

*November/December 2020*

# *Affaire de Coeur*

*Bringing You Honest Reviews Since 1980*

*Happy Holidays  
from AdC*



*Author Teri Riggs is in the Spotlight*



*Beware of the Mental  
Effects of Covid-19*





# *Affaire de Coeur*

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# The World of Formatting Books

by

Pamela Ackerson

Many self-published authors don't hire a formatting company or professional. Unfortunately, it's obvious. Yes, even obvious to readers who know nothing about publishing.

Why, you ask? Because they're not following format protocol. There's nothing wrong with doing something different, but there's a formula publishers use, and there are reasons, very important reasons, why they do it the way they do.

It sells more books.

That's correct. Proper formatting will sell more books. If it isn't formatted correctly, it will appear odd to the reader, and they'll subconsciously feel there's something off about the book.

Proper formatting gives the reader a positive reading experience with no distractions.

So, how is it obvious? I'm going to name a couple.

The paragraphs aren't justified.

The line spacing isn't at 1.15.

Font sizes are off.

The indentation isn't set at the proper setting. Digital printing is very different now than it was twenty years ago.

There is no difference between hard breaks and soft breaks.

First paragraphs in chapters, or break paragraphs are indented.

Chapter headings aren't centered properly.

Now the first thing you're most likely going to say is,

*“Digital printing is very different now than it was twenty years ago.”*

but, when I queried a publisher, they told me double-spaced, times new roman...etc.

Yes. That's correct.



There are several reasons why. One of the biggest reasons is they can read and take notes on your submission without issues. It's to their benefit and yours for them to have easier access to an unfinished manuscript.

Personally, I set up my formatting before I start writing. My preference is Garamond 11.5. However, it can be any font you prefer that is reader friendly.





Once the font, size, indentation, and justification are set, I leave it alone and write away.

There's no need to finish or completely adjust the formatting until the book is finished with edits.

If there's a request for the first 30 pages, I copy and paste those pages onto a new file and format per their preference.

With books that are self-published, once the editor is done with my work, the formatting is adjusted for E-Book and then print.

It's different for each one. It's also different for individual publishing

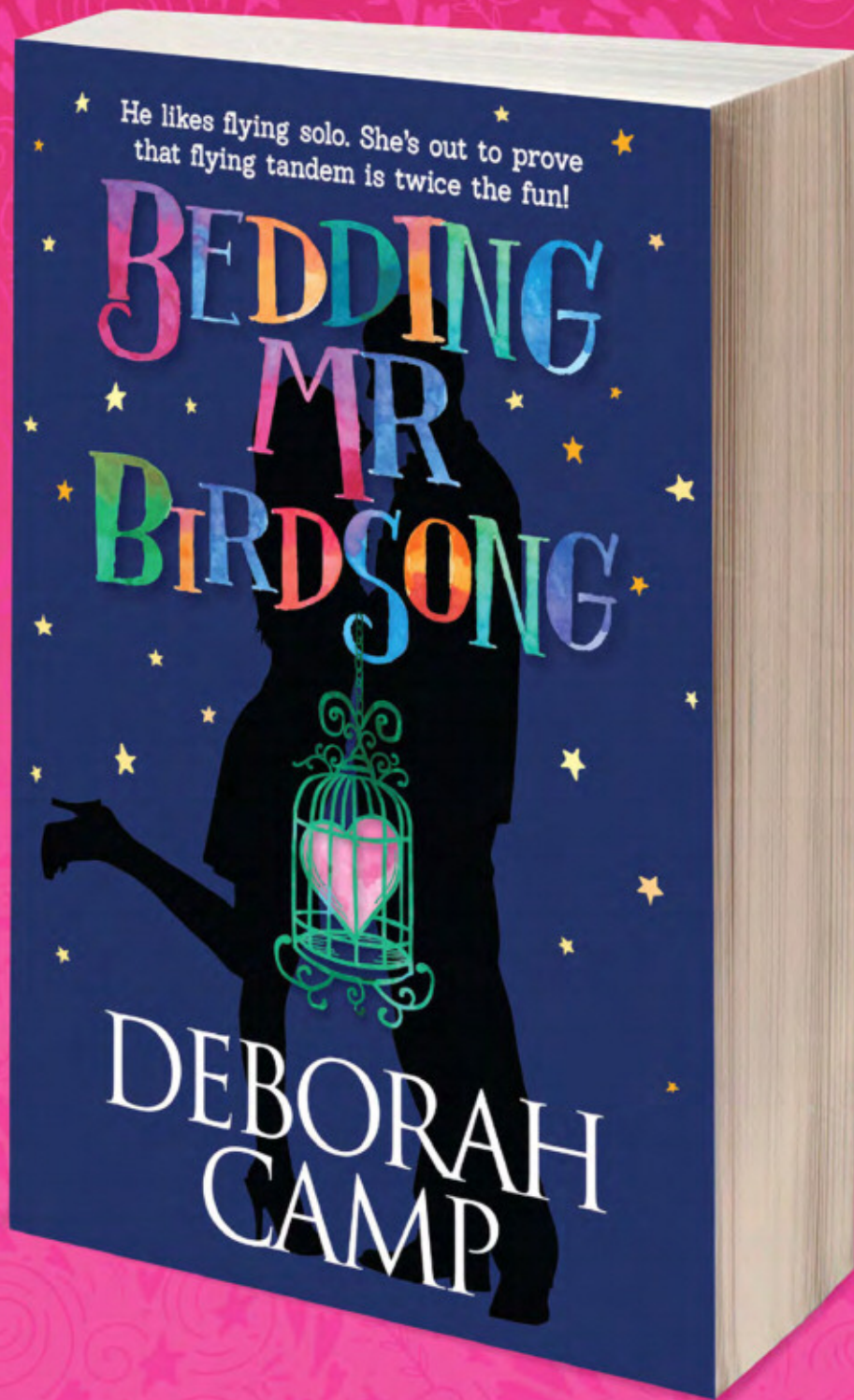
platforms. (FYI-Amaon makes it easy peasy.)

Look at how the big publishing houses format their books and mimic the style. They know how to sell books. They've had hundreds of years of experience.

You'll be very happy with the outcome.







*"A frolicking, sexy romance  
that will tickle your heart  
(and other places)!"*

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# Editorial

by Louise B. Snead

## It's Not Just Physical

This upcoming season will be far different from any we have experienced. To think a tiny virus, something we cannot even see with the naked eye, has taken control and dictates rules so stringent that if we violate them, we will die. It's like one of those horror stories like *Night of the Living Dead* or *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, whereby we don't act like we usually do, and for a while no one suspects anything different. And then two sets of metamorphoses take place--the physical and the mental.

The first thing you notice is a change in appearance. Everyone is wearing something over their faces, objects so big that you can't tell who's beneath. And, if that person wears glasses, they're fogged up all the time, so you really don't know who it is. You can't get closer because the little bug we can't see has dictated that we cannot be closer than six feet or they will invade us, too. If you're like me, you wear gloves everywhere you go. You can't get your mani-pedi, facials, or work out in the local gym without fear that the next person coming in the door is infected. We can't see our family members. We can't go out dining. No theater. We don't trust public transportation enough to go somewhere. We missed so many special events it wasn't funny--graduations, birthdays, trips.

Enter the mental effects of Covid-19. According to the Mental Health Institute, 40% of us are suffering from at least one mental health issue--anxiety, stress, depression. The suicide rates, especially among seniors, is way up because of feeling irrelevant, bored, or powerless. Psychiatrists have identified The Big Three mental manifestations as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. (Including overeating and alcohol abuse.) And psychological issues can manifest themselves physically. Headaches, hair loss, neck stiffness, and backaches are all commonplace physical signs of stress.

Imagine that group of people who would eagerly comply with the restrictions of Covid and stay home and be safe, but they can't. They are the essential employees. Grocery store workers, postal workers, bank employees, restaurant employees, waste management staff, hospital staff, nursing home people, etc., are among those who don't have choices. There are too many to name. These people are exposed every day to the virus. Yet they go to work anyway because (1) they are the sole supporters of their families, and if they don't work, they don't eat or have a place to stay. And (2) they are helpers--from the core of their being, they have to help, and they want to offer what they can to defeat the spread of this. With the mandate essential workers have may come anger, resentment of their predicament and fear that they will take the disease back to their loved ones or that they catch it themselves. Some are living paycheck to paycheck and don't know if they will have a place to stay after the eviction band is lifted. Many of them have no health insurance so they hide their illnesses. These are the definitions of stress.

Getting out of this mental sink hole requires a willingness to self care. What makes you happy? What makes you feel good about what's going on around you? Are there any events that occur that you can participate in and still be safe? Mental health workers suggest that instead of seeking the instant gratification of food or alcohol, take a walk, indulge in exercise. Get busy in the house. Some of my friends are knee-deep in house renovations. Everyone I know is catching up on their reading (listening). Others are using this time to delve into their neglected social media accounts and, believe it or not, Ancestry. We've seen so many



movies and binged on so much TV it's embarrassing. I think I've seen all the Hallmark movies, Lifetime Christmas movies, Netflix and Prime Video movies that interest me, and I know all the words to every song in *Hamilton*. If I said the names Oliver Queen, Barry Allen, Felicity Smoak, Grodd, or Detective Chloe Decker, would you know the level to which what I've sunk? They're all DC comic characters from *The Arrow*, *The Flash* and *Lucifer*. So sad.

What about baking? I've tried so many different recipes. Some of them were awful while others, like my Chocolate Zucchini bread, resulted in multi requests for more. Do you sew, crochet, or knit? How about that story you've been dying to tell? Write it! My grandson is taking piano lessons online. Try it!

"Zoom" and "Go to Meeting" provide wonderful experiences to help us stay together and pseudo help our children who are not going to school. The perfectionist in me hates the angles that end up in distortions on the monitors that come with "Zoom." Plus, I had three inches of white hair growth, so I learned quickly to turn off the camera. But it's so important to keep in contact with friends and families.

*continued on page 30*

# The Best Laid Plans of

## Deborah Camp

*Author of more than 50 novels, Deborah has been a full-time writer since she graduated from the University of Tulsa. She worked for a few years as a reporter/editor for newspapers before quitting to devote herself to writing romances. She also loves to read romances. She volunteers with ARF, rescuing dogs and cats from kill shelters and adopting them to forever homes.*

**S**ounds like a plan! When I was just starting out as a novelist, I did meticulous outlines for each book and I also planned my career. Didn't take long for my "career plans" to fall off the rails. The outlines became shorter to adjust to editor requests.

Occasionally, I would still try to plan my next few years as a novelist, but that never turned out well. What I finally realized is that there is no master plan for a writer. Readers and their tastes are too fickle to assume that what you're writing now is what readers will be buying a year or two from now.

**I** can't tell you how many times I was told by editors years ago that vampires didn't sell. Anne Rice proved them all wrong. This happens all the time. A writer springs up and smashes all the "rules" because their work provides something that readers have been craving. Editors turned down my "Mind's Eye" series centered on two psychic detectives because "there aren't enough readers interested in psychics." I finally went ahead and wrote the series and published in on Amazon. The reviews have been stellar and I'm extremely proud of those six books. (*Through His Eyes, Through His Touch, Through His Heart, Through Her Eyes, Through Her Touch, Through Her Heart*)



**W**riters like Ann Rice, Kathleen Woodiwiss, Jean Auel, and Diana Galbadon broke all the rules and answered the silent calls of readers who wanted something different than what they were seeing on the bookshelves. But did they "plan" those milestones? No. They were writing what they wanted to read--putting on paper their dreams. They hoped someone (or a lot of someones) would also love their characters and stories, but they couldn't have known that their book sales would soar and they'd be bestsellers.

**S**o, like most writers, I write what I want to read. I never thought I'd write historical romances because I didn't read them. Then I read one by LaVyrle Spencer and it inspired me to write one of my own. Never planned to do it and I was stunned that it came so easily to me.

**W**hile I do research on every book I write, my historicals are set in the West of the 1800s and much of it comes to me out of the corners of my mind. I grew up watching westerns on TV and they had provided me with a lot of knowledge I didn't even know I possessed! My parents were raised in the country and I'd listened to their childhood stories of working with mules and chickens, planting crops, picking cotton, etc. I had a ton of information stored in my brain!

When I'm researching, I have to limit myself to how long I allow myself for it because when I get involved in some aspect of history, it's hard for me to stop searching and reading. That's the journalist in me, I guess. There are so many hidden gems in history and I love to stumble upon them. For example, I live in Oklahoma and have visited Guthrie many times. In my research of women of the 1800s who were landowners, I discovered that Guthrie was the divorce mecca of that era. Women could get divorces in Guthrie when

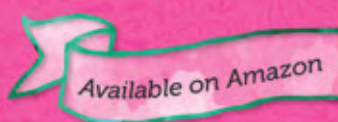


# Bedding Mr. Birdsong

By DEBORAH CAMP



Beautiful women fly in and out of Matthew Birdsong's apartment, but no one has a permanent roost there. Matt caged his heart after a bitter divorce. Zaney Miller, his neighbor, believes she can set Matt's heart free to love again. But can she do it without falling in love with him and breaking her own heart in the process?



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it was nearly impossible to do so in the rest of the country. Amazing! (*To Seduce and Defend* sprang from that bit of research.) I even read about Helen Churchill Candee, Titanic survivor and Guthrie visitor who received her divorce there. She also penned a romance novel set in the west, *An Oklahoma Romance*. A first of its kind!

**H**elen is the type of heroine I love to write about--independent, ahead of her time, brave, compassionate, and passionate. A woman like that needs a man with a steel backbone and stuffed with self-confidence. He also needs a devilish glint in his eyes and a rakish grin.

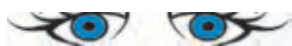
**C**reating characters is the most fun I have as a writer. I spend more time doing that than I do writing a short outline because my books are character driven. I know a lot more about them than I will ever share with the reader. I tell the readers about the characters on a "need to know" basis. I might know that the hero had a horse named Valor when he was a boy, but it never fits into the story so I'm the only one who ends up with that bit of information.

**M**y next two westerns will center on heroes who are fast with a gun to go along with the first one in the series I've planned. (Ooops, there's that word again!) *Ropin' the Moon* has a fast-draw hero and is already available on Amazon. I'll write the next two

fast-draw books as soon as I finish the contemporary romance I'm writing now.

**E**arlier this year, *Bedding Mr. Birdsong* was released. I had such a ball writing that book that I jumped right into another contemporary story. Hopefully, *Nailing Mr. Nasty* will be out around Valentine's Day. The hero is a tough-talking construction company owner who tangles with a temporary assistant, Samantha. Sam isn't intimidated by Jack Nast's snarl and rude mouth. In fact, she thinks he's about the sexiest man she's ever been around. These two have kept me entertained through this weird, shut-in world of COVID and I hope they entertain you, too.

[www.deborah-camp.com](http://www.deborah-camp.com)  
<https://twitter.com/AuthorDebCamp>  
<https://www.facebook.com/officialdeborah-camp>



## Sneak Peek

### Excerpt From *Bedding Mr. Birdsong*

She went to the counter and ordered something. Her blue-and-white-striped skirt ended halfway between her butt and her knees. She had good legs. In fact, she was good all over. Kind of short, but stacked nicely. If he remembered correctly, her eyes were green. Or maybe gray. When she turned around with a paper cup of coffee in hand, he grinned back at her. She had one of those smiles that was like a yawn. When you saw it, you had to do it, too.

Hitching herself up onto the stool beside him, she wiggled about until she was comfortable, then plucked at the front of her dress, before sipping the coffee. “Ahhh! Perfect.” She eyed his cup. “What’s in yours?”

“Coffee with half-and-half.”

Her eyes widened. Yes. They were green. Not grass green, but more like jade green. “Mine, too! We’re twinsies! People make fun of me because I just want coffee. Not latte or pumpkin spice. The real brew.” She touched his cup with hers like they were wine glasses. “You’re almost finished with the book.”

He rested his free hand on the open volume of *Prince of Tides*, giving himself a few seconds to catch up with her. “I am. It’s a great story.”

“Unforgettable. If you aren’t moved by that book, then you’re a statue and deserve to have pigeons poop all over you.”

He chuckled, then wondered if she’d followed him. Would she do that? He didn’t know because he didn’t know her. God, what if she were a stalker girl? One of his college buddies had met a woman in a bar and she’d followed him for a month! Everywhere he went, she was there. He’d finally had to threaten her with a restraining order before she’d left him alone. He realized that the redhead had gone quiet and was waiting for him to say something.

“I . . . um. Sorry. What were you saying?”

“You went man-deaf, didn’t you? The guys where I work do that sometimes. They zone out and let you talk to yourself.” She shrugged and drank some of her coffee.

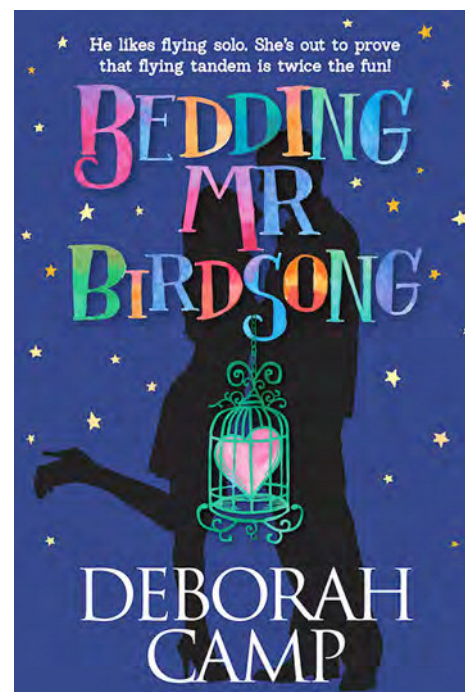
“I didn’t mean to. I was thinking . . .” About stalkers. Are you one?

“I was rambling on about how I had to dart out to buy a few groceries. Mainly dog food. My little monster is particular about his vittles. It’s got to be either Mighty Dog or Little Cesar. I’ve bought more expensive brands and he won’t touch them. You have a cat, right?”

He nodded, then froze. Stalker! “How do you know I have a cat? She never goes out.”

She smiled, but this one lacked power. “Oh. I . . . um . . . I met your ex-wife and she mentioned it.”

“My ex . . .” Warning flags waved before his eyes. Crazy redhead



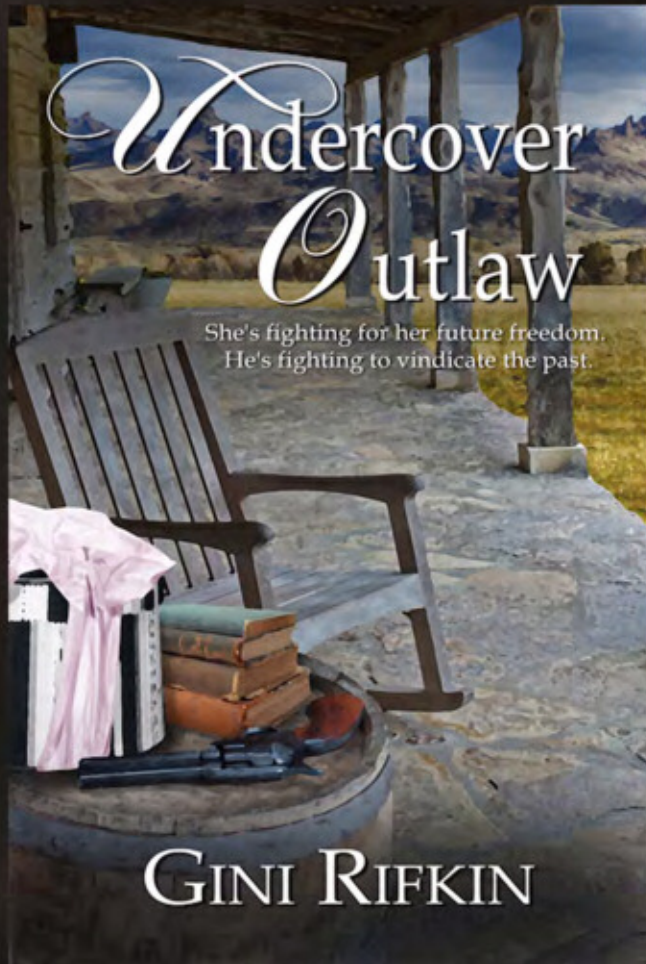
stalker girl! Her name’s Zaney. A moniker the police had given her? He leaned away from her. “Are you following me? If you are, I want you to stop.”

“Following you?” She angled a worried look at him and rested a hand on his sleeve for a few moments. “Seriously? Get a grip, Matthew. I’m not following you. I live near here just like you do, pal. I met your ex by chance a couple of weeks ago at E Street. You know that bar? No? Well, it’s a popular hangout. Anyway, my friend saw your ex and they happened to have gone to college together. My friend remembers you, too. Lonnie O’Grady? Ring a bell? No? Well, your ex-wife came over and they caught up on old times. She needed a shoulder to cry on because of her breakup and all. You know about that.”

He had been steadily shaking his head to everything she was saying.

“You don’t? Her engagement is over. They’ve split. She wanted him to spend more time with her and help plan the wedding and he wouldn’t or couldn’t, so they had it out and it all blew up.”





His quest for  
justice becomes  
a living,  
breathing,  
part of  
his soul.

[GiniRifkin.blogspot.com](http://GiniRifkin.blogspot.com)

Now *that* was funny and he stopped shaking his head and let himself laugh. Bitterly, yes, but laugh. It kind of felt like razor blades moving up this throat.

“I know it’s weird, me meeting her. I mean, we’re in freaking New York! Not Backwoods! But, it happened. I didn’t even know she was talking about you until after she’d left and Lonnie mentioned your name. Birdsong. M. Birdsong! That’s when I knew.” She smacked the bar with the flat of her hand to make her point and it made him jump a little.

“And how did my cat come into the conversation?”

“Toodles?”

*Jesus! She even knows her name!*

“Carin said she sees you every so often when she visits Toodles.”

“And you remembered that.”

“Again, not an ordinary name. And I’m female, so I’m not afflicted with male deafness. I listen.”



# Romantic Traveling Across the Top



Have you ever wanted to go somewhere, and though everyone expresses interest in going with you, when the time comes, there are a thousand excuses why they can't go? Such was the case with me a few years ago. Each year I would beg my children and my hubby to go with me across the top of the United States. I had been to most of the states, and the only ones I had left were Montana, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Alaska. No one in my family was interested in going there. So, I decided I would have to make the trip alone.

AAA which is excellent, plotted my trip from Oakland, California, to a small town in Wisconsin with me driving between 400-500 miles a day. Not totally alone, I took two companions who could not object and wouldn't if they could--my two rescue dogs, Big Jack, an American Stafford Terrier who was a new rescue and Honey, a chiweenie who weighs about 13 pounds.

This was not smart in a couple of ways: a woman driving alone through strange territory is never smart; (2) taking animals alters a trip in a number of ways--you must stop in appropriate places to let them go to the bathroom. You must find pet-friendly accommodations (not as difficult as it used to be, but not the cleanest rooms.) (3) You cannot leave them alone for any length

of time. In keeping with #3, you miss out on a lot of things, i.e. tours.

We left on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, my wedding anniversary, and my husband was so guilted that he agreed to go with me part of the way and fly back after I met my niece. My mode of transportation was a van I had owned for years. I got an oil change, piled the dogs in the van and split.

The first day I was in familiar territory--Route 80. I've taken this route from San Francisco to New York. I drove about 100 miles past Reno, Nevada. After that, I went north to Idaho because Wyoming, while beautiful, is very, very expensive. In terms of hotel rooms, I found myself competing against oil rig people to the tune of about \$400 per night. Thus, I instructed AAA to back-door me into Yellowstone by going through Montana.

Let me digress here to recommend audiobooks. You cannot control radio reception in some of these areas. If you don't have your own music, you may be stuck with something that sends your skin crawling. Audiobooks are a lifesaver. They eat up the time, keep you company and entertain you all at the same time. There were times I reached my destination for the day and stayed in the van so I could hear the end of the disk I was listening to. I heard my first Nora Roberts' book. It was

*Affaire de Coeur*

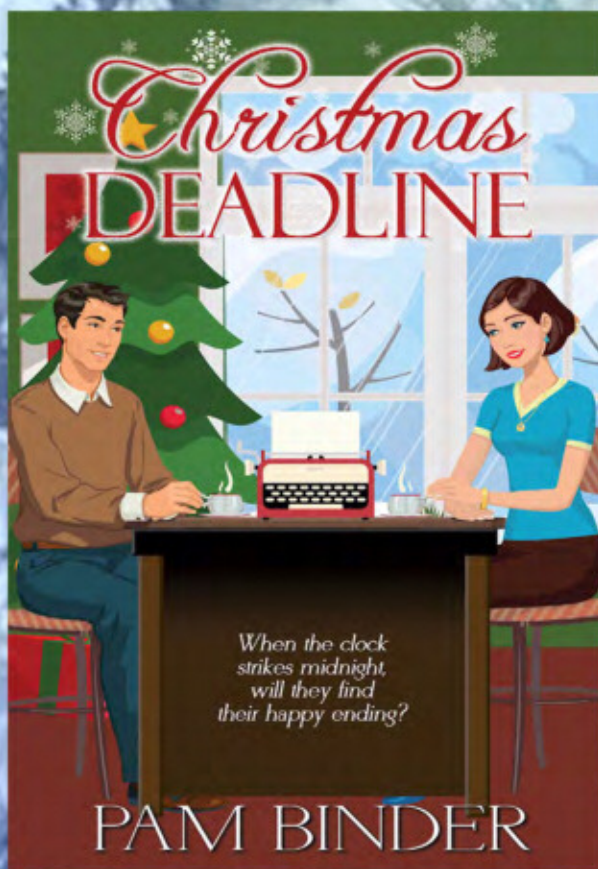
great! I have a huge collection. Let me send you one when you're ready for your next trip. You'll be glad I did.

Back to business. One place not on my agenda that I ended up at was Little Big Horn, the place of Custer's Last Stand. It's in the middle of nowhere, and I can't say how I ended up there (there are so many roads closed for construction, even Interstate highways turned into scary two lane roads). It's not difficult to see why Montana is "Big Sky Country," and at night the stars seem so close you feel you can



*Meet Bullwinkle who lets you know that his shop is opened and sales are on.*





Two Romance Authors  
writing about love

One's an optimist  
the other,  
a pessimist

Will there be a  
happily-ever-after?

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touch them. Detour or not, there is so much history to be learned in that spot and well worth the detour.



*Welcome to Yellowstone,  
a Welcoming site.*

September is the ideal time to go to Yellowstone. First of all, you will miss the crowds and long lines for everything. Visitors have returned to work or school, leaving everything for the ones who don't work or who have retired. Secondly, the gift shops are preparing to close for the very harsh winter season, and everything is on sale! They have bargains you cannot duplicate--i.e. puff jackets for \$15.00, heavy, hooded sweat shirts for \$5-10. All the stuff you typically find in gift shops are, for a change, priced to go.

If you have an AARP card or something that puts you over 50 years old, you can purchase an America The Beautiful National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass which costs \$10 but affords free admission to any federal park in the U.S. except Gettysburg. Designated by President Ulysses Grant as the first national park, Yellowstone is huge and cannot be seen in

a day or even two, even when driving through. There is a vehicle fee for

*Continued on page 17*



*The Old Faithful Geyser*

# Spotlight Interview

## The Spotlight is on... Teri Riggs

*Teri lives in Marietta, Georgia, with her hubby and two puppies who own their hearts. They were high school sweethearts and have been together for fifty years. This qualifies her as an expert on romance. She writes contemporary and historical western romantic suspense. Currently she is working on a paranormal trilogy.*



**AdC:** *When you write, do you outline first, or are you a pantser?*

**TR:** I flip back and forth. When I do an outline, my characters tend to take me in another direction.

**AdC:** *What type of characters do you like to create?*

**T.R.:** Alpha heroes and strong-willed heroines.

**AdC:** *Tell us about your new book or series.*

**TR:** I'm working on a paranormal trilogy about three sisters with differ-

ent psychic abilities.

**AdC:** *What are your favorite passages/scenes in your current release or WIP?*

**T.R.:** My hero doesn't want the heroine to know he likes sweet lattes and buys a black coffee every morning and a latte. He dumps the black coffee as soon as he leaves her coffee shop. I love when he gets caught and tries to explain it.

**AdC:** *What motivates you for a perfect writing day?*

**T.R.:** Sadly, I haven't written much since March when we began sheltering at home. I miss my office where I could write uninterrupted without puppies needing belly rubs, movies needing to be watched, and my house screaming for me to clean it. I've not opened my laptop until today since I had COVID-19 in July. I just haven't had the energy. When I do write, I love music, iced tea, and chocolate to sweeten the atmosphere.

**AdC:** *How/where do you get your plot ideas?*

**T.R.:** Everywhere. Most of my ideas just pop into my head.

**AdC:** *Did you need to do research for the story? And what kind of research did you need to do?*

**T.R.:** For my current WIP I did a lot of research on auras. It was an interesting subject to learn about. Alas, no matter how hard I try I am not able to see any mystical auras surrounding people.

**AdC:** *What is your favorite thing about being an author?*

**T.R.:** I love meeting my readers at conventions and signings.

**AdC:** *Is there a genre that you've been wanting to try writing?*

**T.R.:** Paranormal is one genre I've always wanted to write in. Now I'm doing it.

**AdC:** *How many books do you currently have out on the market and what genres do they fall into?*

**T.R.:** Thirteen, plus I have two short stories in box sets. I write romantic suspense, both contemporary and historical westerns. I have one sexy



## Action-Packed Romance



romantic comedy and wouldn't mind writing another.

**AdC:** Will you be attending any book signings or conventions?

**T.R.:** I won't be going to any until next spring. Hopefully COVID-19 will be history by then.

**AdC:** Pass on some words of wisdom, please, to aspiring authors.

**T.R.:** Write what you love and never give up your dream of writing.

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# Sneak Peek

## Excerpts from *Aftermath*

by Ester Lopez

“Captain Gadara!” The guard saluted when she approached the brig.

“Where is the stowaway?” She demanded.

The guard led her to the cell, where a strangely dressed man sat on a bunk in the small space. He stood immediately when he spotted her.

He slowly looked her up and down, so she returned the gaze. He was pleasant to look upon, but looks like his were deceiving.

“What is your name?” She demanded.

“Conolly. Torin Conolly.”

She gave him her ‘don’t mess with me’ stare. “What is your purpose here?”

“I’m here to learn how to fly your ships so I can train others back home.”

“Where is home?”

“Earth.”

She leaned closer to the bars.

“Where were you when Lieutenant Eno trained your pilots?”

“I was not aware anyone trained our pilots.”

“Don’t you work for the Earthen military?”

“I’m an astronaut with the U.S. Space Force.”

“Why do you want to learn to fly our ships?”

“I told you, to teach others how to fly these ships.”

“That’s not why. That’s what. Tell me why or you can sit there until we return to Earth.”

“All right!” He looked down then back into her eyes. His demeanor changed somewhat. “I get a promotion if I do this.”

“What kind of promotion?”

“Moon Base Commander,” he mumbled.

She glared at him. This reasoning did not make sense. He would be promoted to a high-ranking position and all he had to do was learn to fly their ships? What kind of leader was he? What kind of training did he already have to be a Commander?

“What is your rank?”

“I’m an Astronaut, I told you.”

“What is an astronaut?”

“A pilot, of sorts. I’m a damn good pilot and a test pilot, too.”

“Have you led any missions?”

“No.”

“Why do you want to be a Commander when you have no experience?”



“That’s the deal I made when I left.” He glanced down at his feet.

“They lied to you.” She turned and walked away.







continued from page 13

admission into the park. Lodging (we stayed within walking distance from the Montana entrance) is less expensive than from the Wyoming side, but it's still costly at about \$300 per night. If you are an outdoors person, you will be in seventh heaven, as there is camping, hiking, boating, sightseeing, and fishing.

There is no shortage of different species of wildlife



*Is there any doubt who has the rightaway?*

including bears, wolves, and one I had never seen in person, bison. Within the park is the famous Old Faithful Geyser, probably the park's most popular attraction and a sight to behold. The Continental Divide runs diagonally through and sits on the Yellowstone Plateau. I found this out the hard way when my small dog could not seem to breathe. I approached other dog owners and asked them if their dogs were having difficulty. That's when I learned that we were about 9000 feet high and though it takes a while, my dog would become acclimated. She did.

My next destination was Rapid City, South Dakota, though I-15 was closed because of fire hazards, and I ended up back in Montana again. My goal was singular when going to South Dakota: see Mount Rushmore. Once again, I was brought face-to-face with America's history and could not help but learn some fascinating things. South Dakota is in the Black Hills where Grant sent a team to survey before signing a treaty with the Lakota, essentially giving them the land.

While there, the surveyors found gold in abundance, and with that was the end of the treaty and the Native Americans received nothing.

You don't have to pay a cent to see Mount Rushmore

**Continued on the next page**





*Mount Rushmore*

and the iconic 60 foot images of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and T. Roosevelt. It is visible from the road and so clear you can take excellent pictures from the roadside. Hence, there is no entrance fee but there is a parking fee. If you go inside, you see individual tributes therein to each state--a stone acknowledging each state's year of admission to the United States, a flag of that state. There is also a restaurant, ice cream shop, and souvenir shop. Both guided and audio tours are available.

From Mount Rushmore I headed to Fargo, North Dakota. How can a movie buff like me not go? I had to see if the people sounded like they did in the movie, don'cha know? They didn't. On the way there, I passed the area where *Dances With Wolves* was filmed. I had to stop. I also went through the Badlands. Here I was looking for some more Western movie stuff, only to find out that the Badlands refers to the unusual geological formations of rock and stone.

There is a museum where you can walk through and see various stages of petrification. Below is a sample of petrified rock, and next, there are eggs I purchased there that were carved from rock.



*Ancient rock samples from thousands of years ago*



*Check Out My Eggs!  
They're made of petrified stone*

There is an orphanage called the St. Joseph's Indian School for Lakota children that I have supported for years. When I found myself going through the town of Chamberlain, I recognized the name and detoured through it. The place was beautiful. What I really liked was that they seemed to honor their culture with tributes for previous Indian chiefs like Sitting Bull and Iron Nation.



*A Lakota Tent at St. Joseph's*





*Honoring the Chiefs on the wall of St. Joseph's*

Back on the road, I learned that the route I had taken was the same that Lewis and Clark had taken. It, too, is beautiful country. There wasn't much to do in North Dakota so I spent the night and went back to South Dakota the next day. From South Dakota, I went to Minnesota. When I realized I had passed the bridge that goes from Minnesota to Wisconsin, I drove back the additional 15 miles and crossed the bridge into Wisconsin. That was my last state to cover on this trip and where I was supposed to meet my niece. She had become very ill and could not make it. I had dinner there and went on to Minneapolis to the Great Mall. Before I left the shopping center, I covered every floor, lost my jewelry and recovered it the next day. I have nothing but good things to say about the folks at the mall.

My unorthodox trip was for a specific reason--to go to the states I had never been to. Nonetheless, I highly recommend going to this portion of the country, not now when Covid-19 has hit this area so hard, but at your healthy leisure. There is so much to see, so much to learn that it's worth it. It's beautiful country, rich in history, especially that of Native Americans. I learned recently that one can see the Aurora Borealis from Montana and Wisconsin. I may go back just for that.



## Gift Clues

### Across

1. Men who are so unaware might would buy one of these.
5. Striped candy.
6. Lionel, Tommy, Polar Express or Santa Fe.
8. "All I want for Christmas are my two front \_\_\_\_."
10. Oreo and Keebler-like snacks that are decorated.
11. This kind of cake is iffy but popular during the holidays.
13. Not a desktop computer.
15. The Christmas plant.
17. A symbol of Judaism also used for Kwanzaa.
20. Rolex, Citizens, Tag Heuer, Invicta, Timex and Bulova.
23. Leather or wool to wear on one's hands.
24. These sweaters are ridiculous.
26. Kids use these to slide in the snow.
27. Admits one to concerts, movies, museums and *The Nutcracker*.
28. See's \_\_\_\_\_. (I prefer chocolate with nuts)
29. Provided light before electricity. Scented ones are the best.
30. The stalwart best gift ever.
35. These jeweled stones are the best.
36. One made of mink or fox is a faux pas these days.
37. Necklaces, bracelets, rings and earrings are forms of \_\_\_\_\_.
38. Hung over the fireplace.

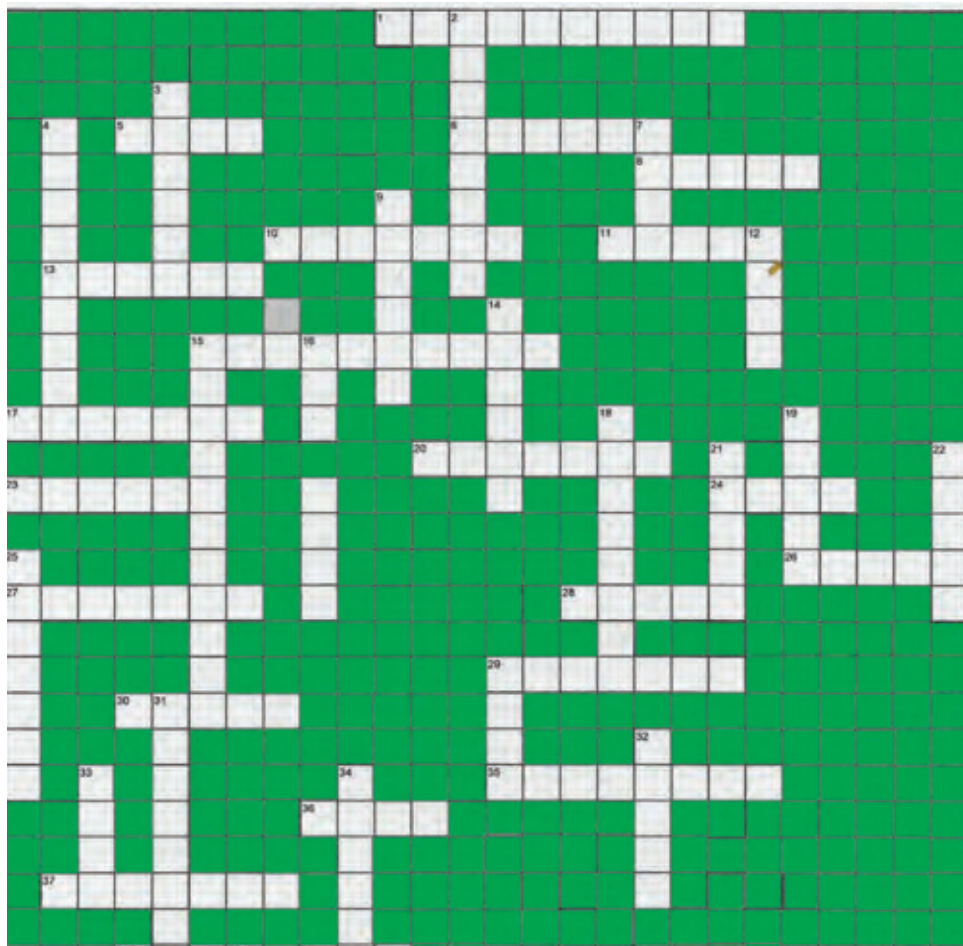
### Down

2. Images taken at school.
3. Men's money holder.
4. The romantic Christmas plant.
7. Goes at the top of the tree.
9. Ice or roller \_\_\_\_\_.
12. Fraser, Balsam or Noble. They're fun to

decorate.

14. Colored or white, these electric orbs brighten trees and windows.
15. This "toy" uses video games and plays dvds.
16. Scene of Baby Jesus' birth.
18. Small piano that makes music of more than one instrument.
19. Barbie et. al.
21. This is a young canine that keeps on giving.
22. Aka 'pocketbook,' may be Coach, Dooney & Burke, or Hermes.
25. \_\_\_\_\_ animals to sit on one's bed.
29. Like cash for Starbucks or Macy's-Gift \_\_\_\_\_.
31. Use them to decorate # 12 Down.
32. Items to read later. May be on the Best Seller Lists.
33. Put this on when coming out of the shower.
34. Put it on to smell good.
39. If you're lucky, you get one of these--Buicks, Lexus, Charger or Cadillac.

Answers on page 22







## Contemporary Romance Reviews

### **Dark Destiny (Secrets of Covington Corner #3)**

*Dani Wade*

**Self-Pub**

Kindle Edition

B08LTM7KTD

★★★★

Video game developers Jamie and Ian have been granted access to the Harrington Institute, an abandoned mental asylum, to map the layout for their next game. Though long-time friends, Jamie has always been afraid to tell Ian how she truly feels. But Ian has a mystery of his own--one long kept hidden within the darkened halls of the Harrington Institute--until the ghosts of the past lead them to answers long sought and a love neither thought possible.

Seriously, what could be creepier than a story about being in an abandoned mental institution with your longtime crush? I'd never give away the smexxy details. Are you afraid of the dark?

*Dark Destiny* is the third installment to Dani Wade's "Secrets of Covington Corner," but could be read as a standalone. These hauntingly romantic novellas are perfect

for curling up with your fav drink and cozy blanket! I can't recommend this series enough!

*Sharing what I love,  
Veronica*

### **Retrograde**

*Desiree Holt*

**Totally Bound Publishing**

Mass Market

978-183943470

★★★★

Romantic suspense author Peyton West's life has been turned upside down. Her sister and brother-in-law have been in a tragic hit-and-run accident leaving her brother-in-law dead and her sister in a coma. Desperate for answers and finding none, Peyton is tired of being stonewalled, and as a last hope measure, she reaches out to a group known as Galaxy. With nothing more than justice on her mind, Peyton is surprised at her instant attraction to Scott "Blaze" Hamilton. And when he agrees to take on her case, the attraction continues to grow and ignites into something so much more...

Galaxy is a highly specialized group of former Navy SEALs that will take jobs no one else could or would do—if you exhausted all other options, Galaxy is your go-to place for help. Scott "Blaze" Hamilton is one of the founding mem-

## Contemporaries

bers of Galaxy, and when he hears Peyton's plea for help, he agrees that it appears a cover-up is going on...but what Scott doesn't plan on is how Peyton makes him feel. Between his attraction to Peyton, clues leading to an enemy of his past and a deception close to home, this case is going to prove to be a true test of his training.

Desiree Holt has written a romantic suspense full of a twisty whodunit, insta-love and of course, verra steamy sex. Enjoyed and would recommend to fans of this genre!

*Sharing what I love,*  
Veronica

### Scarred Hero

Hope Ford

Self-Pub

Kindle Edition

B08HSHZWNL

☆☆☆☆☆



Wounded war hero, Cole Prince, chooses to hide in the shadows. Coming back wounded with scars both seen and unseen, Cole can't believe he let his friends talk him into venturing out to a bar for drinks. Keeping his scarred face hidden the best he can, Cole is mesmerized by the bartender and is completely blown away when she looks upon him without flinching and smiles. In that moment, Cole has hope, hope that maybe he can find some measure of peace and happiness with this beautiful woman that sees the man beyond the pain.

Hope noticed the soldier the moment he entered the bar but can't figure out why he keeps hiding his handsome face. Yes, he has the markings of someone that was wounded and lived to tell the tale, but looking into his eyes, Hope knows he's going to be hers--if she can just get him to give her a chance.

*Scarred Hero* is one of my top romance reads of the year! I'm so in love with beautifully broken heroes, and the author has given me a perfect one with Cole! What a wonderful world we would live in if we saw each other with our hearts rather than our eyes! We could all use a little hope right now. Highly recommend this quick instalove story!

*Sharing what I love,*  
Veronica

### Silver Creek Fire (A Silver Creek Novel)

Lindsay McKenna

Kensington

Mass Market

978-1420150827

☆☆☆☆☆



Leanna Ryan lived in a small town in Brookings, Oregon. After a traumatic experience in her younger days, everything outside of her parents' home frightened her. But Leanna hadn't been just sitting around paralyzed with fear; she worked with her father, a master carpenter renowned for his beautiful hand-carved furniture, and had become an expert wood sculpturer, herself. Her father even featured her work on his website. That's how Wyoming rancher Logan Anderson found her.

Logan was determined to keep his legacy, the Wild Goose Ranch, thriving and modern. He had inherited the land and businesses from his parents who inherited it from his grandfather back to four generations. His Scottish ancestor had originally come to Wyoming to breed Highland cattle but arrived during the silver rush. He soon learned mining wasn't for him and bought ten thousand acres of land instead, going into the lumber and cattle business. They hand-planted acres and acres of trees of all different species, so the land would be self-sustainable and always replenish itself. Logan had updated the ranch with the latest technology, and both the lumber and cattle businesses were doing profoundly well, and his ranch was one of the largest in Wyoming. When his parents retired to Arizona, Logan decided to update the woodwork in his home and started searching for a master carver. And he found Leanna.

*Silver Creek Fire* is a modern, contemporary romance of two lonely people who find each other at their most vulnerable times. Leanna is just stepping out of her comfort zone for the first time since her trauma. Logan is receiving deadly threats from a large company that wants his land (and everybody else's in the valley) for fracking. Logan admires Leanna's love of wood and the delicate care she takes with selecting each piece and Leanna is in awe of Logan's environmentally conscious running of his massive enterprise. Ms. McKenna has penned a winner with this, her first, in the "Silver Creek" series with this tender love story and the expert interweaving of environmental lessons throughout. Well done, Ms. McKenna!

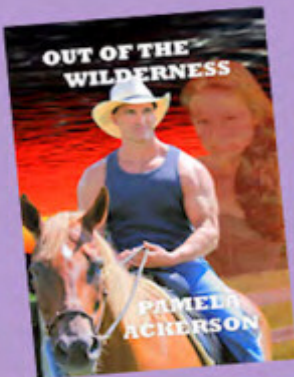
*Lani Roberts*



# Book Obsessed Babes 2021

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## Truth, Lies, and Second Dates

*MaryJanice Davidson*

**St. Martin's Griffin**

Trade Paperback

978-1250053176

★★★★½

Airline pilot Ava Capp is a well-known figure because of her daring handling of an emergency landing a few years ago, but in her Minnesota hometown her reputation is based on being the last person known to be with her best friend Danielle before she was brutally murdered. The case was never solved, and Ava's wanderlust allows her to escape the memories trapped in the hometown she hopes to avoid forever.

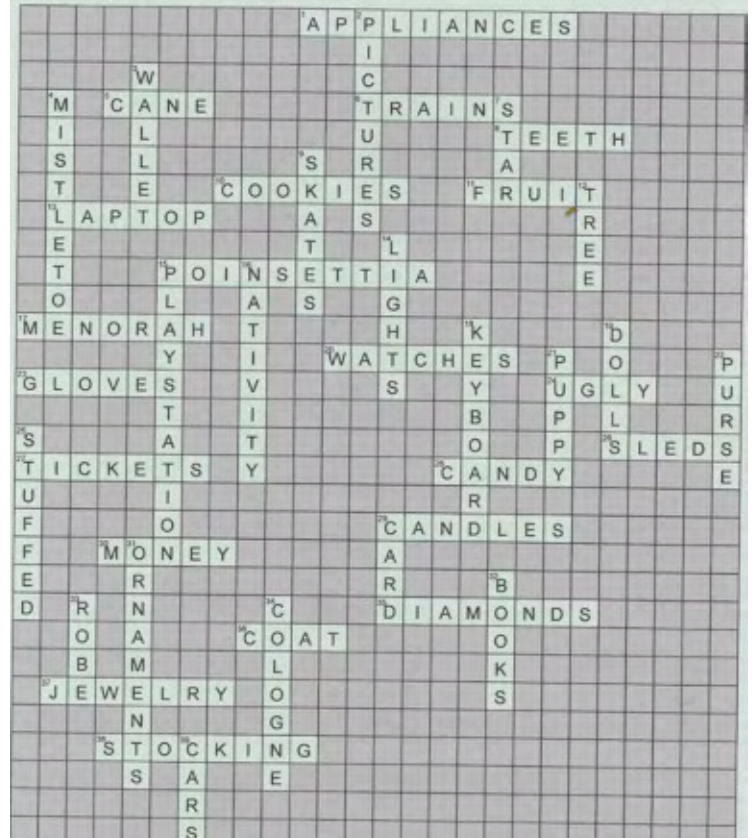
When she is cajoled into attending a memorial service for her friend 10 years after the fact, she must face the lingering scorn of Danielle's family, who somehow blame Ava for Danielle's death. Disturbing events surrounding the memorial call the cold case to the attention of hunky medical examiner Dr. Tom Baker, who can't decide if he wants to court Ava or consider her a suspect.

While the circumstances of this story are laced with nail biting suspense, the author tells the tale with a great deal of humor. The twists and turns of this plot should keep the reader turning pages late into the night until they reach the surprising, unexpected conclusion.

*Hannah Rowan*

## Gift Suggestions

Louise B. Sneed







## *Historical Romance Reviews*

### **The Cowboy Who Saved Christmas**

*Jodi Thomas, Sharla Lovelace, Scarlett Dunn*

#### **Kensington**

Trade Paperback

978-1496725493

☆☆☆ 1/2

“Father Goose” by Jodi Thomas

Since the War Between the States, Trapper Hawkins has made his living playing poker. He wins a pot worth \$500. To collect it, Trapper has to get five little girls to their daddy in Dallas by Christmas. Easy money, right?

Emery Adams sees a chance to start a new life. All she has to do is supervise the girls for three weeks. Easy money, right?

Wrong! But amidst the dangers, Trapper and Emma find love.

“The Mistletoe Promise” by Sharla Lovelace

Josie and the new ranch hand, Ben, fall in love. Then she discovers that he lied. Ben is the neighbor’s heir. He’s

engaged! And his fiancée is pregnant! Heartbroken, Josie refuses to listen to Ben’s explanations.

The next five years destroyed Josie’s family’s ranch. First, there was a devastating storm. Then a disease decimated the herd. Finally, her father died. Josie must find a rich husband to save the ranch. She may have to ask for Ben’s help, but Josie will never admit that she still loves him.

Ben did the right thing and married Winifred, but he never stopped loving Josie. Winifred died during childbirth. Every Christmas Ben wishes for a chance to regain Josie’s love. Maybe this year his wish will come true.

“Christmas Road” by Scarlett Dunn

Clint Mitchum got a letter from his mother. Yellow fever has devastated their town. She’s sick but is trying to hang on for one last Christmas together. Clint arrives home to find an empty house and a note from his mother. She asks him to make sure her caretaker, Amelia Wakeland, is ok. Clint finds Amelia and she has wonderful news. His mother is alive!

Amelia’s daughters have a secret. They’re gonna buy their mother a husband, and they want Clint. He tells the girls that it doesn’t work that way but secretly he likes the idea of



marrying Amelia.

Amelia falls ill. As he nurses her, Clint discovers that he's fallen in love with Amelia. Clint hopes to marry her...if she survives.

The first of these three stories is very good. The other two are mediocre at best.

Sheila Griffin

### **The Highlander's Unexpected Proposal (The Brothers of Wolf Isle #1)**

Heather McCollum

#### **Entangled**

Kindle Edition

B08JK8722F

★★★★★

*"Marry me, Adam Macquarie, and get me the hell out of here."*

Lark Montgomerie finds herself being forced by her father to either choose a husband during the Beltane Festival or be sold so he may be rid of her. Hiding amongst the trees, Lark stumbles upon an unlikely savior in Chief Adam Macquarie. Hearing that he and his brother are looking for brides, Lark takes a chance that her instincts about Adam will serve her well and get her out of the hellish situation she has lived in since she was a child. Lark goes into the marriage asking Adam to be truthful to her, but she is harboring a secret of her own--and secrets always have a way of coming out.

Adam and his younger brother Beckett are committed to rebuilding their ancestral home on Wolf Isle. Cursed for over 100 years, rebuilding it won't be an easy endeavor, but with hard work and wives at their side, Adam knows it can be done. When he's publicly asked to wed by the fiery-haired lass he saved in the woods, he takes a chance she will help his clan and agrees to her unexpected proposal. Adam has a few secrets of his own but is holding onto hope that he can convince his bonny new bride there are no such things as curses, right?

Oh, where to begin with this funtastical tale told only as Heather McCollum can pen! This reader loved it! Loved it! There is a little something for everyone! Smexxy highlanders, a feisty heroine, a cursed isle, an alleged witch, and pirates! From start to finish, *The Highlander's Unexpected Proposal* is a book impossible to put down! Highly recommend!

*Sharing what I love,*

Veronica

## *Historicals*

### **The Princess and the Rogue**

Kate Bateman

#### **St. Martin's Press**

Mass Market

978-1250306098

★★★★ 1/2

Earl of Mowbray, aka Sebastien Wolff, is content with his life as a Bow Street agent, believing that love didn't exist--at least not for him. Meeting the beautiful and mysterious Anna Brown in a brothel throws his life for a loop. The moment he sees her he wants her more than any woman he has ever seen, and after they share a passionate kiss, he can't get her out of his mind. Each subsequent encounter only increases his desire and fascination with her, leading him to a moment of epiphany about love and its place in his life.

To evade a deadly traitor obsessed with marrying her against her will, Princess Anastasia Denisova flees her homeland of Russia and takes on the fake identity of commoner Anna Brown in her new home of London. Anya is determined to make a life for herself, depending on her own abilities and free from the will and control of any man. She takes on the position of a companion to earn a living. When her life is threatened, he reluctantly takes her under his protection, putting them in close quarters where their attraction grows more intense. But will Anya's secret keep them from having a future together?

Sebastien is handsome, cynical, brash, and stubborn, hiding his true emotions behind the façade of a carefree rogue, determined to enjoy his bachelor lifestyle. But Anya slips behind his walls and into his heart so easily, and he finds that he doesn't mind. Despite his accomplishments in battle, as a Bow Street agent, and a part owner of a successful gaming house, once he discovers that Anya is a princess, Sebastien is surprisingly afraid that Anya will no longer want him.

Anya and Sebastien have serious chemistry from the moment they first meet. But Bateman takes the time to develop their relationship gradually, giving them the opportunity to get to know each other. Bateman's vivid description, sparkling and witty banter and interactions between the characters brings the story to life and keeps it moving at a nice pace from beginning to end. *The Princess and the Rogue* is a sweet, steamy, romantic, humorous, yet slightly angsty regency/historical romance deftly balanced with bits of mystery, royal intrigue, and action that readers will find hard to put down.

Lacy Hill

# Paranormal Romance Reviews



## **The Earl of Christmas Past**

*Kerrigan Byrne*

**Oliver Heber Books**

Kindle Edition

B08LJM7B4B

☆☆☆☆

Stranded in the middle of the wilds of the Scottish Highlands during a blizzard, Vanessa Latimer is half frozen and agrees to stay in the only offered room at the inn...one that just happens to be haunted.

Johnathan de Lohr, once a decorated soldier and earl, lost his life in the battle of Culloden. After over a hundred years, he is still at a loss how his spirit became trapped in an inn he never visited. With the holiday solstice, Johnathan once again awakens, but this time there is a beautiful woman in the room...one that may be the very woman he's waited for his entire existence.

Vanessa and Johnathan are soulmates that sadly didn't have a chance to discover each other in one life...but perhaps a Christmas miracle will allow true love to find a way.

Kerrigan Byrne is on my auto read list! This holiday short was so whimsically romantic and verra smexxy that I immediately started reading it over when I got to the end. Loved and highly recommend!

*Sharing what I love,  
Veronica*





# Paranormals

## The Hollow Places

T. Kingfisher

Gallery/Saga Press

Kindle Edition

B084G9KFDF

☆☆☆ 1/2

*"You are about to enter another dimension. A dimension not only of sight and sound but of mind." The Twilight Zone, Rod Serling*

Newly divorced, Kara has packed up what's left of her life and has taken up an offer by her uncle to help him with his museum of oddities. Staying in a spare room, Kara begins cataloging the various odd skeletons, taxidermy animals and whatnots at the museum. She discovers a hole has been knocked in the wall, but this isn't just any hole in the wall. It's a portal to a world full of Them--and she better pray they are hungry.

*The Hollow Places* reminded me of a quirky episode of *The Twilight Zone*. Not sure where it was going or how it was going to end but was for sure ready for a twist! While an enjoyable read, there were passages that started to be repetitious, but overall, I'd recommend to fans of this genre! *Sharing what I love, Veronica*

## Kingdom of the Wicked (Kingdom of the Wicked #1)

Kerri Maniscalco

Jimmy Patterson

Kindle Edition

B08537146Q

☆☆☆☆

*"There are seven demon princes, but only four di Carlos should fear: Wrath, Greed, Envy, and Pride. One will crave your blood. One will capture your heart. One will steal your soul. And one will take your life. The Wicked."*

Since their birth, Emilia and her twin sister Vittoria have been warned of the coming of the Wicked, the seven Princes of Hell. Emilia has always been the more cautious of the two, but when her sister begins sneaking out and obviously hiding a secret, Emilia thinks it's nothing beyond

perhaps seeing her lover. She never dreams she would stumble upon the mutilated body of her beloved twin.

Vowing to the Goddess to find Vittoria's killer, Emilia turns to the darker side of their family magic and summons an unlikely partner in her quest for vengeance. Revenge may be a dish best served cold, but for Emilia, it will be as hot as the fires of Hell if she can stay alive long enough to serve it.

Witches, demons, and the Princes of Hell--oh my! Conjure up a few deadly sins and a serial killer, what more could you possibly need in a frightfully good story? No spoilers here! Enjoyed the beginning to what is sure to be a wickedly good series, although I'm not thrilled with a cliffhanger ending! Would recommend to fans of this genre. *Sharing what I love, Veronica*

## The Paradise Conflict

Abhishek Ghosh

Novel Nuggets Publishers

E-book

B08KSHFTCV

☆☆☆

The story takes place on an earth that has been ravaged by industrial waste and exploitation. The resource of water is decimated except for key areas controlled by the Civil Imperial Regime. The government uses water as a means to control all who are not of the elite class.

The Rebels are fighting the oppression; they know the distribution of water is unfair and push with skirmishes and espionage to bring back civility to the world. They are also on a quest to find Lost Paradise, an almost mythical place where the various tribes of the rebels may finally settle and live in peace.

Mitra, a bounty hunter for the Regime who had been taken away from the parents of the rebel cause when young, has much resentment toward the rebels. The governor of the regime and his underlings liked what they had persuaded Mitra into doing with lies. Mitra knows them personally and had always trusted them until things become amiss and the lies unravel.

On a mission to end the rebels once and for all, Mitra meets Judy, a leader in the rebels, and finds some extremely uncomfortable truths he must now face. He also sees a soul mate in her and now does all he can to help the rebels succeed. They actually wander into the Lost Paradise only to find things have just gotten much more complicated.

The story reads well, and the personal interactions help keep continuity throughout the story. *Lauren Calder*



# Spells, Charms, and The Book of Cures

A grimoire Hitler  
wants to get his  
hands on...

[JoAnnSmithAinsworth.com](http://JoAnnSmithAinsworth.com)

## Shades of Darkness (Guardians of Eternity #16)

Alexandra Ivy

Lyrical Press

Trade Paperback

978-1516110971

☆☆☆

Lively and vivid description, mystery, steamy romance, and humorous interactions between the characters make *Shades of Darkness* an intriguing fantasy/paranormal romance.

Chaaya is sent with her bodyguard Basq into the hellscape mirror London to recover an escaped prisoner believed associated with the enemy with whom she endured centuries of imprisonment as a sacrifice to protect her people and magic.

A vampire, Basq is the strong, silent, solitary type who prides himself on his control, but he constantly struggles for that ease of control around Chaaya. Chaaya, a ghost whose true powers and fey identity are unknown, is fierce, independent, and determined to enjoy her life now that she is free of the hell dimension. On the path to locating the missing

prisoner, Chaaya and Basq grow closer. The banter between them is enjoyable as is the development of their relationship. With fiery chemistry and completely divergent approaches to almost any situation, they are the epitome of opposites attract, but they definitely bring balance to each other's lives.

*Shades of Darkness* is a novel structured with intrigue and mystery, filled with a lot of different characters to keep straight. As the story progresses, each of the character's place, and importance, in the story begins to take shape, which makes it easier. The diversity of fey and supernatural creatures featured in the novel is one of my favorite things about the novel. I also found myself most intrigued by Inga, the Queen of the Merfolk, and Troy. This is my first book in the series, so perhaps I might have to go and read more books in the series for their stories. The novel starts off a bit slow and confusing, but the pacing does pick up as you start to figure out who the characters are and that there are multiple, but associated, mysteries going on at once. *Shades of Darkness* is just the fantasy/paranormal romance for readers in the mood for a mystery driven, humorous, and emotional romance, that mixes magic with bits of action and royal intrigue.

Lacy Hill



# *Erotica Romance Reviews*



## **Hellish Halloween**

*Charity Parkerson*

**Punk & Sissy Publications**

Kindle Edition

B08DC4RRML

☆☆☆☆

*"I don't know how to be a mate--but I feel you missing from my life."*

The Hellish Clan is a centuries old vampire/shifter pack that hunts and destroys demons that threaten the human race. In this installment, the Clan is hosting a Halloween celebration in a most verra smexxy way.

Feeling a little out of place amongst those in the pack that have found their mates, Red is shocked when his senses pick up on his other half, the one he's been waiting on for hundreds of years to make his soul complete, his forever mate.

Pierce has been drawn to NOLA each year for Halloween, never really understanding why, but always feeling more at peace when traveling to the city. When a beautiful psychic hands him an address with encouragement

of go and not be afraid, Pierce finds himself in the presence of a man who makes him feel for the first time in his life alive and wanted and perhaps, loved,

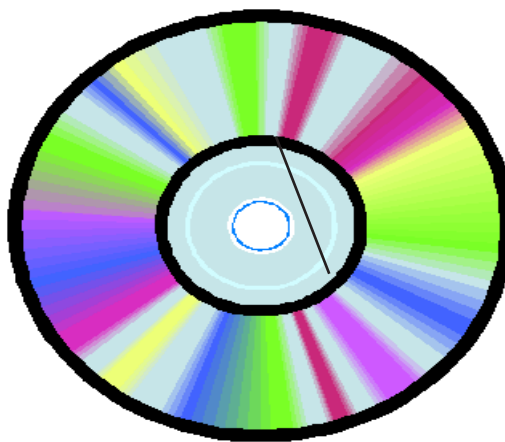
Red and Pierce are true mates, but it may take a little Halloween trickery for these lovers to get their happily ever after treat.

This is another great story in a must-read series! If you are a lover of m/m romance with a paranormal element, I highly recommend the "Hellish" series!!

Readers Note: These are short novellas and to fully enjoy, I would recommend reading in order!!

*Sharing what I love,  
Veronica*





# AUDIO BOOK REVIEWS

## **Shark's Edge**

*Angel Payne and Victoria Blue*

*Performed by Jacob Morgan and Erin Mallon*

**Brilliance Audio**

Audiobook, 7 CD's, 8 hours and 15 minutes

978-1799745013

☆☆☆

Abbigail Gibson is a twenty-two year old who has her own catering business. One of her clients is Sebastian Shark, a billionaire businessman who intends to construct a building in Los Angeles that will dwarf all others. One of his former lovers commits suicide and blames her breakup with Sebastian as the reason for it. This brings on endless groups of people intruding in his life, but he's rather used to it.

Sebastian is attracted to Abbigail, though, oddly to this reviewer, he is really turned on when he makes her cry. The attraction is mutual, but she is mildly intimidated. When he suffers food poisoning after eating one of her sandwiches, she is miffed that he would tell the police the poisoning came from her. That's not the only thing happening around them, and soon they realize someone is targeting Sebastian. With the relationship that seems to be developing between them, Abbi could get hurt.

This audiobook has two readers, one, Erin Mallon, represents Abbigail while Jacob Morgan does the character of Sebastian. Erin Mallon is deft when changing characters, but there are times when Morgan drops into a near monotone. Sebastian refers to himself as a bastard and an a\_\_

hole, and that much is true. It has been some time since this reviewer was turned off by the male lead. As the story progresses, he does redeem himself, which may be too late for some. Set in Los Angeles, this is a contemporary romances with contemporary sex scenes. A slow beginning may encourage some listeners not to finish, but hang in there. It's worth it.,

*Mildred Burkett*

## **Sight Unseen**

*Iris Johansen and Roy Johansen*

*Performed by Elisabeth Rodgers*

**Brilliance Audio**

Audiobook

9 CD's, 10 hours 21 minutes

978-1480526129

☆☆☆☆

Dr. Kendra Michaels used to be blind, but a surgery remedied that. While unable to see, her other senses had been honed to a degree that they were exceptional. Where most people, even professionals, don't pick up on various odors Kendra can, and she can determine the model of a car by listening to the engine. She's on a blind date with a history professor, a man whose secrets she read in seconds after meeting him, when an accident flashes on the TV. She asks him to take her to the scene of the accident where she immediately realizes the accident is a facade that covers up murders, murders that mimic her previous cases. When the



# Audio Book Reviews

FBI asks for her help, it turns out the killer is targeting her.

Murders are occurring, murders that mimic those that Kendra solved in the past. down to the finest detail. The killer is so far ahead of her she keeps getting caught by surprise. When someone close to her, rather than a stranger, gets killed, she becomes more determined than ever to catch the monster.

Set in modern-day San Diego, California, this Johansen read written by mother and son, Iris and Roy, is entertaining. From the murder at the beginning of the book to the exciting ending, they keep the reader enthralled. Elisabeth Rodgers' performance is flawless with her transitioning from one character to another. A debate of the pros and cons of the California death penalty was superfluously thrown in by the characters' hate for one of the killers. A twist that challenges the listener's ability to stretch credibility is the killer comes out of nowhere. This audiobook had a potential to be great, and it's good, despite the forced plot devices. Still, get ready for a ride with this one.

*Mildred Burkett*

## Undressed with the Marquess

*Christi Caldwell*

*Performed by Tim Campbell*

**Brilliance Audio**

Audiobook, 9 CD's

978-1713532057

☆☆☆☆

Darius Grey's luck has finally run out. As this nobleman-turned Robin Hood is standing on the dais awaiting his execution by hanging, he realizes his thieving ways have caught up with him, and in but a few minutes, it will be all over for him. But will it? It turns out that his noble grandparents, specifically the Duke of Pemberly, has the power to halt the hanging, and he does. But there are certainly strings attached. Dare's parents are dead; his brother is dead, and though he has a sister, there is no one to carry on the noble line. Darius must marry and have an heir as soon as possible. There is a slight problem, however. Dare has a wife already, one Temperance Swift.

Temperance had been raised by an abusive father and he had married her to get her out of that situation. They were only married eight months before they split. Now she works as a seamstress. When Dare suddenly presents himself as the Marquess of Milford at her dress shop and tells her she must 'play the role of a wife,' she thinks he's lost his mind. She hadn't seen him in five years. He further tells her they must find a suitable mate for his sister, but Temperance has never been a noble. She would never fit in with society. She refuses

him even if she still feels the fire that is between them. Then again, she needs the money that comes along with Dare's deal so she can help her brother and Gwen, her brother's love is to be her servant. When Dare takes Temperance to meet his grandparents, lo and behold, they have his heretofore unknown "betrothed" to introduce him to, a woman, unlike his wife, is of his class.

*Undressed with the Marquess* is entertaining. The lives of the aristocracy and the people from the rookeries are superbly revealed. The fact that this author is a true storyteller with a working knowledge of the peers of the realm make her stories real. Characters from other Christi Caldwell books are referred to, and the history of the male character is identical to that from another story. Of course, Tim Campbell's performance was flawless, very British, very proper. Enjoyable.

*Mildred Burkett*

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### Editorial Continued

We now have another challenge--Christmas season. We compress so much into six week--decorating, caroling, baking on steroids, buying gifts and getting them to the appropriate people. It's daunting when we're not at the mercy of Covid-19. But add the deadly virus to the mix, and it's almost overwhelming.

Don't stress over how you will get your shopping done. You will. Multi-shopping networks, not to mention Amazon, await your money and will get your gifts out in time, if you give them half a chance, and they're desperate for sales. If you go to USPS.com, you can prepare your packages and have them picked up. It may sound corny, but helping others also makes us feel better about ourselves. Let's show our appreciation to each other, especially the essential workers. We can be kind to them when we see them. We can offer tips, make referrals, and write good reviews of their service.

Pick up that phone and check on them and the seniors that you know. Knowing that someone cares enough to do that means a great deal. Until we have a safe vaccine, be patient, it's not going to be as long as it's been, wear your masks, wash your hands and keep your distance. We will all have plenty to be thankful for next year.

Happy SAFE Holidays  
See you next year!

# Booty from the Other Genre



## **Last Chance to Save American Democracy**

*Haven Scott McVarish*

**5 Journeys Media LLC**

E-book

B08KRQFLN9

★★★★

Haven Scott McVarish has formulated a guideline that he feels is essential to the preservation of democracy and the Democratic Party. He is concerned that the loss is imminent by this or the next election cycle depending on the winner and has put effort into this work in order to avert it. Much history and the appropriate references are put forth in order to bolster his points that apply to the current political climate.

McVarish does not hesitate to criticize either of the major political parties as he tries his best to point out the inconsistencies and abuses both have used against the American public. After giving a rundown of what's at stake, the author gives a series of suggestions to stop a lopsided unfairly distributed democracy. This is not a manifesto but simply presents points that can be used and their reasons for the implementations presented.

Gerrymandering, dirty tricks and statistics used against the voters and voter suppression systems are all discussed to impress the reader of the dangers of losing our choice at the ballot box.

The author has a natural style of presentation. The reader can glean his passion for the subject early on as he takes them on a journey to impress the importance of fairness at the voting polls and politics in general.

Anyone passionate about this subject will have a

good read. Loaded with history, statistics, and graphs, there is plenty to digest. For those less involved it may seem tedious, and depending on their particular political affiliation, some will in all likelihood, avoid this work.

*Lauren Calder*

## **Melting**

*George Stumpf*

**Self-published**

Paperback

978-0578484129

★★★★ 1/2

*"How does one change so drastically  
From when the time of love had we  
To now much less is in between?"*

George Stumpf's poems reach deep down and touch the heart and every crevice within the soul. The author shows emotion and knows exactly how to get the reader to explore their own thoughts and understand others.

*Lauren Calder*





# Late Reviews

(Those that didn't make the last  
issue.)

## **Burning Ash (Forgotten Brotherhood #3)**

*N.J. Walters*

**Entangled: Amara**

Mass Market

978-1649370547

☆☆☆☆

*Burning Ash*, Book 3 in N.J. Walker's "Forgotten Brotherhood" series, is an exciting, enthralling, suspenseful, steamy, paranormal romance that explores whether a deadly vampire hunter and one of the oldest vampires, a contract assassin that scares the monsters, make a good love match.

The characters are nicely developed, likable and relatable, despite all but one being human. While Jo is a remarkable hunter and her reasons for being a loner who doesn't trust anyone, especially vampires, are clear and completely understandable, sometimes she's frustrating. As a person who hunts vampires and is on the road all the time, it seems like she would be able to accept the situation she's in and roll with it more.

From the first page, *Burning Ash* draws readers into Jo's and Asher's story. The action scenes are intense, well written, and always have something at stake for the characters, making the story more intense and suspenseful. Walter's description is crisp and colorful, as well as the world building. Unfortunately, toward the middle of the novel the pacing seemed to slow, and the novel started to drag. The revelation of the villains was underwhelming because it took so long to get to this point. Nevertheless, readers who love

vampire romances, vampire hunting, steamy and intense romance, and well written action and suspense should love *Burning Ash*.

*Lacy Hill*

## **Deadly Past**

*Katie Reus*

**KR Press, LLC**

Mass Market

978-1635561425

☆☆☆☆

*A Deadly Past* by Katie Reus is a steamy romantic suspense novel that takes us back to Verona Bay to explore the development of the romance between neighbors Lincoln Jordan and Autumn Perez, who both have a lot more than friendly or neighborly feelings for each other. Lively description, sweet and steamy romance, relatable and well-developed characters make this an entertaining, but not too dark, suspenseful read.

Verona Bay's Sheriff Lincoln has been interested in his next-door neighbor Autumn for some time but has been holding back trying give her space. A high school art teacher, Autumn has myriad reasons for keeping Lincoln at arms length, none of which she is free to share. After they share a passionate one night stand, it becomes a lot more difficult to resist her attraction to him, especially after discovering she is pregnant with his child. Ten years ago, Autumn witnessed a murder and helped send the murderer to prison. Autumn was

# Late

relocated to Verona Bay by witness protection and doesn't share anything about her past with anyone. After being a witness to a bank robbery, Autumn ends up on the radar of the wrong person, and her life is once again in danger.

Both the primary and secondary characters are nicely developed. The seeds for Lincoln's and Autumn's relationship were planted in *Dark Memento*, Book 1 of the series. So, this reviewer's expectations for their romantic relationship might have been a bit high. However, Reus doesn't disappoint. Lincoln and Autumn develop a relationship that is mature, on equal footing, and built on mutual respect and trust. I did find myself becoming more invested in the brewing potential romance between Adeline and Mac. Hopefully those two will eventually get their own book because I would love to read their story.

While the suspense plot is secondary to the romance, it is nicely developed, and balanced. However, this novel was lighter than *Dark Memento* and not nearly as enthralling or creepy. *Deadly Past* is a quick, suspenseful read that should be a nice change of pace from Book 1 in this series.

*Lacy Hill*

## Guardian's Grace (Dark Protectors #12)

*Rebecca Zanetti*

**Lyrical Press**

Mass Market

978-1516110803

★★★★

In *Guardian's Grace*, Rebecca Zanetti's 12th "Dark Protector" book, the Dark Protector's Universe undergoes some unexpected, life-altering changes, and there are also some surprises in store for the Seven and the Realm as well. Colorful description, phenomenal world-building, wonderful development of the characters and their relationships, steamy romance, with twists, and turns drew me in right away and kept me invested until before I knew it, the novel was over.

As far as Grace Cooper is concerned, she and Adare O'Cearbhaill are mates in name only because he was forced to mate her to save her life. Since then, they have been living separate lives. That works just fine for her until her life is endangered, their separate lives collide. Will they be able to survive a true mating and all that it entails beyond the mating sex? Especially when all Grace can focus on is finding out the truth behind her coma and subsequent memory loss.

Grace is a talented photographer who has always lived in her sister Faith's shadow. Stricken by a coma after a deadly attack by an unknown assailant, Grace was awakened by vampire/demon hybrid soldier Adare mating her. Grace awakens to a new world of immortals--vampires, demons,

shifters, etc.--in which she, as an enhanced human and a key, has a special destiny to fulfill and no memory of her immediate life before the coma. Nevertheless, Grace is resistant to accepting the bounds and limitations of life in the immortal world, especially as Adare's mate and the key, so she returns to her normal life as soon as possible.

Adare is a Highlander who has shut down his emotions after the loss of all his family and countless fellow warriors in wars and battles over the years. He agrees to help his brother by saving his mate's sister from a coma, and he's committed to fulfilling his duty to be her mate and protect and keep her safe. However, he has no intention of falling in love with her. When she leaves to pursue her life, he's fine with it. Still, he finds himself intrigued by her.

The action scenes are intense, well choreographed, and exciting. Zanetti has created a creepy, evil, frighteningly cunning enemy in this series that really keeps the heroes and heroines on their toes, and that keeps the stakes high throughout the novel. As a reader who jumped into this series, there's still so much about this world that I don't know. But it's clear that this book signals fundamental changes to the world and universe that the characters of this series inhabit and that the war between the Realm/the Seven, and the Kurjans/Cysts is about to reach another level. I am excited to see what's next for these characters and this world, as the stakes get higher and more intense. I can't wait!

*Lacy Hill*

## Spoiler Alert

*Olivia Dade*

**Avon**

Mass Market

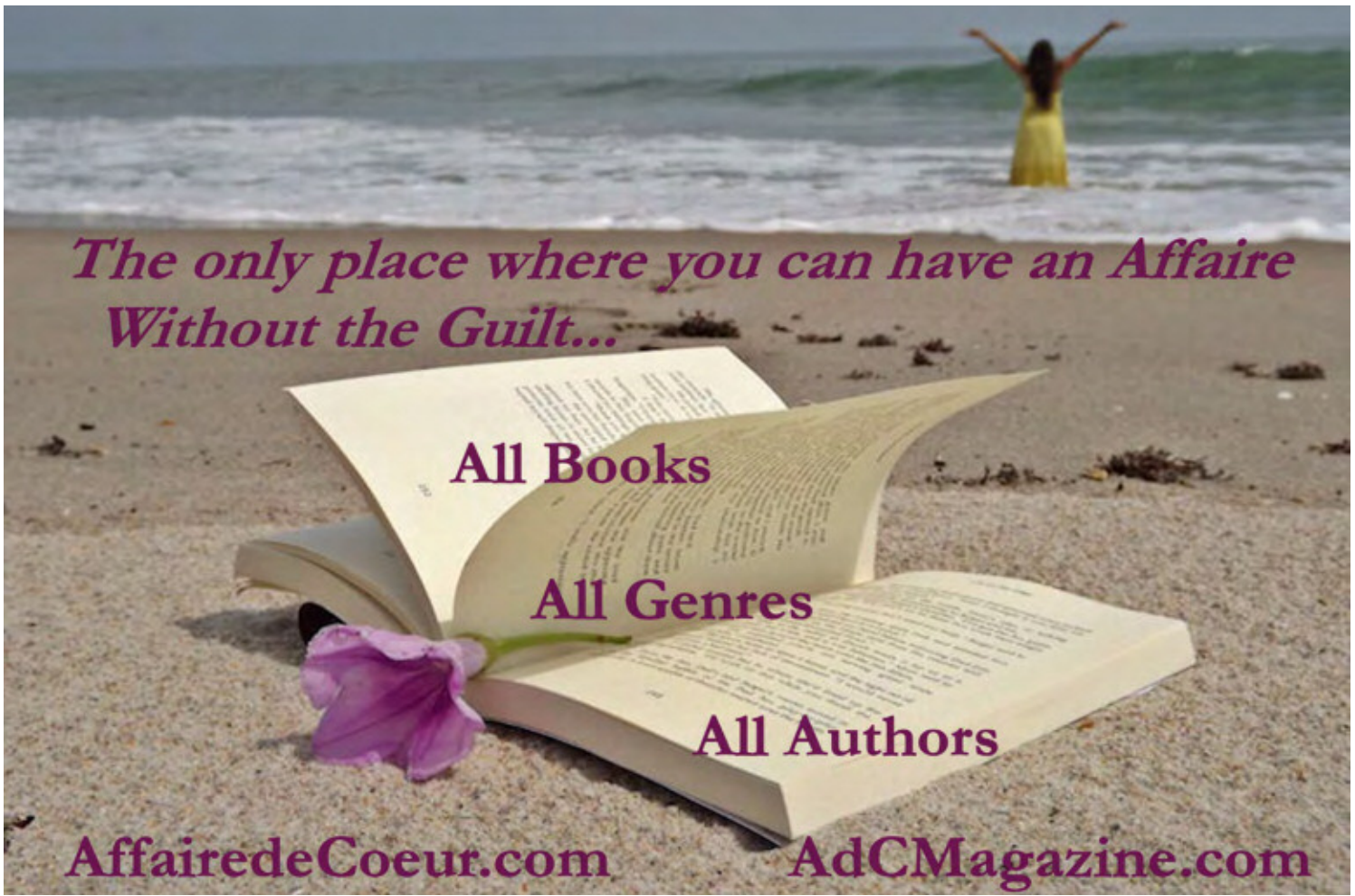
978-0063005549

★★★★

*Spoiler Alert* is a complicated, sweet, steamy, emotional, romantic comedy that explores issues of hiding parts of yourself, self-esteem, self-identity, self-acceptance, learning disabilities, fat shaming, freeing yourself from parental and societal baggage and damaging relationships, and learning to accept love without needing to earn it. Told with alternating flashbacks between the present and the past, the novel explores the development of the relationship between Marcus Caster Rupp, star of popular TV show *Gods of the Gates*, and April Whittier, a huge fan of the show. Readers who are into online fandoms and fan fiction may get a kick out of the in jokes and the character's fandom lifestyles which are captured from an insider's perspective with lively, detailed, and colorful description with crisp writing and pacing that brings the story to life and keeps the story moving from beginning to end without any lags. The characters both primary and secondary are well-developed and relatable in their imperfections.

Both Marcus and April are living secret lives, but who would have thought that those secrets were so intricately





# Late

connected. Marcus discovered fanfiction, writing fic for the show's most popular ship on the Internet, Aeneas/Lavinia, as a way of dealing with his frustrations with his character Aeneas' arc, but it became so much more to him. However, it must stay a secret, or it can cost him his career. April not only writes fanfiction for her OTP Aeneas/Lavinia, but she also creates and dresses up like her favorite characters in cosplay, both of which she keeps hidden and separate from her real life.

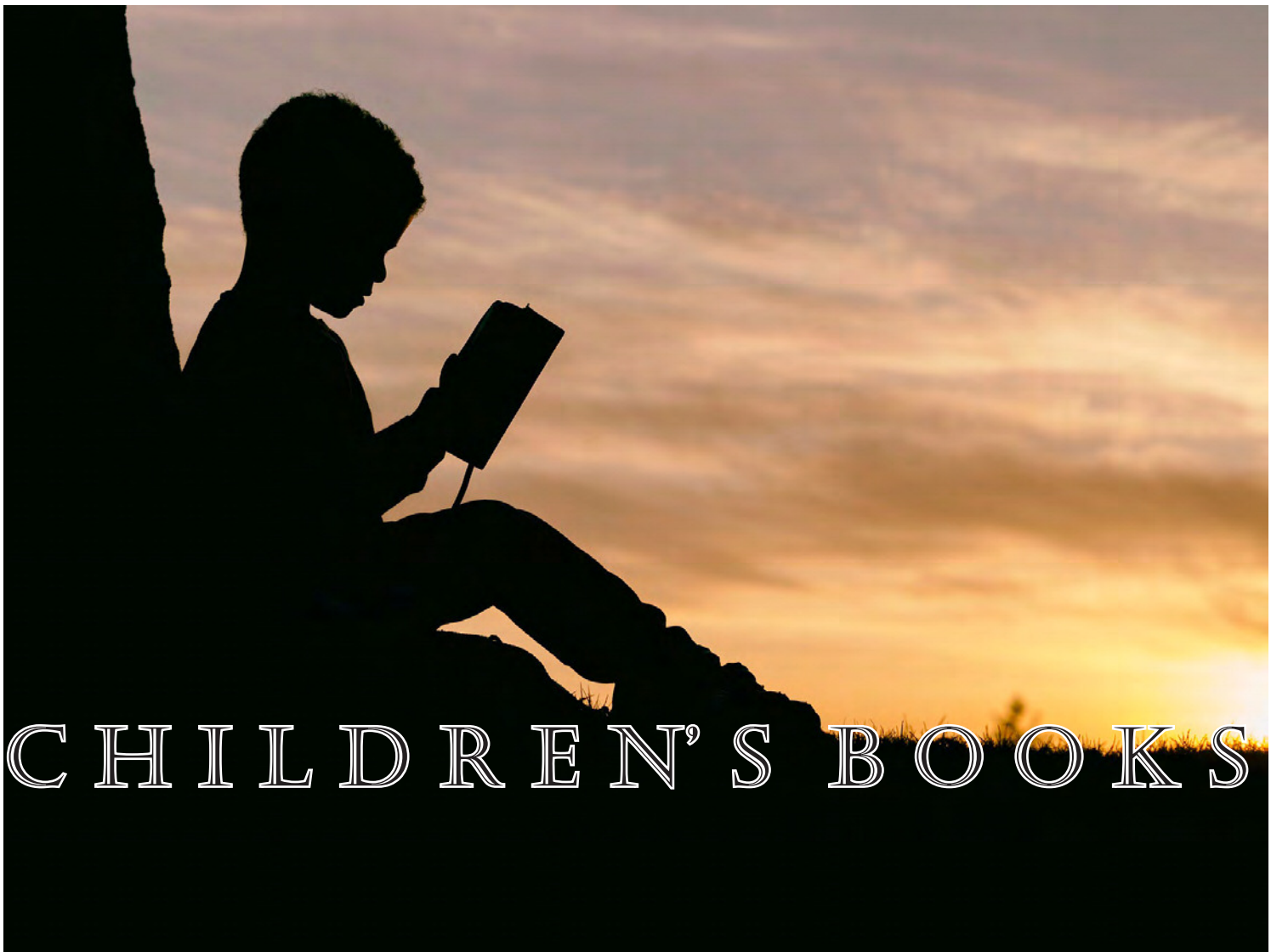
Plus-sized, April is brave, confident, independent, and at peace with her body, and she doesn't have time for people in her life who cannot accept her without trying to change her. Tired of hiding her fandom life, she posts a picture of herself dressed as Lavinia, which goes viral. Marcus sees the photo and the comments and asks her out on a date to shut the trolls down.

While Marcus is seriously into April from the moment he first sees her, April is not into him, at all. Marcus is used to people being into him for shallow reasons and wanting him for the façade he dons, but April just was

not. Once they get past their awful first date, the chemistry between these two is fiery, and they provide balance for each other's lives. Marcus and April helped each other reach that last step of growth that they had been needing to achieve, giving them the courage to do those things they needed to do to become their better selves. With refreshing characters, a fascinating story, and charming storytelling, *Spoiler Alert* is a moving and entertaining love story that is not to be missed.  
*Lacy Hill*



**Happy Holidays from**  
*Affaire de Coeur*



## **Gustave's Adventures**

*Felicia Sanders*

**Self-Published**

*Paperback*

978-1953110015

★★★★

Gustave was a seal, and he had a dream. Even though his parents said it couldn't be done, he still wanted to try. His first attempt was a flop!

But Gustave had a few friends willing to encourage him. He soon learned that dreams could happen if you try hard enough.

This is a good story of learning to work for what you want, and not let anyone say you can't just because it hadn't been done before.

*Lauren Calder*

## **Little Augie and His Trumpet**

*Augie Haas*

**Playtime Music LLC**

*Paperback*

978-1792350733

★★★★

Augie was a typical child, interested in everything the world had to offer him. One day he heard someone playing the trumpet. He decided he wanted to learn.

Augie learned that if he wanted something bad enough, he had to work for it--and work for it he did.

This is a great story for children. It's set up to encourage children to chase their desires and help them have the confidence to enjoy it.

*Lauren Calder*



