Dark, Forbidden Love! Can Miranda and Jet settle their differences in order to stop X Corp from ruining the lives of millions of Americans?

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Mistress Anna and Other Scorching Tales of Erotica

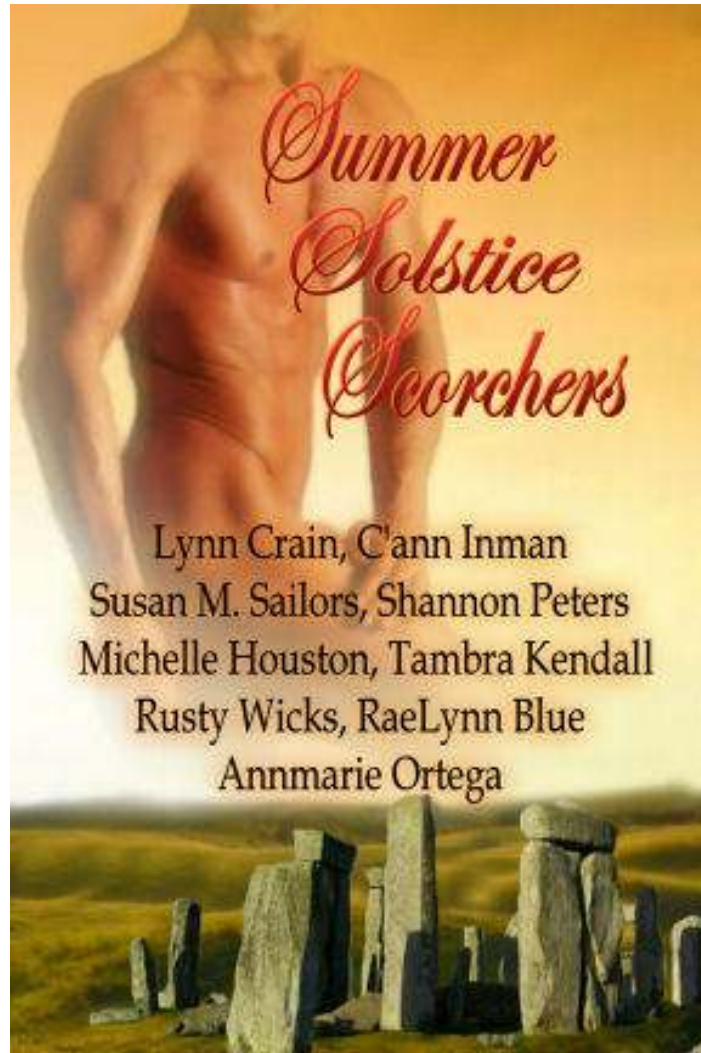
An erotica short story collection with something for everyone!

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Sensualities: Erotic Tales from Beyond the Edge

Sascha Illyvich's first erotic short story collection

<http://shop.renebooks.com/ProductDetails.asp?ProductCode=ILLYVICH%2D05>



Title: A Taste of the Forbidden

Featured in Summer Solstice Scorchers Anthology from Whiskey Creek Press Torrid

Author: Tambra Kendall

Genre: Paranormal Erotic Romance (Some of these stories are very hot!)

Rating: Hot Fudge

Format: e-book

Buy link

https://www.whiskeycreekpress.com/torrid/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=188

Blurb:

Izanna Tremayne, Queen of the Darkness, broke the edict that prohibits having sex with a vampire you've turned. Razi, a demon and The Overlord, has been stalking her for centuries. because she was the most powerful queen in 1,000 years. Now that his strength has grown and she's broken the edict, he prepares for the final battle Can Izanna defeat the demon and save the life of her one true love, the man she turned?

Excerpt:

“This is all *your* fault.” Jason Devon stood on the back porch and glared at Fetch, his vampire golden retriever. “You just couldn’t leave that cat alone. Now I’ve got meet the feline’s owner to discuss damages to her property.” His fingers bent the note releasing an intoxicating scent in the air. His cock stirred in response as it always did whenever he smelled this particular fragrance.

Fetch cocked his head to one side, wagged his tail then went in search of a ball his fangs hadn’t punctured.

Jason glanced at his watch and cursed. He transported himself to the agreed upon meeting place, *Out of This World*. Standing outside the building, he sensed something different about this restaurant, but couldn’t quite place what it was. Instincts on guard, his muscles tensed as he opened the door and walked inside. Cool air grazed his skin along with her scent. His groin hardened with his resolve. Swallowing a growl of frustration, Jason decided four years of torment would stop right now. No more dreaming or lusting after her while in suspended what?

“Welcome to *Out of This World*, Jason. Izanna is waiting for you.”

Years of police training and now being one of the undead taught him to keep his expression closed as he followed the hostess. For the space of a heartbeat, the air crackled with otherworld energy. Jason’s heightened senses caught a nasty maelstrom of undercurrents just waiting for the tiniest spark to ignite and explode. *Hell, what did this woman get me into?*

By their various auras, he picked out the vampires, a few shifters—and what made up the category of *other*. He never paid attention to this nondescript building surrounded by large old trees, tucked away at the end of the street. Jason realized with each step he took, the establishment catered to the elite among nonhumans.

“Here is Izanna.” The woman strode away to soothe a growling customer in the corner.

Jason gave Izanna a barely-there smile. His blood heated with lust so intense it took his breath away. Her skin shone, pale as the moon in the night sky, and he fisted his

hand to keep from reaching out and touching her. *Soon, very soon, I'll claim her as no man, or vampire ever had.* He'd never experienced this compelling force with any other woman.

Instead, he crossed his arms and leaned against the heavy oak partition separating the booths. "Thanks for meeting me. Have you decided what I can do to repay you since my dog destroyed your landscaping?"

"Please, sit down." She motioned to the seat beside her. "I'm Izanna Tremayne. I don't believe we've been properly introduced." She held out her hand.

He raised it to his lips brushing a light kiss across her skin. A tidal wave of lust threatened to drown him from the innocent gesture. For whatever reason, her unique intoxicating scent branded what was left of his soul. Jason released her hand and slid into the darkened booth keeping his manner calm and cool. The attraction could be one-sided and he didn't want to make a fool of himself.

Izanna moved across the seat until her thigh touched his. "Forget about the landscaping. The damage wasn't anything that can't be fixed by my gardening staff." She leaned closer, pushing her body harder against his. "What I want to discuss is more important—I want to have sex with you, Jason. It's taken too long for our paths to cross again. I've dreamed of you for the past four years. I want you in my bed. And...other places."

His cock hardened at the erotic promise of her words. Desire burned a potent path in his veins. "I'm yours. Tell me when and where." *This dark corner table works for me.* She surprised the hell out of him with her direct approach. This wasn't what he expected when he walked in moments ago.

"In fifteen minutes, at my home." She leaned over and the tips of her fangs oh-so-lightly scraped his skin as she nibbled the curve of his neck. "Mmmm," she purred.

A hot sensual rush washed over him the instant her lips and tongue contacted his skin. She whispered directions on how to bypass her security system. Jason swallowed and tried to keep his other head from rearing up for a quick introduction. *Down, boy.*

Izanna tapped the table with a perfectly manicured nail. "Don't keep me waiting."

"I'll be there." By the gods, fifteen minutes was too long.

She rose with the grace of a queen and walked away with the sway of a woman with seduction on her mind. His body throbbed and hungered for the exotic Izanna Tremayne. It didn't matter that she proposed sex first. He was damn happy not to have the ugly chore of guessing whether she wanted him or not. Jason asked the server where the closest transport shortcut was located.

She told him to look for the cool blue orb in the alley behind the building. He had the hard-on from hell. Before he sat down, he'd located the exits—some old habits never die. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a twenty dollar bill, tossed it on the table and left through the closest door.

Once more instincts from his previous job, now honed as a vampire, came to the fore as he stepped into the night. The hair at the back of his neck stood at attention blaring a warning. He scanned the area. Nothing.

One step before he reached the destination point, someone or something grabbed his throat.

The overwhelming stench of sulphur made his eyes and throat burn. He fought but the lack of air sapped his strength. Finally, the grip loosened enough for him to breathe.

“Izanna is mine!” The raspy voice dripped with evil power and halitosis.

Claws pierced his neck while intense blows from fists made of steel rained down on his face, shoulders and back. Each hit left a burning mark and Jason hissed in pain. *What is beating the shit out of me? And why can't I fight back?* All of his abilities were useless. At last, he managed an elbow to the groin of his attacker and tried to shove it away. A hit to the side of his head blurred his vision; he heard his attacker whisper in a cold voice, *“Touch Izanna and I will kill you, vampire.”* A blow between his shoulder blades and a hard shove sent Jason sprawling on the ground.

Too weak to teleport home, Jason lay on shards of broken bottles. The jagged edges sliced his battered flesh. His face stung from tiny pebbles beneath his cheek. Odors of garbage and old urine from the rough asphalt assaulted his advanced sense of smell. *As if my close-up encounter with road-kill breath wasn't enough for one night.* He had to protect Izanna from this asshole.

White-hot rage surged through Jason. He willed his body to move; his muscles refused. A blood-red haze flashed behind his eyes before he passed out.

* * * *

Izanna paced the floor. *Why isn't he here?* She smelled Jason's musky scent of desire, tasted the tang of his arousal on his skin earlier this evening.

As the reigning Queen of Darkness, she could have imposed her will on him, but she wanted Jason in her bed willingly. She risked all to be with him tonight. If she died in the upcoming battle with Razi the Overlord, she wanted Jason to do everything to her.

Make love to her and fuck her so thoroughly that Razi could see the afterglow of sex in her aura and smell Jason's claim on her body and soul.

Her thoughts returned to the night she offered Jason a choice. Even before her fangs sank into his flesh, she had known he was her eternal partner. Being so close to Jason earlier ignited a smoldering fire that scorched a trail from her belly to her core. She erased his memory of her but the attraction was so strong it diffused her power leaving him with enough information to track her.

Izanna cocked her head to the side, reaching out with all her senses. The heavy cloak of evil unfurled sparking her terror. *Is Razi on his way?*

Soon she would face punishment from the Overlord and the Queen Council for breaking the edict with Jason. She grabbed a mohair wrap tossing it around her shoulders. *How can I defeat the demon?*

In the vampire realm, no one was more powerful than the demon overlord. He was an ancient being determined on destroying the entire line of Queens of Darkness. Izanna paced as she waited for Jason. If he didn't arrive in thirty seconds, she would go hunting.

Her mind groped for the answer to Razi's increasing strength. If the overlord discovered a way to breed his own queens then drain their power, it would explain his strength. On the other hand, if he captured the lifeblood essences of the queens before he killed them, the magical energy compounded. Both were terrifying thoughts.

The overlord coveted her. Each time they met, it became harder and harder to defeat the creature of the abyss. More than any other Queen of Darkness, she was the most powerful born in one thousand years. If her eternal mate impregnated her, it would break Razi's power-hold and give her the strength to send the demon spawn back to the pit of hell. At the moment of conception, her irises would flicker like the licking flames of a candle, unleashing a power so great, the demon would piss himself in fear.

Only those chosen queen and of royal vampire lineage produced children and not all of them were fertile. The Dark Goddess blessed many of Izanna's bloodline with the gift of fertility and eternal mates. It was a shame the goddess could not eliminate Razi and his guards, the Nettles.

A sharp sting jerked her attention to her palms and in her mind flashed a vision of Jason. Her stomach cramped and she reached for the bedpost to steady herself.

Jason was in trouble. She had to find him before anyone else did. If he were injured, his powers could be absorbed by any otherworld being.

She closed her eyes, concentrated on him and whispered, "Jason, where are you?" Izanna focused on his scent, his energy pattern. He was still at the restaurant. Flashing to his side, a foul sulfur scent lingered in the air and she wrinkled her nose. Fury seethed and boiled in her like the cauldron of the Great Goddess Cerridwen. *Razi dared to attack*

my life mate? As a woman and Queen of the Darkness, she vowed revenge. Making Razi piss himself was only the beginning.

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Author Bio

Tambra Kendall Sensual. Magical. Unforgettable Romance

Tambra Kendall knew from the time she was 12 years old she wanted to write romance. All those summers spent at the public library reading historical romance provided her love of the genre. In 1994, she joined Romance Writers of America and began the journey to publication.

Ms. Kendall teaches online creative writing classes for Earthly Charms and various RWA chapters. She is a CTM, a Competent Toastmaster, and speaks to local writing organizations on the craft of writing. Please check her website for classes scheduled.

Ms. Kendall writes highly sensual and erotic paranormal romance. For sensual romance, she writes under the name Keelia Greer.

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