

ENCHANTED RAMBLINGS
PRESENTS

TEASERS



Quile

TITILLATING BYTES OF
ROMANCE

The Enchanted Ramblings Teaser Booklet

What is a teaser booklet?

We've put together a collection of excerpts from new and upcoming ebook releases to make it easy for you to find reading material that suits your preferences.

What you should know:

Everything here is as the authors sent it to it. If the author did not send a cover or did not send certain information we obviously had to leave things out. Where possible we've included links to the authors websites and links to the books themselves to make it easy for you to purchase the ones you like.

Please remember that all the excerpts contained in this booklet are the property of the authors.

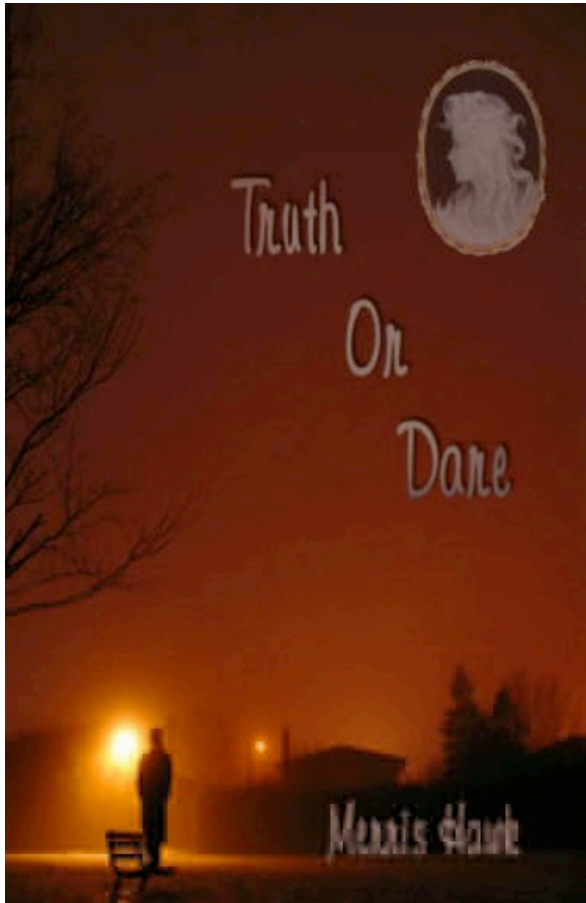
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TRUTH OR DARE

Merris Hawk



Paranormal/Vampire/Romance
8000 words
Silk's Vault Publishing

Author Bio

I've lived most of my life in the Pacific Northwest and here is where I intend to stay. I have the real world around me every day with pets, people and payments; the last thing I want to do is write about it, so I don't.

I started reading when I was babysitting as a kid, after that I had to write my own tales, I was hooked. I use sticky notes to keep ideas handy and music to fuel my muse, I usually miss bedtime by several hours when I have new tunes and characters yapping in my head.

The paranormal is where I find room to create almost anything, any way I like it. I like it with a taste of romance, there are always characters out there needing the touch of a pen to show them where to find their heart's desire. I love doing that.

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[Merris's website](#)

Blurb

Being in debt to a vampire was risky, and when Kezred calls to collect, Cameo knows that her night spent as arm candy to the sexy vampire isn't going to be a walk in the park. Led into the midst of mankind's greatest enemy, can Cameo trust her safety to a man with questionable intentions and no loyalties?

Excerpt

"If you'd told me this earlier I would never have come." Cameo's hands were flat on his chest as she whispered in his ear. The muscles under her palms were hard under the soft silk, it bothered her that she noticed.

"I know." He smiled, and as she felt the movement of his lips on her ear, goosebumps spread down her arms and she stiffened.

Anyone else would have let it go. Kezred's quiet chuckle sent color racing up her face.

"Well well, the Ice Princess has a soft spot."

He breathed the words across her skin, getting the same involuntary response.

“So do you.” Cameo shifted her weight to one foot so she could raise her knee in front of Kezred’s crotch.

He drew back enough to sniff the air, “I smell fear.”

A Song of the Sidhe

Jeanne Barrick



Erotic Fantasy
Novella
Loose ID
[Available Now](#)

Author Bio

Jeanne is a native New Yorker, married for thirty-odd years (and they have been odd) to her high school sweetheart. Although they haven't been blessed with children, they still have heard the pitter-patter of little Tibetan Terriers paws all their married life.

She studied voice privately and sings everything from folk music to Grand opera and in ten languages, including Gaelic and Hebrew.

Jeanne's love of fantasy began at the age of ten when she got her hands on her older brother's Ray Bradbury books. Her love of romance started when she read the galley proofs for a steamy Rosemary Rogers romance. Dealt a double whammy by her mother's death in 1997 and being downsized from her job, Jeanne turned to her dreams and lo and behold, found Silver Fire which combined her two loves of fantasy and sexy romance. Rewrites, edits and contests followed. Life and other projects put it on the back burner until 2004, when, all spiffed up, she sent it off to Loose Id where it found a home.

[Jeanne's Website](#)

Blurb

The place: Ireland, a long, long time ago when sidhe walked among mortals

Donal Bawn was the most handsome man in all of Tipperary with a voice that could lure the birds from the trees. But that all changed when he angered Ogma, High King of the Tipperary Sidhe. Doomed to wander as a hunchback with a voice as thin as a reed, Donal keeps to

the forests away from human companionship until one day he hears a melodious female voice singing the same fragmented tune.

Ceoleen, a beautiful female of the Galway sidhe has also been cursed but for her vanity and foolhardiness. Blinded and exiled to a fairy ring deep in the woods, she can only repeat a broken phrase of music until that fated day when Donal finishes the song for her.

But their curses are only partially broken. It will take a great deal more to decide their fate.

Will their love be strong enough to finally free them?

Excerpt

"My poor darling, can you forgive me?"
He bent his head
burying it in her cupped hand.

Ceoleen's hand quivered as she caressed his thick hair.

"Oh, fioghra, my true love, 'tis no reason to weep. 'Twas only a little hurt. Truth be told, I liked it. All of it." She licked her lips. "In fact, I want more." She drew him to her breasts. "A great deal more."

He leaned into her, and she sank onto the grassy mound.

Pulling away, he found the torn scarf and tied her once more with a shortened length to the whitebeam tree.

He straddled her body, bringing his cock to the apex of her thighs. Spreading her open for his entry, he delved among the curls there. She was ready for him. Hot, slick, her channel wide enough to take his thickness, deep enough to take him all in. His penis hardened. He took his slick fingers and brought them to her lips.

"Taste yourself, a mhuirnin dilis, my sweet little love.
And 'tis sweet you are. Like honey.
Taste and see for yourself."

Obediently, she sucked on the fingers he pressed to her mouth. Salty and musky, hardly like honey to her. Maybe to him? But arousing, yes. Like some sort of love potion it stirred her senses. Her nipples tightened and she moaned.

Donal closed his eyes as the beautiful sidhe suckled. He'd never seen a more erotic sight than her lush lips licking his fingers. No, her lips on his prick would be even more erotic. No, his cock sinking into her cunt would be more erotic yet. He shook his head. No more time to waste. Now.

He lifted her bottom onto his thighs and plunged in. His fingers gripped her slim hips as he plundered her of every last drop of cream. His seed spilled into her woman's core, filling it.

As his cock grew limp, he slipped away from her. Swiftly he untied her hands and brought her into his arms, raining kisses on her face.

"You've made me lovesick, a ghra."

* * * * *

From another chapter

Ceoleen knelt at the top of the fairy mound. Over the years she had learned to arrange her long hair by touch into the most intricate of patterns. One special style she had had no need of creating for Donal to admire.

But today as the rays of the late summer sun heated her skin, she felt the compulsion to arrange her hair in a lover's knot.

Parting it down the middle with a tortoise shell comb, she plaited it into two long, twisted lengths, like a rope. Carefully, she brought them forward so that they framed her breasts, then crossed

them beneath and tied them in the back at her waist. Tying a wisp of cobweb lace around her waist, she was ready for Donal's return.

Settling on her knees, she raised her face to the setting sun, lifted her arms and whispered her plea.

"May my love be captive to my need. May he follow my desires in word and deed. May he satisfy my body's thirst. May he be my last love as he is my first."

She cupped her breasts and began to sway, humming a seductive tune under her breath. Her pulse quickened as she envisioned Donal caressing her. He'd kneel behind her and press his massive cock between her cheeks. His hands would twine with hers as he fondled her nipples. His warm breath would waft against her ear as he murmured words of love. Then his hand would stray lower to the soft curls between her thighs and he'd push his fingers deep within her hot, wet center. It was too much.

Ceoleen fell forward, thrusting against the forest floor as though Donal was fucking her. Then she felt her ass being lifted and a thick cock ramming her. Donal.

"I was watching you. All this time I was watching you."

Watching you wrap your hair around
your tits. Watching you fondle
yourself. Watching you fuck the very
ground. I couldn't take it any
more." He withdrew his cock, then
slammed it into her again. "The.
Only. One. Who. Will. Ever. Satisfy.
You. Is. Me. Understand?" With
each word, he plunged deeper, harder
and faster until Ceoleen was
screaming with ecstasy.

Psychotic

Aline de Chevigny



Romantic / Thriller
Novella
Silks Vault
[Available Now](#)

Author Bio

Being an avid fan of many genres, I decided to try my hand at a few to see which suited me best. Lo and behold, as long as there's a romance in the mix I can pretty much write anything. I started a critique group with a few same minded ladies I'd met on the LUNA board and we developed a goal and worked towards it. When that took off we started an e-zine

[Enchanted Ramblings](#) and it became an instant success.

I live in Ontario, Canada and I am a Chemical Engineering Technologist by trade. When I turned 30 I decided to try something I'd always wanted to do, so I started writing the stories floating around in my head down on paper, hadn't dreamed they'd be published. My family has been extremely supportive of my goal and encouraged me to sub my work. This is what I hope to be my first of many stories to be published to entertain others

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[Aline's Website](#)

Blurb

Doctor Amy Allens isn't looking for love; she's looking for a killer. As a Psychoanalyst she can see into the dark minds that prey on humanity - but Detective Ry Stevens is a complete mystery.

Will their growing attraction make them a stronger team or will the sexual sparks be a distraction that costs them their lives?

Excerpt

Kazinsky inhaled deeply of the rich, heady aroma that surrounded her. He could smell her fear and it excited him. He looked back at the tart tied up in his back seat and grinned in anticipation.

"We're going to have some fun tonight, my little Tart. You picked the perfect outfit to capture my attention this evening. You should be proud."

The little tart had been prime for the picking. She'd been wearing a short leather mini skirt; a fiery red tank top with most of her assets hanging out than in and her shoes were strapless black stilettos. They had to have been uncomfortable to wear but he admitted they certainly made her look sexy.

He only had one disappointment with his prize this evening. She wasn't his usual type. Her hair was too short and she was a blonde. He consoled himself with the knowledge that the next girl would be better. There would be a next girl.

He laughed aloud at the thought of the police force's incompetence. His victim whimpered in fright, bringing a smile to his lips. He started whistling an eerie tune just for her and returned to his musing.

The poor police hadn't come even close to finding out who he was. Well until recently. They had someone new working on his case and she was getting close. He wasn't sure how or why, but he knew a woman had taken over the search. Finally they'd brought in someone worthy of his time to play with.

"Don't worry, my dear. We're almost home, and then we can start having some real fun."

The frightened whimper he received in answer sounded sweeter than endearments to his ears. He would take his time with this one.

Amy looked around the room, fighting back the hurt and anger. Women had been brutally raped and murdered. Young, beautiful women with their entire lives ahead of them were no longer alive because these men had tried to keep her away. She tapped down her anger, her glare focused solely on the man in charge.

She'd left Washington, DC, and had come home to Canada to get away from lies and betrayal. Yet here she was being lied to all over again. Sure, this time it was different. She wasn't being cheated on, but unfortunately her heart was still involved. She realized deep down that she'd rather have her heart torn out than to let one more young woman die because these men wanted to keep

her safe.

She felt a little sorry for Officer Tanner. Detective Ry Stevens had been extremely upset with him for allowing her to tag along. He didn't have to say anything. The look of pure mayhem Ry was throwing in Tanner's direction told her the whole story. It was time to center the focus on herself, and take control of this situation before anyone else got hurt. Taking a deep breath Amy got straight to the point.

"This man, detectives, has been preying on these women for nearly eight months now. Why bring me in so late in the game?"

"Doc, we know how good you are. We've worked other cases together in the past. But this one is different."

Amy turned towards the detective who spoke and glared at him when she saw who had spoken. "It's my job Hank. That's why the department hired me. How is this case different?"

"Cause, Doc, in this one you're what I like to call the main dish."

Finally Amy understood their reluctance to call her in and it angered her. "So in other words, I'm appealing to this perpetrator."

"Him and every other man alive that isn't gay," Tanner said from his corner.

Amy knew she shouldn't smile at the backhanded compliment, but she couldn't seem to help herself. She could also use it to her advantage, if she played her cards right. "Why, thank you, Tanner."

"You're quite welcome, Doc."

"Now, who here can tell me the difference between Tanner and this serial?"

Everyone looked back at her with a blank expression on their faces.

"Come now people. We have a few very obvious distinctions here." Amy made sure to look at every man there before continuing. "Unless you think this serial might be a cop?"

That statement brought nothing but angry grumbles and denials.

"No? Good. So you're sixty to seventy percent positive he isn't in any branch of law enforcement."

"Ninety five percent sure, Amy."

Ah Ry, it's about time you spoke up she thought. "Ninety five percent. Is every one in agreement?"

"Yeah, Doc, we all agree with Ry."

She locked eyes with every officer in the room to verify that, yes, they did agree and they weren't just going along with the majority vote. "Then put it on the board, Hank."

"Doc, would that be a pro or a con?"

"Put it under observations, Hank I don't think Amy's done with that point yet." Ry pointed out in his usual gruff manner bringing a smile to her lips.

"So moving on. Age? Any suggestions?"

"Well the girls are all between eighteen and twenty five, so I'd say under thirty."

She'd been expecting that answer. These guys didn't have any real experience with serial killers, which was why she was letting them give her the stats and making corrections when needed. "That would be a good guess, and normally I would agree with you. But tell me, Tanner, your twenty six, twenty seven right?"

"Twenty six, Doc."

Amy grinned. "And would you say you got a lot of play?"

"I get my fair share." He answered arrogantly.

"Of women who look like this?" She asked holding up then pinning each of the women's photo's on the board she'd had Ry bring in earlier.

Tanner blushed slightly. "Not quite, but pretty enough."

Amy gave him an encouraging smile. "Well, let me impart some information you might not be aware of."

"This ought to be good."

The sarcastic comment had come from the back row, but Amy let it slide. "You mentioned earlier that I was exactly the type of woman this predator is looking for. Does that make me as good looking as these women?"

Every officer in the room kept his mouth shut at her question, except one. "You're a babe, Doc," Tanner remarked flirtatiously.

"When I was the same age as these girls, the only men who could sweet talk me into doing stupid things were men with experience. Tanner is sweet, but not quite a sliver-tongued devil as you've all witnessed. Now, Ry on the other hand is older, more mature and never says anything without first thinking it through. He's about the right age for our serial." Turning to face the man in question Amy steeled herself for the answer to her next question. "Tell me, Ry, your current girlfriend. Is she pretty?"

"Hell no, Doc. Melissa is drop dead gorgeous."

Amy smiled sadly; Hank Adams always answered the questions she asked Ry about his girlfriend. "So, Hank, would you say she is wall worthy?"

"If this guy liked blondes, I'd say most definitely."

Amy tapped down the irrational jealousy she always felt when they mentioned Melissa. "Which proves my point. The serial

killer is older. I'd say between thirty two and forty."

"As old as Forty? Really?"

Amy laughed, leave it to Tanner to lighten her mood. "You think forty is old, Tanner?"

She watched Tanner look at Ry in apology before answering. "Well, yeah, a little."

"I think of it as experienced."

Surprise washed over Tanner's face, causing her to grin in response. "Doc, would you really date a guy that much older?"

"I once married a guy that much older, Tanner. I'm not as young as I look, or as stupid. Now I want you to go through these files and put together a list of what these girls have in common. And what makes them different."

"Where are you going Amy?"

Amy stifled her sigh. "I need air, Detective Stevens. Suddenly I'm not feeling so well."

"Amy, did you want some compa--"

Panic seized her. "No!"

"What's up, partner? The Doc okay?"

Ry turned his glare on his partner. "Well, lets see. I finally break up with Melissa and start putting out the signals to see if Amy might be interested. Then you come along and tell her that my *girlfriend*, which I no longer have by the way, is drop dead gorgeous. Now she's reverted to calling me Detective Stevens. Ask me again what's up, Hank, and we'll be going to your funeral next."

Ry saw the real surprise on Hank's face and sighed. "You broke up with Melissa? When?"

"Three days ago. You know how I feel about Amy. It wasn't fair to Melissa for me to keep seeing her when I wanted someone else." Ry wished Hank would stop looking at

him like he'd lost his mind or grew two heads.

"How'd she take it?"

Wiping a hand over his face, Ry sat on the window ledge looking out at Amy in the parking lot. He watched as the wind played with the strands of her hair that had escaped from her tightly woven bun. "Really well actually, said she saw it coming. She even told me she thought the woman I chose was really lucky and hoped she knew it. Then she asked me to spend the night one last time."

Hank grinned. "You lucky bastard. Break up sex. There's nothing quite like it."

"I turned her down. Every time Melissa tried to kiss me, I saw Amy slipping further and further away."

"You need to tell Doc about Melissa's new status."

Ry turned away from the window angrily. "I tried. She told me she didn't want any company. Or more precisely my company."

Hank ignored the glare. "If she doesn't know about Melissa, then why did she use you as an example?"

Ry growled. "She was fishing."
"Ooops."

"Right, oops. I need coffee. Don't let that woman start without me."

Hank watched Ry walk, away his posture stiff and straight and winced in guilt. He'd never seen him this low. *Gotta fix this* Decision made, Hank went in search of Amy. "Tanner you see the Doc?"

"Not since she gave us our assignment and walked off with Stevens. Man what I wouldn't give to have her sweet on me."

Hank laughed in disbelief. "You need about five years and two inches first. Which way did she go?"

"Ask Stevens. He followed her out like a little puppy." The mischievous grin that

appeared at that comment lightened Hank's mood.

"I will. Thanks. I'll be sure to let Ry know what you think of him and the Doc." The look of panic that crossed Tanner's face entertained Hank to no end.

"Adam's, you wouldn't dare."

"Sure I would. The Doc pinned you perfectly. Young and doesn't watch what he says before he speaks."

"She went outside. She took her purse with her."

Hank wanted to laugh at the totally panicked reactions he was getting from everyone tonight. Walking out of the building, he spotted Amy walking towards her car. "Hey Doc, where are you going?"

"I'll be right back, Hank. I need to make a phone call."

Seeing the sad look on her face made him feel guilty. He got an irresistible urge to make her smile. "We have phones inside and I know you own a cell. It's the hottest ten digit number in the station. People are offering me a hundred bucks for it."

Amy's lips turned up, but the smile he'd been trying for never reached her eyes. "I need privacy for this call, Hank. Somewhere he won't be watching."

"He? He who... Doc I fucked up earlier."

She gave him, the saddest smile he'd ever seen. "Telling the truth isn't fucking up, Hank. I've seen." Amy looked up at the window trying to recall the woman's name. "Melinda?"

"Melissa," he corrected.

"Right Melissa and, like you said, she is drop dead gorgeous if you like your woman to look artificial."

Hank felt his heart go out to her; he'd never known the Doc to act petty. She must really be hurting right now to say that.

"No," Amy sighed feeling guilty. "That isn't fair. She's probably very sweet and quite pretty without her layers of makeup."

Hank put his hand on her arm offering support. "That I couldn't tell you, but she is very sweet."

Amy sighed. "I thought so. I shouldn't be so mean or quick to judge. Maybe the implants make her feel better about herself."

Hank was thrown for a loop by that remark. "Implants?"

"Ask Ry sometime," she teased softly.

"Doc, he broke up with her."

"Why ever for? She sounds perfect."

He could tell she was genuinely surprised by his news. "Maybe, but not for him. Give him a second chance, Doc. He's crazy about you, and he did break all ties before making any moves in your direction."

Amy shook her head, her hair falling in front of her face hiding her expression from him. "I'm not his type, Hank."

Hank gently brushed her hair out of her face. "How do you figure?"

"I'm a lot older than anyone he's ever gone out with."

"Well, you don't look it. Besides, no one knows how old you really are," he teased.

"I was married. I AM married!"

He lifted her chin with his index finger so she had to look him in the eyes. "Don't think he'll care about that. Besides we both know the truth of that statement. Anything else?"

"No part of my body is fake."

Hank laughed. "If that's supposed to be a deterrent Doc, it's a bad one."

Amy gave him a teary smile. "Why haven't you ever hit on me, Hank?"

He flashed her a grin. "That's easy. For one I know you have a crush on my

partner. For another he'd kill me for even thinking about it."

The look of pure panic on her face startled him.

"Seriously, Doc. The real reason that I haven't made a move is because I'm terrified you'll say yes."

Amy slapped his arm playfully. "Would that be so bad?"

"No, at least not until you realized I'm not really the one you want. Then I'd be devastated."

Amy turned away from him in disbelief. "No you wouldn't."

"Doc." He put his hand under her chin and turned her head back so that she was looking at him. "Believe this if you never believe anything else. I really would. You are exactly the type of woman I've always wanted in my life. And if Ry wasn't in the picture, I'd snap you up in a second."

"But he's not—"

Hank frowned at her until she stopped talking. "Come on, Doc. You don't believe that anymore than I do. The two of you can't keep your eyes off each other. Case in point, you tell Ry you don't want him around so he finds the only window in the station where he can keep an eye on you. You're so in-tune with him that you can sense he's there."

Amy blushed. "Hank, I know I reacted badly to hearing that he may still have a girlfriend. But I shouldn't have. I mean technically, I'm still a married woman."

"Married as in getting involved would be having an affair?"

Amy smiled sadly, and he knew this wouldn't be good news. "Married as in, legally separated and husband refusing to sign the divorce papers." They went through this song and dance every time she started feeling down on herself. It was Hank's way of cheering her up and it worked every time.

"No affair then?"

Amy laughed like he'd intended. "Sorry to disappoint you, Hank, but I don't do affairs."

"I would hope not! Are you two quite through?" The freezing temperature of Ry's voice made Hank cringe in guilt. "We have a killer to catch."

"How long have you been standing there?" Amy asked breathlessly, proving to Hank she did care for his partner.

"Long enough."

"What's that supposed to mean?" The anger behind her words had Hank taking a step away from the explosion about to erupt.

"Fine! I heard my partner ask you to have an affair with him."

"I did not!"

"And I heard you turn him down. Can we go in now?"

"You arrogant bastard!"

Hank should have interrupted and set things straight, but he really hated being accused then ignored. So he let Amy have at him.

"How dare you eavesdrop on a private conversation?"

Hank winced at the anger in her tone.

"I wasn't eavesdropping I was merely coming to get you. Can we get back to work now?"

Amy turned on Ry with fire in her eyes. Hank knew Ry would never forgive him for what she was about to do. "So then you missed the part where I asked him out! Hank I seriously think you should reconsider my offer to go out. You couldn't be more wrong in your assessment. I'll be in as soon as I get some privacy to make my phone call. If you'll excuse me!"

Hank watched as she walked away. He saw the pain she tried valiantly to hide from them.

“Thanks a lot partner.”

“Hey! Whoa! Hold up. You came in on the tail end of a conversation. You have no idea what we were discussing.” Hank said.

“You knew exactly how I felt about Amy, but that didn’t stop you from moving in on her the moment I was out of favor.” Ry laughed. “In a situation you created none the less. Bravo, partner.”

Hank had, had enough. “You’re crazy! Absolutely *loco*, pal.”

“Am I?” Ry stood his ground.

“Ry stop sulking and start listening.”

“Well? I’m listening.”

Hank looked at him, at a loss for words. He knew he could never betray the Doc’s trust. “I wish I could tell you what we talked about. But I can’t.”

“Why don’t you just date her, Hank? That seems to be what you both want.”

Hank turned to leave, and started back for the precinct. “That’s it. I’m going back inside before you truly have a meltdown. I would never poach on someone my best friend is interested in. *No matter what you seem to think.*”

Buying Mackenzie's Baby

Kim Rees



Contemporary Romance

Category (260 pages)

Samhain Publishing

Author Bio

Kim Rees started writing when she was ten years old. That's... okay we'll not go into how long ago that was now. But in 2002, she gave in and started writing romance... well... sex. To her surprise, it came naturally. Yes. Please groan at the pun.

Kim lives halfway between Strawberry Fields and Penny Lane. Honest. Just *please* don't ask her to sing.

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[Kim's Website](#)

Blurb

The morning after a high society party finds Kate Hartley in her ex-husband's bed. Just a stupid mistake; something to put behind her... Until she discovers that she is pregnant.

Mack had never wanted children; had only married her in a rush of lust. Kate knows this. Nothing would drive her to ask anything of him. Nothing. But she's homeless and flat broke. And it isn't only her welfare now.

However, Mack has his own agenda. Kate had fooled him once; married him for his money. Whored herself... It was why he had divorced her. But now his grandfather has threatened his mother's home if Mack doesn't marry and produce an heir.

He had vowed never to marry again. But Kate Hartley is his only choice.

And pay back can be sweet...

Excerpt

Prologue

"Note to self: don't drink vodka. Again. Ever."

Kate rubbed at sticky eyes and dragged at her face with tight fingers. Her head pounded. Reluctant eyes stared up at the white ceiling.

Something was wrong. She blinked. It was silly, ridiculous, but it seemed to be a lot further away. Her bedroom ceiling

was low, had that damp patch, swirly patterns. Definitely not high and edged with intricate geometric moulding.

“Okay, still dreaming.”

Her hazy mind happy, she yawned, stretching her spine against the smoothness of the sheets. And froze. Sensation bombarded her. The light scent of lavender. A mattress that didn’t squeal and squeak with every movement, the soft weight of blankets when she had a heavy duvet, and a sleek warmth to the sheets that almost caressed her very naked skin. Naked. She didn’t sleep naked. Couldn’t. It was too cold; what with the old heating-

Kate pulled in her scattering thoughts. Her heart hammered, eclipsing the pounding in her head. She remembered to breathe. “All right. Don’t panic.” She tried not to hear the fear in her own voice. “I’m in a strange bed and I’m naked. That doesn’t necessarily mean-

Her eyes shot to her right as the mattress shifted. Rich, woollen blankets slipped. Horror tightened her already nervous stomach and blood rushed into her face. A man’s tousled, sandy hair. Her eyes snapped away and fixed on the high ceiling. She had to get-

More movement. A heavy arm fell across her and Kate’s teeth dug at her lip, biting back the yelp that wanted to break free. Too late. Too late to make an anonymous escape.

Her hands clenched. Maybe if she just eased out of the bed, let that warm, strong arm slip, slide over her body...

Kate gasped. Memories of a touch, the fiery stroke of impatient fingers, a mouth sliding hot and wet over her skin. Arching under the weight of another body. The ecstasy of skin against skin. Oh God. She had... With a complete stranger.

Her mind shot into the present. The stranger shifted. A large, warm hand splayed over her stomach and then those clever fingers started to move. A gentle, almost sleepy caress that sent flickers of fire under her skin. How? This didn’t happen to her. Hadn’t since... him.

Kate closed her eyes not wanting to deny the curl of heat low in her belly. Only Mack had ever made her skin burn. “Not him. Not now.” Finally, after years of misery, she could put the pain of that man behind her.

“Hmm?”

Even muffled by the blankets, the soft, deep voice made her toes curl. That and what his equally clever mouth-

“Nothing.” The word was a rushing sigh.

“Like that?”

“God, yes...”

“And this?”

Kate was lost in her own rapid breathing as she disappeared into the rush of fire through her veins. An involuntary little squeal escaped. But then... “Don’t stop. Oh God, please, don’t stop.”

Blankets ripped back with a string of expletives. His eyes. Burning anger slashed across her face and Kate flinched against it. All desire shrivelled. Something sick lurched in her stomach. Not a stranger. Kate’s eyes crushed shut, blocking out the cold hatred in that dark brown gaze. She fought back the sting of tears, her hands covering her scalding face. “No!” It was almost a wail.

Cold air washed over her skin. He snatched up the top sheet and Kate made a sudden scramble for, anything, to cover her nakedness.

“What a pleasant surprise to see you too, Kate.”

Her hangover burst back. She groaned. Eyes flicked over his naked

torso, delaying on his arms. The smooth brown skin, still with that sharp muscle definition. She had always loved- No, not going there. This man had torn out her heart and stamped on it. "What the hell are you doing in my bed?" Good. Anger. So much better than the other feeling.

"Your bed?" He was on his feet, fingers bunching the white sheet around his waist. His hard gaze swept over the clean, pale walls and then fixed on her. Steel bands contracted around her chest at the derision she found there. "Since when could you afford a room like this?" His voice grated and dark eyes narrowed. "Did you do this hoping for a handout?"

Kate felt the blood burning her face. Money. It always came back to money with Sean Mackenzie. A wife was only a drain. It was why she hadn't taken a penny from him when they divorced. Her arms tightened convulsively around the blanket that covered her breasts. Not a penny. "You haven't changed, Mack."

"Where you're concerned? No. Never. Now get out."

"Then turn around."

A bark of harsh laughter made her jump. "You have nothing I want to see."

"That wasn't the impression-"

A smirk, and the glitter sharpened his eyes. "A naked woman in my bed? Offering herself?" Mack's voice was a caress and Kate fought the shiver that rippled over her skin. Fought and lost. "What's a man to do?"

He could never resist. No, not going to that memory. "Yes. I see."

Kate pulled in her courage and swung her legs over the edge of the bed. Her toes dug into the deep softness of the rug. She felt the prickle of Mack's eyes as she shuffled across the room. Clothes, underwear, both hers and his was flung around the room. Her face reddened.

Awkwardly, she pulled on her underwear, shrugged into her crumpled dress, trying desperately to keep as much of her body covered with the light blanket.

And Mack, relaxing on the bed, his long, lean body barely covered by that white sheet, a cruel smile cutting his mouth, was obviously enjoying her struggle. "So how was it for you, Kate?"

She watched her hands rub down the creases of her silver, sheath dress, preparing her face for the lie. "Not very memorable, Mack." She gave him sharp smile as she held his gaze. "Sorry."

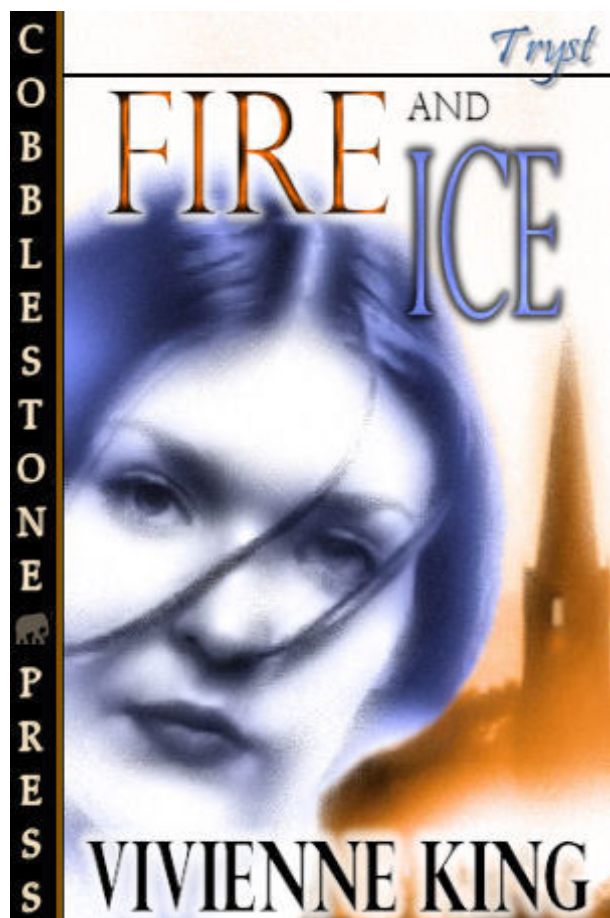
"So you didn't scream my name?" He picked at a piece of fluff on the sheet. "Beg me to take you again?" An eyebrow rose. "And again?" His smile was to himself. "Maybe your acting is worth payment. My wallet's on the dresser. Take what's there."

Kate stared. Fury had her shaking. For one moment, she'd thought he was another man; one who had broken Mack's spell over her body. But no. Stupidly, she'd had sex with Sean Mackenzie. And he hadn't changed. "No," she grated. "And it'll be a cold day in hell before I touch it, or you, ever again."

Hot angry tears blurred her eyes as she ran from his hotel room.

Fire and Ice

Vivienne King



Fantasy romantica novella

36 pages

Cobblestone press

Coming June 3rd

Author bio

Ever since I was a little girl the thing that used to stir my blood most was tales of the supernatural. Creatures of the night. Vampires and werewolves. And now that I'm an adult, yeah, those archetypes still thrill me, but now they must be told with romance being the central theme. Whether my stories are

hot enough to scorch the sheets, or action packed to the point that your heart races and your pulse pounds, I love to write them and share them with the world.

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[Vivienne's Website](#)

Blurb

Lumina, princess of the Ice Kingdom. Pyroth, prince of Fire. Reuniting after a ten-month separation, they cannot resist stealing away into the night for a rendezvous of burning sexual passion. What Lumina and Pyroth cannot know is that this night of passion must last them for the next two years.

Excerpt

Chapter One

"We shouldn't be doing this," Lumina said. Icy snowflakes burst from her fingertips as the excitement of their illicit meeting caused her body to quake. "Father will find us out."

Pyroth grinned. "Your father has no more say in this. We are to be bonded on the morn." He shoved her against the wall of her private chambers. His knee wedged between her thighs, forcing the velvet fabric of her dress to bunch against her dewy cunt.

She moaned and ground her hips down on him. His fingers, like steel bands, gripped her thigh and shoulder.

“And, oh yes, we should be doing this,” he said, warm breath tickling her ear.

Always excited to see the change overcome him, she turned her head to watch. The normally sapphire blue of his eyes changed to undulating hues of yellow, orange, and red. The colors of fire. The pupil was narrowing, becoming a mere slit, a physical manifestation of his wild desire.

She raked her nails down his back. He hissed, stiffening a split second before he nibbled on her ear lobe.

Lumina groaned, nuzzling his neck, inhaling the faint scent of sulfur. He gripped her ass, urging her to straddle his hips.

“One more day, Pyroth, and I’m yours.” She licked the hollow of his neck, sending a jet of frost through her lips. The condensation beaded on his skin in the form of a crystallized dewdrop.

His head tipped back, giving her access to the drop and she lapped it up, nipping his flesh between fevered kisses.

“You’re already mine,” he said with a growl.

She grinned. “Always.”

His nostrils flared, and he marched them to the fur-covered bed in the

center of the chamber. The crystal room resonated with each step he took, and the vibrations hummed through her body. The ice castle created an iridescent glow, surrounding them in an opal-like brilliance.

He sat her on her feet, his eyes focused on her face as he began to slowly undress. Pulling off his shirt first, he exposed the long lean lines of his sinewy body.

She wanted to purr at the sight of his rippled abs and lifted her hands, ready to undo the buttons of her gown.

“No.” The one word traveled along her flesh, quickening her pulse. “Let me.”

Her body ached as a desperate need twisted at her insides. She wanted to scream as the pressure built. Scream, then crawl on top of him, impale herself on his dick and bring herself to a grinding orgasm.

He undid the laces of his doeskin trousers, pulled them down, and then kicked them aside.

“Pyroth,” she murmured, unable to believe that all this beauty, all this male perfection was hers.

Their kingdoms would soon be united, not just by politics, but by love. Her gaze roamed his body, committing him to memory.

He was beautiful. Strong legs coated with a light dusting of black hairs. A proud, jaunting dick, all nine glorious inches of it, nestled between dark curls. He was so thick that many times she felt herself cleaved in two by the violence of their mating. Hot liquid trickled down her thighs. It took every ounce of control she possessed not to reach out and touch him.

Lightning flashed and thunder roared outside the windows. A howling wind crashed against the parapet. The fury of the storm attracted her attention as she glanced through the glass. Outside, the world was in turmoil, chaos, but inside she was safe. Protected.

“Lumina, look at me,” Pyroth demanded. He was wild fire, reckless and dangerous to any but the ice. The ice was his opposite and equal. She was his other half, his perfect mate.

They stood silent, mere inches separating them, as tension filled the room like the palpable beat of a heart. Lumina dug her toes into the bearskin rug.

She longed to touch his face, chiseled to perfection, run her fingertips over the dark shadow that framed his strong, tanned jaw. His full bottom lip begged to be sucked, nibbled and licked. His aquiline nose, regal and prominent, led her gaze to a set of eyes alight with the color of twisting

flames.

She took a step closer, her fingers twitching by her side. This was his game. His foreplay. He wouldn't touch her until her own need became more than she could bear. She was close, but not quite there yet. Her nails dug into her palm.

“Let down your hair,” she commanded.

Slowly, his gaze never leaving hers, he drew the leather thong from his midnight hair. The long length spilled down his back, covering the sides of his face in obsidian shadow. Light reflected off his hair, making it glisten like darkest ebony.

Her nails cut through her skin. The first drops of ruby red blood wound a path down her snow-white palms.

His gaze flicked to her hands and then back to her face.

The blood signaled the rising of her excitement to near frenzy, a red flag he knew well.

His hands whipped out and yanked her to him. She hissed and rubbed her body along his naked length.

He shoved his hands through her floor length hair, wrapped some strands around his wrists and pulled her tight against him. Pain flashed through her body, mixed with equal parts pleasure.

It rippled along her flesh, making her weak and tremble.

His mouth slammed down on hers in a kiss of possession. Tongues collided and dueled. Lumina couldn't get enough of his taste, the spicy sweetness of red wine. His hands spanned her back, undoing the buttons, snapping off a few that flew through the air in his haste to get her out of the frost-blue gown.

Chilly air hit her exposed back, making her nerves tingle and her flesh tighten. Nude beneath, she'd known tonight would happen, had prepared for it. Her protests were weak. Her need to be fucked more than she could bear. His body offered the sweet temptation after nearly a year separation, and ignited a hunger she could not resist.

Pyroth dragged her down to the bed, giving her no choice but to follow.

"You heat my nerves," she whispered.

He framed her face with his hands, his dick lying heavy and thick between them. She couldn't help but move herself over him, loving the feel of its smooth hardness against her.

"I am the fire, my soon to be Queen of the frost."

"Yes."

Their union would be perfect.

Tomorrow two warring nations would unite. Her parents would step down, and she'd reign as Queen to the kingdom of Ice.

Her heart screamed with pleasure.

Sliding down on his body she nipped and nibbled his exposed flesh.

Sometimes soft, sometimes hard. He arched his back in response to each bite, low rumbles of approval vibrating through his throat. When she came to his long length, her instincts took over as the rest of the world ceased to exist.

Lumina drew his hard dick into her moist mouth.

He moaned her name, his hands fisting in her hair. He shoved her face down and forced her to accept all of him.

She hummed, loving the feel of his smooth dick slide along her tongue. She caressed his balls, kneading firmly, but not too hard. Just enough to make him grunt with pleasure.

When his sack tightened in her hands she knew he was dangerously near to orgasm, but she wasn't ready for it to end. Not even close.

Lumina pulled away, licking her lips, still tasting him on her. She groaned and pinched her nipple.

“Fuck me, Pyroth. Now.”

He sat up, a feral gleam in his eyes. Quicker than her mind could grasp, he flipped her onto her stomach, switching positions and straddling her backside.

“Put your arms above your head.”

She heard the strain in his deep voice, knew the control he was exerting not to go berserk and hurt her with the volcanic ferocity of his desire.

Fire was an uncontrollable element, deadly sometimes and dangerous always. His dark desire thrilled her.

She splayed her body out beneath him, throwing her arms over her head and opening her legs wide. Exposed, cool air rushed against the warm wetness of her pussy.

She'd never felt more excited and ready in her life.

“Don't touch me. Don't even move. If you do,” he directed, “I'll spank you.”

She flinched at his words, imagining the cruel sting of his hand against her ass. Her stomach quickened.

“You moved,” he said then swatted her ass, palm down, hard.

White-hot heat seared her flesh, spreading like a rushing tide down her legs and pulsing at her cunt. Her

nerves burst to life and throbbed, but with the pain came a blooming pleasure, deep in the pit of her stomach and flaring throughout her body. She grew wetter.

Lumina bit her lip, not wanting to move, because the spanking hurt, and yet at the same time, she wanted to writhe beneath him just to feel the flash of pleasure that could only come from pain.

She closed her eyes. No more moving...for the moment anyway.

Pyroth lifted off her body, grabbed the silken cords she always kept next to her bed and bound her hands and feet to the head and footboards.

The cords were a joke. They couldn't really hold her if she wasn't willing to be held. They were a matter of trust. Did she trust him enough not to hurt her? The answer was simple. Yes. She trusted him with her life, her heart.

###

Pyroth blinked. His body trembled with need, a burning desire so hot it scorched. He'd been without her touch for what seemed a lifetime.

Their separation had been necessary and unavoidable. His father was frail and had decided to step down from the throne on the day of his son's official bonding ceremony. So for ten

months, Pyroth had been required to keep to his kingdom, learning all he could of his new role and fulfilling his duties as the surrogate king until now. Tomorrow, the ceremony would finally occur. The kingdom of Fire would truly be his, and Lumina would rule beside him as his queen and liaison to the kingdom of Ice.

Their bonding had been a political alliance negotiated between his father and hers. For centuries the kingdoms of Fire and Ice had fought. Bitter, cruel wars that had left many factions divided and in chaos. Tomorrow's ceremony would unite two kingdoms into the most powerful of nations, a bold force against the other territories.

But beyond the political machinations of their fathers, something else occurred. Something few, if any, could have taken into account. The alliance was real. One king's son and another king's daughter had found a love deep and fathomless.

Pyroth knew that even if their mating hadn't been preordained, he would have fought heaven and hell to make the white priestess his own.

He stared at the nubile beauty of her form. She lay still, silent and waiting. Her trust and faith in him absolute. His heart swelled to twice its size. Tomorrow's ceremony would only make public what he already knew in his heart. Lumina was his, now and

forever.

He clenched his jaw.

Her white, porcelain skin, unmarred by imperfections, felt soft and cool to his fevered touch. Her long, bluish-white hair covered her body like a glistening cloak of frost. She lay face down, but even with eyes closed he could paint her features by memory. Ice blue eyes as pure as glacier caps. Rosy red lips, plump and pouty, always ready to be ravished.

The muscles in her shoulders were bunched, coiled and tense, just waiting for him to begin. So he crawled to her then, positioning his head between her silky thighs. Her tiny, pink nub lay exposed like a priceless pearl, moist with dew. He inhaled her musky scent, as the air around them quivered with telltale vibrations of reckless passion.

No more. He couldn't prolong the wait another moment.

Pyroth licked the length of her slit, tasted her sweetness as it filled his mouth, and then he groaned into her.

An animalistic groan spilled from her lips. She pushed her pussy into his face.

He grinned. The devilish vixen. She'd deliberately moved, making sure to

pump herself against his mouth, all but begging for the spanking. She liked it rough and could match him passion for passion.

He drew his hand back and struck her ass, hard enough for a flash of pain to snap through his wrist. "I told you not to move."

Her hands balled into fists, while a breathless chuckle greeted his ears. "Goddess Pyroth, that one was hard."

"Next one will be worse."

"Promises, promises."

He pinched her ass and laughed. "Don't move again."

Pyroth lowered himself back down between her legs and this time sucked her pink nub deep into his mouth, twisting and nibbling.

She screamed, but didn't move. He smiled and pushed a finger deep into her cunt, moving it up and down in pantomime of what his cock would soon do to her.

Lumina's moans told him she was close. Her liquid heat came in torrents. He lapped it up, and his control snapped.

"Now, Lumina! I need you now."

"Yes. Oh Goddess, yes."

With one fluid motion, Pyroth impaled himself inside her moist haven. Her muscles clenched around him, milking him, silently begging him to insert deeper, push harder.

He ground his teeth and closed his eyes, riding the waves of passion that flooded his senses. Their flesh slapped together the harder he pumped.

The quickening flashed through his veins, tightened his sack and made blood roar through his ears. She was so tight, so inviting and accepting.

"Move, Lumina. Move now."

"I thought you'd never ask." She shoved herself against him.

Heat built in his lower belly. The prickling sensation of fire traveled over his flesh, burned through his skull and spiraled down his spine.

He groaned and she yelled, panting harder and faster.

An explosion of light flashed behind his eyes as his soul drew from his body and molded with hers to form one entity, one whole.

On a planet where an orgasm was as dangerous to a female as it was desired, two lovers had to link their souls together and draw an anchor, a safety net to fall back into. Only a male powerful enough could bring the

female back to herself. If his touch and guidance failed to bring her back, she'd be forever trapped in an alternate dimension as a spirit without form.

He and Lumina spiraled toward the heavens. A million bursts of needle-like sensations ripped through his flesh, and he arced into her one last time, pumping out the last of his white, milky fluid.

Then the rush of light was gone, and they fell back into themselves. Exhausted, the stupor of deep contentment numbed his limbs.

Slowly he moved off her body, undid the cords that bound her, and gently traced the deep scarlet handprint on her ass. He lay down and rolled her over, spooning her body against his and running his hand down the side of her face.

She snuggled deeper into his embrace. "I know you should head back to your chambers before the dawn."

"I will, but let me hold you for a while."

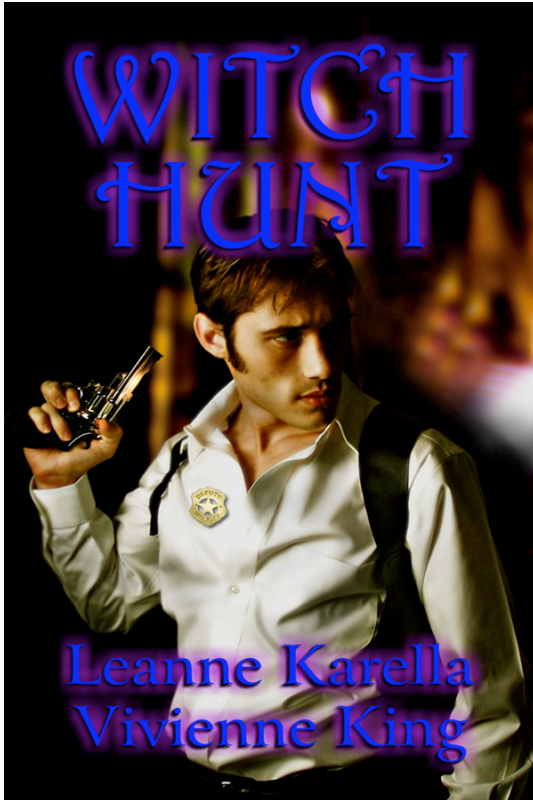
"Yes," she mumbled, the heavy breathing of deep sleep slurring her speech. "That would be nice."

"You own my heart, Lumina."

"Always."

Witch Hunt

**Vivienne King and
Leanne Karella**



Single Title Paranormal
Light Romance
Full length novel
New Concepts Publishing
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Author Bio - Vivienne King

Ever since I was a little girl the thing that used to stir my blood most was tales of the supernatural. Creatures of the night. Vampires and werewolves.

And now that I'm an adult, yeah, those archetypes still thrill me, but now they must be told with romance being the central theme. Whether my stories are hot enough to scorch the sheets, or action packed to the point that your heart races and your pulse pounds, I love to write them and share them with the world.

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[Vivienne's Website](#)

Author Bio - Leanne Karella

The youngest of nine children, Leanne believes that her talent is genetic and credits her big, wonderful family for encouraging and even pushing her to excel in writing. From her father who gave up his dreams of being published to take care of his family, to brothers and sisters who have all succeeded in so many different arts and professions of life, she's thankful to them all.

Leanne wrote her first romance in junior high school and continued writing with ballpoint and spiral-bound notebook all through high school and beyond. Not until she worked a job that gave her a lot of downtime to write did she consider the possibility of getting published, and the dream was born.

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[Leanne's Website](#)

Blurb

Lina Brennen has been searching for one thing all her adult life: A place to call home. Between her Granna Merona--the pesky ghost who has

been by her side since childhood--and Lina's skills as a faith healer, she's been run out of town after town. Trent Godfrey has turned his back on his Native American heritage, terrified of anything to do with the Spirit World. Will their love survive the journey through his buried past and help him accept Lina for who she is, or will their hearts be irreparably broken?

Excerpt

Lina sighed and took off her seatbelt. "Granna, don't do anything, oh, I don't know--" she waved her hands through the air dramatically "--ghostly." Merona lifted a white brow, her smooth skin tightening into a fierce scowl. "Such as?" "Don't scare the humans. I'm just going to fill the gas and come back. I love you, Granna. Don't be mad at me." She lifted the corner of her lips into a semi-smile. "I love you too, sweetling. But we're not leaving." Lina shook her head. "Whatever you say, Granna." Better to keep Merona happy than to argue a moot point. Lina, after all, was the driver. She opened the door as dust devils twirled and danced in the distance. The arid landscape was foreboding and unappealing. How could she possibly be happy here? No, best to move on. Lina made to stand and her grandmother's cold fingers flitted across

her neck in a gentle caress. She turned around.

"Your destiny awaits you. Mind that first step."

Lina's brows drew together and she blinked rapidly. "Huh?"

Merona just smiled.

She shook her head and exited the vehicle. The wind shrieked around her, her hair whipped against her cheeks. Lina frowned, thinking of Merona's words.

Her grandmother was wise, very wise. Usually there was some meaning behind her cryptic remarks if Lina took the time to consider them. But she wasn't in the mood right now, she wanted out of the wailing wind.

She opened her tank and placed the pump in. The price of gas was astronomical. Two-fifty a gallon!

"Friggin' gas prices. What do they think, we're rich or something?"

Once it finished pumping, she grabbed her purse from the back seat and ran towards the door of the building, her head bent low to keep the flying dirt out of her eyes. As she pushed on the door, she tripped over the half step and threw out her arms to prevent her fall.

"Ohh," she cried out. Her disjointed mind saw the ground approaching but there was nothing she could do about it. She braced herself for the impact but fell, instead, into the rock-hard arms of a rescuer.

She grabbed a hold of blue clad sleeves to steady herself, bunching

the fabric. Gradually her eyes traveled the length of the arms. They were big. Really big, and muscular. She gulped.

"You okay?" A deep-timbered voice resonated through her veins. She shivered and gave a tiny nod. Her mouth suddenly tasted quite dry. She stared at his chest. The shirt stretched across well-formed pecs. Her skin prickled. Lina licked her lips and gazed up into the bluest eyes she'd ever seen. They were like the sky at sunrise, royal blue. Black as pitch hair framed his chiseled, heart-stopping face.

That face broke into a grin, his straight white teeth flashing brilliantly against the deep, natural tan of his skin, and she gave a tiny start.

"You gonna just stare at me all day?" he chuckled.

She blinked, heat crept up her neck, and she backed out of his arms. "Oh jeez." She laid her hand against her forehead, her bracelets jangling loudly.

"I'm so sorry, I'm such a klutz."

"Hi, Klutz, I'm Sheriff Trent Godfrey. I don't recall ever seeing you around." He stuck out a large, tanned hand. A well-formed hand. Oh hell, she thought, what isn't well formed about this one?

She grinned, the tight knot of nerves slowly unwinding in her gut and she took his hand in hers. A shock of awareness slid up her arm in an arc of electricity.

His eyes widened a bit. Had he felt it too? And what was it, exactly, that she'd just felt? This couldn't be normal.

Toss of a Coin

Aline de Chevigny

Historical Time Travel

Stunner

Silk's Vault

Coming June 2006

Author Bio

Being an avid fan of many genres, I decided to try my hand at a few to see which suited me best. Lo and behold, as long as there's a romance in the mix I can pretty much write anything. I started a critique group with a few same minded ladies I'd met on the LUNA board and we developed a goal and worked towards it. When that took off we started an e-zine [Enchanted Ramblings](#) and it became an instant success.

I live in Ontario, Canada and I am a Chemical Engineering Technologist by trade. When I turned 30 I decided to try something I'd always wanted to do, so I started writing the stories floating around in my head down on paper, hadn't dreamed they'd be published. My family has been extremely supportive of my goal and encouraged me to sub my work. This is what I hope to be my first of many stories to be published to entertain others.

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[Aline's Website](#)

Blurb

A grandmother's last request, a mysterious old coin, and a heartfelt wish.

Armed with a mysterious package, Angelica travels to Scotland to fulfill the requirements

of her grandmother's will. The package contains an ancient coin and a letter telling her to make one wish. Angelica's wish for true love sends her back in time and into the arms of a man who could make all of her dreams come true – if she'll let him.

Excerpt

Angelica Richmond sat demurely in the chair the Lawyer pointed out to her. She still couldn't come to terms with the fact that her Grams was dead. Sadness gripped her as she felt the insecurities of a life without the woman who raised her. She noticed her hands shaking as the lawyer handed her a cola.

Determination suffused her. She would not embarrass herself in front of her grandmother's old friend. She politely accepted the tissue he offered knowing he worried over her welfare. So she sat up straighter, nodding at him to move forward. She would grieve later.

"Miss Richmond, I'd like to sincerely offer you my condolences. I am very sorry about your grandmother. A more remarkable woman, I've never met. The things she had accomplished in her life, leave me in awe."

Angelica took a sip of her cola to ease the lump in her throat his kind words created. "Thank you Mister Barro. I'm sure she would appreciate that." Angelica closed her eyes and took a deep breath before continuing. "So you wished to see me regarding her will? I don't understand, I thought it was all going to charities so that no one in the family would argue over it."

"Your grandmother knew her family well, and wished to eliminate any and all arguments. So she left the bulk of her estate to be split evenly between the Canadian

Cancer Society and the Make a Wish Foundation.”

“Good, so then you need me as her executor to sign the document.”

“Actually she left a third portion to you. It isn’t large, but it does hold three clauses that you must agree to before I can hand it over.”

“Me? She left me something?” Surprise tinged her response. She hadn’t expected anything other than the home they’d shared.

Barro smiled. *‘Elizabeth had been right to leave this girl in charge. She was sweet and the only level headed member of that entire family.’* “She wished you to go after your dreams. So she left you a modest inheritance to help in that goal.”

“You said there were three clauses. What are they?”

“One. You must use the money to further your dreams.”

Angelica remembered the hours she spent talking with her Grams, telling her of all the dreams she had for her life. She couldn’t very well say no. “Of course.”

“Two. You must take a vacation to a destination of your choice. She has made the arrangements for you to visit Scotland. Is that agreeable with you?”

Tears in her eyes Angelica smiled. “Grams knew me so well.”

“Three. There is this.” He said as he handed her a small box.

“What could this be?”

“I don’t know. That is the one thing she would never share with me. But you must open it only when you reach Scotland. If you give me your word, I will accept that as bond.”

She handed him the empty cola can, and stood up to leave. “You have my word Mr. Barro. Is there anything else?”

“No that was all, now your plane leaves first thing in the morning. So you need to go home and pack. You will find that all the arrangements have been made, all you need to do is enjoy yourself.”

“Seems Grams thought of everything. Thank you for all your help Mr. Barro. Now I know why Grams trusted you so much.”

“Have a good time Angelica, be happy. That’s what she wanted for you.”

“I will do my best. Thanks again.”

Getting into a cab Angelica turned the tiny box over and over in her hands. “What are you up to Grams? You never do anything without a reason, even now. Well, I’ll follow your wishes and not open it until I reach Scotland. You better have an explanation in this box.”

She looked up in time to note that the cabbie was watching her. Probably thinking she’d lost her mind, and hell maybe she had by agreeing to all of this. But Grams was the only one who loved her just for her, so she deserved a little faith. “My grandmother just died.”

“Let me guess. She left you something odd in her will.”

“You could say that. You know the elderly they have a plan and a reason for everything. They just don’t always tell you what it is.”

The cabbie smiled at her. “My Nana is the same way, God bless her.”

Angelica smiled absently and returned to her musings.

“We are here Miss. That will be twelve dollars please.”

Startled out of her musing she looked up. “Oh sorry.” She pulled her purse onto her lap and started digging in it for her wallet. “Here you go, keep the change and thank you for understanding my mumbling to myself.”

“Good luck with the riddle.”

“Thanks.”

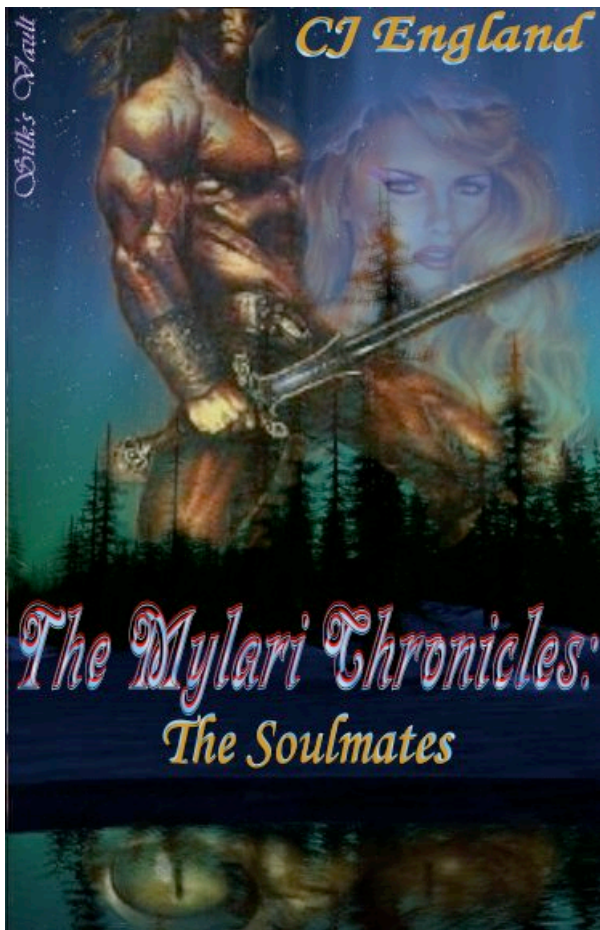
Entering her home she walked straight into her room and pulled out her hardly ever used suitcases and started packing. She placed the box into the bag first, she then started to pack her meager collection of clothing and personal effects she would need for this trip. She had always refused her Grams’ monetary help. She had wanted to make it on her own. Her Grams had always been proud of her for that. Looking around, she realized she had nothing left to do. Mr. Barro had taken care of everything else for her.

That done she sat in her chair and let the tears start to fall, all her sorrow came rushing out as the reality of the situation came at her. Her body shook as she fought back the tears. She was now truly alone, and she’d be damned if she would mar her Grams’ memory by sitting here crying and feeling sorry for herself. She would go on this trip and she would have a fabulous time. Who knew she might just meet the one her Grams promised would find her someday. She shook herself out of her melancholic mood and wiped away the tears as she stood up.

“I should get to bed. The car will be here early to pick me up for the airport.”

The Mylari Chronicles - Soulmates

C. J. England



E-book / Erotic Romance / Fantasy
Novel
Silk's Vault Publishing
Coming April 8th

Author Bio

CJ England credits her passion for writing to her second grade sweetheart, Steven, a blond haired cutie with dimples, who dumped her for a girl who could swing on the monkey bars. She wrote her first story about love and loss after that tragic episode, and never looked back.

CJ says her goal is that her books will spark the imaginations of her readers. That each time they read them, they feel like they are meeting friends. And that somewhere, in their hearts and souls, they too will begin to believe that anything can happen... if you follow your dreams.

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[CJ's website](#)

Blurb

An ancient prophecy comes to life in the erotic tale of the forbidden love between an elven prince and a kidnapped human woman.

When Talia, a human female, is captured and taken into the faerie world, she finds that her life is threatened, until Calion, a prince of the elves saves her. As they escape her captors, the desire between them rises, but it is a love that is *sardai...* taboo.

As they struggle to understand the feelings that they have for each other, the choice is taken out of their hands when Talia is betrayed and she is once again stolen away from her prince.

Will Calion finally understand what Talia means to him? Will he be in time to save her? Will the ancient prophecy be fulfilled, or will all that the gods intended be for naught?

Excerpt

Prologue

Low chanting could be heard as the King made his way up the narrow, winding staircase. It was dark, dank, and musty smelling in this part of the old castle, a place he hated to visit, and rarely did. He wouldn't be here today if the old woman hadn't sent him that frightening message.

*Come to me, oh Faerie King.
I have seen the future in my visions.
Our world is to be no more.*

As he puffed his way up the stairs, he worried. What could the Oracle, or *Tári* as she was known in the Elvish tongue, mean? The old woman only broke her silence when a true vision occurred; otherwise, she was content to stay here in the highest part of the castle murmuring spells and incantations. The king stepped up the last stair with a sigh of relief. He was an old man, his son would soon be taking the throne, and he would be glad to rest. He stepped through the arched doorway and saw her.

She was old, no one knew how many years she carried on her bent and withered form. She stood over the small altar, a thin stream of wood smoke almost obscuring her shadowed face, a face the king had never seen. A tattered black cloak covered her nakedness. Her gnarled hands moved in rhythmic motions over the fire, her aged voice muttering even older words.

When the king could breathe normally, he spoke in a sharp voice. "You sent for me?"

The movements of the old woman didn't change. Her voice didn't stop its chanting. The king watched for several

minutes, and then tried again, addressing her by her name in a politer tone.

"*Tári*...please... what have you seen?"

This time the old crone went still. "I see the future King Daralis, of the Calen'taur Elves. I see your future."

"Speak of what you see."

The Oracle of the Elven people bent forward into the smoke and spit into the fire. The fire sizzled and changed color to a deep, dark blue. "I see the end of the world, my king. I see the end of our people."

The king staggered and put a hand to his heart. "What say you? Our race dies? How can this be?"

"I see a war. A war to end all wars. It will destroy our kind. The Elven people will be no more."

"When?" the old king croaked out.

The crone shook her head. "I do not know. The time was not given in the vision. It may happen in your time or your son's time. It could happen a millennium from now. Our race will end."

"Is there nothing that can be done?"

The woman chuckled, and reaching down, pulled a knife from her cloak. "Give me your arm. If you truly wish to know the answer to your question, you must give the Goddess something in return."

"What?" the king asked warily.

"Just your blood, oh king. The blood of royalty. If you want to find a way to protect your people, I must have your blood."

The old king hesitated. It wasn't that he minded giving his blood. He had given much of that on the battlefields. It was that he wasn't sure he trusted the old crone, Oracle or not.

"Decide quickly, king. The fire burns low."

Swallowing, King Daralis lifted his arm and reached to the Oracle. Grasping it in her surprisingly strong hand, she pushed back his sleeve and quickly made an incision just above the vulnerable spot on his wrist. The blood began to flow in a steady stream into the fire. It sputtered and belched smoke, before finally the flame leapt up, almost singeing the hairs on the back of the king's outstretched arm. He cried out and tried to jerk away, but the old woman held him firmly, her skinny fingers circling his still bleeding wrist.

The fire continued to burn, and the smoke became pungent and thick, turning the color of the leaves in early spring. It filled the room.

"Your offering is accepted, oh king." The woman released the king's arm and he stumbled back from the fire.

He sank to his knees as he pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and bound the wound. King Daralis watched as the smoke became even thicker. He could barely make out the elderly woman beyond the altar. Her mumbling and chanting became more urgent. Suddenly she pushed back the hood she wore and raised her face to the king's, for the first time. Even though she was his elder by many centuries, her lined face still carried the beauty of the ages. He gasped as he saw that her eyes were covered by a thick white film. She was blind. Slowly, the oracle raised her arms over her head, and began moving them in a circling motion, causing the swirling smoke to follow. Soon all the smoke in the room was spinning, with her in the center. The king could feel the wind as it lifted his long hair from his shoulders. He braced himself against it as the Oracle turned her sightless eyes on him.

"You ask for help, I give to thee,

*a message from the goddesses three.
Spears without, a knife within,
treachery will seek to win.
Death, despair, and pain will come,
all your work will be undone.
A mighty war, your people's end,
will come, on that you can depend.
Unless true passion can guide the day,
and give to you a stronger way.
A human female will be the one,
to save the kingdom, you've begun.
She will be the first of three,
to break the hold fortune has on thee.
Varol thysi... passion's force come
true,
breaks through traditions old and new.
Only in acceptance can salvation be,
one of your blood holds the key.
An heir to the throne will this create,
He will win out over fate.
His father's heart, destiny will kiss,
he will carry your mark upon his
wrist.*

As suddenly as it began, the wind ended, and the smoke disappeared. The oracle slumped, exhausted to the floor, while the magical fire extinguished itself in a flash of light. The king was left with the stench of burned blood, and the bitter knowledge that his people's worst enemy... was their only hope.

Chapter 1

The door burst open and the figure of a young woman stepped out on to the balcony. She moved to the railing and looked out over the forest that bordered the property where her parents lived. Her breasts were heaving with emotion, her eyes blind as she stared out at the darkness. Putting her face into her hands, she shuddered with the effort it took to control her anger.

Two days... just two days had been all it took before her parents had started in on her. Natalia, Talia for short, had come back to her parents home in Southern Louisiana, to try to bridge the gap that had come between them. What she wanted for her life, and what they wanted were two very different things. After several days of polite conversation, and strained silences, Talia had almost been glad when her Dad had brought up the subject of her future.

She sighed as she remembered the look on their faces when she had told them she wasn't going back to college for the spring semester. If that hadn't been bad enough, when she told them that she wanted to go backpacking in Europe, and attend an art school in Paris her father had blown his top.

"No daughter of mine is going to be running around in a foreign county. You'll stay in the good old U S of A where you belong. Forget it."

No amount of talking, pleading or explaining had worked. Finally, Talia had told them that she was going anyway, with money saved and the legacy left to her by her grandmother. Her father had ranted and raved, her mother had wept, but the only thing that had come out of the evening was Talia's promise that she would be out of their hair, come morning.

Talia rubbed her eyes and bit her lip to keep from crying. Her parents had never understood her. They had wanted her to get a good education, find a nice man, and settle down nearby so they could enjoy the grandchildren that she would give them. While none of that was a crime, it wasn't what Talia wanted. Ever since she was a child she had this feeling that she didn't belong here. She ached for something that she couldn't see, longed for something that

had always been just out of her reach. She had wanted to travel, but since her parents weren't the traveling type, she had spent her whole childhood going no further than Baton Rouge.

The first major battle with her parents had been on the day she turned eighteen. When she informed them that she was going to take a year to see the country, before starting college, they had gone ballistic. They had cajoled, then argued, and then threatened, but it had done no good. Talia had gone. She had taken her savings, grabbed a suitcase, put it in her little car, and headed for the west coast. She had spent the whole year traveling from place to place, working when she needed to, looking for whatever it was that she was missing. She hadn't found it, but she had had a great time trying.

She had come back and started school, but had known immediately that living with her parents wouldn't work, so she had transferred to another college, and had finished two years of school. Every time she came home to visit, the rift between her and her parents, widened. Her mom had tried setting her up on blind dates. When Talia had refused to go, it just made her parents angrier.

It wasn't that Talia didn't like men. She did. And they liked her. Talia was beautiful, with long blond hair that she usually wore in a pony tail, a heart shaped face, and beautiful green eyes. She had well shaped, nice breasts and slender hips with a tiny waist. When she smiled, her dimples flashed over full, kissable lips. Her biggest complaint was that she was short, only 5'4". She longed to be tall and elegant like one of the models in a fashion magazine. She had learned to dress so that she looked taller than she was.

She wanted to get married... someday, but none of the boys she met had gotten her juices flowing . Not even enough to do anything more than a little kissing and petting. Talia had the feeling that there was someone special waiting for her. She just knew that her soulmate was out there somewhere, and that when it was time... she would find him.

Sighing, Talia left the balcony and went inside to take a shower. She never saw the figures staring at her from the dark edge of the woods.

After her shower, dressed in a long white nightgown, Talia brushed her teeth, and then her hair until it shone. She pulled back the covers on her bed, and pulling her suitcase out, she packed up the few items that she had taken out. If she tried, she could get out of here before her parents got up in the morning. She wasn't looking forward to seeing them any more then they wanted to see her. Casting a quick look around the room, she saw that it was empty of her things. She put the suitcase and her backpack next to the door, for the morning.

Restless, she walked back out onto the balcony. The weather hadn't been bad, but there was a heaviness in the air, like a thunderstorm was coming. She leaned on the balcony railing and gazed at the forest. She loved it's dark tangled paths, and moss covered trees. She had spent most of her childhood in that forest. It was the hardest part about leaving, especially since she knew it may be the last time she ever saw it.

A movement at the edge of the tree line caught her attention. She was used to seeing deer feed in the meadow, and Talia held her breath hoping that she would get a last glimpse before she went to sleep. The figures moved out into the broken moonlight, and Talia frowned. They weren't deer. They

were too big and bulky for that. They moved in a shuffling, awkward way, that had Talia narrowing her eyes. What were they?

Moving quickly now, the two figures came closer, becoming more distinct. Talia couldn't get a good look at them because scattered clouds kept hiding the moonlight, but she got the impression that they were men. She wondered why they would be sneaking around the forest this time of night. Maybe they were poachers.

She bit her lip, almost calling for her father, when the two walked up to the edge of the building. As they reached it the moon came out from behind a cloud and Talia gasped. The figures below her window weren't men. In fact they didn't look human at all. They had massive heads, twice the size of a normal man, that dwarfed their huge bodies. Misshapen and hideous, their faces turned and looked up into hers.

Don't look at them! Her mind screamed instinctively, but before she could look away, the bigger of the two met her eyes and she was frozen. Talia watched in horror as they began to climb up the side of her house, the one who had her in his sight, never taking his eyes off her. Desperately, she tried to move, but she couldn't. She was trapped, immobile, in his gaze.

It didn't take them long to scale the wall. When they reached the balcony, the one holding her captive shifted his eyes for a moment, and she could move. Whirling around, she ran back into her room. She had opened her mouth to scream when she was grabbed from behind. A huge scaly hand covered her mouth, the other arm wrapping around her torso.

Talia fought, her hand scratching and gouging, but it had no effect on the skin of the creature holding her. She took a deep breath, and immediately wished she hadn't. Her

captor stank of excrement, sweat, and a body odor so foul, her stomach rebelled, and she fought the urge to throw up. She wriggled in disgust as the creature ran its hand down her body, feeling every curve of her body. Talia struggled wildly. What were these things? What did they want?

The creature turned and Talia saw the other one lurch through the doors. In the light of her room, she could see the ugliness of the thing. Two, small, pig like eyes peered at her through masses of wrinkled fat. A snout, running with snot and dirt sat above a wide mouth with huge, blubbery lips. It was dressed in stained, filthy clothes that were responsible for part of the stench that surrounded him.

It reached out a fat hand and poked at her breast. "I... want," it said in a rough voice, leaving Talia in no doubt of what he meant. "Give!" She began to tremble uncontrollably.

Talia felt the other shake its head. "No. Must give... Father. He want." But he didn't stop running his hand up and down her body, making Talia's gorge rise again.

The other creature actually pouted. "Want... fuck now!" He started to reach for Talia's breast again, but the other creature cuffed him along side of the head. It was a blow that would of felled a small tree, but the thing barely felt it.

"After... Father. Fuck after Father. He... first." The one that held her started to walk toward the balcony. Talia intensified her struggle, but the creature was unfazed. "Get bags. Make look like girl go. Push car in water. No one find."

Go? They were going to make it look like she disappeared? No one would look for her. Where were these things taking her? Who was this Father they spoke of? She fought harder. The fat hand on her mouth

moved slightly, providing a target for Talia to sink her teeth into. He tasted terrible, but it seemed like it was the one place on its body that was tender, because the thing bellowed and dropped her,

Talia landed on her hands and knees, but was up again in a flash. She screamed and ran towards the balcony, and freedom. She had just made it to the railing when a blow to her head made her world explode into darkness.

The wood was so silent, not even a sparrow sang. It was as if it was waiting. Several moments passed, but no animal stirred. They knew what was coming.

With a loud howl and a crash of light, the timevoid appeared. Leaves and small debris flew around, creating a vortex of wind and sound. The thundering of hooves was heard and out of the mouth of the void, leapt a black horse and rider. Calion Sáralongë, Prince of the Calen'taur Elves had arrived.

He had been on his way home to Calen'taur when he had sensed a disturbance in the faerie mist on the eastern side of the Elven boundaries. It had happened before, usually when an animal blundered in. The mists were littered with the bones of those unlucky few, but every once in a while it was cause for concern, with a human or faerie getting lost inside. While many of his people wouldn't of bothered, Prince Calion was a careful man. His care for his people was well known. He would check to see if something was wrong.

Calion stretched his long, lithe, muscular body. He was sore from the constant riding, and he looked forward to a long soak in his hotpool when he got home. Once he checked out the disturbance, he could be on his way. "Let us go, Roch'mellon." The horse snorted and

jumped into an easy jog. “When we finish here, it’s a nice stable full of oats and hay for you, my friend.” Since that was something that Roch’mellon always looked forward to, he picked up speed to the boundary.

Just a few minutes later, Calion reached the edge of the faerie mist. Wreathing the entire faerie world, it was a wall that separated the faerie world, from the human one. Humans could not see the mist. Only those with faerie blood could see it, and only a true faerie could pass through the mists. Inside, lived the spirits of all those faerie folk who had died deaths not fitting for faerie. Those who died in treachery, or suicide, by execution or witchcraft. It was a terrifying place for a faerie, but for a non faerie, it was certain death.

Calion slipped from his horse’s back and patted Roch’mellon on the neck. “I will return shortly.” The horse snorted his agreement and wandered off to a patch of grass to graze.

Walking towards the mist, Calion drew his sword from its sheath. The mystical sword *Cyllys*, meaning honor in the Elvish tongue, glowed magically as it sang its name aloud. Pointing the sword at the mist, Calion watched as a opening appeared in the swirling haze. Shielding himself with his own magic, he stepped inside.

It was a long time later when he stepped back out, his once smiling face now tense with worry. He whistled and when Roch’mellon ambled over he vaulted onto his back. “Sorry, boy,” he stated, his knees urging the horse into a fast gallop. “We have trouble.”

Once in the mist, Calion had easily picked up the trail of what had caused the disturbance. He had become immediately more cautious when he discovered Orc sign. Orcs were the elves natural enemy in the

faerie world. While centuries ago, a truce had been declared between the two, there was still much hatred and mistrust between the two races. The elves regularly patrolled the border between the two lands, just to make sure the Orcs did not breach the elven kingdom. Now, to find that they had crossed into the human world, made Calion tense with worry.

Using his senses, he had followed the trail left by the two Orcs. He noted the spot where they had entered the human world. Without leaving the mist, he’d trailed along its edge until he found where the Orcs had reentered the faerie realm, but what had disturbed him most was that they hadn’t returned alone. It was bad enough when a faerie traveled into the human world, but to bring one back, a female human no less. That went against everything that was believed in.

Why had they gone against all that was written, and done so? What did they want with the human? Calion clucked to Roch’mellon to go faster. He was very afraid he knew what they would do to a defenseless female, human or not.

Talia woke slowly, wondering why her head was pounding. There was an awful taste in her mouth, as if she had vomited and forgotten to brush her teeth. She moaned, moving her head slightly to see how bad it was. A rumbling of voices stopped her dead, as the memory of what happened to her raced back. Cautiously, she opened her eyes, and almost recoiled, whimpering, at what she saw. She was in what she thought must be a dungeon. It was dreary and dark, with the only light coming from huge twisted candles that were placed all around the room. There were no decorations, no color, just weapons of all sort hanging on the walls. When Talia

looked closer, she cringed when she saw blood still congealed on one of the axes. There was only one door, which was barred, and the only windows were at least forty feet up the walls. The same smell that she associated with the creatures who had taken her, permeated the room, making her gag. Her eyes swept the room and to her horror, she saw her two captors sitting at a large table. They were sitting with a third, larger creature who was stuffing his ugly face with the carcass of something she didn't recognize. There were others in the room, sitting at smaller tables with less food, but they were all just as hideous to look at.

Looking up, Talia noticed that the reason her arms hurt were that they were bound tightly over her head. She tugged, but the knots held tight. She bit her lip, trying to beat down the fear that threatened to overwhelm her. She wasn't going anywhere this way, she'd have to figure something else out. As she took stock of herself, she noticed that for the most part, she was unharmed, only one strap of her long nightgown slightly torn. Apparently, the "Father" hadn't touched her yet. A sweet feeling of relief coursed through her body. She wasn't sure how much longer she'd be lucky, but for now, she was untouched.

Talia watched as the creatures, she wasn't sure what they were yet, argued among themselves. They had no table manners, often reaching into one another's plate to steal food. The three sitting at the head table, were arguing about her. She couldn't hear all their words, nor could she understand them, but the way they kept glancing up at her, made her feel like she was going to be desert.

Calion followed the Orc sign out of the Elven forest and into the swampland that

was considered their territory. He recognized where they were going now. He'd been this way before, tracking his enemy. He felt his adrenaline pumping, his magic jumped to the surface, ready to be released. When he came to the edge of a twisted swamp, he dismounted, leaving Roch'mellon to hide. "Be safe, my friend. I will find you when needed." When he slapped the steed on the rump to send him off, he noticed that a spot on his left arm was burning. He rubbed it absently.

Calion crept along the tree line, keeping himself in the shadows of the contorted, deformed trees that outlined the swamp that the Orcs castle sat next to. Orcs were not the smartest of creatures, but what they lacked in brain, they made up in guile and bulk.

They very rarely posted sentries, just because they refused to believe anyone would dare to enter their domain. Calion slunk along the side of the castle. Looking up he saw the windows high overhead. Taking his bow from his shoulders, he grasped the string with both hands and closing his eyes, he cast a quick spell. When his eyes opened he was holding a length of rope, stiff at one end, and long enough to reach the window. Placing the stiff end in the bow, Calion took aim and with the skill that had made him a hero in battle, the rope arrow silently sped through the open window and wrapped itself around a column just inside. Slinging his bow back over his shoulders, he grabbed the rope between his hands and walked quickly up the side of the castle wall.

Climbing quietly inside the window, Calion hid in the shadows. As his eyes adjusted to the murky darkness, he could hear the Orcs eating down below. He wrinkled his nose at the disgusting smell of the beasts, but edged out further onto the sill to look

underneath. Frowning, he rubbed at his smarting arm again. He must of stumbled into a toxic plant of some type.

The room was full of Orcs, with Udaogong, the Orc king sitting at the head table with his sons, Braduk and Modak. It looked as if the meal was almost finished. Calion hoped that they would take enough time eating so that he could find and save the female. If most of the clan was here, then he would be free to... a sudden movement caught his attention and he shifted to the right of the pillar. He swore silently.

There to the left of the king's table was the human, tied to the wall, her hands uncomfortably stretched over her head. She was slender, but her curves were definitely female. Her long blond hair covered most of her face. She struggled against her bonds, and Calion swore again under his breath, getting to her now would be near to impossible. He looked around the room, searching for ideas.

The natives are getting restless, Talia thought to herself as she pulled against her ropes. Under her eyelashes she watched as the older creature at the table finished his drink and slammed his goblet down. The whole table jumped beneath his hand. He got to his feet and lumbered over to her. His stench was even more revolting than the others, and Talia cringed away from him. Grunting, the beast ran his leathery hand down her arm. She pulled away from him, but he laughed at her, and grabbed her arm again.

"I will fuck you, human," the thing said, drool running down one fat cheek. The other creatures laughed, and punched each other.

"Let me go," Talia cried, twisting her body away. "Why are you doing this?"

The creature fondled himself, and chortled thickly. "You are Chosen. We not let happen. So I fuck... not him."

Talia was staring at him in horror. What was he talking about? Who did he mean? She thought back to the few boys she had dated over the last months. There hadn't been one she'd let get near her panties. "Please, you've got the wrong person. Let me go!"

The monster laughed harder and grabbed at her. "Fuck you, now!" With one hand he reached down and opened the fastening of his pants and lifted out his swollen cock and rubbed it against her. Talia screamed, trying to twist away from him. His penis was huge, over twelve inches long and as big around as her upper arms. It was a grayish green, with blue veins popping out all over it and a green mushroom shaped head. She hadn't thought anything could smell worse than his breath, but she had been wrong. He rubbed at her again, and began to lift the hem of the thin nightgown. He was going to rape her right here! In front of all of them! Talia fought harder, kicking at him with her strong legs, and managed to connect one dead in his groin.

The beast howled in pain, and releasing her, backhanded Talia across the face. She could feel the blood spurt in her mouth as her vision grayed. The creature reached out his hand again to grab her body.

Swoosh! Talia felt something fly by her and bury itself in the hand of the monster. His roar of pain almost deafened her. The creature let her go, and backed away holding his wounded hand. Talia looked in amazement at the arrow that protruded from it. Where had that come from? She could hear the screaming of the other things as they drew their weapons and looked around them for an assailant. Suddenly, the room filled

with a thick, sweet smelling fog, so dense, Talia could no longer see the monster in front of her.

She was brave, for a human. Calion had been as disgusted as she, when Udaogong had pressed his filthy cock against her. Instead of mewling in fear, and fainting as he had expected a female human to do, she had fought back, giving Udaogong a good kick in the mansack, and distracting the Orc enough so that Calion could act. As soon as his arrow had struck the Orc, the elf had taken the rope arrow, and shot it into the ceiling. He closed his eyes and muttered an incantation. Fog, smelling of the *baroli* flower, poison to the Orcs, flowed into the room. When it was thick enough to hide his actions, Calion moved, leaping off the ledge and swinging down to where the human stood tied to the wall. He landed right in front of her.

Talia almost screamed when the man appeared. She pressed herself back against the wall, and watched as he hooked the rope over his arm and turned to her.

Calion stared at the female for a long moment, shock rendering him speechless. He had never seen a human before, but even compared to an elven female, she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, even bloody and bruised as she was. His body warmed in a quick rush that had all the blood pounding to his groin. Just looking at her made his magic sing. What was happening to him?

He could see her fear, and he wanted to reach out and pull her against him to comfort her, but he was certain she wouldn't accept his touch, so soon after almost being raped by Udaogong. Something moved inside him when she cringed away from him, but he ignored it, and pulling out his dagger,

he cut the ropes above her head.

Talia's arms fell down, the blood rushing back into them making her eyes tear in pain. The tall man seized her arms and rubbed them, wanting to help, but then dropped them with a curse. He pushed back his sleeve to reveal an angry welt on his arm. He stared at it for a moment, before he shook his head, and then began rubbing her arms again.

Talia could hear the choking cries of the beasts around her as the fog sent them to their knees, but the sweet smell didn't hurt her. She bit her lip to keep back a cry of pain as feeling began to return to her hands, and as if he knew it, he raised his head and looked straight at her.

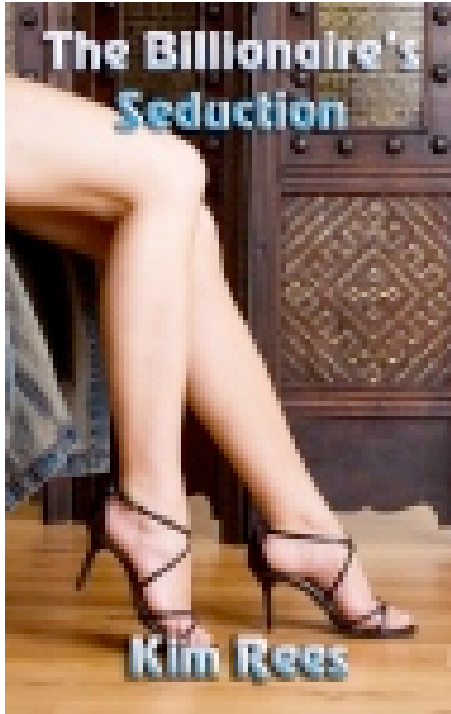
He was classically handsome, with strong features and firm sensuous lips. His coal black hair reached midway down his back, and was held back from his forceful face by two braids tied by a leather thong. She blinked in shock when she noticed the pointed ears and eyebrows, then swallowed hard, as she met tilted eyes that were a piercing sapphire blue.

"Who are you?" she whispered, unable to look away from the heat she saw in his eyes.

When Calion saw her confusion, he dropped her arms, and stepped back from her. He chastised himself for his thoughts. It was forbidden for an elven man to even think about a human female, even if he had saved her life. He willed his body to cool down and then held out his hand. "I am Calion of the Elves. Come with me if you wish to live."

The Billionaire's Seduction

Kim Rees



Contemporary Romance

Category

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Author Bio

Kim Rees started writing when she was ten years old. That's... okay we'll not go into how long ago that was now. But in 2002, she gave in and started writing romance... well... sex. To her surprise, it came naturally. Yes. Please groan at the pun.

Kim lives halfway between Strawberry Fields and Penny Lane. Honest. Just *please* don't ask her to sing.

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[Kim's Website](#)

Blurb

To protect her brother, avenge her father and save herself, Emily Harding must seduce her boss, Jake Penvenhan. Emily knew he preferred his women tall and stick thin and she was neither... but then she saw the flare of desire in his dark gaze. Jake wanted... her. That should have been Emily's first warning.

And Jake Penvenhan thought he knew exactly who Emily was. A thief. A spy. A woman that was a means to an end. Nothing more. Emily Harding would certainly never touch his heart. That idea was insane. He had loved one. Never again.

The past stood dangerously between them and because of this, they were both unprepared for the fire, the passion and ultimately the love that would consume them

Excerpt

Stupid, stupid high heels. Damn it, she was not going to fall flat on her face.

Emily straightened, all too aware that her bust stuck out one way and her behind the other. She would have laughed at herself if the situation weren't so serious. Trembling fingers tightened on the banister rail as she negotiated another thickly carpeted stair. Her chin lifted. She froze.

An ornate, full length mirror stretched before her. Heat bled into her face as she met the gaze of the stranger she had become. Her hair, normally swept back into a neat, plain chignon, fell loose and heavy around her bared shoulders. The soft glow of the lights picked out a shimmer of gold in the deep chestnut. She had spent the afternoon in a salon. Her. Plain little Emily Harding in a beauty parlour. It was insane... Make-up masked her skin, darkened her eyes, made her lips look huge, red and ridiculously pouty.

And she wasn't even thinking about the dress.

"This is never going to work," Emily murmured, watching her alien mouth move.

She took another cautious step and, despite her best intentions, her gaze slid over the clinging scrap of red silk she wore. Emily knew she was short, knew that her figure was a little too round to be fashionable. "Pleasantly plump" had been her brother's attempt at being kind. She pointed out that he made her sound like an over-stuffed chicken. Bobby had laughed.

"And it's all his bloody fault," she muttered. Emily winced at the way the hem slipped farther up her sheer thigh as she attempted another step in her dangerously high and strappy sandals. She let out a slow breath. She couldn't think like that. The problem was Richard... No. Not going there. Bobby. Bobby was in trouble, serious trouble and she had to help him. "But this is the last time. Absolutely, the last time."

Finally turning away from the disturbing mirror, Emily made hurried down the great sweep of stairs. A nervous foot stepped on to the new problem of slippery smooth marble. "How do others do it?" she said, her other foot joining the first. She saw women at work practically on stilts, but walking with a poise and confidence that totally eluded her. Emily's fingers released the safety of the banister and she practiced standing without support. "Okay, all right. Walking. Been doing that since I was twelve months old."

She could hear the murmur of voices and headed toward it on light feet. Her body wiggled. It actually wiggled. "He's just going to laugh. Fall on the floor and laugh."

She stood at the open doors and all humor left her. Emily's palms itched and she curled in her newly painted nails. Nerves tightened her stomach. This was a stupid idea. But she was desperate. And it was far, far too late to stop now. When this was over she would have no job, and hopefully would not be going to prison... but Bobby would be safe. And at that moment, that was her most

important consideration.

Emily edged into the room. Executives milled about, chatting, laughing, drinking very expensive champagne. No one there to recognize who she really was. She pushed down the thought of one man in particular. A vile old man... No. He wasn't in the room.

A waiter stopped and a smile pulled briefly at his young face. She slipped a fluted glass from the polished tray and gripped it tight in her hand. Murmuring a thank you, she moved away from his sharp gaze.

Her eyes trailed over the opulent room, noting the priceless paintings, the beauty of the restored neo-classical décor. She remembered to breathe. The plan seemed more ridiculous than ever. Throwing herself at her boss in the hope of gaining access to information. What the hell was Richard thinking? Emily stared down at the crystal glass in her nerveless fingers, watching the rush of bubbles. Jake Penvenhan. A man whose reputation with women was legendary; a man who liked them tall and stick thin.

Yes, what had possessed Richard? Her gaze darted back to the safety the open doors offered. Leaving, hiding in her assigned changing room. That was a real plan. She would just have to find some other way to get what Bobby needed-

"Emily Harding?"

Her head snapped back. "Mr Lucas. Hello." A plastic smile fastened onto her mouth. Anton Lucas' pale eyes slid from her face and lingered on her too generous cleavage. Her skin itched and she resisted the urge to point out that the breasts came with her attached.

"I almost didn't recognise you."

"Really?"

His attention shifted with obvious reluctance back to her face. Emily did not like the hot gleam of his interest. Anton Lucas also had a reputation on the thirtieth

floor. And it wasn't a good one. "You've not attended one of the Penvenhan functions before?"

"First time," she said brightly. "I'm standing in for Kate. Something went horribly wrong with her diary system. She had to stay in the office." Emily shrugged and instantly wished she hadn't as Anton's mouth curled into a smile. She wanted to get away. His gaze was peeling off what little clothing she wore. Her glass. When had she emptied it? But at least it was an excuse. Emily waved a manicured finger. "I just have to get..." She edged away.

And then her words dried. Jake Penvenhan, standing in the doorway. Frowning. At her.

Emily was a very junior assistant to his PA, Kate Macguire, so her image of Jake Penvenhan had been limited to his occasional sweep past her cluttered desk. Now he stood only a few feet away and her view was all too clear. Tall, stretching inches over six foot; lithe, elegant, in a dinner suit that screamed its expense. A very male face, all hard planes and angles. She knew the stories about him; about the numerous women in his life. Richard had assured her that one more woman...

Dark, dark eyes trapped her and any hope of her plan succeeding just melted away. He was devastating. Emily felt her heart hammering in her chest, the intense burn of color in her face. She knew she was just a short, dumpy, naïve woman in a too small frock. And, damn it, she should not be reacting to him that way. Not after what his family had done to hers. The hard glitter in his eyes mocked her. He knew. He knew. Emily's gaze dropped.

She was a complete and utter idiot.

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This excerpt is unedited and may differ from the published version.

Border Lair

Bianca D'arc



Fantasy Erotic Romance
Category
Samhain Publishing
[Available now](#)

Author Bio

A life-long martial arts enthusiast, Bianca D'Arc enjoys a number of hobbies and interests that keep her busy and entertained such as playing the guitar, shopping, painting, shopping, skiing, shopping, road trips, and did we say... um... shopping? A bargain hunter through and through, Bianca loves the thrill of the hunt for that excellent price on quality items, though she's hardly a fashionista. She likes nothing better than curling up by the fire with a good book, or better yet, by the computer, writing a good book.

Bianca loves to hear from readers and can be reached through her chat group. Details are on her website at: <http://biancadarc.com> . She also has a Newsletter Only group, where you can receive news and announcements about her books, without any chatter. You can subscribe to the newsletter by sending a blank email to: BiancaDArcNews-subscribe@yahoogroups.com .

Blurb

A chance meeting with a young male dragon seals the fate of one adventurous female poacher. The dragon's partner, a ruggedly handsome knight named Gareth, takes one look at the shapely poacher and decides to do a little *poaching* of his own. Sir Gareth not only seduces her, but falls deeply in love with the girl who is not only unafraid of dragons, but able to hear their silent speech, which is a rarity. He wants her for his mate, but mating with a knight is no simple thing. To accept a knight, a woman must also accept the dragon, the dragon's mate... and her knight too.

She is at first shocked, then enticed by the lusty life in the Lair. War is in the making and only the knights and dragons have a chance at ending it before it destroys their land and their lives. But there's nothing a knight enjoys more than a noble quest and winning the heart and trust of a maiden is the noblest quest of all.

Excerpt

She and her mother lived there, under the thick cover of trees, and had for many years. It was their haven, their home. Nothing as magical as this had ever happened to Belora, living isolated in the forest, and she decided to enjoy this moment out of time, flying high above the world. She would likely

never have the chance again, for it was rare that a dragon transport a human that was not his knight partner. She knew that from the stories and legends the old ones told of knights and dragons. Even her mother, who had been friends with a dragon in her youth, had never flown with one. It was a rare and magical experience

Do you like the view, little one?

“It’s beautiful!” Belora had to shout to be heard over the racing wind.

The dragon chuckled smokily, thoughtfully directing the stream of smoke out behind him and away from her. She realized from the gesture that he was well used to being around humans and carrying them as he flew, but she guessed he didn’t carry too many in his claws. The legends all said knights rode on the backs of their dragon partners.

“Where are you taking me?” She pulled her eyes from the gorgeous vista long enough to question her predicament. If he was taking her to a tribunal, she was in big trouble. She’d rather know now if she would be facing arrest when they landed.

Fear not, little one. I said you had a good case for the stag. We will let the knight decide.

They cruised over the edge of the large mountain lake. The water sparkled

below as the dragon dropped a bit lower. A moist breeze off the water teased her senses.

"What knight?"

Rather than calming her fears, the news that there was a knight in the area only made things worse. She’d been poaching, plain and simple. Mere peasants weren’t allowed to kill the deer to feed their families, but the dragons were welcome to them as a snack at any time.

That knight, the dragon thought back at her. It took her a moment to understand his meaning, but when she looked down and just ahead of them, she saw a sleek male body cutting through the waters of the lake. He swam like a fish or like one of the great sea creatures she had heard stories about. She found herself distracted by the sun gleaming off the powerful muscles of his arms as he sliced through the water, heading for shore. Something about the man’s hard body pulled at her most feminine core though she had never felt the like before.

I am Kelvan and that’s Gareth, my knight.

Her eyes followed the man cutting through the waters below. She’d never seen a dragon in person before, much less a knight. Surprisingly, the hard-muscled man intrigued her even more than the amazing blue-green dragon who spoke so effortlessly in her mind.

The thought gave her pause. She'd met any number of men from the nearby village and never had such a reaction to the mere sight of one, but there was something about this man. Without even seeing his face clearly, she felt something deep down inside her stir to life. It was as if something in him called out to her – to the deep parts of her femininity that had never been awakened before. She wanted to know this man. She wanted to see him smile, and she wanted to know what those shining muscles would feel like under her hands.

The thought shocked her. Shocked, and excited her, if she were being honest. The thought of his strong arms wrapped around her made her insides quiver. The thought of his lips trailing over her untried body caused moisture to blossom between her thighs. She felt desire for this unknown man, the likes of which she had never experienced, but oh, how she wanted to experience it now!

The scandalous thought roused her from her contemplation of the handsome man. *He was just a knight*, she tried to tell herself. She didn't even know him. He would probably be old and unattractive when she finally saw his face clearly. No matter what she tried to tell herself, though, she kept looking back at the man cutting through the water so effortlessly, as if drawn. She tried to

shake off the almost magnetic pull the man had on her, but it was surprisingly hard.

Self's Blossom

David Russell



Blurb

Self Blossom is a romantic, erotic tale of a vivid portrayal of the quest for the inner truth, empowerment and sexual liberation of Selene, a woman searching for primeval abandon and reckless adventure. Intelligent, a

university graduate and a successful careerist, Selene became emotionally scarred by unhappy relationships. Riled and taunted through the years by her former college roommate Janice, Selene gave in to the long term desire to 'get one back' at Janice by having a passionate holiday encounter.

Immediately drawn to the sea and seduced by it's brutal yet sensual waves, Selene seduces a young boy on a deserted beach. Once she meets the mature and powerful Hudson, Selene finally begins to claim her sensual destiny. Through a slow process, accentuated by Selene's shyness, introspection and circumspection, she embarks on a long and elaborate interplay of leading on and rejection. The volcanic passion builds until there is a blazing row. A possible drowning, the final ritual undressing at long last, leads to the ultimate flowering of the woman Selene was meant to be.

Excerpt

Here, she was on a beach,
pure and simple. Now the sea
breathed heavily,
whispering and murmuring to
her. It was returning her
stare, speaking to her. It
was the spirit of love,
beckoning her with a
pulsing, sinewy body.

In all its lines, shades,
and fleeting forms, Selene
saw the essence of pure
beauty, all grace of form,
flesh, limb and feature. It
was in one, all the
lovers of whom she could
possibly dream, conflated
into one elemental ideal.
He, pure love in soul, bade
her to enter his domain and
make it hers.

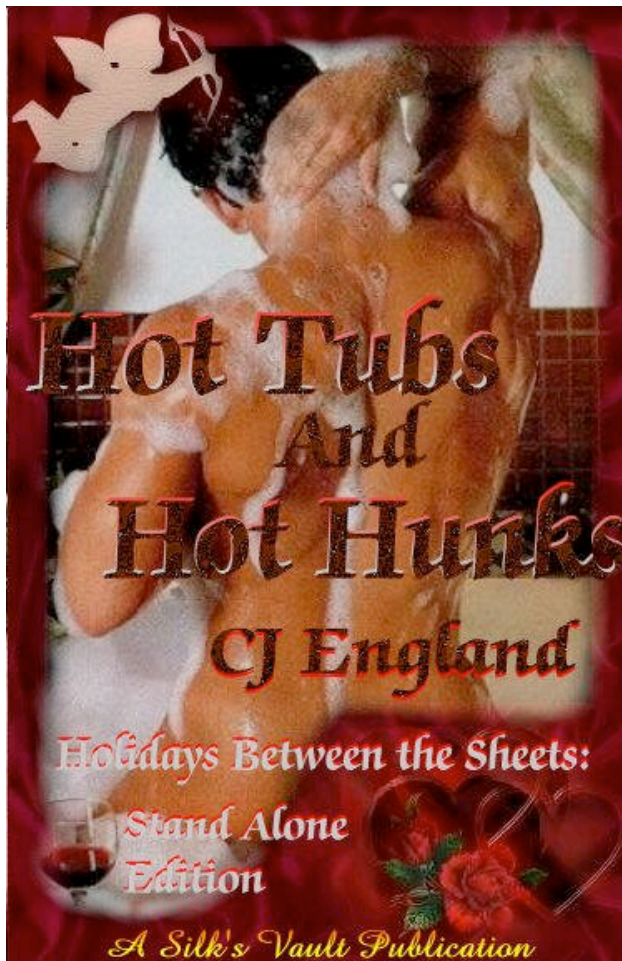
His arms moved her hands to
unclasp, unbutton, and
unzip . . . the blossom
emerged. The sun became the
eye of all that was not
earth, and Selene loved
fully, though the pallor of
her skin left her
momentarily abashed.

At first she lay in the
tide's path, the top of her
head at its most extreme
mark. The sand bank made a
soft bed. The sea lover
smoothly caressed her

calves, thighs, hips,
breasts, shoulders, and
cheeks before retreating
to pause in his mossy
pinnacles. Three times this
action was repeated,
and then Selene stood up,
wading in with arms
outstretched. Her arms were
linked, as she stood up to
her neck in the saline flow.
The balls and heels of
her feet wobbled, slithering
on the moss. With the next
wave, she lost her balance
—her breath prepared in
unison with the hissing
around her. She threw
her head back, once again
horizontal, and launched
into a backstroke, sweeping
and circling. She parted her
legs wide with each thrust
of motion, each
sweep of self-propulsion
pushing out to answer the
cavernous currents of his
passion. Seven circles gave
her a delicious, warm bliss
—then the sea lover,
well pleased, carried her
back to a near-dry bed.
Aching and contented,
Selene dozed a while.

Hot Tubs and Hot Hunks

C.J. England



E-book / Erotic Romance / Contemporary

**Stunner / Short Story
Silk's Vault Publishing**

Author Bio

CJ England credits her passion for writing to her second grade sweetheart, Steven, a blond haired cutie with dimples, who

dumped her for a girl who could swing on the monkey bars. She wrote her first story about love and loss after that tragic episode, and never looked back.

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Blurb

We all know that shopping can taking the sting out of a bad breakup. But can buying a hot tub, and then accepting a different kind of service from the hot hunk who comes to install it, make a girl's Valentine wishes come true?

When Mandy and Sawyer meet, one touch causes spontaneous combustion, and Sawyer immediately sets his sights on more than just a hot tub install. But add to that an ex-boyfriend, a mischievous ferret, and two people who are just a tad commitment shy, and you have a story that will show you what happens when you take a chance on a hot and unexpected love.

Excerpt

Prologue

People who celebrated Valentine's Day were all wet. Or Mandy would be, as soon as she signed the check for the Valentine's present she'd bought herself. She chewed on her pen and wondered for the umpteenth time if she'd gone nuts. Could she afford it? Yeah...she had the money. She just wouldn't buy that new Valentine's outfit that she'd been looking at. What would she need

with a new outfit, anyway? She wouldn't be going anywhere on Valentine's, especially since she'd just broken up with her boyfriend only two weeks before the special day.

Mandy shook her head. That's why she was here in the first place. She had gone out to buy herself something for Valentine's Day, since she sure as hell wouldn't be getting anything this year from a man. Steven had dumped her. Said he needed... "space". Mandy had found out what that meant when he started dating Tammy, her aerobics instructor, the very next day. What pissed her off the most was that she didn't feel bad about it. Which meant that she'd squandered six months on a guy that she should never have been with in the first place. If there was anything that Mandy hated... it was waste.

So, to make herself feel better, she was buying something she'd always wanted. Mandy was going to spend her Valentine's Day... hot and wet.

She bought herself a hot tub.

Sawyer watched the woman swing out through the doors. He hadn't gotten a good look at her face, but the rear view was damn fine. Too bad he'd been at lunch when she'd come in. He'd of like to have gotten a better look at her. He walked over to Jimmy, who was filling out the paperwork. "Did she buy anything?"

Jimmy jumped and swung around to look at Sawyer. "Yeah... she bought the Model #3000. I tried to talk her into a #4000, but she didn't go for it." He straightened the papers. "Wants it installed by the 14th. Said it was a Valentine's gift to herself."

Sawyer grinned, his wheels turning. *A gift for herself, huh?* Maybe the lady was unattached. He grabbed the paperwork out of

Jimmy's hands and read her name. "Mandy Hinshaw. Hmmm... I'll take the install on this one. Put the work order in my box."

Jimmy goggled at him. "You? You do an install?"

Sawyer laughed. "I haven't forgotten how." He stared out the door, remembering the long legs and fine ass of Ms. Mandy Hinshaw. "And this is a perfect time to start back up again."

Chapter 1

Mandy was sitting at the computer when the doorbell rang. She swore out loud and glanced at herself in the mirror. Her face was covered with a blue facial mask, and her hair was a messy red pile at the top of her head. "Maybe they'll just go away," she said as she stared at the door.

The doorbell rang again, followed by a loud pounding that made Mandy jump. Whoever was at the door meant business. "Oh well. Mandy made a face at herself and felt the blue gunk on her face start to crack. "It's probably another salesman. If anything, this will scare him away."

She walked to the entry, just as another loud knock made the door rattle. "I'm coming," she shouted. "Geesh, it better be important with all the noise you're making." Mandy threw open the door and found herself staring into the most gorgeous hazel eyes she had ever seen.

Lord...he was hot. His face had an outdoor tan with chiseled features and a nose that was slightly crooked, like it had been broken. He had firm sensuous lips that made Mandy want to bite them, but even better was the faint cleft in his chin, barely seen because of the heavy stubble that covered it. Mandy

was a sucker for dimples. He wore his dirty blond hair a little long, easy for a gal to grab a handful when necessary. And those eyes... oh... my... god. Fringed with long thick lashes, his eyes were a rainbow of green, brown and gold.

Tearing her eyes away from his face, Mandy checked out the rest of him and hoped that she didn't start drooling. Long and lanky, he stood about 6' 2" of hard male flesh. Even under his flannel shirt she could see the muscles in his arms. His tight jeans showed off everything to its best advantage, especially the bulge at his crotch.

His crotch? Mandy jerked her eyes back up to his that were now dancing with amusement. Suddenly she remembered the facial. Closing her eyes, she almost groaned. Great... the hottest man she'd ever seen shows up at HER house, and she looked like a big blue Smurf with really bad skin. Opening her eyes again, she smiled sickly, feeling the mask crack even more. "Errr... I... Can I... help you?"

It was all Sawyer could do to keep from laughing. Here she was... the woman he'd been thinking about for days, and she looked like a dried up blueberry whose head was on fire. At least her fine body could still be seen. She was wearing tight green stretch leggings and an off the shoulder t-shirt that was snug from too many washings. Saliva pooled in his mouth when he saw she wasn't wearing a bra. Her perky nipples pressed against the worn fabric. Sawyer swallowed hard.

"I'm here with your delivery," he managed. "Where do you want it?"

Mandy stared at him in confusion, thinking of the many ways she'd like to interpret that statement. "What delivery?"

Sawyer frowned. "I'm from Hedonistic Hot Tubs. I'm here to set up the

hot tub you ordered."

Mandy poked out her lower lip as she thought, making Sawyer wonder what was wrong with him, because he wanted to chew on that lip, blue gunk and all.

"It's not supposed to be delivered until the 12th. You're early."

Raising a blond eyebrow, Sawyer looked at her. Today is February 12th."

Many shook her head. "No it's not. I specifically set it up for Saturday the 12th, 'cause I wouldn't be working. This is only Wednesday."

Sawyer rubbed his chin. "I don't know what to tell you...except today is the 12th."

"Wait a minute..." Turning, she disappeared into the house.

Sawyer rocked back on his heels. Okay, so this wasn't going quite the way he'd planned. First, he couldn't see her face because of the goop, and now he was having doubts about her intelligence.

"Here's my calendar," he heard her mutter from inside the house, "and today is Wednesday... Ohhh baby... did I wake you up?"

Sawyer's heart dropped. Her voice had gone low and loving, the way a woman's did when she talked to a sweetheart. Damn it... she was involved.

"Go on back to bed. I won't be long. I just have to clear this up and then I'll get you some food... okay?"

Sawyer couldn't hear any reply, even though he leaned as far in the doorway as he could. He pulled himself upright when she came swinging back around the corner.

“Here... see? It is Wednesday!” She shoved a small calendar at him. “You’re early.”

Taking it, Sawyer closed his eyes and counted for patience. *Nice ass and no brain*, he thought. Handing it back to her, he tore off the top three pages of the day-by-day calendar. “Now... it’s Saturday.”

Mandy stared down at the daily pages that the guy had ripped off. She felt her cheeks get warm. She’d done it again. Forgotten to tear off the days. Could she look any more foolish to him? First the mask, and now... “Oh.”

Rolling his eyes, Sawyer motioned to the waiting truck. “Can we get started? Or is this the wrong address too?”

Mandy narrowed her eyes. “Don’t be a smart ass. I’ve just been a little distracted lately.” She sighed. “I guess this means I missed CSI again. Damn.”

“It was a repeat.” Sawyer was surprised that the ditsy redhead would watch such a show. He’d expected maybe MTV or the shopping channel.

Mandy brightened. “Cool.” Then her lip poked out again. “But I’m still late on my bills.” She looked up at Sawyer who was standing there patiently. “Sorry.”

Sawyer couldn’t help but grin. She may not be the sharpest tool in the shed, but even with the gunk, there was something about her. “If you show me where to put it, we can get started.”

When Mandy smiled ruefully at him, a large piece of her face broke off and fell onto the calendar. She heard the delivery guy choke back a laugh and she sighed. So much for seducing him, he’d probably die laughing first.

Chuckling, Sawyer said, “Why don’t you just point the way and we’ll get it moved to the back. You can... ahhh... fix your

face.”

Wishing she could disappear, Mandy pointed around the side of the house. “That’s the easiest way. Then around to the back deck.”

“Great.” Sawyer moved toward the truck, but some little devil inside him made him turn back around. “Ms. Hinshaw?”

Mandy stopped in the process of closing the door. “Yes?”

“You may want to check your TV when you go back inside.”

“My TV?”

Sawyer couldn’t help the grin that broke out on his face. “Yeah, they’re probably looking for the escaped Smurfette as we speak.”

Mandy’s eyes widened as she watched him walk away, noting that his ass was as fine as the rest of him. She gave a little giggle, and then a laugh. Giving up, she leaned back on the doorjamb and howled. She’d been right. She did look like a Smurf.

It was an hour later when Mandy peered through the large window that looked out on her deck. She’d taken the time to shower, as well as fixing herself up a bit. No point in letting him continue to believe she was blue and brainless. Now, dressed in a tight green pantsuit that matched her eyes, she felt better about facing him again.

She could see the hot guy and another man muscling the tub into position on the deck. Her body grew warm as she watched the guy take off his flannel shirt. Wearing only a tight brown t-shirt underneath, Mandy could see every muscle in his upper body ripple with the effort of moving the tub.

As they positioned it on her deck, Mandy thought about how wonderful it would feel when she slid into the water for the first time. She imagined herself walking outside, wrapped only in a towel, a glass of wine in her hand. In her dream she saw herself slip out of the towel and ease into the hot water. She slid her hands over her slick body, wishing that there were someone else to touch her that way.

When the delivery guy's face came into her mind, her eyes popped open. Mandy grinned. She bet his hands would feel just fine. Shaking her head at the fantasy, she looked back outside and gasped. They had finished positioning the tub, but it was in the wrong place.

Sawyer heard the door open and turned his head, but it wasn't a Smurf that walked outside, but a red haired, green-eyed goddess.

Damn, he thought to himself. *She cleans up real good.* Sawyer gazed at her creamy skin and full red lips, and then almost groaned out loud as he saw the curvy body displayed in the tight catsuit. The zipper was pulled down enough to show a generous amount of cleavage. Her long red hair cascaded wildly over her shoulders, and when she got closer, he was charmed to see a smattering of freckles across otherwise perfect skin. The only thing that marred her features was the scowl on her face.

"It's in the wrong place." Mandy walked up to him, having to tip her head upwards to look at him from her 5'7" height. "It's too far out. I thought I said that I wanted it next to the house."

Sawyer got a whiff of her scent. Soft and feminine, with a hint of musk to it. "Ms. Hinshaw. I wanted to show you something. We can move the tub if you don't like my idea."

Mandy considered him. "Call me Mandy." Sawyer took her hand, feeling heat curl in his stomach when he touched her. "My friends call me Sawyer."

Mandy smiled. Sawyer... She liked that name. "Okay... Sawyer... what do you want to show me?"

"Come over here." He took her to where she'd wanted the tub. "Now imagine you're sitting in your hot tub." He looked down at her as she watched him with wide eyes. "Are you there?"

Mandy giggled. "Yeah."

"Now... look around at the view."

Mandy did so and shrugged her shoulders.

She saw her deck, the house and the sky.

"So?"

"Just wait." He brought her to the outer edge of the deck, and placed her where he thought the tub should go. "Now look again."

Opening her eyes, Mandy gasped. Just moving it out six feet, made all the difference. Now she could see the river and the valley below. "Oh... you're right, this is much better."

"I thought so," Sawyer said smugly.

"But the guy at the store said I should put it by the house, because structurally, it would be safer."

"True... but it wouldn't take much to shore it up. Just a few boards and some cement."

Sawyer's practiced eyes ran over the area.

Mandy frowned. "I wanted it done by Valentine's Day."

Sawyer grinned. It was a quick job, one he could do in a day, but he didn't tell her that. He didn't mind spending the time with her; even knowing she had a guy. "I can do it all. No problem."

Mandy chewed on her lip, making Sawyer's cock twitch. "As long as it will be ready by the morning of the 14th."

Tempting Escape

Heather McVey



Erotic Contemporary Romance

324 Pages

Whiskey Creek Press

[Available Now](#)

Author Bio

Heather McVey was born in Scotland, just outside of Stirling on the first of May 1979. Currently she lives with her ridiculously cute husband of the last seven years in Germany on the angelic Bodensee. Like many writers, Heather was bitten by the writing bug early in life, she wrote her first novel "Under the Red Moon" at the tender age of fourteen. She never finished her second novel "The Dark Youth," which was about a teenage girl who fell in love with a lonely three hundred year old vampire, but then being only sixteen herself at the time Heather had other things to experience like her first kiss, and she definitely had other things on her mind like boys, boys and well yes you guessed it boys.

Throughout the years, Heather's writing remained nothing

more than a pleasant hobby, a way for her to bring the many characters in her head to life. She never considered sending anything for publication, until a year ago, when a family friend convinced her that her books were something which others would enjoy to read. Heather's friend was right, and now, here she is very excited to be a new author. A true romantic at heart, she really hopes her erotic novels add excitement, and bring a lot of pleasure and spice into your life. Heather would love to hear from her readers.

mcvey_hotreads@yahoo.com

[Heather's Website](#)

Blurb

Nurse Shelly Blake needs a man badly. After ditching her cheating ex, and going on her honeymoon to the Maldives alone, she intends to experiment, and indulge in a bit of voyeurism with as many men as possible. Trouble is, since she first tasted Guy Pearson, she can't find a man who scratches the itch in her groin quite the way the handsome blue-eyed diving instructor does. Everything about him is virile and sexy, dark and enticingly dangerous, he arouses her like no other man ever has. She's hot and horny, but she hides her sizzling passion beneath a cool, distant exterior. Scared of being hurt again, the only man Shelly truly wants is the only man she won't allow herself to have.

Guy Pearson, alias chick-magnet to his friends, just can't seem to get the, emerald-eyed blond out of his system. Sex with her is the hottest he's ever had. But when Shelly leaves him, the truth hits him hard. He's in love with her. Guy will stop at nothing to get Shelly's hot body back in his bed. He intends to do whatever it takes to win her heart again, even if he has to leave his paradise island and travel halfway around the world to do it. This time Guy intends to keep her for good, and he won't be taking no for an answer.

Excerpt

October, 2004

London, England

"Why in the world am I really doing this?" Shelly Blake grumbled to herself as she sorted through the clothes that she would take with her on her honeymoon. *I must be mad*, she thought, recalling the times that Ted had cheated on her with other women in the past. She reminded herself, with a determined tilt of her chin, that he had changed recently. *Hadn't he?* Annoyed with herself, she pushed aside the doubts which

rocked her. Of course he'd changed. Why else would she be marrying him?

Just for some reassurance, she glanced at the cream wedding dress, which had belonged to both her grandmother and her mother before her, with its puffed sleeves hanging on the outside door of the wardrobe. She then turned her attention to the pile of clothes before her. She had something new and something old, what else did she need? Ah, that was it, something blue. Picking up a faded pair of blue panties, she shoved them in the old, shabby, brown suitcase sitting on her white bedspread. She snapped the lid shut before the already bursting seams had a chance to protest and spill their load.

What now? she asked herself. Dressed only in a loose-fitting black cardigan, a bottle of red wine in one hand and a glass in the other, she strolled to the window and looked out across the deserted local park. It was a plot of land on the street corner, scattered with trees and holding a thick maze of rosebushes near the centre. There were a few swings, a slide, a seesaw, and three battered animals on springs that bobbed one back and forth drunkenly, until the backside grew too sore to sit on them.

As a little girl, Shelly had loved the park. Later, as a teenager, she'd often sat on her favorite bench and watched the children at play as a form of escape. She felt lonely and unsure, in spite of the fact she was getting married tomorrow. She wasn't sure, if the truth be told, that she wasn't making yet another mistake in a line of many.

As her worried eyes roved over the park, she could have really used the lilting laughter of the children to soothe her, but the ferocious rain thudding against the windowpane had kept even the most rowdy children, along with their watchful mothers, away. From her centrally heated bedroom, she could see that a vicious wind was beginning to pick up outside. It was evident in the thunderous sway of the trees and the clouds, which blew quickly across the laden sky. She sighed wearily and prayed for sunshine come the morrow. With slender fingers, she drew the curtains and lay back on the single bed she had slept in as a child. Next, she picked up the silver-framed picture of Ted that had sat by her bedside for as long as she could remember. Almost shyly, she touched the colored image with her forefinger. He was a handsome man, she decided, her intended, with his remarkable fair hair and grey eyes. He was also a good lover, fantastic in bed, actually.

Shelly could admit to herself if to no one else, that was half the reason why she was marrying him--that and because she loved him, of course. Her thighs clamped and throbbed, remembering the last time they had made love. It had been outside in a sun-drenched cornfield with the sun beating down on their warm, slippery bodies. Just thinking about it now, several X-rated thoughts ran through her mind.

Tonight there would be no lovemaking because it was bad luck to see the bride before the wedding. Shelly didn't believe in traditions, but her mother and the older women in her family were adamant that the customs had to be obeyed. Sipping at her wine, she cursed the foolish traditions under her breath. It annoyed the hell out of her that she couldn't even invite her fiancé over to make love to him; since her pussy was wet and in need of a little release. She sighed, sometimes, well most of the time, the little horny organ between her legs had to be obeyed.

And so it was that she obeyed it now.

Putting aside her glass, Shelly pushed her hand under her panties and gave way to the fantasy building in her mind. It was one that she frequently had; although the time and the location often changed, the muscular, blue-eyed man never did. She creamed her fingers, imagining her dream lover. He would be opposite in looks from Ted--tall, dark, handsome, and maybe just a little bit dangerous. At five foot two, she was small, so her head would barely reach to his chest. He'd have to pick her up to kiss her fully on the mouth. He'd be a big, possessive, protective man ... a man she could lean on. A man who could snap her in two if he so wished it.

Her pussy cried, and her inner muscles contracted tightly against an imaginary penis. Shelly's smile turned mildly wicked, he'd know how to navigate the curves of a woman, particularly her curves. Sometimes he would be a tender, gentle lover with candlelight and soft caresses. At other times, sex with him would be a wild rollercoaster ride that left her sore, tired, and satisfied beyond reason.

Closing her eyes, she decided that he'd start out kissing her softly. His body would be muscled, sleek, and always ready to please her.

Her nipples stiffened in the warm room.

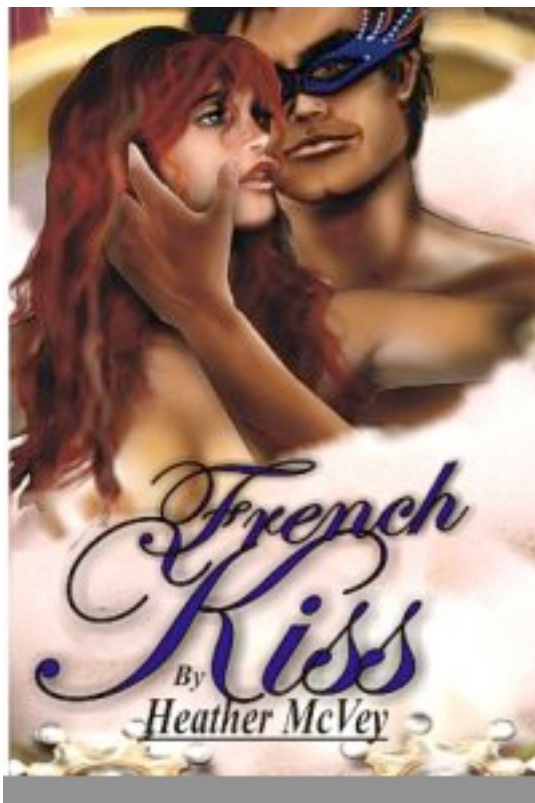
He would be wearing a leather mask and nothing else, holding a whip in one hand and a black velvet blindfold in the other.

In her fantasy, Shelly gasped as his mouth descended and he sucked her nipple in. Both a playful and dominant lover, he pushed her down to the floor and gave her nipple a quick bite, then he switched his attention to the other aching bud. Giving that one just the right amount of suction, he set off a burst of fiery sensation in and around her groin, leaving her body shaking and demanding more.

She skimmed her fingers over the rippling muscles of his wide shoulders ... his chest ... his ridged belly. He used his hands too, sliding his long, callused fingers over her bottom, her back, and the incredibly sensitive spot beneath her chin. And *oh, yesss*. Now he'd found her clit and was rolling it between his forefinger and thumb. *God, yessss*.

French Kiss

Heather McVey



Erotic Contemporary Romance

264 Pages

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Author Bio

Heather McVey was born in Scotland, just outside of Stirling on the first of May 1979. Currently she lives with her ridiculously cute husband of the last seven years in Germany on the angelic Bodensee. Like many writers, Heather was bitten by the writing bug early in life, she wrote her first novel “Under the Red Moon” at the tender age of fourteen. She never finished her second novel “The Dark Youth,” which was about a teenage girl who fell in love with a lonely three hundred year old vampire, but then being only sixteen herself at the time Heather had other things to experience like her first kiss, and she definitely had other

things on her mind like boys, boys and well yes you guessed it boys.

Throughout the years, Heather’s writing remained nothing more than a pleasant hobby, a way for her to bring the many characters in her head to life. She never considered sending anything for publication, until a year ago, when a family friend convinced her that her books were something which others would enjoy to read. Heather’s friend was right, and now, here she is very excited to be a new author. A true romantic at heart, she really hopes her erotic novels add excitement, and bring a lot of pleasure and spice into your life. Heather would love to hear from her readers.

Blurb

Emotional wreck, Heather Hunt living with the cruel burden of a car wreck that wasn’t her fault where her little sister lost her life is in desperate need of a man. Ridden with guilt, Heather hasn’t had sex for so long she’s almost forgotten what its like. When Pierre the gorgeous, stranger with the honey-tipped French accent turns up on her doorstep, she realizes for the first time that her trusty vibrator and her internet sex chat room are no longer enough. Heather needs something more to be satisfied—preferably Pierre with that tall, dark, mouthwatering body of his, and those come-to-bed chocolate-brown eyes.

Pierre du Pardue, a know it all big-time architect, with his own multimillion dollar company has many women in his life, both paid and unpaid for. He doesn’t really need another one, or so he thought. It seems however that his horny, troublesome body has other ideas, for ever since he clapped eyes on the Scottish redhead, with the fiery temperament he’s wanted to break through her cold surface defenses, discover the sultry woman he’s sure lies within and ultimately tame her. Can he? He’s willing to die trying.

Excerpt

Glasgow, Scotland
December 2005

"Why in the world did I really come here?" Heather Hunt grumbled to herself as she flipped through a catalogue from a DIY store containing paint samples—one of which she hoped to brighten up her new home with. *Home*, her tawny brows drew together into a frown. That was false. You couldn't really call a two-roomed apartment, which hardly had space enough to swing a cat, a home, now could you? *I must be off my friggin' head*, she thought, while her eyes scanned the room with the wallpaper, which at one time would have been white, but was now grey, peeling in places. Her small upturned nose crinkled at the faint trace of dampness hanging in the frigid air as she furiously rubbed at her goose-pebbled legs.

When her eyes fell on the dusty mirror hanging above the tiled mantelpiece, she froze. Sitting as still as a statue, she watched as the color drained from her face. Heather grimaced at her reflection. Even distorted, it was a pretty face, wide of brow and pointed of chin with a pert nose, full pink lips, and large thickly lashed eyes, but Heather noticed only the deathly pale pallor of her skin, the too-wide mouth and the fire fall of her blood red hair.

She looked at her eyes reflecting back at her and blinked away the moisture that pooled in their corners. They were stunning grey eyes, which for all their beauty, she hated. Eyes, which were a startling reminder of the little sister she'd lost. Lynn had been a buxom brunette. As sister's they'd been as opposite in looks as could possibly be. Except for the eyes, Lynn had had Heather's eyes. Consequently, every time Heather looked in a mirror she was

reminded of the young, vivacious, and highly loved sister she'd lost when the car she'd been driving had plummeted into a ditch. Lynn had been killed instantly. Learning the news in her hospital bed, Heather had wished that it had been her. Five years later, that wish hadn't changed. It had, if anything only gotten stronger.

The authorities shortly after the accident had infuriated her with their gentle words meant to console. While she'd lain with a broken collarbone, a punctured lung and three broken ribs in her hospital bed, they informed her that the brakes on the Mercedes she'd been driving had failed. Then clearing their throats they told her, as if they were giving her the greatest gift in the world, that she wasn't in any way responsible for the accident.

But she felt responsible.

Christ, did she feel responsible.

She took a deep sip of the tangy wine and rolled it on her tongue before swallowing. Then breathing evenly, using a yoga technique, which she'd learned in class, Heather tried to return her thoughts to safer waters—her new flat and what color she should paint the walls.

A loud, retching sob escaped her lips. It was no good. The flat along with everything else in her life could just go to hell. She wanted her little sister back!

Damn it, she wanted her life back!

She wanted to feel like a human being again.

Dismayed, Heather let the catalogue she'd been flicking through for the last half hour fall to the floor. The heavy book hit the ground with a thud, the pages turned for a moment as if blown by a breeze before coming to rest upon the threadbare brown carpet, sporting more cigarette burns than she could count. Dressed only in a green cardigan and a

pair of fluffy grey bunny rabbit slippers, both birthday presents from her ex, a bottle of rich, red Bordeaux in one hand and a glass in the other, she strolled to the window for the hundredth time.

She was restless and confused.

Only the day before she'd moved herself and her stuff consisting of five carton boxes, one suitcase, and a microwave oven into the small, damp Glasgow flat. The flat, which the estate agent had described as, "Spacious with a view," had turned out to be a dreary pit. The only window of any reasonable size in the living room offered a lackluster outlook over the dismal eighteenth century Victorian tenements in Glasgow's East End that in Heather's opinion should have been demolished years ago.

She was insane all right for coming there.

Completely.

As her train had departed from Waterloo, the rain thudding like a thousand pebbles against the carriage top, Heather had looked on the move as coming back to her Scottish roots. But in truth, in the moments when she was being honest with herself, and in the last few years she was the first to admit that there hadn't been many, she was running away. She was running away from the death of her sister and the mess she'd made of her life. At twenty-seven, having qualified two years previously as an interior architect, she hoped that her job opportunities would be better in Glasgow. She'd found nothing in the overcrowded London market apart from Mike, her dead-end ex of approximately eleven months.

Mike had been a mechanic. What could she say about Mike really, except that he'd turned up in her life just when she'd needed something to fill the gaping hole left by her sister's loss. Heather's

lips curved upwards remembering his cock. At nine inches, it had been huge, and the sex great, but the downside was that he'd had a personality about as interesting as a snail and an I.Q. of zero.

She could almost hear her sister's voice, *Heather, you'd have a better chance getting some intelligent conversation from a Neanderthal. Change the record girl.*

'Change the record' had been their code for moving onto another man. Remembering, Heather's smile widened, they'd had a rating system for men too, which hinged on what they wouldn't toss a man out of bed for. 'Milkman' meant he was attractive in an unusual kind of way, and could bring a glass of milk to bed anytime. 'Digestive Biscuits' were a step-up, and 'Cookies' meant that he was a sex god.

But the ultimate in masculine desirability rated a 'Strawberry Tart'. 'Strawberry Tarts' were tasty, juicy, and sticky, something that every girl wanted to sink her teeth into.

To date they'd never seen a 'Strawberry Tart', but they'd always hoped that one day they would. For Heather maybe it would be, but for Lynn it was already too late.

Closing her eyes, Heather let the now familiar wave of pain wash through her. She'd learned long ago, in the early days when she'd almost gone mad with grief that it was better to go with the pain, than try and fight it. When she opened her eyes, she asked herself the question she'd always been afraid to ask. Was her ex just another mistake or had she really been in love with Mike?

No!

Her answer was quick and decisive.

Heather doubted that she'd ever been in love. In fact she often wondered what the word actually meant. Was it

created by fairies? This magic little gift that only the good girls got? Then, in that case, Heather supposed she must be bad. Hey, she must be worse than bad, with the string of botched relationships she'd had—she must be as bad as they come.

Did she miss him?

No!

Did she miss the sex?

Definitely.

Recalling Mike's cock, the way it had felt as it parted the lips of her pussy, she flushed. Remembering his golden cock ring, the pleasurable way it had grinded against her clit, usually bringing her to orgasm before he had even fully entered her, she moaned. Her nipples beaded when she ran her hand over the itchy wool of her cardigan. Her pussy softened, and she sipped at her wine. Closing her eyes, she laid her forehead against the cool single-glazed windowpane. Hot, steamy sex that was what she needed, what her body was crying out for night after night. Sex like she hadn't enjoyed for so long, she'd almost forgotten what it felt like to take a man's cock in her fanny and have his spurting climax trigger her own.

"God, girl," she breathed. "Your know-it-all, major pain in the butt sister, Meg, is right, you really do need to get laid and badly."

She opened her eyes, her skin clammy and her cotton panties drenched. The closest she'd come to a lover lately, fictional or otherwise, was an Internet chat room, which made her monthly phone bill insufferable and her trusty vibrator that sounded as loud as a Jumbo Jet taking off from Heathrow.

Christ, it was almost a year since she'd last had sex.

She was horny and then some, but then again the offers that she'd had

despite the protests of her pussy hadn't been worth taking. Heather hadn't once regretted that she hadn't taken them, but it didn't stop her from being in need of a little bedroom activity. A year was a bloody long time to go without the feel of a cock that was for sure. Of late, she'd dreamed a foolish, girlish dream of being in love and being loved in return. But the gut wrenching guilt was always there, a dark nightmare ready to ruin her fanciful daydreams, as part of her life as the air she breathed.

Heather supposed the bottom-line was that she didn't believe that she really deserved something as beautiful and as precious as love.

How could she when her seventeen-year-old baby sister was lying cold in her grave?

She drained her wine glass and poured another. The dull burn of alcohol in her belly was no compensation for the ache in her soul, but at least it helped to take the chill off the air even if it was only an allusion. She hadn't been able to light the boiler earlier, and she supposed her flat was probably colder inside than out. With slender fingers, she pulled back the horrible orange curtains with brown polka dots that served to offer some privacy on the thin window, which was directly opposite another building five arm lengths away. Whoever had lived in the flat before her, she decided definitely needed a reality check. The curtains had gone out along with the swinging sixties.

Outside, the sky was as grey as glass, grey as the depressing mood that surrounded her. A group of workmen were laboring jadedly fixing to her untrained eye some sort of power line in the ground with thin Scottish faces proud and scowling as they worked beneath the stormy sky. It was mid December around nine in the morning, and the weather

outside her smog covered window matched the month perfectly, from dark, sadistic clouds to the ancient oaks seeming less majestic without their summer plumage of leaves, to the unapproachable yet awe-inspiring hills in the distance. With a sigh, Heather drew her eyes away from their rocky beauty back to the workers below. Her black-and-white portable TV had finally called it a day and died, and since then the workmen had become like her own private TV show to her restless mind. Dressed in yellow jackets, jeans and high sturdy boots, they were something to occupy her thoughts other than her sister's death, the guilt which seemed to be eating her from inside like a cancer, her ex, never mind her nonexistent finances, and the dire economy.

To Heather's great chagrin, there wasn't one nice looking man among them. Not one she could imagine his sleek body sliding over hers, while she wrapped her legs around his hips and took his cock into her. She was about to let the curtain fall when the large man, not wearing a safety helmet walking confidently into their midst, caught her attention.

He was gorgeous, a male Greek Adonis—better, Michelangelo's David walking and breathing in the flesh

Heather's thighs clamped and throbbed alarmingly. Her glass shook and a trickle of wine spilled on the carpet. Her unpainted lips curved upwards in a half-smile; at least she wouldn't have to worry about cleaning it. The carpet had been ruined years ago, probably before she was even born. Her eyes wanted to return to the hunky male specimen below, and she let them.

He was tall. Since she was four stories up, Heather couldn't be sure, but she reckoned that he was over six feet

judging by the way his head almost brushed some of the low hanging branches of the ancient oaks lining the concreted pavement below. A few X-rated thoughts ran through her mind just looking at him. Hungrily, she watched him, momentarily absorbed in the way his jacket so nicely outlined his wide shoulders and strong back, and then there were those blue jeans, well-worn and faded, lovingly cupping his long well-defined legs not to mention the best looking butt she'd ever seen.

If there had been a prize for the butt of the millennium, his would have won it hands down.

He was like the man of her dreams, a man she supposed every girl fantasized about once in a while thrusting between her thighs. Suddenly the part that made her pussy drenched wanted to gobble the handsome stranger, to sink down on his cock and ride him until she was on the best orgasm of her life.

Heather sighed lustily, then shrugged it off. She had given up on men, a shame really because the stranger below definitely had a body designed for sex. Lithe and muscular, sort of predatory yet refined, but only barely mind you in a very well put together package. A package, she sniggered which she wouldn't mind unwrapping. True, she couldn't see the guy's face, but she was certain that he was definitely a cookie.

The more Heather watched the good-looking stranger, the more her pussy pulsed until eventually it was hot and wet, screaming out for some release. Her vibrator was still packed away, so she supposed she'd just have to do it the old-fashioned way. She wasn't a fan of self-masturbation. She preferred someone else to bring her to the pinnacle of her release, preferably a man with well trained fingers or better still a tongue, but

sometimes, and it was a sad fact to admit pleasuring ones self was a necessity.

Placing her glass on the windowsill, she slid one hand down across her breasts and slipped it beneath her panties. As she visualized a huge cock dripping silver threads of pre-ejaculate from its bronzed head, she thrust a finger into her pussy, then spread her juices over the folds. She started out with small circles around her clit; with her free hand she pushed her cardigan above her pert breasts, exposing her nipples to the cool air of the room. They stiffened and throbbed immediately. In her mind's eye, one man was eating her pussy, a second was toying with her nipples, while she swirled her tongue deeply in the wet, creamy pussy gyrating on her face.

The thought of it, two men and a woman with her musky scent and unshaven crotch focused purely on her pleasure sent Heather into orbit. Her orgasm, which came hard and fast, caused her to moan loudly, as ripple after ripple of her climax flowed through her, scorching every cell like liquid fire in her body.

Taking deep breaths to try and calm down, a naughty smile curved her lips while her eyelashes cast dark shadows against her pale cheeks. *Man, seeing that sexy guy must have really affected me*, she thought, then she frowned. Women featured often in her fantasies, but in reality she hadn't ever slept with one, because they lacked a certain piece of equipment between the legs, which Heather couldn't imagine going along for a pleasure ride without. She sniggered again, the sexy guy below judging by the way his jeans had bulged, certainly wasn't lacking in that department. Conjuring up his image once more, she slipped a finger back into her wet pussy, ready, and willing to reach an erotic high

using the stranger's image.

Just as she was about to climax for a second time, her telephone rang.

Blast! Heather opened her eyes. The rain was thudding against the window, which was steamed from her breath in a rapid staccato. Apart from the workmen below, their boots casting up muddy shadows as they ran to take shelter in one of the three yellow wagons parked on the pavement, the street was deserted. She pulled her fingers from her panties and grumbling she hurried to the hall.

"Hello." She practically snarled into the receiver.

Silence hummed over the line, broken by intermittent static, before a voice eerily like her own spoke.

"Hello, darling,"

"Oh, hi, Mum," Heather said warily. The relationship between mother and daughter had been strained since her sister's death. Heather knew that her mother didn't blame her, but she blamed herself and consequently she couldn't look those who had loved Lynn in the eye without feeling a crushing guilt which never seemed to get any better with the passing of time.

Her mother asked after a long pause, "Have you settled in yet, darling?"

Heather rolled her eyes. "Mum, I just got here."

"Have you unpacked?"

Heather looked around at her stuff still in the cartons. Should she lie or tell the truth?

"No."

"Bumpkins, what can you be living off of then?" Her chastising mama-bear growl ended in a soft cough. Heather hated that her mother smoked. But since her sister had died there had been no one, including herself, who could talk sense into the woman about her health or

anything else for that matter. Christ, she supposed if her mother died of lung cancer tomorrow, then that would just be another death on her conscience.

"I'll get round to unpacking today."

"Promise?"

Heather frowned, she hated unpacking. "I promise."

"And how's the flat?"

"Terrific. It just needs a coat of paint."

No, it didn't, it needed demolished. A rat-a-tat-tat sounded on the outside door to her left. Grateful for the interruption, Heather said quickly, "Look, Mum, I'll call you back, okay, someone's at the door."

She replaced the receiver before her mother could protest. Shivering in the chilly hallway, she flung open the front door. The most devastating sight she'd seen in a long time greeted her. Devastating for what? Her libido, that's what. Six-foot-four inches of prime male flesh filled her doorway. Arithmetic had never been her strong point, but she estimated him at around thirty give or take a couple of years. Certainly he was not much older than she.

"Hi." The dark haired man extended his hand. Heather noticed that it was large and shovel shaped, definitely a hand that could drive a woman to her knees. "I'm Pierre, the cabling and the electricity in this building are very old and they need to be replaced. I'm overseeing the replacement of them. You have probably seen the workmen below, yes?" At her nod, he smiled. Perfect white teeth flashed, and the soft skin around his eyes crinkled slightly. "I just wanted to let you know that sometime this evening and possibly in the next few days that the power will be out in this building, since we have to rewire the electricity from here to the pipeline in the road. I am sorry for this inconvenience, mademoiselle, but it is unavoidable."

It came to Heather that the male bundle of testosterone infused flesh filling her doorway was the sexy worker guy she'd just glimpsed from the window. The very same guy—naughty devil that she was—who she'd just been fantasizing over. Was this her lucky day or what? Her skin tingled. His sexy voice with the very pronounced accent, which she wasn't sure but guessed, was probably French, washed over her body like a caress. When she looked up, he was grinning.

She blinked, but nope he was still grinning.

Damn! If it wasn't the nicest looking smile she'd ever seen, too.

He had a cute dimple that just begged her tongue to plunge into it.

Woo, woo, forget cookie, she'd finally gone and caught herself a glimpse of a strawberry tart. Heather pushed away the painful thought, if only Lynn had been there to see it. It didn't help any to wish for something that could never be. Her sister was dead, and no amount of wishing was going to bring her back. Ever!

Heather realized that the hunk was speaking, and she opened her mouth to reply, but she couldn't form a single coherent sentence. Up close, he was even more fascinating than he'd been at a distance. His hair was thick and shiny, a rich black, without a hint of grey. Raindrops shimmered like pearls in its depths. His yellow workers jacket contrasted sharply with the dark golden bronze tone of his skin, which shone sort of like the rich caramel her mother used to decorate the toffee cake with on every one of her birthdays until she was old enough to celebrate it in a club with her friends.

And he wore a wicked, half-taunting smile on his face which could melt the heart of even the most frigid woman.

And well she was a long way away from being frigid. She was horny; the juice flowing from her pussy could melt the polar ice cap faster than you could blink.

In the next instant, his bold gaze snagged hers and held tight. Heather found that she couldn't look away, even if she'd wanted to, which she most certainly did not.

Damn girl, her inner voice cried, *that guy is hot*.

His eyes were a clear chocolate-brown with small flecks of gold threaded through, almost hypnotic in their unusual beauty. She'd never seen eyes that color in her life.

He cleared his throat, and Heather realized that she'd been staring. "You do speak English don't you, chérie?"

"What? Oh yeah. English sure." She cursed herself for sounding like a complete idiot, but she just couldn't help it. They didn't make them like this in London. If they did, she would never have left. Seeing him, she supposed must have short-circuited something vital in her brain. All she could think about were his hands and what he could do with them.

He was still speaking in his husky voice. "I had to ask since I myself had to learn the English language."

"Why." Heather couldn't stop herself. The words poured out as if of their own volition. "You French or something?" His face lit up. "Oui."

Heather cursed, she was sounding more and more like an idiot with each passing second.

Thankfully the hunk on her doorstep didn't seem to notice. "How did you guess, chérie?"

Heather shook her head in an attempt to clear the fog that seemed to have picked the worst possible time to clog her brain. "Err...sorry how did I

guess what?"

His smile became more pronounced. "Why, that I am French of course?"

"Oh, your accent, it's a dead giveaway."

He leaned his hip casually against the doorframe. "Have you met many Frenchmen then?"

Heather pulled her eyes away from his big, bronzed hand spread across her door. "No, I guess you're the first." Christ, she wracked her brain. What had the guy asked her? No matter how hard she tried to remember, she couldn't. She was going to have to ask him. Hell, she'd end up looking like an even bigger fool. Screw her hormones for going into overdrive just then.

"Sorry, but what do you want?"

His white teeth flashed in the dimness of the hallway, and his brown eyes sparkled. "I came to tell you that the power was going to be out at around eight this evening."

Heather pinched the tender skin between her brows. Had he? Was that before or after she had remembered that Frenchmen were supposed to be good with their tongues?

"And I suggested if you haven't got a flashlight and some candles, then it's probably a good idea to buy some."

Heather nodded, if the power was going to be out it made sense. She forced her eyes up when they began to wander towards his zipper.

"Are you okay, chérie?" Pierre asked. "You look pale?"

She could do this. He was just a man for Christ's sake. "Yeah, I'm still not with it you see I just woke up." She lied.

His eyes crinkled, and although he didn't smile, she had the distinct impression that he was laughing at her. "I suggest next time you decide to pleasure

yourself, you close the curtains properly, yes. My colleagues and I were sufficiently heated despite the biting wind after watching your little performance, mademoiselle."

"M-m-my what?" Heather asked, floored by Pierre's words. She couldn't have heard him correctly. There was no way she'd heard him correctly.

"Your little performance, I must say I loved the way your tiny body shook with your climax, chérie."

Obviously her hearing was fine. "Oh."

The red flush of embarrassment extended from Heather's cheeks down into the stark green of her slightly open cardigan. She prayed for a hole to open in the floor so she could drop in and find a place to hide.

Pierre never even noticed her embarrassment. As his gaze swept downward, he only wished the buttons hiding the little redheads breasts would pop. Were they as full as they looked? Or were they merely an elusion created by one of those pushup bras that women seemed to be so fond of, and which men, well from his point of view anyway, hated. He wanted to dive his hand in the V neckline of her cardigan and find out. A very big problem was developing in his jeans. He reasoned that he shouldn't be horny after the hour he'd just spent with Tina. The good-looking blond had sucked him off then he'd fucked her, but he was, and for a redhead too that didn't even reach to his shoulder. He wanted to shake his head at the absurdity of it all. Heather knew she was babbling. "You saw that...I mean you saw me touch... touch myself?"

He nodded slowly with a clear deliberation that sent her pulse rocketing. "Oui, I saw everything."

Heather lifted her gaze to him again, ready to excuse herself and make a quick

exit before she humiliated herself further, but his eyes were focused on the hem of her cardigan, presumably trying to get a glimpse of what she'd been playing with under there. The blazing fire in their velvety brown depths caused her nipples to stiffen, and a wave of confusion to wash over her.

While he studied her crotch, however, it gave her a chance to get a better look at near perfection. His face resembled a statue in a museum, chiseled chin, clear-cut angles and Roman-looking nose. All that bronzed skin looked unusually soft, and she suddenly had the insane urge to run her fingertips over his cheek to find out. The black curls resting on his forehead fell into a pair of incredibly long lashed eyes. His mouth—his incredibly sexy mouth was sensuous and full. A hundred thoughts ran through her mind just imagining what she could do with a mouth like that. Or more importantly what he could do with a mouth like that. A quick vision of his face lost between her thighs, his black hair mingling with the vibrant red curls of her pussy, while he licked her fanny, flashed across her mind.

Think. She mentally knocked herself on the head, trying to get her brain to function. He was a man. Despite what her body was demanding, it would be a very bad idea to let him stand there staring at her crotch all day. She took a rejuvenating breath. "Look I don't well err usually...touch myself. I'm really sorry that you had to...err see that."

"Don't be, I enjoyed it." His brown eyes twinkled, velvety soft and highly seductive. "But it is always better together, chérie, don't you agree?"

"Err, sorry," she said and risked a glance at him. He was still looking at her, but she couldn't read his expression in the dim light of the hallway. "You've completely lost me what is better?"

“Sex.”

“What?” This time Heather looked at him directly, wide-eyed with surprise.

He grinned, and God was it a sexy grin. “I merely meant that sex, or masturbation for that matter, are always far better together than alone.”

His voice was low and sultry and sent shivers racing down her spine.

“Well, don’t you agree?” Pierre prompted, delighted by the sweet reaction his words had upon the woman when she just stood there gaping at him like a carp out of water.

Eventually, she managed a shaky. “I...I suppose so.”

Still rocked by surprise, Heather watched as he stepped around her into the hallway. Just for a second, the clean male scent of him was all about her, Heather found herself holding her breath. The scent of male sweat mingled with spicy cologne should have been offensive, but oddly she found it highly arousing.

Damn, she thought the man even smelt good.

It was too good to be true—he was too good to be true. She had to be delirious, or dreaming or something. She pinched herself just to make sure and when Pierre didn’t disappear in a puff of smoke, she almost groaned.

He was real, she was horny, and in big trouble.

Even from a foot away she could feel the heat that his large body seemed to radiate in gallons. She had to bite her lip to stop herself from wrapping herself around his body and getting up close and personal.

“You’re cold, chérie. Why don’t you have the heating on?” The softly spoken question demanded an answer.

For the first time, Heather realized that her teeth were chattering. “I can’t

light the boiler...I just can’t light it. I’ve been trying and trying, but I can’t!”

“You poor thing.” Pierre thrust a hand into his jeans pockets, rattling change while he shifted his erection to a less obvious position. “You must be freezing.”

Heather dropped her gaze; on the contrary she’d never felt warmer.

“Don’t you have someone that you could call?”

Heather almost fainted as those brown eyes probed hers. “Not really, you see I’m new here.”

While she was debating the logic of admitting to a stranger that she was practically alone in a new city, Pierre walked through to the kitchen as if he knew his way. As if he owned the place. Ignoring his rudeness, Heather had no choice but to follow meekly at his heels.

“Boilers, chérie,” he flung over his shoulder, “can be tricky things.”

Heather tried, but failed miserably at casual. “I wouldn’t know. I’ve never had a boiler before. I lived with my mum in London you see and we had central heating.”

Pierre’s thick black eyebrows rose in an incredulous arch. “You mean you weren’t living with a man?”

Heather’s first thought was that he was blunt; the second was that she really didn’t want to get into a discussion about Mike. It was better when she kept that bastard as far from her thoughts as possible. Every time she thought of that rat, she usually ended up throwing something.

Reading the emotions on her face, Pierre said apologetically, “Sorry, I didn’t mean to pry.”

“It’s okay,” Heather gave him a weak smile. “No I didn’t have a man before coming here.”

“Now that I can’t believe.” He made a tisk-like sound. “In France, you’d have

many men willing to warm your bed. Are these Englishmen really as cold in the sack as I have been led to believe?"

Heather laughed. "I don't think I'm qualified to answer that."

He wiggled his eyebrows suggestively. "No?"

She found herself smiling. "And even if I was, I wouldn't be telling."

He nodded. "Now that's a wise answer."

Heather felt herself grin as a warm flush tinged her skin. For a second there, she'd actually felt almost like a normal person again. It had been so very long since she'd really laughed that she'd been beginning to think that she never would.

"You know," Pierre said breaking into her thoughts as he stopped, turned and placed his big hands on her shoulders. "If your bed is really so cold, perhaps I should show you, *chérie*, how a Frenchman could warm it up."

Heather swallowed; she was dying for the big hunk to fuck her.

"Well?" he asked as he bent and breathed the question close to her ear.

For a second his cheek contacted with the sensitive skin of her neck. Heather's pussy pulsed. His strong, stubbly chin begged for a woman to lick her way down it until she could tangle her fingers in his midnight hair, tilt his head back, and continue to his luscious neck.

His arms tightened around her. "Should we go and see just how warm we can make your sheets?"

Trembling, Heather looked up, shocked by the heat in his gaze. "Don't get cute with me, Pierre."

Cute. Oh, yeah, he was cute all right. Heather felt her nipples stiffen. Dog gone.

"Now that's a pity." His smile widened, causing his eyes to narrow and the lines bracketing his mouth to deepen

charmingly. "Because I promise you that I would have been the best lover you've ever had, *mademoiselle*."

Heather gaped at him; she'd never met anybody more conceited. Christ, if his head swelled any further, he wouldn't be able to fit back out the front door.

She moaned as images of them making frantic, passionate love in the hallway danced before her eyes, even as her thrumming body told her that it was happy to have the uninvited hunk stay forever in her house.

Determined not to let his own disappointment show, at the redhead's refusal, Pierre started off again along the unwelcoming corridor with the ghastly purple wallpaper. When he reached the kitchen, he took off his coat, laying it on the back of one of two chairs situated at either end of the small wooden table, he crouched on his heels. His eyes flicked over the chaos where the redhead's spent matches still littered the linoleum, in a pile beneath the wide-open boiler door, before he looked up.

"Why don't you go and put something a little warmer on while I'm wrestling with this?" he suggested. "By the look of you, you might end up with hypothermia." While he held her eyes a slow devilish grin stretched across his face. "And if you did, then I'd have to warm you up, wouldn't I?"

The thought of the gorgeous black-haired man warming her up was more than an appealing one.

Scared that Pierre might somehow see the truth in her eyes, Heather balked and dashed from the kitchen. Behind her, she was sure that she heard him laugh. Back in her bedroom, angry that she had allowed the man to fluster her so, she shoved her left leg into a pair of jeans, pulled up the zipper then fastened the two buttons of her green cardigan above

her breasts before tying her hair up in a ponytail. With it swinging down her back in sumptuous waves, taking a deep breath, she entered the small, whitewashed kitchen. It was free of furniture apart from the microwave, table and chairs, and a sorry looking tomato plant, yellow tinged, which probably wouldn't live to see the light of another day.

Pierre caught her eye immediately. Heather supposed it was difficult to fail to notice such a fine male specimen. For a moment, she stood in the doorway and simply drank in the sight of him. From the top of his wavy, jet-black hair to his muscled arse, he was a man well worth ogling. She shook her head. She'd given up on men for better or for worse; she should really start trying to remember that, even if the magnificent man kneeling before her did make that difficult.

Heather supposed she must have sighed or something for she found herself looking into Pierre's eyes. For a charged moment, grey eyes held brown, and the room seemed to hum with an electrifying tension, which she swore thickened the very air itself.

Then Pierre grinned, and the spell was broken. "This boiler I think is older than me, but I've almost got it going."

Flustered, Heather looked at the boiler with the bronzed pipes in question. "Thank goodness, it'll be good to get some heat in here."

Pierre glanced at her, "Yep, not a moment too soon by the looks of it. Your nose is starting to turn blue."

He watched as she rubbed furiously at her nose. "Is it?"

"Nah." He was shocked when he felt a warm smile curve his lips. It had been so very long since he'd really smiled. He had quite forgotten what it felt like. "I just couldn't resist teasing you."

That grin made him look younger, and a flutter of attraction stirred in the pit of Heather's stomach. Ignoring it, she narrowed her eyes, and deplored, "You're wicked."

"Careful," he warned, the light in his eyes making her feel giddy, "compliments will get you everywhere, mademoiselle."

Heather felt a smile tug at the corner of her lips as she returned her attention quickly back to the boiler. She couldn't help but notice though the way Pierre's wide shoulders hunched over the boiler where there was now a glowing flame. And when she found it hard to tear her eyes away from his luscious lips, which as she watched blew on the flame that sparked and caught, and the boiler with a guttering sound rolled into life, she reasoned that she couldn't be blamed. The guy after all was male perfection.

While Heather was still studying Pierre's sculpted arse, he stood and smiled down at her from his great height. "I think you should have no more problems with it now."

Heather praying to God that he hadn't seen her check him out, rushed on, "Thanks, I don't know what I would have done without your help."

He wiped his dirty hands on the front of his jeans. "You would have probably frozen to death."

Having a hard time wrenching her eyes away from those long, tanned fingers which spoke of a million things, strength, passion, and yet kindness, like an idiot, Heather could only nod, and watch as he shrugged a very muscled bicep into his yellow worker's jacket. She ran her tongue over suddenly parched lips, beneath his red checked shirt. She'd seen a definite rustle of perk abdomen muscles, which begged for a woman's touch.

When Pierre had zipped up his jacket, the blood in Heather's veins froze as he looked at her with his gorgeous, thickly lashed eyes. "Do you have a name mademoiselle or shall I just continue to call you chérie?"

"A name," Heather breathed foolishly.

A smile lit up his face, and he replied beaming delightedly. "Oui, you know one of those little things that your parents usually give to you."

Blushing profusely, Heather mumbled, "Of course, I've got a name."

Pierre's smile widened. "Good, then if it is not a secret please tell me what it is, chérie."

Feeling like the world's biggest idiot, Heather rushed on, "My name is Miss Hunt, err Heather Hunt that's my name, Heather Hunt." She rolled her eyes, then smiled crookedly up at him. "And if I don't stop saying it I'm going to wear it out."

"Heather," Pierre repeated testing the foreign name on his tongue. "I like it, it's a pretty name."

Heather had never been very good at replying to compliments, so she just shrugged awkwardly and nodded.

Back in the dim hallway, lit only with a single forty-watt bulb without a lampshade, Pierre said, "Well I best be getting on. It was nice to meet you, chérie"

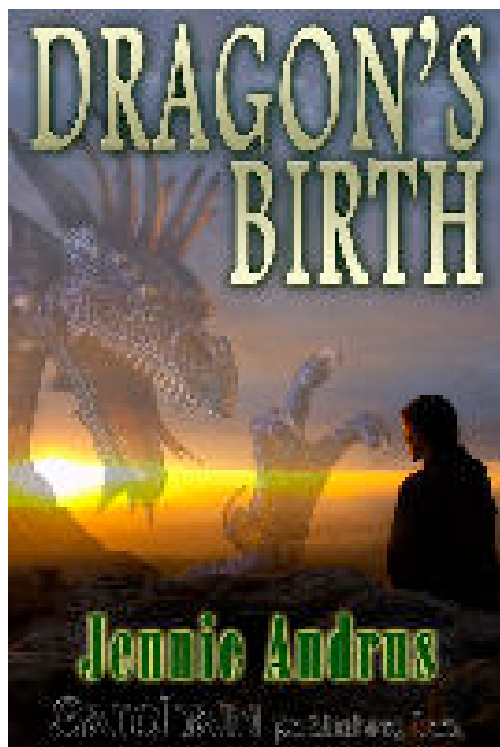
Was it only wishful thinking, Heather wondered or had he sounded reluctant to be leaving? She watched as he turned and left, but not before she'd seen that he was aroused. His tight jeans hid nothing. Judging by the size of his erection, which had looked like a very large lunchbox, he was an extremely well-endowed man. A fresh rush of sticky wetness creamed her panties.

He was aroused, the thought got her hot and wet, even as she wondered why.

As his sure-footed stride carried him quickly away along the lime green corridor, Heather's composure returned, as did her bated breath. He was attractive-plus, especially up close. Why she'd almost felt magnetized, wanting to touch him and have him touch her, in all her most intimate places with those big hands of his. What a state to be in, she thought. *Of course, at the moment, I'm sex-starved so why am I so surprised?* She wondered. Clicking the front door closed, she decided that she would have to unpack her vibrator after all and prompt.

Dragon's Birth

Jennie Andrus



Fantasy Romance

Novella

Samhain Publishing

[Available Now](#)

Author Bio

Jennie has known since fifth grade that she wanted to be a writer. She is a huge fan of anything with magic or space travel (yep, even the cheesiest of sci-fi flicks) and if there is a love story mixed in, so much the better.

Jennie lives in rural Ontario with her husband, 2 kids and an assortment of animals.

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[Jennie's Website](#)

Blurb

Lexanii spent ten years preparing to destroy the beasts that killed her best friend, Argon, the man she loved and hoped to marry. She knows more about dragons than anyone in the Kingdom, including how to kill them.

When a dragon carries her off, she expects to become its lunch, but instead she finds herself face to face with Argon who is alive and well and looking damn good. Commander of a secret army of dragon shifters, Argon and his troops await a war that was foretold hundred of years ago.

With her personal mission no longer relevant, can Lexanii take on a new task and become one of the creatures she's long sought to destroy?

Excerpt

Someone was watching her.

"Damn it!" There was nothing within running distance; she was completely open to attack. Scanning the skies, she almost didn't see it as it circled in the glare of the midmorning sun.

Her fingers itched, and excitement overrode fear. After ten years, she'd have her first chance at revenge.

Slowly it circled, drawing nearer and nearer at such a leisurely pace that her nerves began to fray. Her mother, an officer in the royal army, had told her stories of soldiers who'd broken down during the moments before battle. The wait, she'd told Lexii, was a killer. Losing your cool in those final moments could cost you your life once the fighting started.

Quickly, she ran a mental check of her resources. She had the dagger and knew that the belly was widely considered to be a dragon's soft spot. One well-placed stab could nick the beast in a vital organ, weakening it enough for other attacks to be effective. She had gypsol weed and bloodhound in her pockets; the first a powerful hallucinogen, the second extremely caustic. Other pockets contained vials of emetics and poisons, as well as powders to irritate the eyes and, as a last resort, a dust that would attack the nervous system leaving them both twitching helplessly. She didn't want to have to use it, having seen the effects. They didn't look pleasant and since there was no way to use it without being affected as well, she'd keep it in reserve.

She'd thought it would attack slowly. Her research had shown that dragons seemed to have the ability to paralyze their victims. Certainly Argon had made no effort to save himself or hide from the approaching creature. But, after a few lazy circles, it swooped, a reckless dive that sent the blood draining from her face.

Her muscles tense, she waited, then, at the last possible second, dove for a boulder that jutting from the ground. The dragon roared and scrambled to land on the uneven terrain.

With a smirk, Lexanii reached into a pocket and withdrew a small linen pouch full of bloodhound and gently eased open the frayed ribbon holding it closed. Her other hand pressed to the ground, feeling the vibrations in the stone as the beast thundered closer. The boulder wasn't very large, barely big enough to huddle behind, but it was enough. The dragon had to come to her, close enough that she could throw the bloodhound in its face. Battle-high pumped excitement through her as she waited.

When she saw the golden eye peer around the edge of the boulder, she threw the pouch and scrambled to her feet, running as fast as she could for the next boulder. The weight of her pack made her stumble awkwardly and she fell, scraping her face on a patch of rubble.

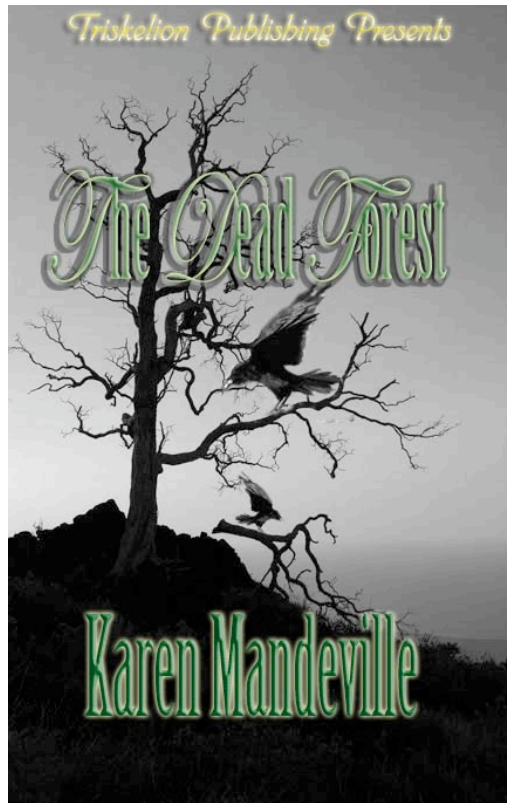
She tasted blood and cursed, then spat on the ground and tried to get back to her feet, slipping on the stones that rolled and skittered under her on the exposed bedrock. Panicked, she risked a glance over her shoulder and saw that the dragon merely watched her. Evidently the bloodhound had no effect on it at all.

It was at that moment she realized she might be in serious trouble.

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The Dead Forest

Karen Mandeville



Fantasy/paranormal romance
Novel
Triskelion Publishing
[Available Now](#)

Author Bio

Australian author Karen Mandeville writes a variety of genres including erotica, dark fantasy and paranormal romance. Five of her 28 years was spent as a journalist and has eight contracts signed for releases in 2006. She made her debut with the release of her erotic short story in the Winter Wishes Anthology through Whiskey Creek Press Torrid and her novel, The Dead Forest with Triskelion Publishing.

If you would like to know more about Karen then head over to <http://www.karenmandeville.com> where you can see when her next chat is, learn more about her writing and read interviews about her upcoming releases.

She also has a newsletter to keep everyone updated, all you have to do is head over to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/karenmandeville> and join up to receive your free copy of BeDevilled.

Blurb

**Do you dare walk The Dead Forest?
It's home to soulless creatures, witches
and shapeshifters.
Three men fight for Rebecca's love but
only one shall succeed for she has a
tainted destiny.**

Learning she has magical powers is one thing but knowing how to harness them and protect herself from a growing evil is another.

**The Dead Forest is about betrayal,
horror, deception, honour, fantasy,
unworldly creatures, emotional conflict
and true love conquering all.**

Excerpt

"Tell me the truth!" Rebecca screamed as she lifted her hand ready to strike again. Rutherford licked his bottom lip. He tasted blood—his blood. He turned slowly to look at her. For such a frail thing, she could pack a punch when she needed to. Her hand stung as it connected with his right cheek again. His pale skin colored as the blood rose to the surface of her attack. She was too strong for him. She was no longer the meek, reserved Rebecca he fell in love with. She was demonic. The soul he gave her had rejected both of them. He didn't

realize this would be the result of his decision, his poorly-timed actions.

"I *demand* that you tell me Rutherford," Rebecca yelled again, looking for something to arm herself and threaten him with. "How did all this begin? You said you made a deal with my father. Well, I demand to know what that deal was!"

In all her hellish glory, a now magnificently powerful Rebecca stalked across the room, sending him scuttling into the corner. "Don't think you can hide from me in here. I am going to treat you the same way you treated me, now talk!" She grabbed one of her framed pictures off the castle wall and smashed it against the cold stone floor. He watched helplessly as she destroyed his treasured painting. Her eyes were wild as she turned and seethed at him. "I will tear this place apart if you don't start talking! What was the deal you made with my father?"

She continued to scream and ramble as she reached for more and more of her paintings and pulled them off the walls as she continued her tirade.

"Alright... alright," Rutherford started, admitting his own defeat. He was left with no option but to tell her the truth. "I will tell you and I swear this is the truth. I met your father just a short while after your mother found out she was pregnant with you. He came to me with grand plans of building up his farm. His ideas were good. Very good. And I, being a businessman, said it was a great opportunity. So we collaborated. Both your mother and father fell on hard times soon after you were born, so he came to me asking for advice and help. I came up with an offer that he should have refused, but he didn't..."

It was the year when everything changed, when life began, or did it? Rebecca had just turned twelve and she and her Papa had arrived in the village to sell their weekly produce and attend church service. She had sensed her father didn't enjoy going to the services but was hesitant to say anything. She knew he was making the effort to raise her the best he could on his own; her mother had died giving birth to her. He used to tell her stories of how she looked just like her mother.

Every Sunday, Papa would tell Rebecca to play with several of the other girls from the village, but secretly she hated them. The other girls would tease her, poke out their tongues and run off to giggle about something.

On that particular day, one girl named Elizabeth MacDougall stared at her all through the church service. She turned her head to look behind her to see if Elizabeth was looking at someone else. So constant was Elizabeth's piercing gaze, she started to think she had something on her face. After the service she had moved to stand at Papa's side while he spoke with Elizabeth's mother and father.

Elizabeth continued to stare at her as she played with the hem of her apron. Rebecca didn't really have any friends her age and she was curious about what Papa and Elizabeth's parents were talking about.

"It's arranged then. We look forward to seeing Rebecca later," Mrs. MacDougall said. Papa smiled at Rebecca as he reached for her hand.

"Where are we going Papa?" she said as she looked up at him.

"It's not where *we* are going Rebecca. It's where *you* are going." She didn't budge from her spot. "Come on, we have to go and get you ready."

"Papa, I can't leave you alone," she said, appalled. She looked back to find Elizabeth still staring at her as they walked away. Papa stopped abruptly and placed his hand on her shoulder as he looked into her eyes.

"You will have to leave me one day," he said softly.

She looked up at Papa before he finished his sentence. She thought he looked sad. His eyes clouded over as he looked down at her innocent face.

"But I'm never going to leave you Papa." Her avowal brought a smile to his face.

"So where am I going Papa?" She grabbed hold of his hand and started to walk with him towards the cart.

"Well, you're a young girl Rebecca and young girls should have young friends."

"But I have you Papa."

"Yes, but that's not the same," he said in a hurried tone. She clambered into the cart as Papa slapped the reins. Rebecca thought the world of her father. He worked hard to earn his way through life. He had little education, but made smart choices when it came to the comfort of his and hers living environment. He was a strong and proud man. Papa was involved in many village events and was known for many villages around to be one of the most successful farmers during the hard times. Papa had planned each harvest to perfection.

He'd built the cottage they lived in himself. The loft was Papa's quarters while she slept in a small room off the kitchen. He'd built the cottage with two fireplaces. One in the main room and the other in the kitchen. It was the only cottage in the Shire that had two fireplaces. Papa said it was important to keep the winter chills out or they'd both end up being sick with no one to look after the farm.

In Rebecca's eyes he was always strong. He could work on the field non-stop for hours and still have the strength to pick her up and put her into bed. She felt safe and happy. There were other times when she felt lost and scared. Some nights she would hear him crying and call her mother's name. One night she listened to him make his way from the loft and run outside as if he were chasing someone or something.

"Tell me what Momma looked like," she would always ask as he tucked her into her bed.

"Well, she had the same color brown hair as you. She had the most beautiful green eyes—like you. You have her smile. When I look at you I see your mother, Rebecca. It's a constant reminder that she is nearby...watching over you."

Papa's green eyes would always shadow over when he spoke of her mother. Rebecca stopped asking about her when she noticed his night terrors becoming more frequent.

He did his best to provide her with the love and care she needed. He worked hard to keep his home and land. He would often tell her that one day it would be hers.

As an only child, Rebecca spent most of her time entertaining herself. Every week Papa would try in vain to get her to play with the other young girls from the village when they went to market day, but she always ended up walking away from them. She'd tell him the other girls were mean to her, but every week Papa would force her to play with them again. She much preferred to play on her own. She could then do as she pleased. That's why she liked to paint. It was a solitary pastime.

As a young child, he would often find her making pictures in the dirt as he worked in the field. He would stand over her

small body as she swirled her hands and fingers to make intricate patterns. Papa would call her name several times before she would turn her attention to him. It was as if she were in a trance.

Papa saved a little of the money he made from selling their produce from the farm to buy her a pencil and a small amount of paper. Even her squiggles looked like detailed pictures to him.

As they rode along, the reality of where she was going sunk in. She felt sick at the thought of going to that girl's house.

"But I don't want to go Papa," she protested even though she knew his patience would soon be gone if she pushed the point.

"Rebecca, I really think it will be good for you to go and stay the night. It is one night. I am sure they cannot be as horrid as you say."

Rebecca knew she had to give him a reason or she would be forced to go.

After a few minutes, she spoke again.

"They look at me funny," she said meekly.

"They what?"

"They look at me funny," she repeated loudly as the cart whizzed past the Dead Forest.

She saw Papa lift his hand to cover his mouth to stifle a snicker. "How do they look at you funny?"

She felt silly for saying it and sick when Papa snickered at her, but she was desperate not to go.

"They make faces at me...and say mean things when I walk past them at the market. They don't have chores to do. I do. I don't want to go. They are spoilt."

"I am sure they don't mean it and besides, Elizabeth is a very nice little girl. You will have a great time. You will do your chores and get cleaned up before I take you over there."

She scowled and turned her attention to the forest as they sped towards home.

Rebecca dawdled through her day in an attempt to get out of attending the sleepover. She took extra long in the paddock while tending to the vegetable patch. She spent more time than was necessary when grooming her horse.

"Come on Rebecca," Papa bellowed from the cottage's front door. "I know what you are trying to do and it's not going to work." She dusted her grubby hands on her apron and started slowly towards the cottage.

When she made her way to her bed she noticed Papa had already folded her nightdress along with a few items for the night. Carefully lying on the bed, she made sure she didn't disturb the clothes.

"I don't feel well Papa," she said, curling into a ball. Papa's footsteps got louder as she brought her knees in tight to her chest. She watched Papa's shadow on the floor grow larger and the footsteps stop before she squeezed her eyes tight. She could feel him looking at her.

"Very well then. You had better stay here while I eat the chocolate I bought for you to share tonight." He sounded very annoyed with her.

Chocolate was something Rebecca only had on very special occasions. She opened her eyes slowly and uncurled her legs before rolling onto her back. She looked at him grinning at her.

"Since you're sick you won't be able to have any, so I guess it's all for me," he said as he moved to the side of her bed and put his hand on her forehead. Rebecca closed her eyes as he pressed his large palm against her head. "Well, you must be sick if you are willing to turn down chocolate," Papa said worriedly as he retracted his hand.

Rebecca sat up and crawled off her bed. "I don't want to go, but if you want me to go...I'll do it for you Papa." She hugged him around the waist. "Maybe the sickness will pass." She looked up at him and smiled as he cupped her head with his big hands.

"You will have a good time Rebecca," he said in a comforting voice. "Now get washed up. We have to go soon."

She didn't take long to get ready. As they headed off down the track, she realized this would be the first time she would be away from Papa.

She was terrified of leaving him alone and the fact she disliked like this girl didn't help. She took a deep breath as they neared Elizabeth's family home. Mrs. MacDougall held her head high as she came from the cottage. She watched Rebecca jump from the cart and reach up to get her things as Papa lowered them down to her.

"Oh dear. Rebecca, a young lady should never jump from the cart," Elizabeth's mother said in a shrill tone. Rebecca glanced to Papa and rolled her eyes. Papa tried not to snicker and pretended to clear his throat while covering his smile.

"Well, have a good time Rebecca. I will collect you in the morning. I love you."

"Bye Papa," she replied. "I love you too." She stepped back from the cart and waved at him as he drove away. She waved even though he wasn't watching her.

"Rebecca. A young lady doesn't throw her arm around to bid someone farewell. It's a simple movement of the wrist," Elizabeth's mother said as she moved behind her.

Rebecca winced at her shrill tone and the fact she was being told what to do. "Now, come along. The girls have been waiting for you."

She watched Papa head off down the track. She felt alone. She felt lost. She felt scared. She didn't want to be here. She wanted to be at home. At home only one person told her what to do. Rebecca felt a hand slide over her shoulder.

"I said now. I do not like to be kept waiting Rebecca." Rebecca turned and slowly looked up at Mrs. MacDougall.

"I am sorry. This is the first time that I have ever been away from Papa." She tried to look the elder woman in the eyes.

"Yes...being raised by a man and only spending time with a man is a bad thing. I will have to speak to him regarding that tomorrow. But for now, the girls are inside playing. Come along."

Rebecca followed her into the cottage. She saw Elizabeth sitting with two other girls in front of the fireplace. The one with brown hair gave her a quick smile while the other girl with red ringlets scowled in her direction. She recognized the girl with the red ringlets but didn't know her name. She had seen her in the village several times but had never spoken to her.

When she moved further into the room, all three girls stopped playing. She released a long silent sigh before pursing her lips as they stared at her.

"Hello," she finally said. Mrs. MacDougall took her nightgown and chocolate from her hands and pushed her towards the girls.

"Well go on, go and play," she said. "You know Elizabeth. This is Clara, Elizabeth's cousin and the girl with the red hair is Patricia."

All three girls sat with their dolls in their laps. Rebecca noticed a discarded doll next to the fireplace and slowly made her way to take her place on the floor. "Hello," Clara said. Patricia shot Clara an awful stare.

"Can I play?" Rebecca asked quietly as she reached for the discarded doll.

"We already are playing," Patricia snapped. She reached over and snatched the doll by the head, yanking it free of Rebecca's hands. "These are my dolls. You didn't ask and no one is allowed to touch them unless I say," she snarled.

"I'm sorry." She looked at the dolls.

"Besides, look at your hands," Patricia spat. "It looks like you have been playing with pigs. I don't want you touching my dolls." At that statement, she turned her back on Rebecca. Rebecca caught Clara looking at her hands. She curled her fingers into a fist and tucked both hands into her lap as she looked at the floor.

"It's been a lovely day today. Why don't you girls go outside and play?" Mrs. MacDougall said as she hunted the girls out the door.

Rebecca followed the girls around the side of the cottage. She could see a field of flowers, a vegetable patch and the Dead Forest off in the distance. She felt so far away from home. The girls broke into a run leaving her alone. She didn't bother chasing them. She knew this was going to happen. They weren't going to change. They were already mean to her, why would tonight be any different? She walked along the edge of the garden patch and over to a grassy hill before sitting in a bed of daisies. She saw the girls making their way to another part of the yard but she wasn't fazed.

Rebecca sat with her legs crossed and inspected each daisy she picked closely before she placed it in her lap. She'd started linking them together to make a chain when a jet-black crow landed a short distance from her. She watched it closely as it eyed her before she continued threading daisies into the

chain.

"Hello crow," she said, watching it out of the corner of her eye. It squawked at her as if replying. "I wish I could be like you. Just pick up and fly away. I'd fly home right now if I could. Where do you live crow?"

She threaded the last daisy to make a daisy halo and placed it on her head. "Do you like it?" She cocked her head, showing it off to the crow. The crow bounced towards her. "I don't know why people are afraid of crows. You don't seem to want to do me any harm," she said as she started linking daisies for a necklace. The crow had moved closer and stood at her feet. "Who wants to play with dolls anyway?" she asked the crow before it released an ear-piercing squawk. It spread its wings and flew off. Rebecca turned around and saw Patricia standing a few yards behind her.

"Who are you talking to? I guess the villagers are right. You *are* mad, just like your mother and father," she snarled with a smile.

Rebecca got to her feet. "What?" Patricia may have been taller and older than her, but she wasn't afraid of her.

"Did you make that?" Patricia asked sweetly as she walked towards Rebecca, pointing at the daisy halo.

"It's easy. I can show you." She bent over to pick up the chain end and another daisy to show her. She looked down at the length of the flower chain. It had to be several feet long. She didn't realize it was that long until she stopped. "All you have to do—" she started.

"No, I'll just take this one!" Patricia reached out and snatched the daisy halo from Rebecca's head, taking a fistful of hair with it. Rebecca screamed and clamped her hands on her head. "Besides...it suits me better," she said as

she plonked it on her head, trying to make it fit but only succeeded in crumpling the daisies in the process. Rebecca rubbed her head as Elizabeth's mother called for them to go back inside. Patricia pointed her finger at Rebecca and jabbed it into the air. "You say anything about this and I will tell them you were talking to the crow," she threatened. "Do you know what happens then? They will take you away from your father and chain you up. Everyone knows what crows do."

Rebecca waited for the girls to make their way to the cottage before she set off. She stared at Patricia's head as the girl skipped along with the now-tattered daisy chain squashed on her head. *Swoop*. Out of nowhere a crow hurtled towards Patricia and nipped the daisy chain off her head, taking a large chunk of her hair. The girls screamed and flung their arms in the air as they set off in a run. Rebecca wondered if it was the same crow.

She knew she shouldn't laugh because she would be seen, so she looked at the ground and grinned. She didn't think there was anything wrong with talking to crows or any animal. But she knew other people did think it was strange, so she never mentioned it.

All through supper the girls continued to ignore Rebecca. Preparing for bed, she got into her nightdress and twisted her hair back into a bun. She looked in her belongings for the chocolate. She looked on the floor. Nothing. She looked again where her nightdress had been placed, but she was still unable to find it. As she returned to the fireplace to rejoin the girls, she saw the chocolate wrapping.

"That was for all of us to share," she said, looking down at the small piece that was left.

"We did share it," Patricia said as she scooped up the last piece and shoveled it into her mouth. Rebecca didn't understand why they were being so mean to her when she didn't even know them. She looked away from Patricia and took her place on the floor with them.

The candles filled the room with a golden glow; each of the girls sat on the floor, wrapped in a blanket and listened to the wind howling. The girls giggled as the candles threw shadows on the walls. They all released a high-pitched squeal when the wind pushed the window boards hard against the cottage wall.

"We should tell ghost stories," Elizabeth suggested.

"What kind of ghost stories?" Rebecca asked.

"Tell us the one about your mother!" Patricia snarled. Rebecca looked at her, not knowing what she meant.

"What story about my mother? She died when I was just a baby."

"That's not the tale we all heard," Patricia said. "We heard your mother went crazy and lives with the Evil One in the Dead Forest."

Rebecca felt she was glued to the floor. "The Evil One?" She had never heard of such a person. She had no idea who they were talking about.

"Yes. My brother copped a beating for mentioning his name at the kitchen table once," Patricia said, turning to the others with glee. "He said he saw a faceless man walking along the edge of the Dead Forest." Clara and Elizabeth cringed at the mention of the Evil One.

"What was he wearing?" Elizabeth asked. "My brother told me he wears only black, from head to toe. His cloak and hood cover him." Patricia moved closer to the girls and spoke in a hushed tone. She continued to stare at Rebecca as she spoke. "There are so many tales about

him, but one of them is that if you see his face, you die because he's so white. He's like the Angel of Death coming to take your soul. That's why there are so many crows in the Dead Forest. They are the souls of people who haven't righted their wrongs, so they are trapped in the body of the crow and feed off other dead things to survive."

Patricia nodded her head as she leaned back and stared at Rebecca. Clara glanced at Rebecca before tugging on her blanket.

"Another tale of the Evil One says that he stole a baby from a woman in the village, but the baby was dead inside her," Clara started, trying to find her voice. "The tale says he was able to breathe life into the baby with his special powers and now the baby works for him. He comes into town and does his work. They say his eyes are as clear as the stream and his skin as white as milk."

"I heard the rumor that Rebecca's mother went crazy and has been lurking in the Dead Forest waiting for her," Patricia said in a harsh tone. All the girls held their breath and waited for Rebecca to speak.

"What did you say?" Rebecca asked calmly but quietly, taking in what she said.

"I said, I've heard people of the village saying your mother went crazy when she found out she was having you and waited until you were born before running away. That she now lives in the Dead Forest with the Evil One, plotting to take more babies from the villagers while they wait for you to go crazy and join them."

Rebecca's cheeks felt like they were on fire and her mind went blank. She lurched forward and swung her hands in front of her. She grabbed hold of Patricia's curls and pulled her head hard towards the floor.

"You lie!" Rebecca screamed over and over again as she thrashed about on the floor, striking and kicking out, hoping to hit Patricia anywhere. Clara and Elizabeth scrambled to their feet and tried to get away as Patricia's hair twisted around Rebecca's fingers. She yanked hard and snaked her fingers around more hair before pulling with all her might again. Patricia's screams matched the howling of the wind as Rebecca swung her hands towards her, hoping to strike her mouth. Although she was smaller in size she knew how to hurt someone. Elizabeth and Clara stood back before trying to grab Rebecca by her ankles.

Rebecca kicked out, pushing Clara across the room before turning her attention back to Patricia who was still screaming as chunks of her hair were being pulled. Tears teemed down Patricia's face as she tried to defend herself, but Rebecca's fists kept knocking her hands out of the way as more hair was grabbed. Patricia tried to get to her feet but Rebecca pushed her over and climbed over her body, sitting on her belly.

Pathetically, Patricia swung her arms as she continued to scream with all her might. Rebecca's vision was blinded by her hair hanging in her face, but it didn't stop her from swinging her arms.

She brought her hand down and contacted with Patricia's cheek. Her hand smarted so she knew it would have hurt Patricia. Patricia lifted her hand and covered where Rebecca had just slapped. Silence. Everything stopped.

Rebecca puffed as she looked through her hair to see Patricia staring up at her.

"You are crazy. Just like your mother," she whispered. Rebecca couldn't stop the rage from taking over her body again as she balled her fists and swung at Patricia again. Patricia managed to grab

hold of some of Rebecca's hair and pulled, trying to inflict any amount of pain. Elizabeth's mother joined the four girls' screams and howled at them all to stop.

Elizabeth's mother raced to the water pitcher and tipped it on Rebecca and Patricia. It had little effect. Both girls continued to scream while arms and legs went in all directions. Rebecca balled her fist and brought it down hard, connecting with Patricia's nose.

Rebecca didn't hear the sound through the screams but the feeling of Patricia's nose crunching under her fingers made her stop. She pushed her hair out of her face as she sat up to see blood spurting out of Patricia's nose, running down her face. So much blood from two tiny holes. Patricia howled and clamped her hands over her face as she tried to protect herself. Rebecca slowly inched away from Patricia and looked at her fist. It was covered in blood.

"Rebecca!" Mrs. MacDougall screamed.

"She started it!" she shot back.

"This is no way for any young lady to behave. You apologize immediately."

"No," she said indignantly as she balled her fists again.

"Oh look at you, you poor child." Elizabeth's mother turned her attention to a sobbing and stunned Patricia. Rebecca looked at Patricia then at herself. Both were splattered with blood and water. Their nightdresses clung to their bodies as Rebecca felt her rage dying down. She knew she was going to be in huge trouble from her father.

Mrs. MacDougall scolded Patricia to stop screaming as she assisted her to sit up. The girl stifled her cries to a sob as Mrs. MacDougall surveyed the damage.

"I told you she was strange! You said so yourself," Patricia sobbed, shooting Elizabeth's mother a glare. "It won't be long before you will be with your mother

again, Rebecca."

Mr. MacDougall appeared from nowhere and lunged at Rebecca. He reached out to grab hold of her arms, but he wasn't quick enough. She hurtled forward and grabbed at Patricia's hair again.

Rebecca did not let go as Mr. MacDougall lifted her forcibly into the air and away from Patricia. Her fists were still clenched around Patricia's hair so she too was lifted off the ground.

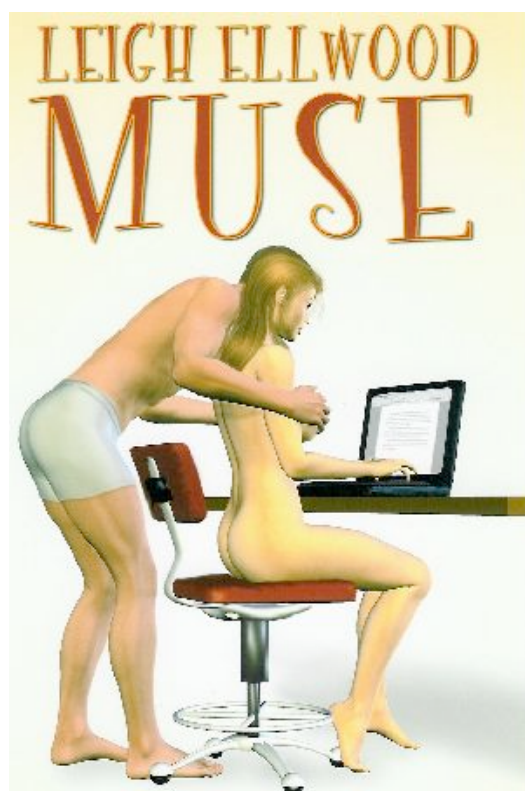
Patricia released a blood-curdling scream as her hair was pulled out by the fistful. It was a sight of hands, arms and hair going in all directions as Mrs. MacDougall jumped forward, slapping at Rebecca's hands, trying to make her let go. As clumps of hair tore free from the root, Patricia fell on her behind, squealing in pain as tears streamed down her face.

Rebecca continued to lash out with her legs as she was tucked under the elder man's strong arm and walked out of the cottage. Patricia howled as Mrs. MacDougall pulled her into the kitchen in an attempt to calm her down.

Elizabeth and Clara sat in silence as they surveyed the floor littered with tufts of red hair, listening as Rebecca's screams and moans get quieter and quieter.

Muse

Leigh Ellwood



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Author Bio

Leigh Ellwood is an award-nominated author of erotic romance. Her works are available through Phaze, Venus Press, Midnight Showcase, and Silk's Vault. Leigh also records a podcast at her blog at <http://leighellwood.blogspot.com> .
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Blurb

The world is waiting for the next steamy Tania Garber romance...all Tania has to do is write it. But with her marriage ended and her inspiration gone, Tania doesn't know if she can write romance anymore. She needs a muse, and finds the next best thing in her new downstairs neighbor.

Wesley Boone needs a break, from his work and from romance. A sought-after fashion photographer, he has lost his eye for beauty and hopes a vacation will relax his nerves. Then he meets his new neighbor, who excites him to no end, but will the excitement end when she learns his secrets?

Excerpt

Of the three daughters of Giles Henry Pringle, governor of the principality of Cozelle, middle child Iona was not considered the prize catch, despite arguably being the loveliest of the trio. She was as delicate as the spider's web —on the outset fragile and transparent, a seemingly laughable challenge, yet to some an impervious, complicated snare. To listen to Giles at night when he believed no ears were tuned to him, one would soon discover Iona was no more than that.

Despite Iona's behavior, the men continued to call, their eyes fixated eventually on the swell of Trina's bosom as enhanced by her gauzy dresses. Iona's best chance for sealing a willing union lay in either Trina's quick betrothal (a slim possibility, as Trina's threats to stall the inevitable out of spite were becoming more numerous) or with a suitor unbiased when it came to the Pringle women.

The baby of the family, Nattie, favored her deceased mother in appearance and manner. Tall and sinewy with brown doe eyes positioned over high cheekbones, she shunned the fashions that dictated her sisters' lives, preferring manageably shorter hair and outdoor activities to interest in local politics, a thing shared between her father and sisters.

Handsome would be the proper term to describe her, not quite demure, not exactly mannish. Giles had not worried in the beginning, thinking young Nattie would eventually run herself into maturity and pursue the course destined for her. Today, the morning of her eighteenth birthday, Giles worried. He saw no signs of her slowing, not a flicker of interest in any of the young men in town.

Twenty-year-old Iona, to be certain, exhibited no interest in this occasion; the day was like any other. This morning, as usual, found her...

Tania stopped typing and looked at what she had written, her forefinger lightly nudging the scroll button sticking out of the computer mouse. The words bobbed up and down on the screen, giving Tania a headache.

Where did the morning find Iona? What was she doing? Wearing? Saying?

Moreover, what else would the morning find?

Would anybody care what Iona was doing, saying, wearing, or singing?

Would anybody want to pay twenty-one dollars to know?

Tania sighed, thinking back to last night's dream. Damn her muse for leaving her when he said he'd stay. Damn her characters for staying when she wanted to scam.

Tania glanced at her notes for this story in progress. Why, too, had she started to tell the story with Iona? At best, she had earmarked Iona for a secondary character, someone against others could bounce off dialogue. Tania shrugged; maybe there was some truth in the theory spread by her writer friends that some characters tended to take on lives of their own when being written. Perhaps Iona felt like being the center of attention.

Well, Tania decided, as long as she was writing something instead of wishing to write something, Iona could scream to the heavens and tap dance.

Tania then sighed. She wasn't writing now, though.

She looked up at the clock above her—a thick wooden disk with black, metal Roman numerals fastened in their positions with tiny black grommets. The minute hand did not appear to have moved since she sat down to her allotted four hours of writing, though the ticking of the second hand clearly filled the silence in her one bedroom condo.

She blinked the sleep from her eyes, squinted, and craned her neck upward; yes, she saw it now...it was eight-fifteen in the morning in sunny Virginia Beach. Beyond the clock, through her living room-cum-office windows, the Chesapeake Beach shoreline was alive and bloated with out-of-state vehicles, surfboards and vacation clamshells

strapped to their roofs. Tourist season had begun.

Tania hated tourist season.

Her gaze drifted back to the clock, which now read eight-sixteen. The clock had been a wedding gift from her now ex-mother-in-law. It matched nothing Tania owned, yet Hubby—Ex-hubby, Tania mentally corrected herself—had insisted on keeping it to spare Mum's feelings. Hubby had thought nothing of sparing Tania's feelings two years after unwrapping that hideous gift when she arrived home late to find him screwing one of his freshman Psych 101 students on their couch, however.

Though she kept it to spite him, Tania hated the clock more than the incoming tourists who would spend the next four months crowding her favorite restaurants and her favorite nooks along the shore. To say nothing of grabbing the good parking spaces in every lot from here to Williamsburg, she reminded herself with a labored sigh. Had she not already been suffering severe writer's block, she would surely have blamed her inability to continue this latest story on the thoughts crowding her mind.

"How much worse can it get?" she moaned to the ceiling. Her answer came immediately with the shrill peal of the phone.

"Gah!" Tania clutched the mouse and dragged it back and forth across its pad, sending its white pointer zig-zagging over the words she had written. The urge to depress the left button, highlight everything, and hit delete passed quickly, and instead she lifted her hand. The sparse paragraphs onscreen were the

first she had written in months. Hardly her best work, but this was only a first draft. Surely something could be salvaged.

"Go away!" she yelled after the phone's third ring. The answering machine triggered and Tania listened to the automated female voiced default message before her agent's louder, more demanding voice filled the room. Cheryl Ormond, as usual, sounded two minutes away from an apoplectic fit.

"Pick up the goddamn phone, Tania. I know you're home."

Tania did not move, did not breathe, as if any hint of mobility on her part would betray her to the machine.

"Tania Garber," Charlene warned, "if you don't pick up the phone and talk to me right now I swear upon everything holy that I will—"

Beeeeeeep.

Tania relaxed and exhaled, but her relief was short-lived when the phone rang again. Cheryl did not miss a beat.

"You want me to sing? I'll do it, girl. You like ZZ Top? I know their whole catalogue, and don't think I'm going to let some answering machine stop—"

The third time the answering machine triggered, Cheryl immediately launched into "La Grange," and Tania enjoyed her first genuine laugh of the week as the normally high-pitched agent attempted a Texas-flavored bass. It was enough to inspire her to finish the sentence of the last paragraph written:

This morning, as usual, found her in the tiled kitchen of the governor's ancestral residence, a two-acre plot on the edge of town known as The Grange.

"They gotta lotta nice girls, ya'll," Cheryl drawled. "Yuh, huh-huh, huh..."

Tania picked up the hand-held receiver by her computer and the singing on the machine ceased. "Uncle!" she cried.

Cheryl however, appeared to have lost her sense of humor in the split second between her song and Tania's acknowledgment. "Where's the book?" she demanded.

"What book?"

"Don't start with me, Tania. Your publisher is hounding my ass for the next Tawny Garbo romance, and if it's not on my desk or in my e-mail inbox within the next week then it'll be your ass."

"What? Cher," Tania whined, glancing at the clock, "it's eight-twenty in the morning here. The publisher's in California. Who's hounding you at five-twenty in the morning? And why are you hounding me now? Did you finish your morning yoga routine early and have nothing better to do?"

"Number one, I do Pilates. Number two, I'm hounding you because I need your book. Now. Yesterday."

Tania's face stretched into a grin. "Heh, heh, you said 'Number two,'" she replied in her best Beavis and/or Butthead impersonation. Tania often had trouble discerning the two.

"It's not funny, Tania. Your publisher doesn't think so, either. Your tardiness is throwing off their schedule."

"Don't you have other clients to harass?"

"My other clients turn in their work on time. You used to, too."

Tania leaned back in her office chair, wincing as the coils underneath groaned. "Yeah, but what fun was that, being punctual and obedient? Admit it, this way brings much more excitement to your work, wouldn't you agree?"

"If by excitement you mean threats of breach of contract lawsuits, then yes."

"What?" Tania bolted upright and the chair sprang forward, causing her to brush against the keyboard. Frantically she pointed her mouse to the Undo command and cleared the gibberish tarnishing what little there existed of her first draft. "They wouldn't do that."

"They would, they will, they're going to." Tania heard the rustling of a stack of papers on the line. "Marketing and PR is about to begin on this book, their art department already has a draft cover, and we have yet to see word one. Tania, do you realize how much money these guys have put into selling your books? How much they stand to lose if you don't deliver?"

Tania looked around her sparse apartment—at the television set that was not cable ready, the pastel green recliner draped with a white afghan to conceal the grime left by years of sweat, and the coffee table with the chip in the left corner—and sighed again. Those who believed that all famous writers were fabulously

wealthy and living on tropical islands were sadly mistaken. Of everything she owned, only the couch was new. For good reason.

"I know I bring in a lot of money through sales," Tania said finally, "and I know how little of the percentage of those sales go to me, after the publishers take their share, and after I've paid my agent."

"Hey now. Without me, you wouldn't even be getting that," Carolyn retorted. "Bedeviled would still be taking up space in the trunk of some editor's car. You know that."

"I do," Tania conceded. She had to admit that despite the lack of furs in her closet and extra zeros in her bank account, she had struck gold when she signed on with Carolyn Ormond's agency five years ago. She remained eternally grateful that the agent had found something salable in one of her novels that the previous thirty or so agents had obviously overlooked. Bedeviled, her third novel written and first one published, became a hot property in Carolyn's capable hands, the first of what Tania christened the B books, as every title since published began with that letter.

Staring at her computer screen, Tania pondered another, less encouraging B word: bankrupt. "What's this again about a lawsuit?" she asked.

Cheryl's sigh was a gentle roar over the phone. "I'm meeting with them later this morning, my time," she said. "I can do some sweet-talking, and at best buy you a week. You think you can have something for me by then? I mean, I know it's not brain surgery for you. Just a nice, Tawny Garbo historical romance with lots of sex, heaving bosoms,

throbbing weiners...it writes itself basically."

Tania, of course, knew better. "A whole week? A whole, seven-day week?" Today was Monday. She would have to increase her allotted writing time to a full eight-hour workday. Perhaps overtime.

Tania hated Mondays more than she hated tourist season and the ugly Roman clock now ticking loudly in her ear.

Cheryl appeared not to hear the panic in Tania's voice. "How much do you have written so far?"

"Oh." Tania clicked the mouse. "It's going rather well. I have a good twenty thousand words down." Give or take nineteen thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine.

"Well, that's not so bad." Cheryl's tone reflected a boundless relief. "Tell you what, I'll definitely get you a week and to reward you, I won't bug you until next Monday. Unless, of course, I hear back from Eve on Bedeviled."

Tania felt her heart throb. "Definitely, let me know what happens there." Eve TV, a cable network specializing in women-centered programming, wanted to option Bedeviled for a miniseries. What Tania stood to earn in the subsidiary sale would hopefully cover a complete design makeover for the condo, with some nesting money to spare.

"One week, darling," Cheryl sang. "Give me something good, or next time I'm singing Metallica's greatest hit, over and over again." Her agent rang off without a goodbye.

"One week," Tania muttered to her computer screen. Seven days to write a novel. It had been done, she knew. Jack Kerouac purportedly had written *On the Road* in four days, and given the formulaic, romantic pap Tania was known for writing, this next piece would not require as much thought as the great Beat writer had given to his work. Boy meets girl with instant attraction, girl dismisses boy after implausible miscommunication over ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend, girl finds herself in dangerous situation. Boy rescues girl, boy and girl live happily ever after. Intersperse with some creative sex and BAM! Bestseller. Stories like these did easily write themselves.

Tania drummed her fingers across her desk. That being the case, why were there no further words on her screen? Where was that handsome dream man who had destroyed the monstrous manifestation of her writer's block, then promised to be with her? She closed her eyes and tried to conjure his image, but failed.

"Probably out to lunch with the Tooth Fairy," Tania grumbled.

She had an idea, of course, a kernel of thought centered around three sisters. Three was her lucky number—*Bedeveled* proving that theory, the third time definitely being the charm in that case—and she wanted the streak to continue. This work, however, would be her fourth published work, if it even made it to print. Tania did not want to be a three-trick pony, despite her numerological suspicions.

Three sisters: Iona, Trina, and Nattie. Nice, historic-sounding names for the

bucolic village setting of the fictional Cozelle, named for her parents Cole and Zelda. This untitled work, as with the other B novels, would probably be ripe with flowing damsels garnished with cursed, heirloom jewelry and handsome warriors with rippling, muscular chests and flowing hair to arouse the envy of any romance cover model. There would be conflict with a jealous villain, maybe some fistfights and swooning, and naturally a few scenes of sweaty, passionate lovemaking in the cornfields.

All Tania had to do was write it.

She wanted to bang her head against the monitor. Why could she not write it?

She lowered her head on the keyboard, oblivious to the clacking sound emitting from the pinhole speakers on her monitor. Cheryl was going to call next Monday morning and Tania would still be in the same position, miserable over this failure and worried over how to stave off a lawsuit when she had nothing of value to pawn. The clock was hardly an antique; Mum-in-Law had purchased it at Target. She would have to forfeit her film earnings from *Bedeveled*, she realized, unless Eve TV decided not to option it. Then there would be nothing to forfeit.

"No!" Tania straightened and positioned her fingers at ASDF and JKL;. She could do this, she could write. She needed a new recliner, a new computer, and a new outlook on life to replace the cynical one that had grasped hold when Hubby moved in with his nubile, twenty-something love bunny. She needed only to get the poison out of her head and pick up where she had left off, and scanning her first draft she saw she had left Iona in the kitchen.

"Come on," she muttered, squeezing her eyes shut again. Deep within the recesses of her memory emerged a faded image—tall and handsome, with piercing blue eyes.

Yes! She smiled.

With a deep breath, Tania plunged headfirst back into The Grange to shape the remainder of Iona's day:

She was perched in her seat at the oak rectangular table—far left to accommodate eating with her left hand—hovering over a plate of steaming corn cakes, scowling. Giles, sitting opposite her, no longer bothered to inquire of her discomfort. Each day brought a new answer, another wheedling request to dismiss their manservant...

Then a thunderous, deep bass shook the floor, rattling a ceramic clown figurine Tania had perched on an occasional table by the couch. Iona's cozy existence faded instantly along the image of her muse, leaving Tania's fingers back at their starting position.

"Damn it!" she cried, and sprang from her chair. The noise was coming from downstairs, but how could that be? The owner of that condo, an elderly retired Navy captain, had left last week for an extended European package tour with several other oldsters. The man had no family that she knew of who would be staying there.

The noise was a steady beat, peppered with loud, staccato commands and girlish squeals. Terrific, Tania thought. More than likely the captain sublet his place to a pack of college students for the season.

Assuming the condo, which was laid out similar to Tania's, went for eight hundred dollars a month, four kids desiring close beach access and walking distance to three bars could bunk together cheaply, living off beer and Cheetos. Tania was certain Jack Kerouac never had to work under such conditions.

She slipped on her tennis shoes and stomped down the flight of stairs to number 101, determined to give her new neighbors a welcome they would never forget.

A Good Catch

Megan Hussey



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Author Bio

Megan Hussey is a professional author and columnist who has published two novels, "Jingle Bell Romance" and "Mauve Christmas," and is a participating writer in a number of romance anthologies. She is also the leader of the Playgirl Posse, a group that supports Playgirl magazine, PlaygirlTV and the concept of quality erotica for women.

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Blurb

After forsaking her unfortunate role as bridesmaid in the *Wedding From You Know Where* (and the accompanying pain of watching her sister marry her ex-boyfriend), Monique seeks escape in the solitude of her houseboat -- and the quiet beauty of Florida waters. What she finds, however, is a sensual merman who aims both to heal her heart and satisfy her deepest desires.

The troubles of this everyday lady of the land soon are forgotten in the arms of the gorgeous Ethan. Yet is he a passionate diversion, or the "good catch" who will win Monique's heart?

Excerpt

"Monique, you can turn around now."

The woman started, and her back remained turned to the source of her temptation.

"You're decent?" she asked, wondering if he had discovered and enveloped himself in her Miss Piggy beach blanket.

"I hope you think so, Monique."

Shaking her head confusedly, Monique turned to face her guest.

The mystery was soon solved -- and Monique found herself staring at the most beautiful, immaculate man she had ever seen.

Ethan stood naked before the bathtub, his tall, muscular form effectively dwarfing the small room and its delicate decorations.

In his human form he was nearly a foot taller than his stunned hostess, and had legs that were long, toned and well-muscled. His hips

and thighs were hard and trim -- and his lower stomach was artistically planed.

Forcing her wandering gaze upward, she saw that his equally delicious upper half remained wet from the bath, and glowed in the rays of incoming sunlight afforded by a nearby window. His long dark hair hung in soaking ringlets past his shoulders, and his wide, expressive eyes were filled with a strange wonder.

And in Monique's estimation, a stranger desire.

"I don't understand. . ." she said simply.

Chuckling softly, Ethan made no move to cover himself -- but did keep a safe, respectful distance from his befuddled hostess.

"Monique," he breathed, saying her name slowly and sensually. "I would never force you to do anything you didn't want. Say the word and we'll go swimming and have a pleasant, friendly afternoon."

With this he paused, drawing slightly closer as he seared her with a boldly seductive gaze.

"Yet if you say no to me," he continued, "say it because you don't want to be with me. Not because your family and friends might frown on your having a wild affair with a virtual stranger."

Tilting her head, Monique pursed her lips curiously.

"So you're planning on things getting pretty wild?" she asked, tone slightly hopeful.

Giving her an affectionate grin, Ethan walked slowly toward her -- his every move accented by sleek, catlike grace.

"I plan on fulfilling your every fantasy and making love to you, thoroughly and completely," he said, voice barely above a whisper. "I plan on making you scream."

Huntress of Darkness

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Author Bio

Kari Kincade lives in San Francisco. She loves to read fantasy, paranormal, time travel romances. She always thought about writing a romance novel, but was too shy to try. With the encouragement of her friends, she

wrote her first stunner, A FAERIE'S LOVE. She is currently working on a fairy tale book and a fantasy book series involving dragons.

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Blurb

For centuries, Aleski Dimitros had been hunting the vampire who had killed his wife. Unable to locate him, Aleski had settled in the outskirts of a small town that he helped to establish. Residents were so intrigued by the vampire legend that they adopted their ways and habits. Growing restless, he ventured into town where he met Katrina McKnight, a private investigator and a vampire hunter. He had felt an instant attraction to her. However there were obstacles that they had to go through. Will their love be able to overcome those obstacles?

Excerpt

Drago, sensing that Aleski was momentarily distracted, took advantage of the situation. He pounced on Aleski, knocking him to the ground and, using his body, pinned him down. Drago wrapped his hand tightly around Aleski's neck, cutting off his air. Aleski struggled against the tight hold, trying to gain back the advantage. However, it was useless.

"Oh and just before I kill you, I thought you might want to know this. It was I who killed your wife." Drago boasted. "She was such a sweet thing, but no spunk."

Upon hearing that news, Aleski's eyes glowed red. He was furious. He had found his wife's killer and now he was helpless to seek his revenge. He

renewed his efforts to free himself so that he could kill him. He used all his strength to bring forth a strong wind, aiming it directly at Drago. It picked him up and threw him away from Aleski. He got up and sped over to Drago. However, Drago was ready for him. He raised his arm and clawed Aleski across his torso with his talons. Aleski staggered back at the blow and he fell down as he tripped over a fallen branch. Drago was about to strike again when he felt pain on his shoulder. Turning his head, he saw several wooden stars imbedded in him. One was in his shoulder, one in his upper arm, and one in his stomach. It was burning him and smoke was coming out from where the stars were imbedded. Drago snarled in pain. He took a quick look around and located a figure in black. The only part that was showing through was the eyes. Drago narrowed his eyes into slits and looked at the figure.

"I will get you next time!" Drago yelled at the figure. "Mark my words, I will enjoy killing you."

Drago laughed evilly and promptly disappeared. The silent figure went over to Aleski to see how he was. Aleski looked at the figure coming nearer to him.

"Katrina ... what are you doing here?" Aleski asked and then saw the way she was dressed. "And why are you dressed like that?"

Katrina reached up and pulled the covering down from her face. "Are you alright, Aleski?" She asked him, and then at his nod she continued. "I am a vampire hunter. After seeing the killing of that woman, I knew people's lives were in danger. It is my duty to rid the world of

them."

As she spoke, she noticed the blood on his clothes. "You are injured. Let's stop the bleeding first and then we must get you to the hospital."

"NO! No hospital!" Aleski argued. "I will not go to the hospital! I will be alright. You do not have to worry about me."

Katrina shook her head at his stubbornness. "We must stop that bleeding, otherwise you will bleed to death."

"I will be alright," Aleski repeated, trying to reassure her.

Katrina knelt down to assist him up, hooking her arm around his upper arm. Grateful for the assistance, Aleski got up, wincing from the pain as he did so.

"Here, lean on me for support," Katrina offered.

"It is ok. I can make it. We need to get back to the house." Aleski replied. "It is not that far. I just need to rest."

As they walked back to the house, Aleski leaned a bit on her. The moment he did that, he knew it was a big mistake. He could hear her heartbeat and her blood flowing through her veins. With the loss of his blood, he wasn't sure if he could control the urge to feed off of her. His fangs began to grow long and the beast within cried out to take her blood to satisfy the hunger. With a strong will power, he resisted the compulsion. He could not take the chance that she would not kill him, knowing now what she was. Aleski turned his head away from her. He could

not let her see him like this. He looked over to see how far they still have to go. Judging the distance and at the rate they were walking, it was going to be another ten minutes.

"So, how did you become a vampire hunter?" Aleski asked, trying to distract himself from the temptation. "How would you know whether the person is a human or vampire?"

"I grew up in a family of vampire hunters. Even my ancestors were vampire hunters. The hunting techniques were handed down from generations to generations. I was taught by my parents and brothers on how to fight them and to look for signs and clues." Katrina told him. "As I grew older, I began to use my woman intuition. It has not failed me yet in detecting a vampire. Of course, we don't announce it everyone. They would think that we are loonies. I know because I was ridiculed by my peers as I was growing up."

"I am sorry to hear that. However, it made you a stronger person." Aleski commented. "So what did you do afterwards?"

"After I graduated from school, I went abroad and studied with a ninja master. That is where I learned my fighting skills. I learned from the best." Katrina responded. "I combined that with what I was taught and, voila ... I became a ninja vampire hunter."