

*January-February, 2021*

# *Affaire de Coeur*

*Bringing You Honest Reviews Since 1980*



*Celia Breslin is AdC's  
February Force*



*Deborah Camp is  
Always in the Spotlight*

**Reviews!  
Reviews!  
Reviews!**





# *Affaire de Coeur*

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# *No Need to Find an Agent for These Publishing Houses*

*by Pamela Ackerson*



**Isn't this wonderful? Celebrate!  
There are publishers out there who are  
willing to take your submission without  
representation of an agent.**

This isn't a complete list. It's just a few to get you started in the right direction. One absolute request from every single publishing house: **Follow the submission guidelines or you will not be considered.**

**Albert Whitman and Co.** ~ Children's books, picture books, middle-grade fiction, and young adult fiction each have their own submission details to follow.

[www.albertwhitman.com/submission-guidelines-for-unrepresented-authors](http://www.albertwhitman.com/submission-guidelines-for-unrepresented-authors)

**Beacon Press** ~ Nonfiction publisher that publishes only deep fundamental issues, with diversity, religious pluralism, anti-racism, justice, equity, and compassion for humanity.

[www.beacon.org/Assets/ClientPages/Submissions.aspx](http://www.beacon.org/Assets/ClientPages/Submissions.aspx)

**Evernight Publishing** ~ They want complete manuscripts between 8,000-100,000 words in sub-genres of romance, erotic romance, and limited urban fantasy.

[www.evernightpublishing.com/pages/Submissions.html](http://www.evernightpublishing.com/pages/Submissions.html)

**Felony and Mayhem** ~ They publish mysteries with plots related to literature, philosophy, religion, academia, history, music, art, politics, food and wine, theatre, magic, anthropology, and settings outside the U.S.

[www.felonyandmayhem.com/pages/submissions](http://www.felonyandmayhem.com/pages/submissions)

**Free Spirit Publishing** ~ Publisher for nonfiction books, and learning materials for children, teens, parents, educators, and counselors, etc. They distribute through major trade and library distributors, in bookstores such as Barnes & Noble, on Amazon.com, and their mail order catalog.

[www.freespirit.com/submission-guidelines](http://www.freespirit.com/submission-guidelines)

**Kensington** ~ Kensington is America's independent publisher, and publishes in hardcover, trade paperback, and mass market. They publish over 600 books annually in both fiction and non-fiction.

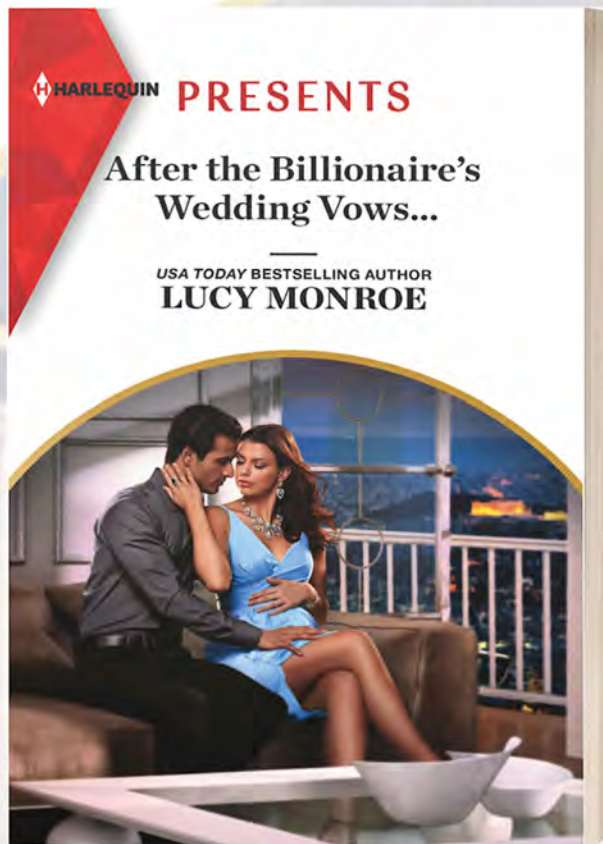
[www.kensingtonbooks.com/pages/submissions](http://www.kensingtonbooks.com/pages/submissions)

**Koehler Books** ~ Publisher of Christian, historical, mystery & suspense, nonfiction, and Young Adult. They review your completed manuscript (no proposals); consider you and your writing experience, your marketing plans, and your ability to collaborate with their team.

[www.koehlerbooks.com/submit-your-work](http://www.koehlerbooks.com/submit-your-work)

**Painted Hearts Publishing** ~ At this time they are welcoming submissions for all genres of LGBT+ romance from both new, unpublished authors and those already estab-

## What comes after “I do”?



With his marriage on the line, Andros must choose—because closing the distance between himself and Polly will mean destroying the protective barriers he’s long fought to keep intact...

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lished in the field. They urge all authors submitting work to review their guidelines carefully.

[www.paintedheartspublishing.com/submissions](http://www.paintedheartspublishing.com/submissions)

**Sky Horse Publishing** ~ The core categories of our Skyhorse imprint include outdoor sports, adventure, team sports, nature, and country living, with a good dose of politics, true crime, history and military history, reference, and humor—practical, literary, and general trade.

<https://www.skyhorsepublishing.com/submissions/>

**The Dark Castle Lords** ~ DCL accepts submissions in all genres. They are accepting well-written stories with solid plots, well-developed settings, and characters that are fully developed. Your submitted story should fit into a specific genre and heat level; however, some

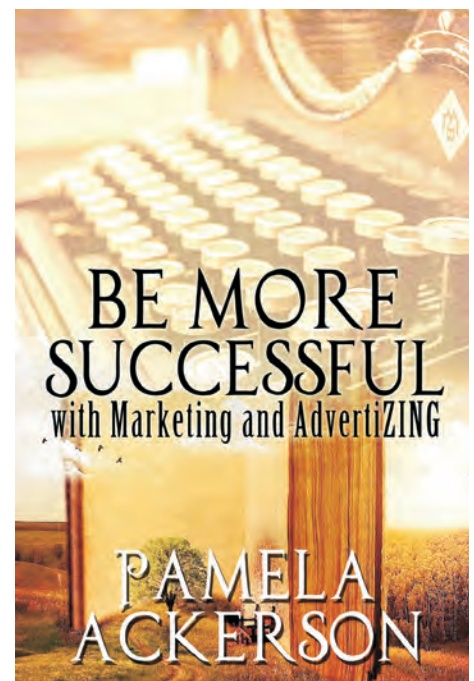
crossover of genres is allowable.

[www.thedarkcastlelords.net/submissions](http://www.thedarkcastlelords.net/submissions)

**The Wild Rose Press** ~ The Wild Rose Press accepts queries for romance and other genres, including but not limited to women’s fiction, mystery or thriller, historical fiction and erotica. Please read the details on how to submit properly for their lines and requirements before sending them a query.

[www.thewildrosepress.com/traditionalpublishing](http://www.thewildrosepress.com/traditionalpublishing)

Don’t forget! One absolute request from every single publishing house: **Follow the submission guidelines, or you will not be considered.**





# February 2021's Calendar Girl!

## Celia Breslin



Celia lives in California with her husband, daughter, and two feisty cats. She writes urban fantasy and paranormal romance, and has a particular fondness for werewolves, vampires, angels, and the Fae. When not writing, Celia can be found editing for other authors, exercising, reading a good book, hanging with her family, or indulging her addiction to Joss Whedon's TV shows and movies, as well as everything in the Marvel Universe franchise.

**AdC:** *How many different genres do you write?*

**CB:** I write in several genres, including urban fantasy, paranormal romance, science fiction, and fantasy. My current published works are urban fantasy and paranormal romance. I also dabble in poetry under another pen name.

**AdC:** *Tell us about the type of characters you love to write about.*

**CB:** I like to write vivid characters with flaws, fun quirks, strengths, and weaknesses, hopes and dreams.

Basically “real” people in fantasy settings.

**AdC:** *Do you have a new book or series?*

**CB:** Yes! This year, I was invited to write in a high-heat romance, multi-author, shared world called The Cupid Dating Agency. All stories in the series are unique standalone reads so you can read them in any order. The backstory for the series goes like this: A big war between Heaven and Hell happened, Lucifer lost and no longer runs Hell, humans know about angels/demons, and angels/demons/humans now co-exist and often get matched for potential partnerships (business and/or personal) by the Cupid Dating Agency. I have four stories planned starring a team of four, Warrior-class angels who find love in the Northern California wine country. My first two stories released in 2020, in August and December are: *A Warrior's Kiss* and *A Demon's Embrace*.

**AdC:** *Favorite quote?*

**CB:** Hm, what to choose... Let's go with *A Warrior's Kiss*. Nicky is a wicked smart woman who doesn't appreciate the cupid's meddling ways... She's chatting here with her snarky BFF, Maya.

(Nicky) - “The cupids are a bunch of pushy, nosy matchmakers. No one is running my love life but me.”

(Maya) - “You need to actually have a love life to run one, you know. And admit it, you're not totally immune to love. I saw you with him.”

(Nicky) - “I don't know what you mean.”

Maya rolled her eyes. “You were attracted to Mister Wrecking Ball.”

“Was not.”

“Were, too.”

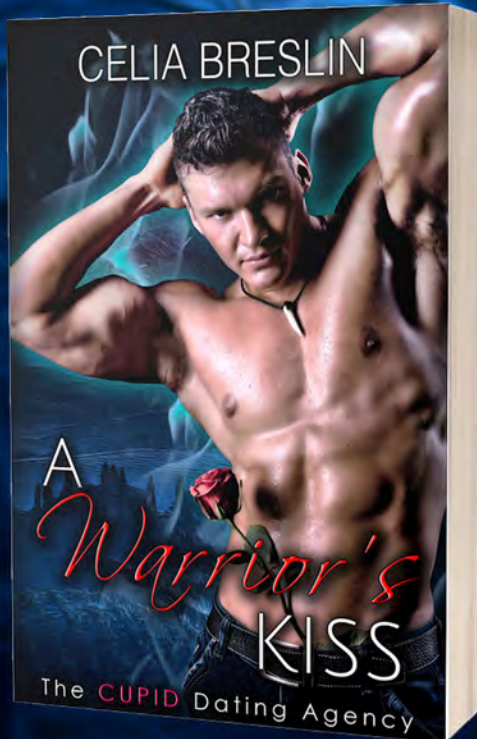
“Not.”

“Too.”

**AdC:** *What do you do when you just don't feel like writing?*

**CB:** After I released *A Demon's Embrace* in December, I took a break for the holidays. It's good to take time off to relax and recharge. If we're referring to a workday when new words need to happen for the WiP, then I'll work on the story outline and/or review and

# Pulse-Pounding Love on the Wild Side



She's chasing  
her dream.

He's after her heart.

CeliaBreslin.com @CeliaBreslin

edit previous scenes to get in the mood to continue writing.

**AdC:** *A lot of controversy going around about how authors shouldn't write about things they've never experienced, i.e. if you're not trans, gay, an addict, etc. don't write a character like that...what's your take on that?*

**CB:** Research, research, research. Also, find beta readers who have the experience you do not. Have them read and review your story. Expert beta reader feedback is invaluable.

**AdC:** *Many indie authors don't get their books edited by professionals. What advice would you give them?*

**CB:** Always get your work edited. You want your work to be as professional as possible, right? Editors add the layer of polish every story deserves.

**AdC:** *What do you do to go beyond your comfort zone when it comes to writing and life?*

**CB:** Try new things! In writing this could be different types of characters, a whole new fantasy world, a different genre... just go for it. The new "Cupid" series has me writing angels for the first time and I love it. In life, I'd say the same thing, for example, I love to exercise, so I try new workouts, especially ones outside my usual comfort zone. Variety makes

working out fun, interesting, and challenging.

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

**CB:** Due to the global pandemic, I am staying home. You can check my website or subscribe to my newsletter to keep up-to-date on future appearances and giveaways. Or, say hello on social media!

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

**CB:** Write what you love. Trends come and go, so discover what lights a fire in your muse and go for it. Also, it's easy to procrastinate with all the distractions available to us, especially via social media, so set writing goals and a schedule, gather some accountability author buddies, and write, write, write!

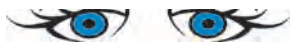
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Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CeliaBreslinAuthor>





## Sneak Peek

### *A Warrior's Kiss*

#### **Cupid Dating Agency Series**

**By Celia Breslin**

*She's chasing her dream. He's after her heart.*

French teacher turned entrepreneur, Nicolette Durand has one goal in mind when she leaves the big city for the California wine country, and it has nothing to do with men. Intent on establishing a new business with her bestie, Nicky doesn't care how many dating edicts the cupids send her, she's simply too busy. Then a hunk of surly angel crashes into her life.

Ezekiel is less than delighted when the Almighty assigns him and his elite team of warriors to Earth with instructions to help the cupids. Now Heaven's top soldiers are running two businesses, including a gastropub where speed-dating events are a part of their mission. But Zeke may have to rethink his surly position on this earthbound gig after he meets the kind and curvy biz owner next door.

Nicky is sure she has no time for a relationship, not even with the gorgeous hunk of heaven who rocks her world, but Zeke is determined to convince her otherwise. Too bad a supernatural disaster and thousands of Hell's minions intent on destruction and mayhem might stand in their way...

### ***A Warrior's Kiss Excerpt*** **– Nicky and Zeke's First Meet**

"Think he's dead?" The whispered question quieted his internal whining.

Nice voice. Soft and smooth, like velvet. Feminine. Clearly, he wasn't alone.

"He sure looks dead." A second woman replied, louder and with a chuckle.

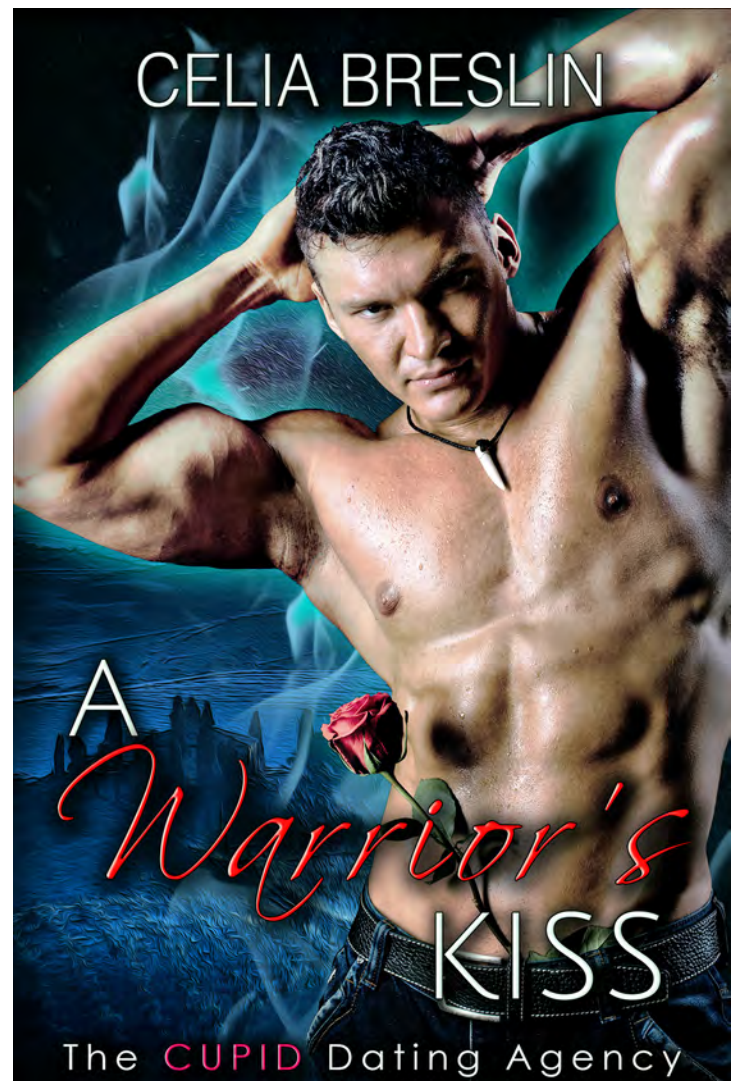
He suppressed a scowl and kept his eyes closed.

She thinks this is funny?

Bodies shifted behind whatever his head had cracked into, edging closer to either side of him.

"There's no blood, though," she of the velvet voice murmured. "Shouldn't there be blood?"

Ah, their business neighbor. She came to a halt near his head, her body heat and peaches-and-honey scent saturating his senses. He should open his peepers and say something, see if the female looked as good as she sounded and smelled.



Shit. Where had that reaction come from? He had no room in his life for a woman, especially not a mortal woman.

"Maybe we should check for a pulse," the one Peaches had called Maya suggested.

"I'm not touching his body."

Fast reply from Peaches. Jesus, did he look so horrible? And double Jesus, why did her opinion matter? He must have hit his head harder than he imagined.

"C'mon, girlfriend. It's a big, beautiful body. How can you not want to get your hands on it?"

Listen to your girlfriend, Peaches. No. Wait. Belay that order.

"Really, M? One-track mind much?"

He tensed to haul his ass upward, but a soft, gentle hand landed on his shoulder, feather light, then slid down his bare arm, kicking up a riot of electric sensation along his skin. He should move, but damn if he didn't want to see what she would do next. Or touch next.

Warm fingers palpated his inner wrist, right over his madly beating pulse. Racing for her? A human female he hadn't even laid eyes on? Shit.

Eyes shooting wide, he sat up.



# Editorial

## Don't Count February Short!

For a short month, February has a lot going on. Though the Christmas season is long, I don't think there is another month that celebrates as much as February.

Let's start with Black History Month. I have watched this celebration evolve over the years from Black History Day to Black History Month. It used to be that only the firmly committed or those willing to take a risk would even mention Black History Month. Now, it seems that everyone goes all out to acknowledge it. It's about time!

Some of the things I love about Black History Month:

Hosted by five women--Whoopi Goldberg (with a Friday alternate of Ana Navarro), Meghan McCain, Joy Behar, Sunny Hostin, and Sara Haines, *The View* is a combination of political discussion and entertainment. During Black History month, every day on *The View*, an African-American is acknowledged for his/her contributions and throughout the month, they promote Black-owned businesses. I have learned so much watching *The View*--people I have never heard of. I frequently heard myself saying, "I didn't know that."

Along those same lines is the programming that occurs on other channels. My DVR is so busy with shows taped on top of shows. Prime Video (Amazon's station) has run two I can recommend. Please know there are many others that will meet my definition of good or excellent, I just haven't watched them all.

Let me start off with Denzel Washington's movie on HBO/Max, *The Little Things*, with his co-star Rami Malik. It's a squirm in your seat, yell at the screen movie.

Quite different, but still very

good, is *One Night in Miami*. Based on a true story of the night Muhammad Ali won the world championship by beating Sonny Liston, it highlights a meeting of four friends---Ali, Malcolm X, Sam Cooke (soul singer and songwriter of "You Send Me", and football Hall of Famer legend Jim Brown. Who knew they were friends? The movie focuses on the racism they experience despite their fame and wealth. The self-imposed burdens they felt to advance the cause of African-Americans was real. I loved it!

*Judas and the Black Messiah* debuted last weekend and told the story of the murder in his sleep of Black Panther leader 21-year-old Fred Hampton. Starring Daniel Kaluuya (*Get Out*), it follows the infiltration of the Panthers by an African-American teen Bill O'Neal (played by Lakeith Stanfield) on the orders of the FBI and J. Edgar Hoover (Martin Sheen). Even though you know the outcome from the onset, it's gut-wrenching. IMDB.com has done a tribute to Black Directors, featuring some of the films we know and love--*Devil With the Blue Dress*, *Precious*, *Girl's Trip*, *Malcolm X*, *Black Panther*, *Coming to America* and so many, many more.

The Smithsonian and History Channels are featuring programs about Black people in history every day. I've seen two on the Tuskegee Airmen. PBS has really stepped up, showing a documentary on the history of Black Churches and its influence on this country and the history of Black music and its meaning and effect. Both were created by West Virginia native son Henry Louis Gates, Jr. with John Legend, and many others as guests.

Reluctantly parting from entertainment, I'll bring up the second day of February--Groundhog Day. Did Punxsutawney Phil see his shadow? I don't know, but the weather from coast-to-

coast sucks. Two feet of snow in Dallas while we have no rain and 60-degree temperatures? I don't care what he saw, he needs to look again. Cancun anyone?

Valentine's Day. Named after a saint, it's supposed to be our day to commemorate love *vis à vis* candy, flowers, dinner, gifts, especially lingerie. Though my husband and I did forego our annual question this year, "Do women give men gifts on Valentine's Day?", I thought about it. I hope you had a good one. What did the song say? "And most of all, when snowflakes fall, I wish you love."

I'm jealous about the next two events: *Mardi Gras* in New Orleans or better yet *Carnival* in Brazil. I cannot wait to do both. I've been to one *Mardi Gras*--when I volunteered after Katrina. With many of its citizens having been relocated to Houston and other areas, it was high in spirit though attendance was poor. I swore I would come back. When the disease I refuse to mention in this editorial is over, it's on my list as *Carnival* with my Brazilian friend Aisa.

The History Channel along with CNN has a documentary on Abraham Lincoln in honor of President's Day. The HC already had one on Washington. It was very good. And, if you're hankering for that era, Netflix is replaying the program *Turn* (a spy series in the Revolutionary War). Showtime is showing the three-part series *Sons of Liberty*, OWN (the Oprah



continued on page 23

# *Romantic Traveling*

## *Antigua*

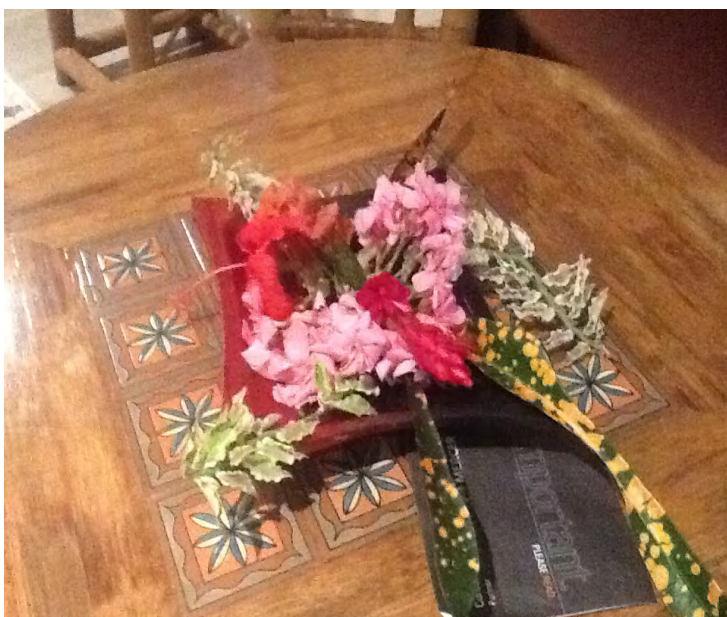
**T**o be honest, geography was not my strong suit in school. Consequently, I had never heard of Antigua. I consider myself well-traveled, but this little island took me by surprise. Pronounced an-tee'-ga, this is a Caribbean nation where it's joined by Barbuda. One of the larger islands, it is completely surrounded by the Caribbean Sea. It's noted for its beautiful beaches and not very far from Puerto Rico and Saint Kitts (though I learned that most of the natives took a boat and went grocery shopping in Jamaica).

Antigua is an independent country with the history of having been colonized by Great Britain, though named by Christopher Columbus. As with most West Indian islands,

Africans were enslaved and brought to the island for the purpose of growing sugar cane. As the population of the Africans grew, conversely with that of the decline of the number of whites, insurrection followed and ultimately the trade slave was abolished in 1807.

Our trip was a family break that began two days after Christmas and ended on January 4<sup>th</sup>. Upon arrival at our condo, we were provided with a colorful, complimentary rum punch which was available all day. Now, that's the way to start a vacation! When we arrived at our place, we found a fresh centerpiece of flowers on the table, a really nice touch.

Since Antigua is known for its beaches, it seemed only right to check them out. They are absolutely beautiful. The place where we stayed on Jolly Beach provided a huge swimming pool, but we flocked to the warm beaches and white sands instead.



*Simple, yet lovely, 'welcoming' flower arrangement in the rooms*



*Swimming pool by the sea*



# Capital City Author Event WELCOMES



*John  
Antorino*

MONTGOMERY, AL  
MAY 21-22, 2021

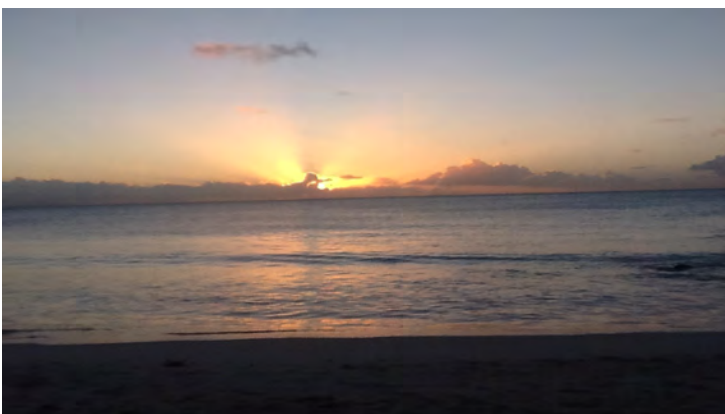


There are tours galore available if you preferred structured activity. You can find everything from glass bottom boats to snorkeling, swimming with the dolphins as well as sunset tours, catamaran rides, farm-to-table expeditions and journeys to St. John, Antigua's capital. We decided early on that we would be better off making our own arrangements.

After we drastically overpaid for a non-existent seat in the overcrowded bar at Shirley Heights Restaurant to watch the sunset, we struck out on our own.

0We actually did quite well in filling our activities

lists: a New Year's Eve celebration, a venture into St. John to watch the New Year's Day celebrations, a privately cooked lobster dinner, midnight on the beach and swimming lessons in the pool. (I am the only member of my family who cannot



*Now d'ere's a sunset, Mon*

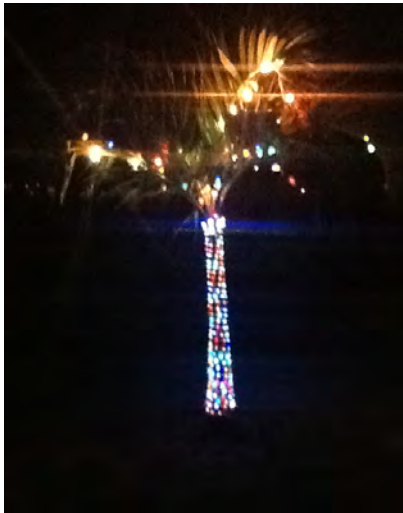


*Mount Obama*

swim—hence, I reluctantly missed my outing with the dolphins.)

On the way to Shirley Heights, we went to Mount Obama, a mountain peak and a park named after our president! (Ok, I partially get it, but why haven't we changed some of our names to his as well?) Formerly known as Boggy Peak, it's located in the Shekerley Mountains and overlooks part of the Caribbean Sea.

Unless you live in Florida, Southern California, or one of the Southern states, you are probably unaccustomed to seeing palm trees decorated with Christmas lights. Such decorations are everywhere, including along the beaches. It is



*Palm tree decorated for Christmas*

equally difficult to convince yourself that it is Christmas and New Year's when warm waves are washing back and forth going over your feet.

To my hubby's delight, there was no shortage of tennis courts. Occasionally, a tropical storm would go through them, but as one native described to me, "It's like a woman walking gently through a garden." I don't know about that, but the rain was light, and it didn't last long. While he played tennis, I sneaked off to get a massage. On the grassy area between the massage place and tennis courts, I saw several things I had never seen: (1) beautiful flowers indigenous to the area; (2) a mango tree with baby mangoes on it; and (3) an animal, the likes of which I had



*New Year's Day Parade*

# Book Obsessed Babes 2021

[facebook.com/bookobsessedbabes](https://facebook.com/bookobsessedbabes)

St Augustine Beach, FL • March 19-21, 2021



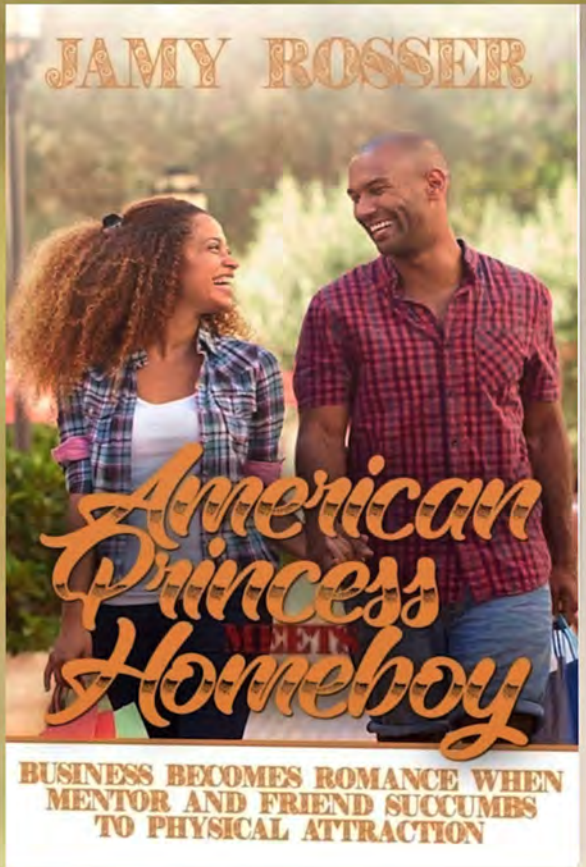
**Meet Actor/Model  
John Antorino**

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# American Princess Meets Homeboy



David's life has shifted in a different direction.

Will his success change him or will he still be the man Hope fell in love with?

Amazon/Jamy-Rosser

never seen, and I've watched many animal shows. Coming from a massage, I did not have my phone or camera to take a picture of said creature, but I must have described him well because the gentleman I was pressuring (in somewhat of a panic) to tell me what I had seen informed me it was a mongoose. Much later on, I recalled that mongeese are found where there are snakes. Needless to say, I did not take any more shortcuts across grassy fields for the remainder of my visit.

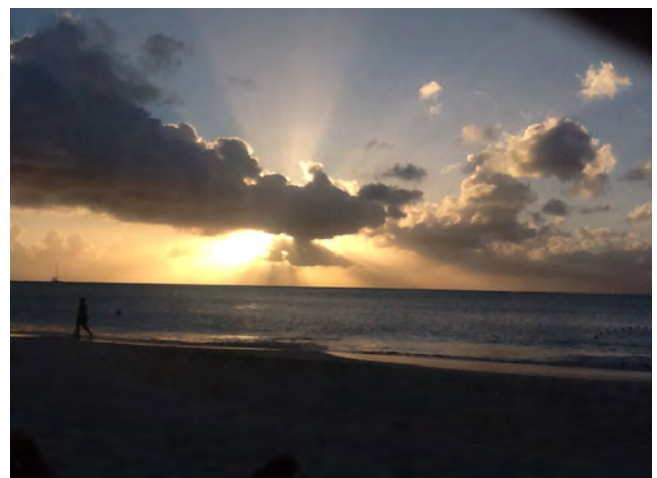
Cultural activities abound in Antigua, whose population is 91% Black. The native women make a plethora of goods—from jewelry to clothing and often sell them on the beach. If you sit (or lounge in a chaise-lounge chair) long enough, a nice-looking, talented man may approach you and start serenading you. Don't fight it, girl. Enjoy it! The song will definitely have a reggae beat that is almost hypnotic.

On New Year's Eve, we went to a nice nightclub called the St. James. It is located on the ocean, sans beach, with waves pounding the walls near the tables. Though the service was slow (and who isn't on New Year's Eve?), they served good food and drinks and had a nice, talented trio who had quite a repertoire of songs.

New Year's Day found us taking a local bus to St. John. To our good fortune, the locals were putting on a parade, accompanied by their own various bands. What an

unexpected treat! The costumes were beautiful, as you can see in the picture. Among the natives watching the parade was a young man wearing an (Oakland) Raider cap, and a man whose hair was so long, it touched the sidewalk.

It's always sad when a vacation ends, especially when you believe you won't be back because there are so many more places you like to visit. But maybe I will go back...I certainly recommend it. There isn't anything I would change except coming back home as soon as I did.



*Does anyone see the thunderbird in the clouds?*

# The Spotlight Stays on Deborah Camp

*Deborah Camp lives in Tulsa, OK, with three dogs. The love of her life resides in New York City, so there is usually a lot of flying involved. However, during the Age of COVID, Zoom became very, very important. When she's not writing or reading, she's watching television, daydreaming, yakking away with friends, or raiding the refrigerator. A goofy romantic, she cries during commercials about homeless dogs and laughs uproariously during commercials about erectile dysfunction.*

**AdC:** *How many different genres do you write?*

**DC:** Three, I guess. Historical romance (westerns), contemporary romance, and romantic suspense.

**AdC:** *Tell us about the type of characters you love to write about.*

**DC:** I like to write about complex people who have overcome adversity. I love to write about misunderstood heroes and bad boys who have hearts of gold. As for women protagonists, I like women who stand up for themselves, are intelligent and self-reliant, and who aren't "husband hunting."

**AdC:** *Do you have a new book or series?*

**DC:** Yes. It's called "Campy Romances," and they are fun, flirty contemporary romances. First one is *Bedding Mr. Birdsong* and the second was released right before Christmas – *Nailing Mr. Nasty*. I'm writing the third one now.

**AdC:** *Favorite quote?*

**DC:** "Don't wait for your ship to come in. Swim for it!"

**AdC:** *What do you do when you just*



*don't feel like writing?*

**DC:** I write, whether I'm "feeling it" or not. When I'm off work, I read, talk, and gossip with friends, play with my dogs, and regular stuff like that. I volunteer with an animal rescue group. I used to foster dogs, but now I mainly help with adoptions and paperwork. We had a big year in 2020 and were able to rescue more than 800 dogs and cats from kill shelters and place them in loving homes.

**AdC:** *There's a lot of controversy going around about how authors shouldn't write about things they've never experienced, i.e. if you're not trans, gay, an addict, etc., don't write a character like that...what's your take on that?*

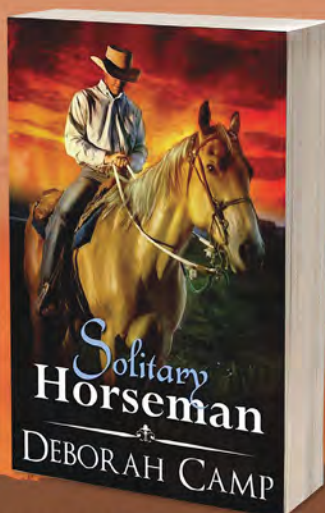
**DC:** I love to research things. That's part of the joy of being a fiction author, so I'm always writing about things I haven't personally experienced. I mean, I can't live in 1885, right? So, I have to research sufficiently to be able to place myself back there and use my imagination as to how it felt to live in those times. I can't be a man, but I write in the male viewpoint, so I talk to my man a lot about how his brain works, how he feels when he's mad, turned on, having an orgasm, etc. So, the whole thing about only writing about what you know, I think, should be viewed as writing about what you've experienced and what you've researched.

**AdC:** *Many indie authors don't get their books edited by professionals. What advice would you give them?*

**DC:** I'd say they need to open their purse/billfold and pay for a professional editor. You can't see all your mistakes because, often, you don't know you're making a mistake! I can't begin to recall all the times an editor has taught me about grammar or certain words



# Stories as Beautiful and Spirited as America's Fabled West



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or punctuation I'm using incorrectly. And I have made my living at times being a newspaper or magazine editor! I'm good at it, too. But I can't know everything. Especially about my own writing. The eye skips over your own work because your brain knows what you meant to write, and it corrects it in your head and fools your eye into thinking that's what you saw on the page. A good editor will also point out inconsistencies in your manuscript that should be corrected.

**AdC:** *What do you do to go beyond your comfort zone when it comes to writing and life?*

**DC:** I don't try to go beyond my comfort zone in life. I enjoy being comfortable. As for writing, I do challenge myself from time to time and write something I might not have tried before, or it's been a while since I've written in that category. For example, before I wrote *Bedding Mr. Birdsong*, it had been a couple of decades since I'd written a contemporary romance. I'd written romantic suspense, but not a short contemporary romance since the 1990s! It was fun to get back to that genre again.

*tions?*

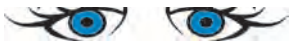
**DC:** No. I don't do those anymore.

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

**DC:** Keep learning your craft and keep reading other people's books. I read 78 books in 2020 and I hope to read 80 to 85 in 2021. About half of the books I read last year were written by people I'd never read before and I discovered some "favorite" new authors. I also try to review books I read and post the reviews on Goodreads and Amazon because I know how very important reviews are to me. What you read are your textbooks. Other authors are your instructors. When I read, I learn better ways to present certain scenes (fight scenes, introspection, observation), I'm reminded of lovely words that I could be using in my work instead of the same ones I use over and over again, and I'm inspired to write better love scenes and sex scenes and emotional scenes. Writers who don't read, don't grow.

**AdC:** *Will you be attending any book signings or conven-*

*Affaire de Coeur*



## Sneak Peek

Excerpt from *Nailing Mr. Nasty* by Deborah Camp

Smiling and feeling like a *tigress* –*ah, when he called her that!* – she waltzed out of the restroom and ran into the nasty man himself. Jack stood by the kitchen door, obviously waiting for her. She glanced around.

“Where is everyone?”

“Heading to another bar or home.”

“Oh. Party’s over?”

“Guess so. I’ll walk you to your car, unless you want me to drive you home. How much did you drink?”

“A margarita. I’m sober.”

“Maybe I’ll just follow you to make sure you get home okay.”

“I’m all grown up, Jack. I don’t get tipsy on one watered down drink.” She headed for the door and he fell into step with her. The parking lot wasn’t as full now. When she’d arrived, it had been packed and she’d ended up parking behind the building. Jack walked with her to her one-of-a-kind vehicle. She unlocked the door and turned to face him.

“Thanks. I’m good.” When she said that, his brows dipped, shadowing his eyes even more. She felt rather than saw the shift of his mood. The air around him seemed to sizzle. He lifted his hands and placed them on either side of her against the Thing.

“This is one ugly car.”

“Says you.” It was hard for her to talk past the pulse in her throat. She rested a hand strategically and purposefully on his chest where his heartbeat could be felt. His blue chambray shirt was soft against her fingertips. She looked at him through her lashes and smiled.

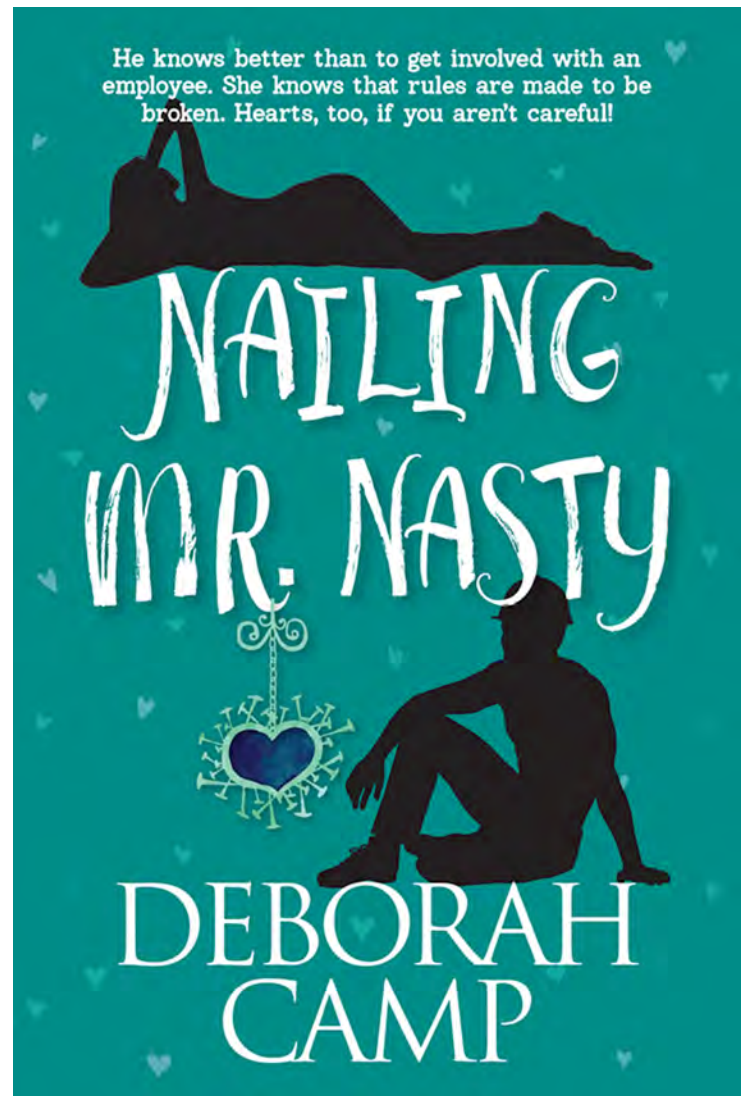
“We shouldn’t be doing this,” he said.

“What? Touching?”

“This.” He leaned in closer, nuzzling her hair, breathing her in. “I’m your boss.”

“Not now, you aren’t. You’re Jack Nast and I’m Sam Striker out here in the dark. Touching.”

He moved quicker than she thought he would. A guttural sound, almost like a growl, vibrated in his chest and then his mouth was on hers, covering hers, searing hers. She slipped her arms around his waist and tasted peppermint on his lips. He was solid against her palms as she stroked up his back, skimming over his shoulder blades and along the curvature of his spine. She yearned to feel his skin slide hotly against hers. His hands moved to either side of her head, positioning her mouth where he wanted it, his fingers tangling in her long hair. He didn’t dive in with his tongue. Instead, he teased her, lightly painting her lips and nudging the corners of her mouth. She flattened herself against him, needing to be closer, wanting to burrow into him. She felt his arousal, hard



as steel, and just knowing she’d done that to him made her smile against the heat of his mouth on hers.

“I want to fuck you into next week,” he rasped against her lips. “I want to go at you long and hard. Take my sweet time. Make you sore.”

*Jesus.* Could she orgasm just from hearing him say such things to her? She lifted her lashes to stare into his oceanic eyes. “Who’s stopping you?” she challenged him because she was in. All in.

“Not who. What.” He fanned his long lashes slowly and his fingers flexed against her scalp. “Like I said. We can’t be goddamned fools, Sam. I’m your boss.”

“Like I said. You’re not my boss right now. You’re Jack Nasty.” She smiled at the reference. “And you are kind of nasty, huh?” She smoothed her hands through the sides of his hair. It was soft and curled around the base of her fingers.

“In a good way.” He tipped her head back, making her look into his eyes again. “You like it dirty, baby? You like it a little rough?”

“Talk’s cheap. How about some action?”

One corner of his mouth lifted and he shook his head. “I don’t know what to make of you. I can’t decide if you’re a risk taker or a prick teaser. Maybe some of both.” He gath-



ered fistfuls of her hair and moved her head back more until it touched the car behind her. "But I get the feeling that if I shoved you into the back seat of this piece of shit car and tried to bury my face between your thighs, you'd stop me."

A cold finger of trepidation slicked down her spine. Damn it. He was right. She was talking a lusty game, but what he'd described made her back off instead of lunge forward. Oh, she wanted him, but not like that. Not all tawdry and cheap.

"I actually own a bed back at my place," she whispered, her voice losing some of its previous brass.

He released her hair to drag his fingertips along her jawline and down her neck before settling his hands on her shoulders. "So much for getting down and dirty." He chuckled. "Tangling limbs with you in that bed would cause me all kinds of trouble. You're Lucy's friend and Lucy would pitch a fit about me taking advantage of you. You're my employee and I know better than to fuck the help. The crew would get wind of it and give me everlasting grief. Yeah. You would cause miles of misery for me. Besides that, you don't have any business inviting me to your place. You

don't know the first thing about me." He shoved away from her and reached for the door handle. "You're right. You're sober. Go on home, Sam."

Feeling chastised, rejected, and pissed off, she turned and jerked the car door open. Flinging herself into the seat, she wrapped the seat belt around her with angry movements, all the while feeling Jack's amused regard. She slammed the door shut and jammed the key into the ignition, firing the engine. Deciding that she wouldn't let him have the last word, she looked up into his shadowy face.

"I know you well enough to have sex with you." She let go of a churlish bark of laughter. "It's not like I want to write your biography, for Christ's sake." Then she hit the gas and left him standing in the parking lot, staring after her. "Take that and chew on it," she grumbled, then sucked in a noisy breath when she felt the burn of tears in her eyes. "No. Nope. I won't cry about this. He's not that important. I'm glad he slowed our roll because I don't want to go to bed with him." A hot tear escaped the corner of her eye and slipped down to salt her lips. What hurt more than the rejection was that he was right about all of it. A sexual encounter

would cause ripples of discontent in some corners and disapproval in others. He was also right about how she wanted him. A little dirty, yeah. But respectful.

"Your loss, Jack Nast," she murmured, swiping away the tear track. "You won't get a second chance with me."

Even as she said it, she knew it was a lie.

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**Facebook:**  
<https://www.facebook.com/official-deborahcamp>





# PUZZLE

## Out With the Old; In With the New

### Across

3. *New* \_\_\_\_ *City* (Wesley Snipes' flick).  
 5. Not east.  
 9. "Same Old \_\_\_\_ (Four Tops).  
 10. "What's New, \_\_\_\_?" (Tom Jones' song)  
 11. *No* \_\_\_\_ *for Old Men*.  
 14. He wrote about his old one in Kentucky, Stephen

\_\_\_\_.

16. This old one, "he just keeps rollin' along."

20. Walter Matthau was a \_\_\_\_ *Old Man*.

21. He has new clothes, so he thinks.

22. Movie classic \_\_\_\_ *and Old Lace*.

23. Scottish word for old.

24. Old \_\_\_\_\_. A place to buy clothes.

28. Jane Fonda film set in Mexico, *Old*

\_\_\_\_\_.

29. Bon Jovi sang about this lady from New Orleans.

30. *40-Year-Old* \_\_\_\_\_, a movie.

31. "\_\_\_\_\_ New Me," a Dusty Springfield

song.

32. Song, "In the Good, Old \_\_\_\_\_."

33. Gospel hymn, "Old Time \_\_\_\_\_."

### Down

1. John Carpenter's movie in New York with all-star cast.

2. Sneaker type, New \_\_\_\_\_.

4. Christopher Walken's film, \_\_\_\_\_ *of New York*

6. Singing group, New \_\_\_\_\_ on the Block.

7. *Twilight Saga*, *Old* \_\_\_\_\_.

8. New England state, New \_\_\_\_\_.

12. Tear jerker about a dog. *Old* \_\_\_\_\_.

13. *Old Man and the Sea* was written by

15. She had a brand new pair of roller skates.

17. "What are you doing New Year's \_\_\_\_\_?"

18. Old \_\_\_\_\_, Bourbon whiskey, favorite of U.S. Grant..

19. "They do it the old-\_\_\_\_\_ way."

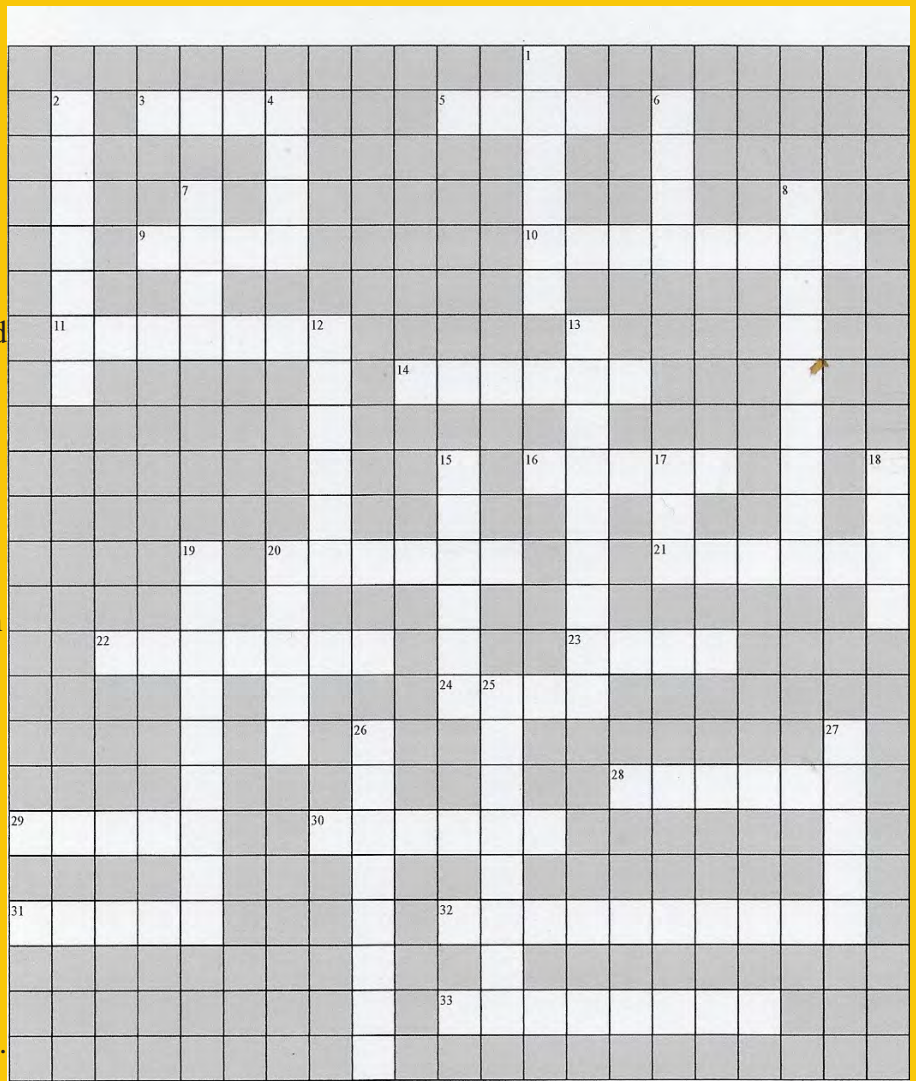
20. Scorsese's film, \_\_\_\_\_ *of New York*.

25. Patti LaBelle has a new one.

26. The geyser, Old \_\_\_\_\_

27. "This Old \_\_\_\_\_," a Johnny Cash song.

Answers on page 30







## Contemporary Romance Reviews

### **After the Billionaire's Wedding Vows**

*Lucy Monroe*

**Harlequin**

*Kindle Edition*

B0893GFX9W

★★★★

*"Why don't you call me Andros anymore?"*

*"Andros was the man I fell in love with."*

*"And who is Alexandros?"*

*"The man I married."*

Pollyanna fell in love and married Greek billionaire Alexandros Kristalakis. Little did she know that loving Alexandros would come with a price--one that will leave her feeling out of place and always coming in second to his family and his business. Five years after saying, "I do," Polly has accepted her lot in life and clings to the early memories of their romance. Her beloved Andros is no more, and in his place is the powerful head of the Kristalakis Family. How can she possibly compete?

Alexandros Kristalakis loves his wife more than anything; so when he overhears an off-handed comment about him not considering Polly's feelings, he is struck with

the truth that perhaps he has taken his beautiful bride for granted. Carefully, he begins observing how his manipulative mother treats his bride as well as how his sister is constantly criticizing her. Alexandros begins to realize that he's allowed Polly to feel less than what she is--his beloved wife and mother of his children. Alexandros is now on a mission to reclaim his love and show Polly that she will always come first in his life--but is it too little too late?

Billionaire tropes are not usually my genre of choice, but there is just something about this story. Set aside the powerful tycoon and money and get to the heart of the plot--two lovers that took vows to love and cherish each other regardless. Like a lot of relationships, over time, a pattern emerges of going through the motions of how "happy" couples are supposed to behave. The author reminds us that after the wedding vows are said, it takes work and an open and honest dialogue on behalf of both sides to keep the romance alive. After the *Billionaire's Wedding Vows* is thought-provoking and well-written, would recommend! *Sharing what I love,*  
*Veronica*

## Dixie Under Siege (A Warrior's Passion #2)

Natasza Waters

Self-Pub

Kindle Edition

978-1777468903

☆☆☆☆☆



*"It didn't matter how broken I was, he would walk through Hell itself to find me and bring me back to the light."*

For over a decade, Dixie Hammond has been on the receiving end of a psycho stalker. Moving from state to state, she receives a few months reprieve before the sadistic notes and texts once again start. Tired of always being on the run, Dixie is ready to take a stand. But never did she dream that her once-upon-a-time lover and ex-fiancé would be the one helping her confront her foe.

At 18 years of age, Josh Hunter was head-over-heels in love with the girl next door. Dixie was his one and only, but when she breaks off their engagement to go off to college, Josh, in turn, joins the Navy and becomes a member of the elite Alpha Squad Navy SEALs. Always remembering the girl he loved in his youth has kept him returning from missions time after time. When he bumps into her at the local coffee bar, time stands still, and it's as if they had never been apart. But Dixie has a tormented past, and her SEAL will have to win the biggest battle he's ever fought to gain her trust--as well as her heart.

WOWZA! Reader, I'm gonna be flat out honest when I say military romances are not my usual trope. But I luv Natasza Waters' writing style. So, of course, I jumped at the opportunity to read her newest release! This sizzling hawt military romance has just the right amount of heat combined with a whodunit thriller that will keep you guessing right up to the end! One of my fav reads of the year! Highly recommend!

*Sharing what I love,*  
Veronica

## Driven (Deep Ops #4)

Zebecca Zanetti

Zebra

Mass Market

978-1420153019

☆☆☆☆☆



*Driven* focuses on Deep Ops' understandably moody, tortured team leader Angus Force and its empathetic, mysterious psychologist Nari Zhang, neither of whom we know nearly enough about. Angus' search for the serial killer he had once pursued and shot to death, has been given new life with an anonymous tip that his nemesis Lassiter, AKA "the Surgeon," is still alive. Watching and waiting for Lassiter to strike again, Angus is determined to find him and make Las-

20

*Affaire de Coeur*

## Contemporaries

siter pay for murdering his sister and stop him from killing, any other innocents. even though everyone else believes he's dead. When a woman is found murdered and brutally mutilated, Angus is convinced Lassiter's back even if the MO is not exactly the same. This murder is only the beginning of a string of brutal murders that creep ever closer to the Deep Ops' team, leading to a dangerous obsession with Nari and a deadly battle for survival for Angus, Nari, and the Deep Ops' team as they work to solve the murders together.

The characters, their motivations, and their interactions with each other are creatively and skillfully developed. Even the love scenes, which are both sexy and emotionally intense, further the development of the characters and their story. Angus and Nari have a combative relationship with scorching chemistry they are determined to resist. They have been able to avoid each other and their attraction quite well so far in the series. But with the events in *Driven*, it's impossible for them to continue hiding from their attraction and each other anymore, though they try their best. When that fails, they try to pretend it's casual. I loved the interactions between them. They cover the full spectrum of emotions, sometimes all at the same time. Angus may be the alpha leader of his team, but he cannot control Nari. She can match him any day. Nari steals the show in *Driven*. There is so much more to her than the mild mannered, intelligent, empathetic psychologist. She can hold her own and is quite the bad ass in her own right. While she is technically the team's therapist and not Angus', she can't help but want to help him. Especially as he is in a bad place, submerged in guilt, drowning himself in alcohol. But he refuses to be helped, especially by a psychologist, particularly Nari. It's all part of the push-pull of their relationship. Nari is dealing with some personal and professional issues of her own outside of the Deep Ops' team.

As always, the action sequences are plentiful, exciting, and deftly conceived. They, along with the exposition benefit from Zanetti's vivid description which effortlessly brings the characters and the story to life, draw you into the story and the characters' lives and world so quickly you're invested in these characters and the novel before you know it.

*Driven* is a crazy intense read filled with heart-stopping action, suspense, steamy and emotional romance, humor, unbelievable twists and turns, and all the characters you love and "love to hate" from the series. Excellent character development, lush description, on-point pacing, and wonderfully executed action scenes that will keep readers engrossed in this sexy novel. Readers who love romantic suspense that is steamy, action packed, and a little dark will love this one.

*Lacy Hill*



# Contemporaries

## The First Bullet (West Echo #1)

Rachel Rivers

Self-Pub

Kindle Edition

B08Q9K66DK

★★★★★



*"I understand you're feeling alone in that hole, but you don't have to be there alone. I'll sit with you in the dark until you can pull yourself out--I'm willing to fight for you until you can fight for yourself."*

Brock Doughty has taken an oath to protect and serve the citizens of Knoxville. Since a young boy, his dream has always been to be a police officer in order to help protect his community. Now that very community is being plagued by a crime spree of robberies, and Officer Doughty is determined to bring them to justice. Following up on a call, he pulls over a vehicle matching the description of the robbers--except it's not the suspect's. It's a beautiful woman, Maria Moretti, who's developed a prickly attitude towards the Thin Blue Line. Brock is both intrigued and attracted by Maria's demeanor and is determined to discover what put that chip on her shoulder and offers his to comfort and support this woman who has stolen his heart.

Maria Moretti has not had a good experience with the boys in blue. While she knows that there are good and bad people in all walks of life, she's struggled with overcoming a darkness in her past--one that threatens to devour what is left of her soul. That is until the night she's pulled over by Officer Doughty, and she takes a chance on a man she knows is all wrong for her--but in all the ways that matter, he's perfect. When Brock has his own encounter with the darkness she knows all too well, Maria has to make a decision that could change both of their futures--forever.

*The First Bullet* is an amazing story of how quickly life can break you, but it also reminds us there is always light leading you out of that darkness if you only know where to look. This smexxy romantic kick-ass book is a must read! Wish I could give it more than 5 stars! Highly recommend and can't wait for the next installment in the "West Echo" series!

*Sharing what I love,*  
Veronica

## Nailing Mr. Nasty (Campy Romance #2)

Deborah Camp

Self-Pub

Kindle Edition

B08R6138FR

★★★★★



*"You're a beautiful creature, a striker--and I'm going to f\*ck you so hard you'll need mercy,"*

Samantha "Sam" Stiker's best friend is taking some time off for maternity leave and has asked her to fill in as office manager working for contractor Jack Nast. Sam is more than qualified for the job, but after meeting her new boss, she begins to wonder if she'll be able to keep her feelings for Mr. "Nasty" strictly professional.

Jack Nast knows he's called Mr. Nasty because of his no-nonsense demeanor. While he approved to allow Sam to fill in as his office manager, he was not prepared for how she would make him feel and react when he's around her. Maybe Samantha is exactly what Jack needs to turn his frown upside down.

*Nailing Mr. Nasty* is a flat-out fun and smexxy romance to read! The chemistry between Sam and Jack is off the charts, and I found myself smiling and laughing at their snarky banter. My review can't do this story justice! Loved it and highly recommend!

*Sharing what I love,*

Veronica

## Ten Rules for Faking It

Sophie Sullivan

St. Martin's Griffin

Trade Paperback

978-1250624161

★★★

*Ten Rules for Faking It* is one of those novels that is nothing like you expect it to be, and that's not a bad thing. Exploring how a young woman lives with debilitating anxiety and panic attacks within the setting of a romantic comedy about a radio producer's 30th birthday and the changes she decides to make to improve her life, the novel is sweet, emotional, humorous, angsty, and entertaining.

Unfortunately, things seem to always go disastrously wrong on radio producer Everly Dean's birthdays, which is why she probably should have been prepared for her 30th of all birthdays to really suck worse than any of the other's. There's a whole list, notably her parents' first split and the year she had to have her tonsils out. Somehow, however, she found herself woefully unprepared. First, she finds out with

## Contemporaries

her very own eyes that her boyfriend is cheating on her with his assistant. To deal with this disastrous start to her 30's, she comes up with some rules/guidelines to help her make it through with her sanity intact and without becoming bitter. Then, her DJ best friend, Stacy, fails to mute her mic while Everly rants on air about her cheating ex for all the world to hear to her complete embarrassment.

That would be bad enough but then her boss at the radio station, Chris, whom she finds cute and might be attracted to feels sorry for her and starts talking to her today of all days – after ignoring her very existence the entire time that he has worked at the station and being so standoffish with her that she's convinced he must hate her. After Everly's rant about her ex and the listeners' response and some chatting between Everly and Stacy on air, Chris comes up with a promotion to find Everly a better boyfriend like on *The Bachelorette*.

I love the way the novel starts off. It draws you into the story and into Everly's world, immediately making you care about her. Sullivan's description is vivid and her development of Everly's character is fitting. Everly suffers from debilitating anxiety, a lot of which seemed to be worsened by her parents on again/off again relationship and the stress from playing middleman and the grown up in her dealings with their immature antics. Everly's self-soothing/calming measures are a nice touch to add to her character development and enrich her character. While some of the situations in which she finds herself because of her parents are humorous, it's mostly not cool and very frustrating. Initially, I thought the novel would be more humorous throughout based on the beginning. There is humor sprinkled in places but for the most part, it's more angsty and emotional. But to me it read like more of a romantic drama with bits of humor. The dates, along with Everly's list, increase her anxiety but they also broaden her horizons and help her to grow over the course of the novel.

I loved the interactions between Chris and Everly. You can see Everly begin to step outside her comfort zone when she is with him and that's nice development for her character. You also can see Chris softening and not hiding as much of his emotions and personality as they spend more time together. Although the story is told in both Everly's and Chris' viewpoints, it seems like we get more of a view of Everly's emotions for most of the story, which impacts how we see Chris and limits how we can connect to his character emotionally.

*Ten Rules for Faking It* has some nicely written scenes that totally draw you in and those moments are a joy to read. Although it falls short on the full-on humor of the average romantic comedy and has some character and pacing issues, it is a heartfelt, evocative, introspective, sweet, angsty, and humorous romantic drama about first learning to accept

yourself as you are and then taking responsibility for your own happiness to begin making changes to grow as a person and to improve your life.

*Lacy Hill*

### Whiskey Flight (Cedar Creek Suspense #1)

*Violet Howe*

**Self-Pub**

Kindle Edition

B08QMCFYKS

★★★★

*"Whiskey--There's nothing like its bold flavor and strong burn to remind you that you're alive." Melanie A. Smith, Everybody Lies*

Once upon a time, Dani had it all--an adoring boyfriend, a family, and a dream to leave her hometown to make a name for herself. But when Dani runs off to Chicago to chase after her dream, she quickly discovers that perhaps she acted too rashly. When her lover and best friend Seth doesn't follow her, she's determined to cut all ties with her past in Cedar Creek.

A decade later, Dani's life becomes completely shattered. The man who swept her off her feet turns out to be a mafia hit man, and now she's on the run and hiding in plain sight back in the small town of Cedar Creek. Now Dani will have to become as strong as the whiskey she drinks because the love of her past is about to collide with the danger of her present.

If you are a fan of Violet Howe's "Cedar Creek" world, you will enjoy the first installment to her suspense series! Highly recommend!

*Sharing what I love,*  
*Veronica*

### You Had Me at Hockey

*Kelly Jamieson*

**Loveswept**

Kindle

B08DMW4NST

★★★★

After surviving a near-death accident as a teen, risk averse, pro hockey player Josh is all about routine, living a boring and quiet life with no surprises. He likes to think he is a warrior. So, when he is traded from Dallas to New York he is less than thrilled. A down-to-earth, free-spirited, adventurous, and offbeat YouTube podcaster, Sara, has always been a bit weird and viewed as a social out-



## Contemporaries

cast. Her personality and forthrightness are a bit much for most people and has made dating difficult for her, which is why she's still a virgin. She's been able to use her weirdness to her advantage by filming her personal experiences and interests—learning TikTok dances, fashion, food, etc.—and incorporating them into a successful podcast.

Josh and Sara meet when Josh is a guest on her podcast. Neither is excited at the prospect initially. But they connect almost instantly, and the podcast turns out to be fun for both. He's not quite what she expects, he's much hotter, and she finds herself fascinated with discovering why he's so uptight. Sara is unfiltered, funny, and full of life, and Josh is drawn to her despite the uncertainty and turmoil she brings into his life. She hopes to continue to make him laugh and maybe get him to have some fun and loosen up. He can teach her some things that she's been longing, and needing, to learn as well.

Jamieson tackles serious social issues head on with sensitivity, thoughtfulness, and aplomb while developing the characters' backstories, inner lives, and furthering their growth. The result is excellently developed characters who are relatable and character interactions that are authentic, poignant, and lively. The chemistry between Josh and Sara is instant and visceral, leading to passionate love scenes that also contribute to the development of the characters and the story. My favorite thing about the novel is the amount of time that Josh and Sara spend talking to each other about all kinds of things—very personal things, and just whatever—and being intimate outside of sex. It is believable that they are developing more than just a sexual relationship because of the way that they turn to each other for emotional comfort and talk to each other about life stuff when they needed someone.

It's obvious that Jamieson knows her hockey. I loved the details and specifics about hockey that Josh shares with Sara and how interested she becomes in hockey as the story progresses. I also liked that there is significant game play as well, but it is well balanced with the romance. A genuine love of hockey is apparent throughout the novel, which is appropriate and kind of necessary for a book titled *You Had Me at Hockey*. Readers who are also hockey fans will not be disappointed.

*You Had Me at Hockey* is a can't miss sweet, sexy, humorous, angsty, entertaining sports romance about taking the chance to open your heart and your life to love even when you don't exactly feel quite ready for it and it doesn't come in the package or ways you expect it to.

Lacy Hill

Winfrey Network) is replaying *Underground* about Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad, and you can always see Disney Plus' *Hamilton*.

*Gung Hay Fat Choy!!* It's the lunar year of the Ox! This time of year usually finds Chinatown (both in Oakland and San Francisco) in full swing, culminating with the parade. And the food! This year everything will be virtual, and I will watch it and eat my virtual eggrolls, but I cannot wait until it's live again.

Another thing I love is that QVC and HSN are featuring black-owned businesses every day. African-Americans who would not have had a venue to sell their products, let alone an audience of this size, can show their wares. Kudos to both stations. (You know one of them bought out the other one, so they're the same.)

I celebrate all of these events as much as I can and encourage you to do so, too. I am so proud of the progress that has been made during Black History Month, but we still have a very long way to go. My biggest disappointment comes from the Romance genre of books. It's not easy to find heroes and heroines of color (other than with authors Beverly Jenkins and Alyssa Cole). African-Americans are terribly underrepresented, a fact that we hope will turn around.

Enjoy your February.





## Historical Romance Reviews

### **Courting Trouble (Goode Girls Romance #2)**

*Kerrigan Byrne*

**Gnarly Wool Publishing**

Kindle Edition

B08B4ZY6KN

★★★★ 1/2

*"I loved you for your flaws, not because I was blind to them."*

Viscountess Honoria Goode, Nora to her friends, has long hidden the truth of her turbulent marriage. Forced to abandon the love of her youth, Nora has sought comfort in the most unlikely of places, never dreaming it would cost her more than a sullied reputation, but quite possibly her very life.

Dr. Titus Conleith has spent his life forgetting the very woman he finds on his examination table. Bleeding out from a gunshot wound, Titus can't believe his heart still beats so strongly for his beloved Nora, the woman who crushed his dreams along with his ability to ever trust in loving another.

Nora and Titus have been given a second chance at their happily ever after--if only they can have faith in their love washing away the sins of their past.

Kerrigan Byrne has a way of taking damaged characters and showing the reader how quickly we are blind to judge someone based on their outward façade. We are all damaged in our own ways. While the second in the series, this story could be read as a standalone. However, I would recommend reading in order to better understand the backstory of Nora's character. Enjoyed this newest release and already looking forward to the next!

*Sharing what I love,  
Veronica*



## Dancing with Danger (Goode Girls Romance #3)

Kerrigan Byrne

Gnarly Wool Publishing

Kindle Edition

B08B4ZPQ9W

★★★★ 1/2

*"I desire you like I have no other woman. I would take as many nights as you would offer, but I'll settle for just one."*

Mercy Goode is a strong-willed and intelligent woman and deemed overly much by would be suiters. Beyond caring what the ton thinks of her and her opinions, Mercy does what she pleases, and currently, it's playing amateur detective determining who murdered a friend of hers. Having a penchant for attracting trouble, Mercy is discovered at the scene of the crime and gets accosted and arrested by the local authorities. But she swiftly discovers she's not alone and is somewhat rescued by a man whose very presence sets her soul on fire--Raphael Sauvageau.

Raphael Sauvageau has been drawn to Mercy Goode since the first day they met and finding her being struck and injured by another has his blood raging seeking vengeance. Although he finds himself intrigued to find her investigating the same crime, Raphael knows he must set her aside to keep his promise to his brother. But Mercy is like no other he's ever encountered, and he must have her--at any price--for any length of time he has left on this earth.

Mercy and Raphael are fire and ice dancing along a dangerous path to discover who killed their mutual friend. Will Mercy finally find the man willing to love her just as she is? Will Raphael finally find redemption in Mercy's arms, or will fate spin the wheel denying them whatever chance they could have found loving one another?

WOWZA! Another home run for Kerrigan Byrne! While the third in the series, this story could be read as a standalone. However, I would recommend reading in order to better understand the characters. Now, let's get to the next installment to the "Goode Girls," because I already know I'm going to be head-over-heels in love with Gabriel!!! Give it to me now!

*Sharing what I love,*

Veronica

## Historicals

### The Devil's Laird

Brenda Jernigan

Scott Publishing

E-book

978-1005175788

★★★★

*"Yer blood is mine and my blood is yours until the end of time."*

Lady Siena has been blessed with the gift of sight. To those around her, however, she is seen as cursed and a witch. Now she is being dragged to her death at the end of a hangman's noose. But just as the end is upon her, an unlikely savior rides in, snatching her from certain death. The fierce Devil's Laird he is called, and he's drawn to her like a moth to a flame. Taking Lady Siena back to his fortress, Roderick swears to protect her from harm and love her till the end of time.

Roderick, Warlord of Kirkurd, has lost everything--his wife, his son, and his ability to feel anything but rage and grief. So, when he charges in to avenge their loss, he's shocked to see a maiden about to hang. There is something about her. Though she is beaten and bruised, Roderick sees a beautiful soul desperately in need of his protection--which he vows to all he will give.

Lady Siena and Roderick are drawn together as if they were meant to be--and each will sacrifice a piece of themselves to save the other.

*The Devil's Laird* is an historical romance that has a little bit of everything--a taste of the paranormal, a quest for the holy grail, and an insta-love happily ever after. Would recommend to fans of this genre!

*Sharing what I love,*

Veronica

### Highland Defender (Scots & Swords #2)

Kathryn LeVeque

Sourcebooks Casablanca

Kindle Edition

B088P87RRC

★★★★

*"She has given me the will tae regain what I have lost--myself."*

After leading his men into a battle they could not win, Bane Morgan flees his home and clan in the Highlands.

# Historicals

Feeling as if he no longer has the worth nor right to bear the name *Highland Defender*, Bane has all but given up on living. But when he sees a young lass in distress, he rises up out of his despair to come to her rescue, never dreaming that it is she that will once again give him purpose and hope

## Her Wicked Marquess (Sinful Wallflowers #2)

Stacy Reid

Entangled

Kindle Edition

B087P597X

☆☆☆☆☆

*"You speak your thoughts so boldly. Is there nothing you are afraid of?"*

*"I am afraid of years from now looking back on my life and feeling the keenest of regret that I had not lived. Of never feeling again the way I feel with you."*

**Revenge**--that one constant thirst for revenge against those that caused harm to his first love is what has shaped Nicholas Ives, the Marquess of Rothbury, into the man he is today. Nicholas is playing the long game in his quest for vengeance, and in doing so, has developed quite the reputation for being a rake throughout the *ton*. This reputation is the very thing that has kept the eyes of those he means to ruin off his plan for retaliation. But when he bumps into an intriguing "wallflower" by the name of Maryann FitzWilliam, Nicholas begins to wonder if he's finally met someone who can bring life back to his long dead soul--if he's ready to remove the mask and set aside his vengeance and replace it with a love worth forgiveness.

Maryann FitzWilliam will not be forced to wed the odious man her parents have picked. Devising a plan with her fellow "wallflowers," Maryann plots to be most sinful and starts a rumor that she was the innocent that the rakish Marquess of Rothbury stole kisses from after sneaking into her bedroom window. With the *ton* spreading the rumor, Maryann is confident that she will be free to live her life without the constraints of a husband. But the one thing Maryann hadn't counted on was the Marquess actually sneaking into her bedroom--or the intense feelings she would develop for him.

Nicholas' and Maryann's story is a slow burn romance, and dearest reader, I so very much loved it! Heartfelt at times, soul crushing at others and so verra verra smexxy, *Her Wicked Marquess* is a must read for fans of this genre! Loved and highly recommend!

*Sharing what I love,*

Veronica

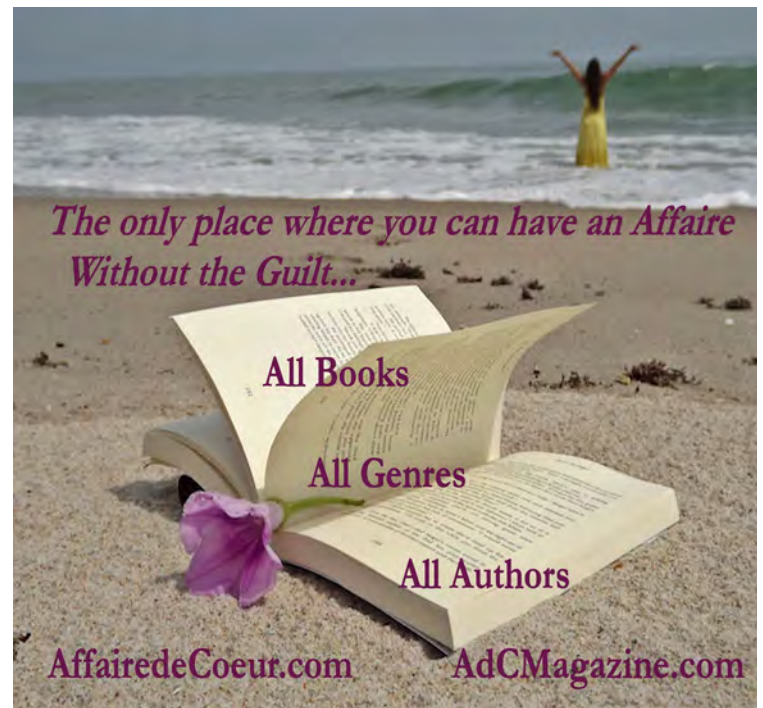
for a new beginning.

Lucia Symington is living in servitude paying off her father's debt. After being accosted by thieves for the food she was sent to purchase, Lucia is saved by an unlikely looking hero. Although covered in dirt and grime, Lucia sees the man beneath his slovenly clothing, and offers him shelter. During his stay, Lucia tells Bane of the Ludus Caledonia and how men have been known to seek out this gladiator style warrior facility to pledge their allegiance in hopes of being trained to fight and to earn coin.

Bane and Lucia are instantly attracted to each other, and Bane seizes the opportunity to train at the Ludus Caledonia to buy his beloved's freedom. But the warriors Bane fights in the arena are nothing compared to the battle he will have to wage against the mistress Lucia serves--and the lengths he'll have to go to win their happily-ever-after. *Highland Defender* is what I'd consider an insta-love historical, and if you enjoy LeVeque's writing style, this will for sure be an enjoyable read! While the second installment to her "Scots & Swords" series, this may be read as a standalone. Would recommend to fans of this genre!

*Sharing what I love,*

Veronica





# Paranormal Romance Reviews



## **Ancient Enforcer (Ancients Rising #3)**

*Katie Reus*

**KR Press, LLC**

Kindle

978-1635561586

★★★★

*Ancient Enforcer*, Book 3 in Katie Reus' "Ancients Rising" series features two of my favorite things in romance – the friends to lovers' trope and paranormal romance with dragon shifters, werewolves, vampires, and witches – so I get the best of both worlds with this read. It did not disappoint. *Ancient Enforcer* is a sexy, steamy, and sweet romantic paranormal romance with a captivating blend of suspense, action, and horror. Though, for most of the first half it mostly focuses on the development of the friendship between Mikael, a dragon shapeshifter and former general, and Avery, a human house flipper, into a sexual relationship before the suspense

or action kicks in – not that I'm complaining. The territory Alpha asks Avery to shelter Mikael and his brothers as they adjust to life after a group of dragon shifters tried to take over the world, causing untold destruction.

Avery is strong, confident, and happy with her life. However, her parent's relationship left her believing fairy tales and happily-ever-after aren't real. Yet, she is drawn to Mikael and wants nothing more than to have a chance with him. Nevertheless, she is determined to remain only friends rather than be hurt if he found a beautiful dragon mate.

Mikael had lost so much during the war that he has become hardened and jaded. He should stay away from Avery who is the opposite of everything he's known and should want—a kind, gentle human who is generous and sweet. But he knew almost from the moment he had first met her that he wanted her to be his. The hard part was convincing her, particularly, when she was unwilling to believe he could genuinely want a future with her.

Mikael's and Avery's relationship development is shown through a combination of the present and flashbacks





## Paranormals

to the past so we can see the progression of them becoming friends and their growing attraction. Their relationship and interactions are sexy and sweet. Avery and Mikael are nicely developed, relatable, and likeable characters. Readers cannot help but root for this couple and wish them the best which increases the tension and conflict when her past comes back to create danger for them. While we do see interactions among characters from the previous books, Reus does not spend much time on developing Avery's and Mikael's brothers outside of their connection to the lovers and their importance to the story.

The world-building and description is vibrant and detailed, bringing the story, characters, and action scenes to life. With each new book, Reus opens up the "Ancients Rising" universe a bit more, bringing in new characters, villains, threats, and challenges for the heroes and heroines, and increasing the stakes. This novel is a bit lighter in tone than the previous novels while veering more into the horror genre

with some elements of the story, and it works. Readers who love this series and who love sexy paranormal romance with a great blend of action, suspense, and horror won't be able to resist *Ancient Enforcer*.

*Lacy Hill*





## **Murder on the Metro**

*Margaret Truman/Jon Lund*

**Forge Books**

Hardcover and E-Book

978-1250238870 (Hardcover)

978-1250238863 (E-book)

★★★★1/2

Author Jon Lund has stepped in to continue Margaret Truman's "Capital Crimes" political thriller series.

From the very beginning, *Murder on the Metro* races from one crisis to another, from drone attacks on an Israeli beach, to the suspicious death of the American vice president, to a suicide bomber on the Washington, D.C. Metro. These seemingly unrelated incidents gradually come together due to the detective work of private investigator and former government operative Robert Brixton, aided by a retired Israeli agent and the Secret Service agent who protected the deceased vicepresident.

Going up against powerful political forces puts the makeshift team in mortal danger as they race to foil a plot that could change the world, and not in a good way. The heart-pounding action shows a side of political intrigue we can only hope is really a work of fiction.

*Hannah Rowan*

## **Waiting for the Night Song**

*Julie Carrick Dalton*

**Forge Books**

Hardcover

978-1250269188

★★★★ 1/2

Cadie Kessler was eleven when she and her best friend, Daniela, first saw Garrett. He frantically waved them away from the pier he was sitting on. They left, but after Garrett went inside, the girls returned. Cadie climbed up and left a note in the book he'd been reading. She and Garrett began exchanging notes left inside books on the pier. He warned that if his uncle ever spotted the girls near the pier it would be dangerous for them all.

One day Cadie was climbing up to leave a book for Garrett. She heard his uncle arguing with someone. Suddenly a gunshot rang out! Daniela made Cadie swear she would keep the incident a secret, but Cadie panicked and told Daniela's mother. Daniela was furious that Cadie had broken her promise. She and Daniela haven't spoken since.

Cadie grew up to become an entomologist for the forestry department. She's researching the link between mountain pine beetles and forest fires. The biggest problem in Cadie's life is not being allowed to conduct research on restricted federal land. Then she gets a text.



*MYSTERIES*

Daniela says that the body had been found and Daniela's dad is being questioned. She needs Cadie to come home. Twentyfive years of secrets are about to come to light.

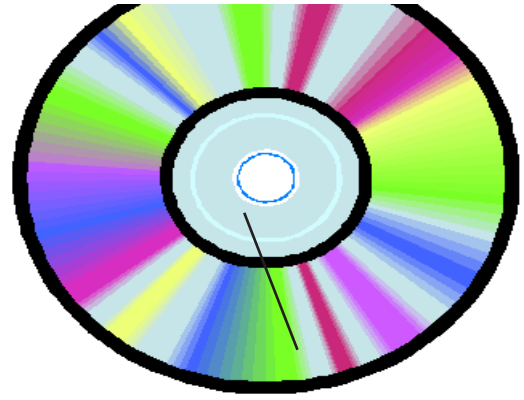
This book is part mystery and part environmental warning. It's a surprisingly good book.

*Sheila Griffin*

## Out With the Old; In With the New

[illegible]





# AUDIO BOOK REVIEWS

## Driven (Deep Ops #4)

Rebecca Zanetti

Roger Wayne

**Tantor Audio**

Audiobook

B08SRBJ2SG

★★★★★



Rebecca Zanetti's fourth "Deep Ops" book *Driven* focuses on the team's mercurial, tortured team leader Angus Force and their mysterious, empathetic, psychologist Nari Zhang, giving them (and readers) the chance to finally learn more about each other. Angus' search for the serial killer he had once pursued and killed in a shootout, was given new life from an anonymous tip that his nemesis Lassiter, AKA "the Surgeon," is still alive. Waiting for Lassiter to strike again, Angus is determined to find him, to stop his killing spree and make him pay for murdering his sister. Everyone else believes Lassiter is dead, but when a woman is found murdered and brutally mutilated, Angus is convinced Lassiter's back even if the MO is not exactly the same. This murder sparks a string of brutal murders that result in Angus, Nari, and the Deep Ops' team fighting in a deadly battle for survival. as they work to solve the murders together.

While the novel is told from both Angus' and Nari's viewpoints, Roger Wayne is the sole narrator for the audiobook. His narration for Angus captures the weariness, determination, frustration, and anger driving his pursuit of Lassiter but also his sarcasm and wry sense of humor. His narration for Nari captures her strength and kindness, as well as her frustration and sadness about the personal and professional issues she deals with separate from Deep Ops. Best of

all, her voice and the other female characters' voices are not exaggerated and distinctly fit each character. He does a great job of capturing the different voices of each of the characters – Deep Ops' team members, the villain, new characters, HDD officers, etc. The emotional intensity of Nari and Angus' relationship, the darkness of the murders and the killer's psychopathy, and the thrills of the suspense and action of *Driven* all come through so vividly in the narration with Wayne's variation of cadence, dialect, and mood. He is the perfect narrator for the "Deep Ops" series because he makes it so easy to visualize Zanetti's amazing characters and story, bringing them to brilliant life with ease.

*Driven's* audiobook is a highly recommended listen for readers who enjoy listening to romantic suspense with steamy and emotional romance, heart-stopping action, well-developed and relatable characters with amazing chemistry, and thrilling, surprising plot twists.

*Lacy Hill*

## The Girl From Nowhere

Christopher Finch

Performed by Peter Bertrot

**Brilliance Audio**

Audiobook, 1 mp3

978-1491529545

★★★

Art student turned private investigator Alex Novalis is walking down the street minding his own business when this beautiful young woman walks up to him and grasps his

# Audio Book Reviews

hand like an old lover. Her name is Sandy Smollett, and she's being stalked. More than that, her life is in danger. Against his better judgment, he plays along...and gets played.

Sandy is much, much more than the image she presents as a stripper. She has dangerous friends and co-workers like her sleazy boss who offers Alex money to keep her safe yet keep his hands and other body parts off her. He turns it down, and regrets it immediately. He'll guard this woman for free, even if she has better game than he does. She's a knockout, and Alex is pretty superficial. When a dead man inexplicably ends up in her apartment, he asks himself who this 'Girl from Nowhere' is.

Set in 1960's New York Chinatown, *The Girl from Nowhere* is a throwback to film *noir* like Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*. Peter Bertrot uses that Bogart-like voice and dated phrases of a time gone by to narrate this story in the first person. Alex is not particularly likeable—he's inordinately swayed by his sex drive—but once he became committed, to Sandy, he was all in. If film *noir* is your thing, you will like this offering.

Mildred Burkett

## Mischief and the Marquess

Sylvia Day

Performed by Lulu Russell

Brilliance Audio

Audiobook 3 CDs

978-1713531357

☆☆ 1/2

When two Regency mothers who are best friends get together to plot the marriage of their reluctant children, mischief abounds. The two children involved are Justin, the Marquess of Fontaine, and Lady Sophie Milton-Riley. The problem is that their marriage will never be accepted by polite society because Sophie is disgraced—she's birthed a bastard son. She willingly accepts her role as an outcast and does not want to taint Justin by association.

Justin has loved Sophie a very long time. Whereas he was heartbroken because she chose another man over him, he is willing to toss his hurt aside and marry her. She thinks he has lost his mind—he would lose so much if she did so. She is content to live in seclusion with her son.

This is not the first Sylvia Day book this reviewer has done. Usually, they are well-potted stories with surprises thrown in. However, *Mischief and the Marquess* lets this reviewer down on so many levels. There is not much to the

story and in-depth information about the characters is non-existent. Considering that one out of the three disks was spent with the two main characters going at it sexually, it's no wonder. Lulu Russell performed the voices on this audio. Her extremely slow pace of talking was a vocal caricature that bordered on boring.

Mildred Burkett

## The Quantum Weirdness of the Almost Kiss

Amy Noelle Parks

Narrated by Nick Mondell and Elizabeth Cottle

Dreamscape Media

Audiobook - Unabridged

B08L5L3P7M

☆☆☆☆

*The Quantum Weirdness of The Almost Kiss* by Amy Noelle Parks is a sweet, young adult romantic comedy full of longing, math, science, and friendship. It's a heartfelt exploration of the push and pull between a lifelong platonic friendship and a romantic relationship and being caught in that confusing, deep space in between. Told in dual POVs, the audiobook is wonderfully narrated by Nick Mondell as Caleb and Elizabeth Cottle as Evie.

Evie is a mathematical genius who struggles with anxiety and might also be a bit on the autism spectrum. She and Caleb are next-door neighbors who have been close friends since they were small. While Caleb languishes in unrequited love for his lifelong best friend Evie, she remains oblivious to his feelings. Caleb believes that as time goes on and Evie comes around to being interested in dating, she will choose him. However, when Evie suddenly becomes interested in a transfer student who shares her mathematical gifts, he feels that his hope that Evie will someday choose him slipping away. In desperation, Caleb tries to get Evie's attention by connecting with her on an online forum. Evie's simple life of focusing solely on math becomes even more complicated when she finds herself torn between three boys.

With lovely visceral description, well-developed characters, and a charming story, the novel captures the emotions, butterflies, and ups and downs of first loves and crushes. The narrators do an awesome job of bringing the characters and story to life. Having the narration in both Caleb's and Evie's POVs, elevates the listener's emotional investment in the story. Both narrators' voices were good matches for the characters and made me care about the characters. Your heart hurts for Caleb, knowing that he just might be the right person for Evie if she ever lets go of the limited idea of what she believes their relationship needs to be. At the same time, you accept that exploring her feelings for Leo is something that she needs to explore right now.

*The Quantum Weirdness of The Almost Kiss* is an entertaining, humorous, angsty, and refreshingly emotional and honest exploration of the transition from best friends to boyfriend/girlfriend, that also deals with issues of anxiety, social awkwardness, self-esteem, mental illness, and Christianity, all within the setting of a science and math academy/boarding school.

Lacy Hill

Affaire de Coeur





# Spells, Charms, and The Book of Cures

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

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

## Audio Book Reviews

### **Shattered**

*Helen Hardt*

*Performed by Aiden Snow and Lucy Rivers*

**Brilliance Audio**

Unabridged CDs--7 discs

978-1522652687

★★★★ 1/2

Ryan Steel is the best looking of the affluent Steel brothers, and he knows it. Two of his brothers are getting married in a double wedding at a somewhat nude resort in Jamaica. Single and on the prowl, he's ready. On the plane to Jamaica he notices Ruby Lee, the maid of honor in his group, is not sitting in first class with them and pays for her upgrade over her objection. At first glance, Ryan thinks Ruby is dowdy but a great conversationalist even though she's a cop. When she shows up later, dressed by her friends, he couldn't keep his eyes off this beautiful woman.

Detective Ruby Lee has baggage. Her father is a psychopathic killer who raped his niece and tried to rape his own daughter—and molested Ryan's brother Talon. Ruby

is an innocent, and thanks to her father, she has pulled back from relationships with men. Ryan suspects she is afraid and tries to take things slowly. They're making progress when a college student Ryan previously met and her two friends meet Ruby and Ryan at the bar and allow themselves to be talked into going water skiing with strangers. Though Ruby's police instincts kick in and she asks them not to go, they ignore her and only one of them comes back.

*Shattered* explores a number of issues from recovering from being a victim of crime to being the daughter of a psychopathic killer to sex trafficking. Aiden Snow and Lucy Rivers do a good job of mastering different voices except for Snow's attempt at a Jamaican accent. Can't win 'em all. There were some spots where the story lagged in favor of thoughts or projections about sex, but that may suit some fans. The intrigue surrounding the missing college students make up for it.

*Mildred Burkett*



# Late Reviews

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

## Not Myself Today

Muriel Ellis Pritchard

Black Rose Writing

E-book

B08F5GFDNX

\*\*\* 1/2



Lindsey Anderson is an 18-year-old high school senior soccer star with everything going for her when she dies suddenly after her last game. She wakes up in the body of a 14-year-old prostitute who is being hunted down by her violent ex-pimp. Lindsey can't believe that her old life is gone, and is determined to recover what she lost, if she can stay alive long enough.

*Not Myself Today* has a blackly humorous tone that is initially jarring, considering the subject matter of teenage sex trafficking and abuse. It took a while to warm to Lindsey, considering her judgmental attitudes towards Annabeth Shepherd, who faced very difficult circumstances in her short life. However, the author capably conveys the dynamic of her distress and shock at her sudden death and seeming resurrection in a new body.

Well-developed relationships with prominent secondary characters are a strength of this novel. Descriptive imagery and active storytelling make for a gratifying read. The author is to be applauded for her decision to spotlight real life sex trafficking of children in America in this fiction

novel. *Not Myself Today* would be best suited for older teen readers.

Danielle Hill



**African-American Authors featured on the  
back cover with one of their works.**

**Row 1n left to right:**

**Richard Wright--*Native Son***

**Toni Morrison--*Beloved***

**Malcolm X--*The Autobiography of Malcolm*  
(ghost written by Alex Haley)**

**Row 2: left to right:**

**James Baldwin--*Fire Next Time***

**Amanda Gorman--"*The Hill We Climb*"**

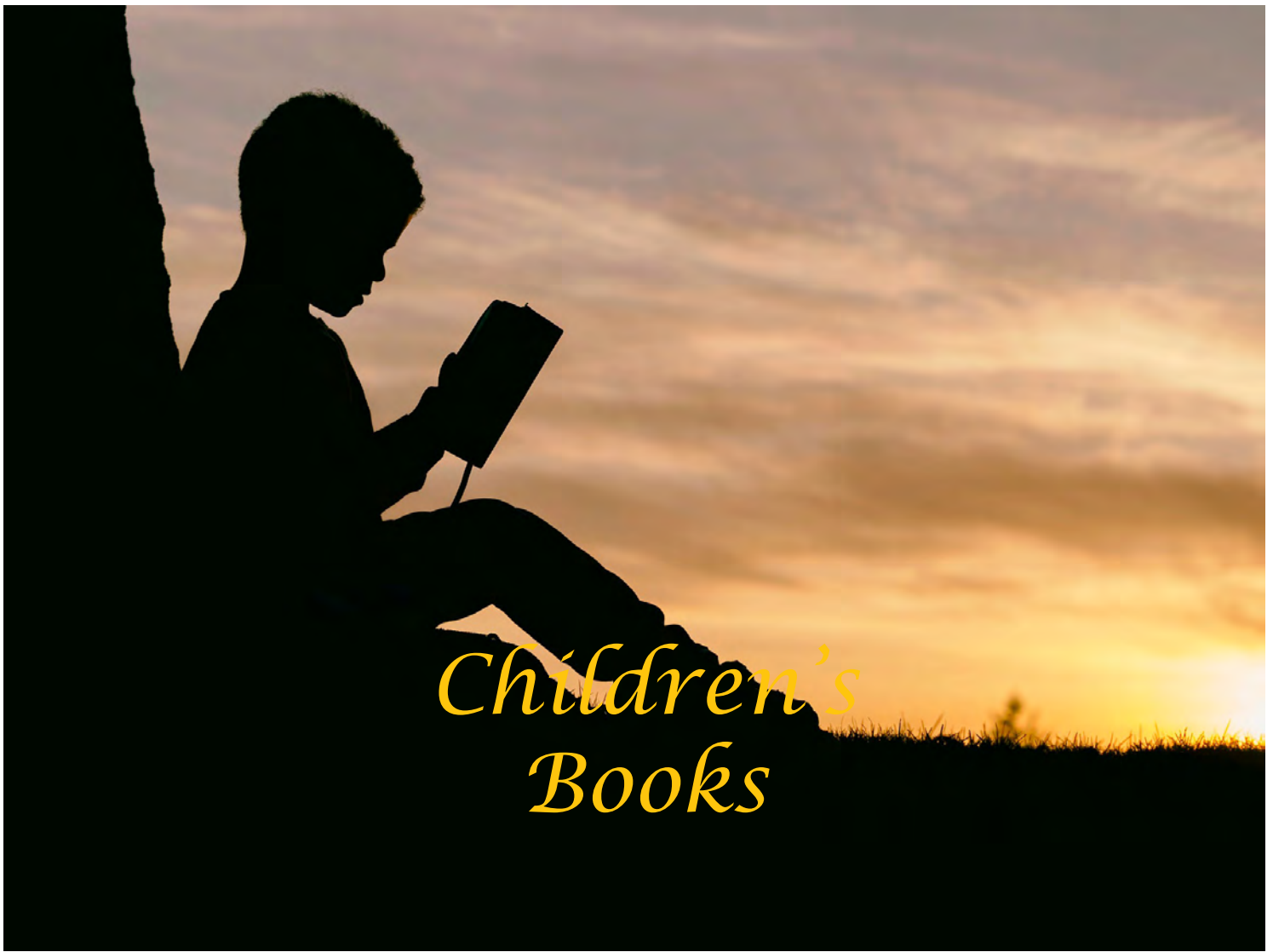
**/Row 3: left to right:**

**Michelle Obama--*Becoming***

**Isabel Wilkerson--*Caste***

**Alice Walker--*The Color Purple***





### **Lil' Bug Race Rap**

*Pierce Renee Birdsong*

**Rosedog Books**

Hardcover

978-1638031440

☆☆

*Lil' Bug Race Rap* is the story of a race or two between Buzzin', a bee, and Freddie, a fly. They plot a course of the race and take off, but each is distracted by something in their environment. Antwan, the O.G. ant, has watched the race from afar, and wants to jump into the mix with another race. Off they go.

*Lil' Bug Race* is done in a poetry/rap style. While that is the charm of it and the reason it will appeal to kids, the inconsistency of the rap is its bane. No specific age group is recommended for this book, and that is an issue for this reviewer. There are things that are not appropriate for the younger age for which the pictures seemed designed (i.e. a fly eating poop, a maggot on a dead cat joining the fray,

and the impact of a poop. . The pre-adolescent will probably appreciate it the most.

*Mildred Burkett*

### **Why is Mommy Crying**

*I. Cori Baill*

**River Grove Books**

Paperback

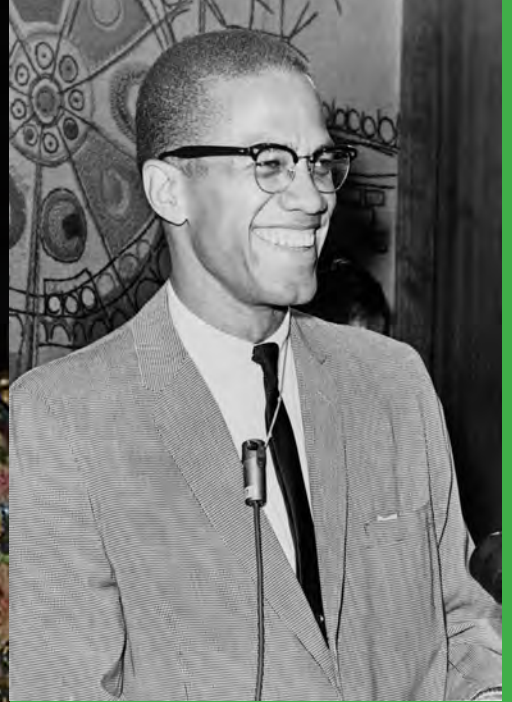
978-1632993779

☆☆☆☆ 1/2

Grieving can be a difficult emotion to deal with, especially by a child who doesn't quite understand. This story is beautifully written in a way that will help parents and children who are going through a difficult process of loss.

Written by a board-certified OB/GYN with experience dealing with women and their families, she's penned a comforting tale to help deal with mourning the loss of an unborn child.

*Lauren Calder*



*Affaire de Coeur  
Celebrates  
African-American  
Authors*

