

July-August 2024

Affaire de Coeur

Bringing You the Best and Most Honest Reviews

Set off the fireworks with
renowned author **Richard Becker**



Ester López'
Little Horses

Reviews

Reviews

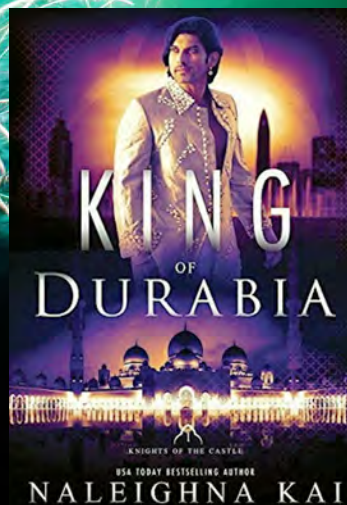
Reviews



And

Cover Model

Vikkas Bhardwaj



Affaire de Coeur



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July-August 2024



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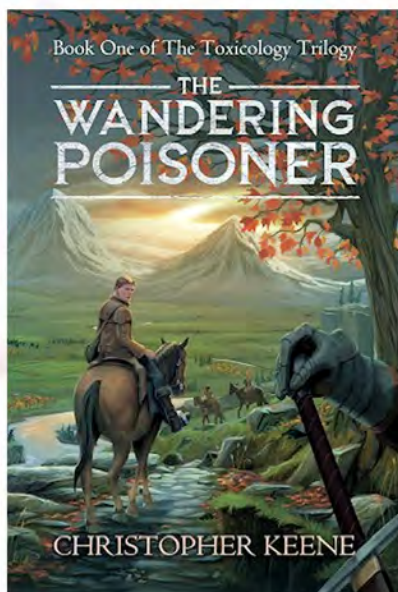
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AdC loves conferences:
This time it's the Capital City Book
Event and
Read It Write It Book Event



Romantic stories to put the sigh in your life.



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THE STAFF

Editorial Director
Louise B. Snead

Editor-in-Chief
Lanelle Brent

President of Advertising and Marketing
Pamela Ackerson

Founder and ROM-CON Director
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Dear QWERTY

by Pamela Ackerson

“Writing Coherent Fiction and Non-Fiction”



Dear QWERTY,

I had a reader tell me my story was confusing because it was written out of order. What do they mean?

Writing Coherent Fiction and Non-fiction. Unless you're adding a memory or back story, everything needs to be in chronological order. When you do add a memory or back story, care must be taken. Your manuscript needs to be organized logically and explain how the story is connected. Use sequential order and patterns.

For example, compare and contrast or cause and effect are essential for life lessons as well as storytelling. The use of transitional phrases will guide the reader.

“He put his shoes on, after he pulled on his pants.”

It's much easier to put pants on before the shoes...

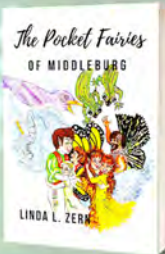
“He was running late for work, he pulled his pants up before leaning over to tie his shoes.”

“He had to fill the air in his tire, before he



Don't venture beyond the perimeter of the family ranch...

The treacherous Florida coast is overrun with warring tribes, pirates, and orphaned children-turned-soldiers roam the land, Tessa journeys beyond the safety of the S-Line Ranch and faces the collapse of civilization. Her story is a testament to the enduring human spirit and the struggle to stay human in an inhumane world. Hope and faith become a beacon of light in the darkness and that even in the face of overwhelming odds, humanity can find a way to endure and thrive.



In the enchanting world of pocket fairies, the bond of love is as magical as the flutter of tiny wings. Perched high above Middle Street, Gennis, Paunch, and Jolly are waiting for their wings to grow. They think themselves tight-fast from the dangers of the world below but will soon embark on a grand adventure when a great storm threatens their home.

The three fairy nestlings muster the courage to leave their cozy traffic light home in search of their missing parents. With their hearts intertwined by love, the brave fairy nestlings spread their wings to face the unknown.



Reed Baye Hunter stands at the crossroads of the real and the unreal. In the shadowy depths of Gryphon's Glade, where the dark waters slip through the cypress trees of Reed's childhood home—ancient tales, whispered secrets, myths, and nightmares. Her quest for truth weaves through a labyrinth of enigmas.

Reed delves deeper into the heart of the glade and confronts the impossible, daring to unravel the mysteries that lie submerged beneath the deep waters of her childhood memories.

[Amazon.com/Author/LindaZern](https://www.amazon.com/Author/LindaZern)



was able to leave for work.

“After he filled the air in his tire, he was able to leave for work.”

Repeated words/synonyms can be used. However, you must make sure you don't keep using the same words to avoid redundancy.

“Noticing his tire was low, he stopped at the station. He had to fill it with air before he was able to hit the highway.”

“After he filled the air in his tire, he was able to leave for work and avoid being late.”

Creating unity when it comes to manuscript writing is essential. Don't put it in the body of the chapter if it's unnecessary. If you've got your main character at a diner, unless the server will return in a future vital scene, or is a part of

the story, it's unnecessary to name her or give a detailed description of what she looks like. A description is fine, but a detailed description isn't crucial unless it's vital to the main character.

“Rylan was running late for work. He hopped about, rushing to pull his pants up before leaning over to tie his shoes. Rushing outside, he noticing his tire was low and had to stop at the station. Rylan filled the tire with air, before he was able to hit the highway and avoid being late.”

Unifying several paragraphs by using transitional words will help the reader and polish your manuscript. Keep what you're writing significant and in sequential order. It'll avoid confusion and make for a much faster or steady-paced story.



Tampa, Florida

October 5, 2024

50+ Authors

Saturday Book Signing

Hyatt House Tampa
Airport /Westshore

The Spotlight is Shining on...

Richard Becker

AdC's Mr. July



Richard R. Becker is an award-winning, best-selling American author. His coming-of-age crime thriller, Third Wheel, broke into the top 100 thriller and suspense literary fiction novels on Amazon in October 2023. The novel has also won six literary awards, following in the footsteps of his first book, 50 States, a collection of fifty short stories with one story set in each American state. When Richard isn't writing fiction, he works as a creative strategist and writer for brands and businesses all over the world.

AdC: *Tell us about the genre(s) you write, and the type of characters you love to write about.*

R.B.: My writing is eclectic, like my reading. But there are a few similarities readers can expect. My characters tend to be relatable, everyday people who are faced with extraordinary events from their perspective. I enjoy writing literary fiction with an edge, often but not always dark. The edge can be anything from moral dilemmas to physical threats. Most of it explores the human condition, the kind and the cruel.

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

R.B.: My newest book is *Third Wheel*, a coming-of-age crime thriller that explores how far a downtrodden

teen might go to belong when his choices seem nonexistent. It's set in the shadowy suburbs of 1982 Las Vegas, a time when law enforcement and drug cartels started putting pressure on organized crime. Should he go along to get along or go it alone even if that means isolation?

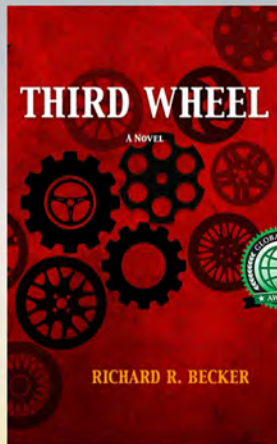
AdC: *Which tasks/projects do you find you tend to procrastinate on and why?*

R.B.: Despite working in advertising and marketing, I've always struggled to sell myself. I don't necessarily procrastinate, but I can find a few dozen other things to do first before making a cold call or sending out emails. The irony is that I have no problem doing it for others. I suspect it stems from struggling for years with a low sense of self-worth despite a laundry list of successes. I've

improved recently, but it's been a lifelong struggle.

AdC: *If you had to pick any character in one of your books, who is most similar to you, who would you choose? Why?*

R.B.: My newest protagonist, Brady Wilks, is the most similar to me as we share many life experiences. While we are different people and see the world differently, I was immediately drawn to write his story after he appeared in a 10-story Kindle-exclusive companion to *50 States* called *Ten Threads*. The story, *Third Wheel*, was partly conjured up from a memory, and I immediately knew that it wasn't just a story but the first chapter of my debut novel.



"A brilliant, mind-blowing debut novel that ends with a big surprise. Five stars!" — Seattle Book Review



more by Richard R Becker | www.richardrbecker.com



AdC: *If you were transported to the setting of the book you're currently writing, where would you be?*

R.B.: I would be transported to Augusta, Maine. It's the fall of 2017, and while there isn't any snow on the ground, the weather is taking a turn toward cold fog and light rain.

AdC: *If you saw a doorway/portal in the middle of the forest, would you enter it?*

R.B.: Ask me in a couple of years, and I may give you a different answer. As much as I'm an adventurous spirit, and there are many times in my life when I would walk on through to the other side, I also love my family. As it is, my daughter will be attending college several states away, and my son lives up in Reno, Nevada, so I'd rather stick around and see what happens in their lives.

AdC: *What do you wish you were better at?*

R.B.: I'm a good artist, but not a professional artist. If I were a better illustrator, I would have also published

several children's books.

AdC: *What is something you say a lot?*

R.B.: Write your own stories. I tell my kids this all the time. I want them to write their own stories instead of letting others write them for them. I even included those words in my first book as a dedication to them.

AdC: *What do you do when no one is around?*

R.B.: I read, write, and draw. Having a block of time is like gold to me.

AdC: *When running away for fun, where can you most likely be found?*

R.B.: I love traveling all over the United States and am starting to look beyond our borders, too. I love exploring new places and trying new things. I'm always looking to discover new places, and I have already plotted a road trip to take my daughter to college. Once she is safely moved in, I plan to take a different route for the return trip.

AdC: *Where is one place you don't*
Affaire de Coeur

like to be?

R.B.: Las Vegas has been very good to me, and I've always given back to the community. I've built a business here and raised some outstanding kids. But I never intended to stay so long here.

AdC: *You get in trouble, who are you most likely with?*

R.B.: I better keep that a secret. I don't want to incriminate them.

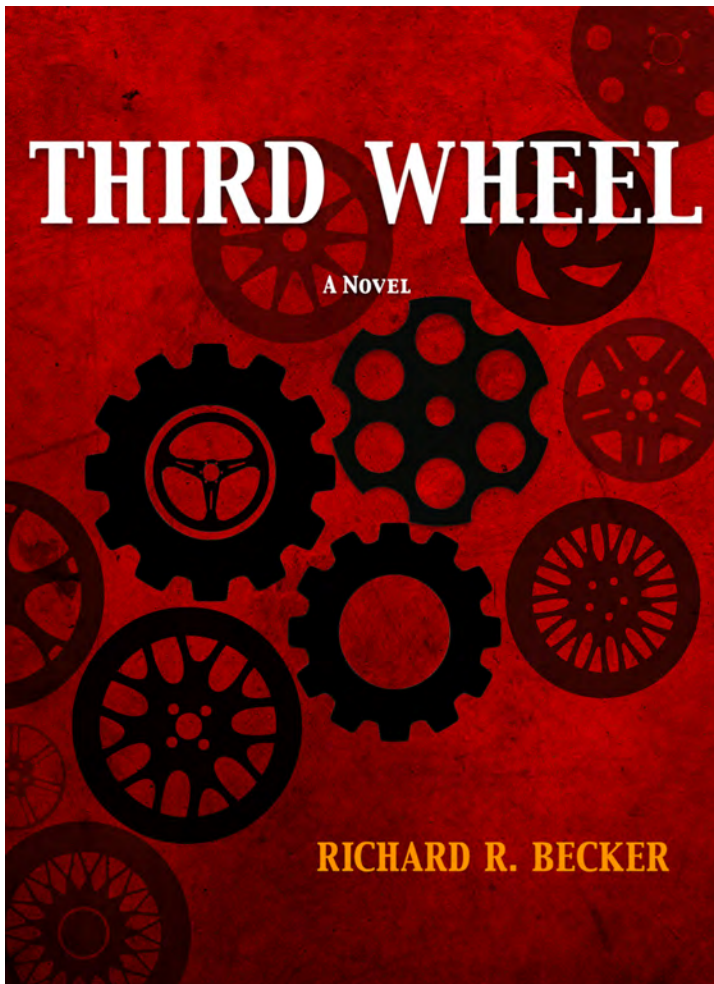
AdC: *What are one of your quirks?*

R.B.: I'm a little bit of a perfectionist. I don't expect other people around me to be, but I'm always trying to figure out how to do things better. I mean everything — even cleaning the house.

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

R.B.: Right now, I'm currently working on scheduling book signings with bookstores in several cities that I'll pass through while taking my daughter to college. I'm going to have some good

continue on page 10



The Third Wheel

by Richard Becker

She came at me with the hose, only rethinking her advance when I came toward her with one of the buckets. She was laughing. We were both laughing, dodging ribbons of water like two kids at one of the splash pools back home. Then I telegraphed my intent to empty whatever remained in the bucket on her head.

"Don't you dare," she said, backing up into the grass. "Brady!"

I dumped the water off to the side while knocking her off balance, laughing as we fell back and landed on the lawn

together. I was on top of her for a brief moment, eye to eye, until she tossed the hose to the side and rolled me over, so she was on top. It was the first time I noticed she wasn't wearing a bra.

She could see the realization written all over my face because she gave me a mischievous wink and smile. Then she grabbed my hands, pressed them to her hips, and leaned over to kiss me. When her lips touched mine, it shocked me — not in the electrical current sort of way but in a stupefied daze of disbelief.

She must have felt my stupefaction because she stopped and moved my hands off her hips and above my head. She adjusted her position. Instead of getting tangled up with a new boyfriend, she took on the role of being the big sister pinning her kid brother down. She never stopped smiling, but she looked at me sideways.

"How old did you say you were again?"

"Sixteen, seventeen this year," I lied.

"I don't think so," she said, shaking her head with a laugh.

She got up and held out a hand to help me up. I didn't need her help, but I let her pull me up all the same, waiting for the hammer to drop because there was no question it was going to fall. I was too young for her, and she also caught me in a lie. I kept expecting the worst, thinking there was no way this would end well. She surprised me again.

"Come on," she said, warmly but with reservation.

"We still have to wax it."

That's what we did. We shared a few stories about growing up while applying white wax over the car. When we were done, we rubbed all the wax off. The Pinto almost looked new compared to how it looked when we started.

Cheryl never did ask me my age again, but something had changed. It wasn't a definitive "I can't believe how stupid I am" kind of change, but more of a "what am I going to do" kind of change. Strangely, I felt the same way. Here was a girl so out of my league but somehow into me anyway, and I blew our first and probably last kiss.

After we finished, she gave me a ride. The whole way home, I could tell that the boundaries hadn't settled yet. They kept rolling in and out like the tide of an ocean. She liked me. She couldn't like me. I liked her. I didn't have a prayer.

Continued from page 9

news to share soon!

Please give us the following contact information: Personal

web page: bio.site/richardrbecker

Twitter: <https://x.com/RichBecker>

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

AdC LOVES Conferences

Capital City Book Event

The Capital City Book Event took place in the Renaissance Montgomery Hotel and Spa at the Convention Center. The fun began Friday May 17, 2024.

The Meet and Greet with a 'Dancing through the Decades' theme started Friday evening and continued with the book signing on Saturday afternoon.

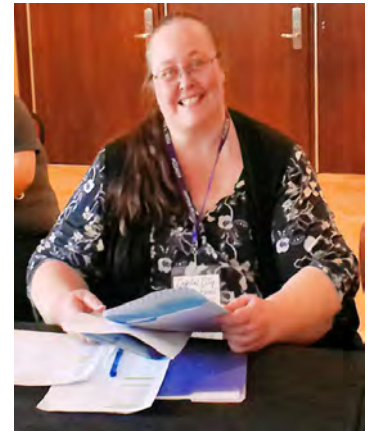
The Raffle Basket/Giveaway announcements were spread throughout the book signing event starting at 2:30 PM. All Raffle Basket proceeds will be donated to Service Dogs Alabama (www.servicedogsalabama.org).



Author and Host, Livell James



Author Becca Jameson



Hostess, Michelle Sewell



*Hostess Tammy Smith,
Photo Credit D.J. Claxton*



Author Victoria Saccenti



Author Miranda Lynn and Model Ryan Mills



Author Sandy Sullivan and daughter Becky



Author Kimberley O'Malley

AdC LOVES Conferences

The Read It Write It Book Event

The third annual Read It Write It book event, hosted by Heidi Hess, was held at the Mall at Wellington Green in Wellington, Florida, on June 15th was a fantastic event with over thirty authors representing all genres. Author workshops and panels were available throughout the day.

For more information on next year's event: www.heidicreates.net



Author Delta James



Author Sheila Fowler



Hostess Heidi Hess



Author T.R. Lawyer



Wayward Cat Publishing



Read It and Write It



A gripping and chilling story of a troubled marriage, a farmhouse with problems much worse than the constant flooding, and the shape of disrepair that shadow over it. It harbors dark secrets, hidden dangers, and a legacy of horrific murders that have followed the home and those who have inhabited it for well over a hundred years.

A legacy of horror, and a compelling narrative with supernatural elements, promise an intense and thrilling epic tale of love and marriage. Blended with the fearful whispers of the Book of Lucifer, the zombie genre finds new life and a new definition in 'She Rises at Night.'

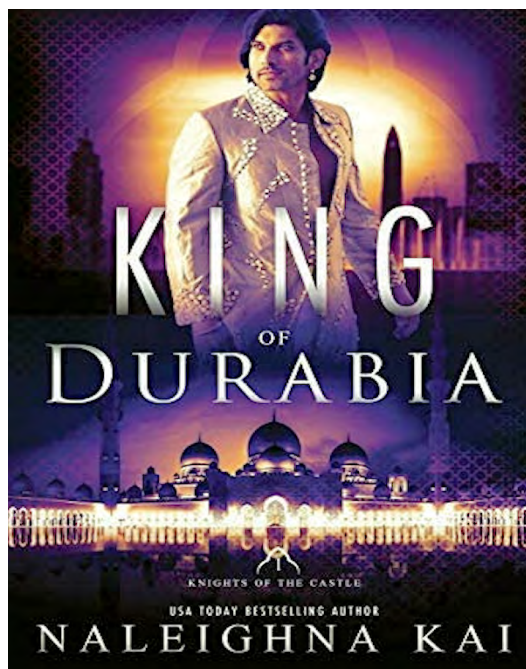
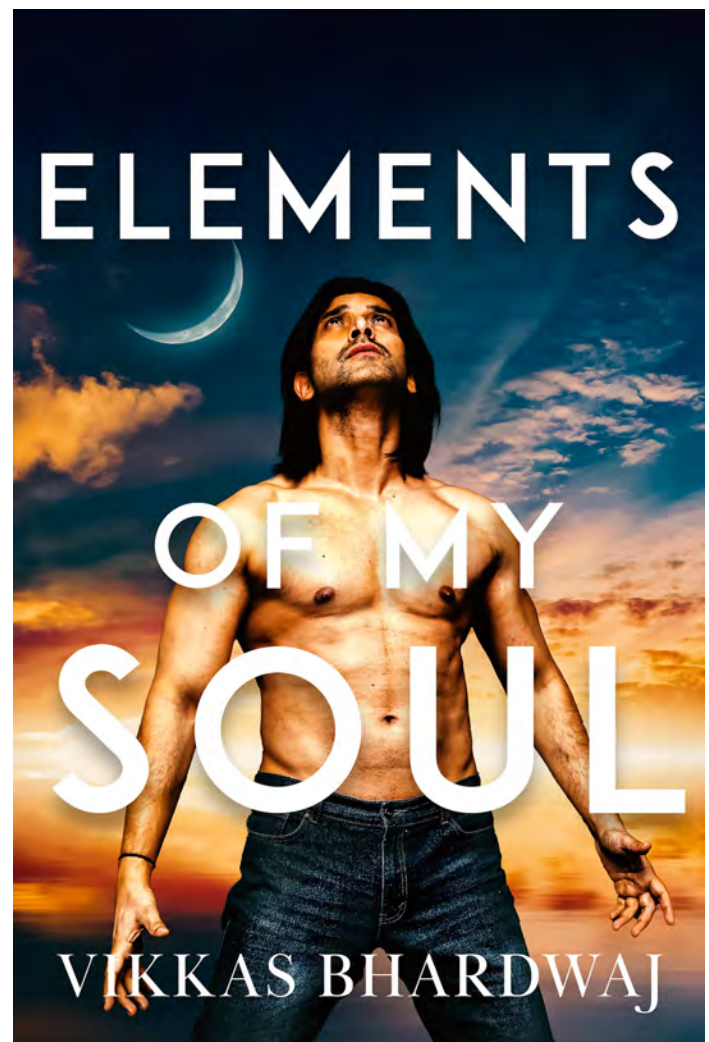
[Facebook.com/AuthorJaeElFoster](https://www.facebook.com/AuthorJaeElFoster)



COVER MODEL CORNER

INTERVIEW WITH

VIKKAS BHARDWAJ





of a goddess who lived with us.

Debra: What goddess wisdom has your mother passed on to you?

Vikkas: Patience. One thing she said was, 'Always weigh your words before you speak, son. If people waste your time Vikkas, let them. Don't worry about what they do, you keep doing your work, son. God watches it all.'

Debra: And you have done some amazing work. If you could do a photo shoot anywhere in the world for a cover, where would you most want to go? What sort of shoot would it be?

Vikkas: It would have to be an exotic location, maybe Greece or Italy, or even India in the deep jungles and or in spiritual places, a book that is mysterious perhaps. In India, I would love to shoot by the Ganges River where one gets liberation Moksha.

Debra: I hope you get to do a photo shoot by the Ganges River and in the deep jungles of India, that sounds amazing. You're an international cover model and actor. Have you traveled far? Tell us about your travels and what you seek when you travel.

Vikkas: I have travelled the path of spirituality, religiously, as my Mumma and papa are devotees of Goddess Durga Maa. I have gone to Amarnath yatra deep mountains of Shiva in Jammu and Kashmir, north of India, and I have travelled to Vaishno Devi, another holy pilgrimage in India. My sister and I grew up with the Goddess (Mumma) and my father is a renowned singer who sings bhajans (religious songs) all over California. I seek knowledge, wisdom and patience from my parents. What they have instilled within us.

Debra: Beyond romance novel cover shots, what other projects or jobs keep you busy?

Vikkas: We have a family business, a car wash that I handle, and I have a film project coming up by a company called Peacock and Butterfly Productions PVT LMTD.

Debra: So, we will see you in another film soon! What's one question you wish an interviewer would ask you?

Vikkas: I wish to be asked about family values and how they have changed here since the 60s and 70s. Even the food industry has changed. Before, food was cooked in the household, and now it is all about pesticides and fast food that is making people sick and pharms are making billions off it.

Debra: If you wrote a book, what would it be about?

Vikkas: I wrote a book called *Elements of my Soul* which is dedicated to my mother.

Debra: Today, I am excited to be interviewing Vikkas Bhardwaj, Actor and International Model from India. The first Indian to become the face of romance novels worldwide. On over 600 covers so far and counting. Welcome, Vikkas. Tell us how you began. What was the first cover you appeared on?

Vikkas: Whatever I am and do is with the blessings of my parents. My mother is Goddess and with Devi's Blessings I exist on this planet. My first cover was with author Grace Burrowes book titled *The Jaded Gentleman*.

Debra: I wish to express my condolences on the loss of your mother. You've described your mother as a goddess. What qualities did your mother have which made her appear this way to you?

Vikkas: Mumma was an angel, she's number 9 in numerology, she was born in Navratri (9 days of goddess). Her name is Devi which in Hindi means goddess. She was the most giving, kind, nurturing, happy, and a lady with patience, filled with light and love. All her life she cooked for everyone, fed everyone's stomach, she was the most amazing cook you will ever meet in your entire life. Her presence was filled with love and over care. Now that I don't have her in my life physically, I feel handicapped as she was my all. My sister Megha is a branch from this grand beautiful tree, my father Mr. Sudesh Bhardwaj is all we have left. Sam. my brother-in-law, and Krrish, my nephew, were my mom's love. Pure love, and not a day goes by that we don't think about the memories

Debra: That is a lovely way to remember her.

This question is almost always asked in interviews because your fitness level is beyond the average persons. What is your exercise routine and what sort of nutrition plan do you follow to achieve and maintain your level of fitness?

Vikkas: It's called passion. I believe everyone can achieve it. It is a matter of time, where you need to get motivated, and stop eating animals, as they cause blood problems and diseases.

Debra: If you could share three simple fitness tips the average romance reader could do every day to stay healthy, what would they be?

Vikkas: Do planks, do sit ups at home, and drink plenty of fresh fruit juices. I used to make it for my mom and dad, now it's just me and papa. My fresh juicing starts with carrots, beet, ginger, and celery. It detoxes your body completely,

Debra: It's your birthday dinner and the calories don't count. What's on the menu and what are you drinking?

Vikkas: My mama used to cook amazing Indian food every day. Every day was and is special. An Indian delicacy we used to have is golgappe. The menu was grand vegetarian paratha, dal, aloo gobi, halwa and ice cream. Drink wise I love my beer.

Debra: It sounds like a grand dinner indeed. Now I'm wanting to try these dishes. J Cover models receive attention for their outer beauty. What are your thoughts on inner beauty?

Vikkas: This world is all about money, but people forget money doesn't mean you are successful, neither having six cars and a big house. Inner beauty is something given to you as a gift by your parents, and if they haven't, then you acquire it through your spiritual learnings and life itself. Your karmic journey can be either, you take a lot, or you give a lot. Money does not equate you to being a successful human being, it is your kindness, compassion, and how much your soul gives to the people who do not have anything at all, and how much are you willing to share it with them. Materialistic bullshit never impresses me.

Debra: Describe the perfect romantic evening.

Vikkas: It must be on the beach.

Debra: Eight quickie questions: Watching the sunrise or watching the sunset and the stars?

Vikkas: Both. I pray to the sun god, as it unleashes its power to give life, and I pray to the sunset, as I await the next morning to bring sunshine into my life and everyone in this world.

Debra: The beach or the mountains?

Vikkas: Def the beach.

Debra: Primitive camping or luxury hotel?

Vikkas: I love hotels.

Debra: Snow skiing or water skiing?

Vikkas: Neither.

Debra: Favorite movie.

Vikkas: In Hollywood it's *Superman* starring my fav Christopher Reeve, and in Bollywood it must be Amitabh Bachchan, and Salman Khan films.

Debra: Best book you ever read.

Vikkas: *The Laws of the Spirit World*.

Debra: Fav. Sport to play.

Vikkas: Cricket.

Debra: Fav. Sport to watch.

Vikkas: Cricket and tennis.

Debra: Vikkas, thank you for visiting with me today. It's been fun getting to know you. Before we say goodbye, how can fans stay-up-to date on your latest news?

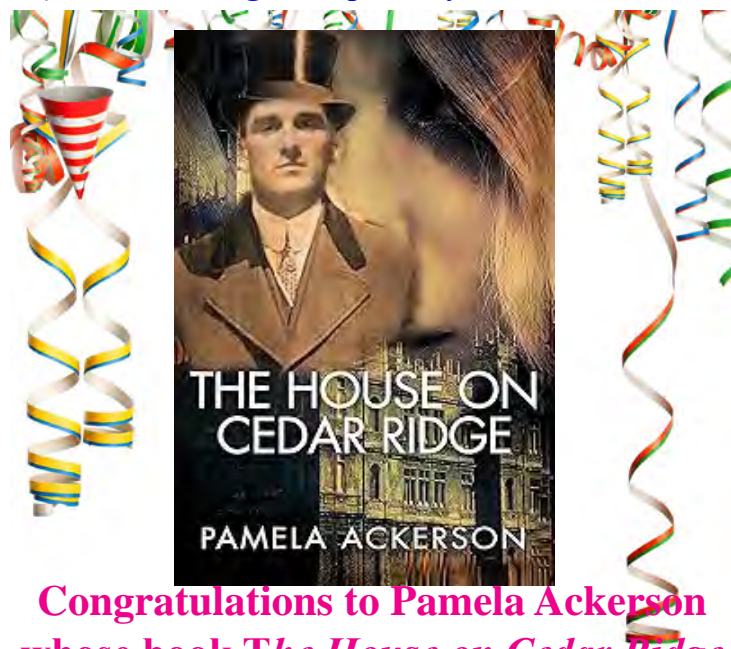
Vikkas:

Website: www.vikkaszone.com

Facebook: [Facebook.com/vikkas](https://www.facebook.com/vikkas)

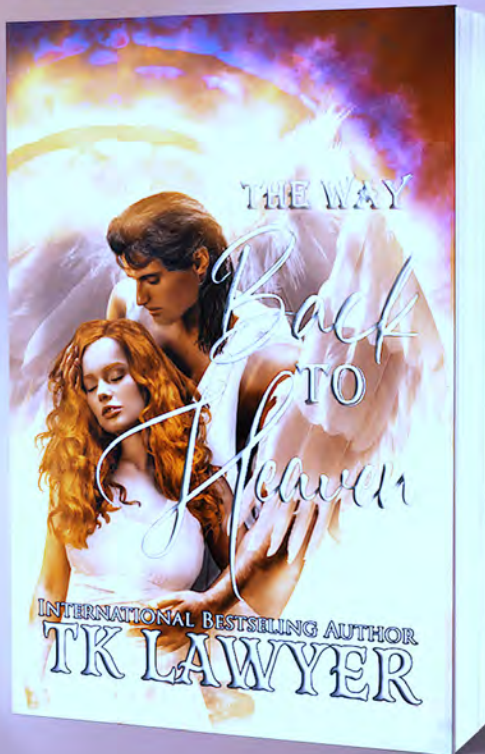
<https://mrstaroftheworld.wixsite.com/vikkas>

Debra Parmley writes suspense, military romantic suspense, historical romance, fairytale romance, and urban fantasy romance. She lives in a motorhome fulltime with her husband as they travel the U.S. She has interviewed cover models since 2011 and enjoys sharing interviews with readers of *Affaire de Coeur* Magazine. She loves to hear from you! Readers (and Models who wish to schedule an interview) may contact debra@debraparmley.com



**Congratulations to Pamela Ackerson
whose book *The House on Cedar Ridge*
is going to the big screen.
We're so proud of you!**

Judgment is made by him, and it is final.



Will Josiah let you pass, or will you drop into an unknown abyss?

As an usher to the Other Side, meeting the fabled Josiah means your Mortal Life is gone. Your fate shall be measured by the decisions made in life.

Will your soul pass through the gates to utter bliss or plummet into darkness, agony, and pain?



Jasper: Why was it so hard to find a good man?

Centurion: Centurion thinks he has it all—until the one subject stands in front of him.

Apollo: Lauren was only an assignment. He wasn't supposed to fall in love.

Aeron: Kim craves a loving future with someone who feels the same—one day. Can true love exist after a decade of heartbreak?

Orion: Zoe never imagined she would find herself having to choose between two angels.

TKLawyerAuthor.com @TKLawyerAuthor



Our Other Spotlight is on...

Ester Lopez and her adorable Little Horses

AdC's August Calendar Girls



Ester Lopez ~ The Interesting Story Behind *Little Horses*

My husband decided my granddaughter needed something to take care of, so he bought a pregnant mini horse. Knowing nothing about horses, I did research. I don't think my husband knew as much about horses as he let on. For instance, he wanted the horses to eat the grass in the field we own so he wouldn't have to mow. We later learned that the grass made the horses fat and now they are on thyroid medication for the rest of their lives and are limited to how much grass they eat.

Another thing we learned was that horses couldn't eat pea vines or anything moldy. Bucky ate some pea vines my husband gave him and he got colic. The veterinarian came and saved Bucky's life. We had to keep Bucky walking around the field until the veterinarian arrived. Now, the horses eat grass and feed in the spring, summer, and fall, and hay and feed in the winter.

Owning mini horses is much like having very large dogs. They like to play, and run, and chase things, and get dirty, and they require a large field to do that in. They're too small to ride unless you're under 80 lbs. I wanted others to know a little more than I did when we first got them so they can make an informed decision. I don't regret having mini horses because they do have interesting personalities, but they do require regular care of their feet and worming. If you love dogs or cats, you know they also require regular care, so it's not much different, just a little more expensive.

The biggest surprise to me was learning that mini horses could live to be forty years old. My oldest granddaughter (the one my husband bought the horse for) isn't interested in caring for the mini horses. The youngest granddaughter (who is now five) seems interested in all animals. She'll be learning to care for the mini horses. You can find her on her website:

www.esterlopez.com

Facebook at www.facebook.com/EsterLopezAuthor

www.goodreads.com/esterlopez

**COME MEET
US AT THESE
2024
BOOK EVENTS**

**HOT IN BILOXI
BILOXI, MS
SEPT. 13-14, 2024**

**FLIRTY IN TAMPA
TAMPA, FL
OCT. 4-5, 2024**

**AUTHOR FEST
MELBOURNE, FL
NOV. 16-17, 2024**

PUZZLER

Summer Foods

Across

2. The meat patties are on the grill.
6. A skewer with meat or shrimp on it and veggies or fruit between.
7. This squash is popular (and sometimes too plentiful) during the summer.
8. They are orangish and look like a peach but are smaller and more tart. Makes a great jelly, though.
11. This melon is usually orange inside and very sweet.
13. A pitcher that allows you to put fruit, vegetables or spices in a section and that mixes with the liquid in the pitcher.
14. One can cook this big mushroom on the grill and serve it on a bun with condiments. Great!
15. Peaches without the fuzz.
17. Cooked on a grill.
19. The healthy berry, it is sweet, small, mixes well with other food, and makes a wonderful jam.
21. "It must be jelly 'cause ____ don't shake like that." Put it on your toast.
22. Can be made into prunes or raisins but fresh off the tree is a fav.
23. A dessert which can be made of different fruits, but has a crust on the top.
25. These Bings don't sing but taste great in the summer.
26. This cone is topped with flavored ice.
28. Another name for a Blackberry.
33. These grow in the wild and have big stickers. The fruit is dark and has its own tiny seeds.
34. These come in red, gold, black and purple and great in lemonade or tea.
35. This premium very sweet cherry was created by crossing a Bing and a Van cultivara cherry.
36. This melon is yellow-green inside and can be very sweet and tasty.

Down

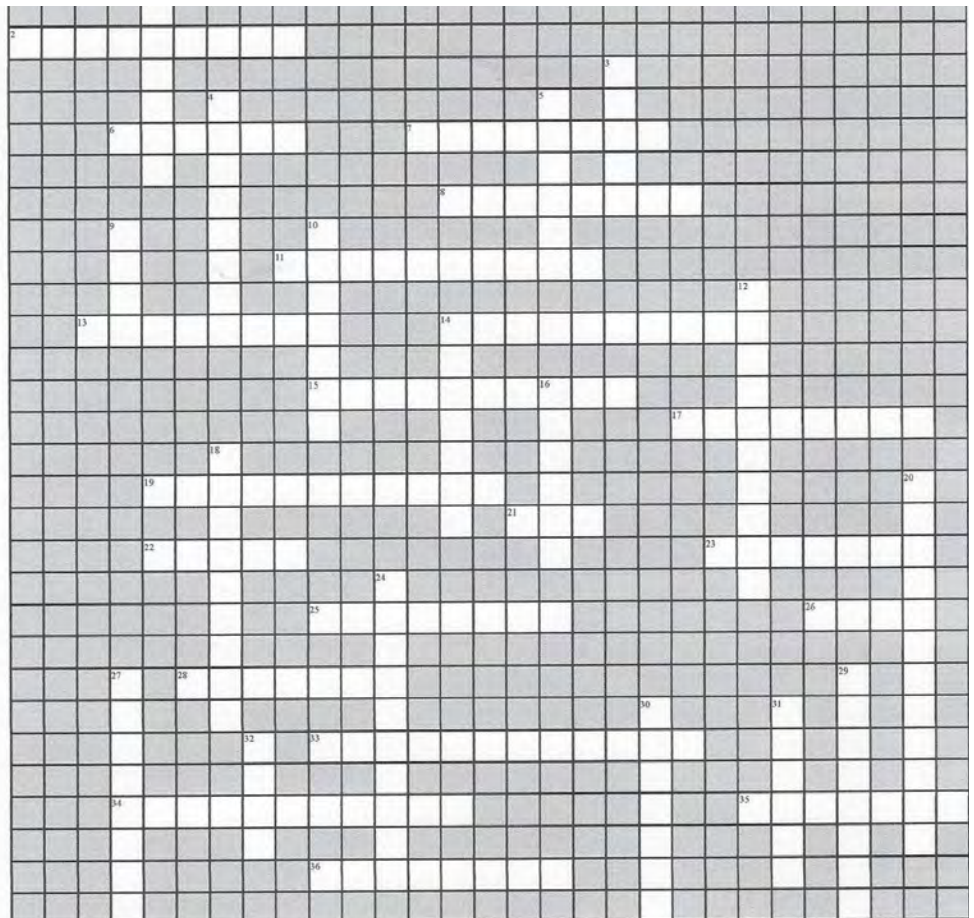
1. An ice cream dish covered with syrup or toppings.
3. A green, reddish stone fruit, it grows

- on a tree in the tropics. They have a huge seed and wonderful sweet taste.
4. These red fruit are popular during the summer. The Early Girl variety starts you off and you end with Beefsteak and cherry ones.
5. Aussies often prepare theirs "on the Barbie."
9. During the summer, we eat it "on the cob."
10. Processing the fruit and vegetables while they're fresh so you can eat them another time of the year.
12. Grows on a vine, gets very big, may or may not have seeds, and the meat is red or yellow and sweet.
14. Varieties include Alberta, Freestone, Donut, white and about 395 more.
16. This company has a hot dog eating contest every summer.
18. Grows on a vine, long and slender,

used to make pickles.

20. This fruit is known to make good short cakes.
24. Irnposible, Beyond Meat and others serve this group who doesn't eat meat.
27. A frozen dessert made of milk and/or cream and flavored with chocolate, fresh fruit, and other extracts.
29. A drink made from yellow citrus fruit.
30. A boiled egg that has the yolk removed and mixed with a variety of ingredients like onions, mayo, mustard, sugar, etc. and put back into the egg white. Every Southern girl has a dish for this.
31. This salad is made from either russet or purple root vegetable.
32. A barbecue favorite, they are beef or pork with long, meaty bones.

Answers on page 26



REVIEWS

- ★★★★★ Amazing/Excellent
- ★★★★ Good
- ★★★ Average
- ★★ Something's missing
- ★ More than one element missing

Sometimes a book does not quite fit into the description above. That is when the reviewer will use 1/2 to indicate it is better than its description but not quite at the next level.

Books are evaluated on (1) Characterization (2) Plot (3) Pacing, (4) Writing and (5) Originality



Do you think you can write a fair and honest review of a book you've recently read? Here's your chance. We accept guest reviews. If you would like to submit one, pick a book that has just come out, whether you liked it or disliked it, and write a review of it. It's not as easy as you think. Send it to our website at www.adcmagazine.com.

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Contemporary Romance

The Best of All (The Best Men #2)

Karla Sorensen

Montlake

Trade Paperback

978-1662514433

★★★★1/2

In Karla Sorensen's *The Best of All*, commitment-phobic Liam Davies and hopeless romantic Zoe Valentine, who believes in happily ever after, are appointed co-guardians of their mutual best friends' sweet, bright toddler, Mira after their deaths. Liam and Zoe never got along, but now they must resolve their differences and provide the secure, loving family and home Mira's parents wanted for her. In Zoe's and Liam's dual first-person Points of View, this compelling novel about grief, loss, family, and love explores Liam, Zoe, and Mira's relationships combining flashbacks from pivotal moments of their first meetings with the present.

From its first scene, Sorensen draws the reader in with her vivid

Affaire de Coeur

world-building and detailed descriptions filled with the characters' senses to make you feel like you are with them each moment. Sorensen uses their dialogue and colorful, natural-sounding banter to develop complex, messy, relatable, and likable characters readers can't help but love and root for. These interactions also help to reveal and evolve the story and the characters.

Readers will love Liam, Mira, and Zoe's funny, sweet, and poignant scenes of them learning to be a family. Further, Sorensen's writing is outstanding in the scenes that deal with their emotional, heart-wrenching, and beautifully written grief over losing a parent and best friends. Sorensen excellently explores grief and loss, particularly for a young child and a person stepping into a care giver role for the first time. Liam's scenes with Mira wonderfully display this.

Sorensen transitions Liam and Zoe's relationship from reluctant allies barely tolerating each other to partners, friends, and more. Though they try to deny and fight it, Liam and Zoe are

Contemporary Romance

deeply attracted and drawn to each other, with an intense chemistry and connection that becomes more than sexual as they spend time together caring for Mira. Sorensen excellently builds the tension between them, allowing them to develop a friendship and relationship based on more than sexual attraction before they become intimate because it's best for them and Mira. Her descriptions make their first kiss and love scenes feel intimate, sensual, emotional, and romantic.

The Best of All is an absorbing, sweet, steamy, hilarious, sexy, poignant, and fast-paced romance that's perfect for fans of sports romance, opposites attract, forced proximity, first-time parents/instant family, and enemies-to-lovers.

Lacy Hill

Can't Help Falling in Love

Sophie Sullivan

St. Martin's Griffin

978-1250910608 Trade Paperback

978-1250910615 E- Book

☆☆☆

When Alexandra (Lexi) Danby's father died, the former high school star athlete is forced to drop out of college to care for her mother, who has sunk into a deep depression. When Lexi discovers her father's business was deeply in debt, she began working two jobs to repay it and scrimps to keep the family home her mother refuses to leave. Watching her mother give up on life convinces Lexi that loving someone would be too painful if she lost that person.

Will Grand is an executive in the family-owned Grand Babies stores owned by his grandfather. His family is a fixture in Seattle's high society circles, and Will's mother is determined to match him with a woman she feels fits the family's status.

Lexi struggles to be a good

waitress as she waits on Will, but she hasn't quite got the hang of the job yet. When a group of old high school buddies come by the restaurant, she is embarrassed by having this job. Will quickly rescues her by pretending she's eating with him, and they somehow mistakenly give the impression they're engaged.

Things snowball from there, causing problems with friends and family alike but the ruse solves problems for both of them. Introducing Lexi as his fiancée horrifies his family and puts a brake on the family attempts to matchmake him with women he's not interested in. Being publicly acknowledged as Will's fiancée helps Lexi keep the true circumstances of her current life from ruining her image with her former high school friends. As they do a remarkable job of pretending to be in love, both Will and Lexi start to wonder if it may be more than an act.

Can't Help Falling in Love is a refreshing, somewhat traditional story told with humor and a touch of angst as these two look inside themselves to discover what the world has to offer them.

Hannah Rowan

Escape the Everglades

Caridad Piñeiro

Harlequin

Mass Market

978-1335591710

☆☆☆ ½

Ex-marine and widower Carlos Ruiz isn't looking for love or romance. However, he unexpectedly finds it with Natalie Rodriguez, a security expert and army veteran suffering from migraines—and PTSD like her K-9 Missy. She's hired to protect him and his son, Lucas, from poachers, and she and Missy help him chase down leads and rescue his son when he goes missing.

Piñeiro skillfully develops the relationships between the characters,

including between the primary and secondary characters. Carlos and Natalie's interactions are charged, emotional, and sexy. The South Beach Security K-9 Division is a well-oiled machine that works well together. The scenes with the characters exploring the Everglades and protecting and caring for the animals living there are fascinating, informative, and integral to the plot.

Piñeiro's writing, description, and world building shine in these scenes, drawing the reader in from the first scene and keeping them turning the pages. Her dialogue is colorful and natural-sounding, and she smoothly combines English and Spanish, the characters' two languages, within the dialogue and story. She develops her complex characters through funny, snarky banter and sweet, sexy, and charged intimate interactions and love scenes that reveal and evolve their characters. The novel's high-stakes action scenes are well-constructed and exciting and place the characters at significant risk, leaving you on the edge of your seat several times during the book.

Sweet, sexy, funny, angsty, emotional, suspenseful, action-packed, and fast-paced, *Escape the Everglades* is a perfect romantic suspense romance for fans of single parents with children, protection/bodyguards, protection of animals in natural environments, nature conservation, and action/adventure and mystery/thrillers set in the Everglades.

Lacy Hill

Contemporary Romance

Finding Mr. Write

Kelley Armstrong

Forever

E-book

B0CK8CSK3T

★★★★★

Daphne McFadden already knows that as a female author, the cards are stacked against her. Now she knows just how much. Because her sudden whim to pose as an “outdoorsy hunk of masculinity” male author for her new book just resulted in the unthinkable: a bidding war, a huge book deal, and the kind of fame every author dreams of. Now she’s in big trouble. Because she needs to convince the world that Zane Remington actually exists . . . but how?

By hiring an actor, of course.

Chris Stanton is not an actor—not officially. He’s used to balancing the books, not pretending he wrote one. Still, he’s mostly certain he can pose as some overly macho bro-author. But when the media descend on Daphne’s gorgeous remote home in the Yukon, it’s not enough for Chris to just be the face of Zane Remington—he’ll have to become him, all while hilariously balancing the terrifying dangers of the wilderness, a massive femme fandom, and a serious crush on Daphne. But as the hype circus gets more out of control, it’s just a matter of time before someone discovers their little white lie.

Romantic comedy is not what I usually read by Kelley Armstrong. But, as usual, she does an amazing job. *Finding Mr. Write* is an adorable romcom with a serious subplot. Chris had me rolling with his over the top performance as Zane and I empathized so much with Daphne. This book left me with a wide smile.

D. Antonio

The Ornithologist’s Field Guide to Love

India Horton

Berkeley Publishing Group

E-book

978-0593547298

★★★★★

Beth Pickering and Devon Lockley are professional rivals when it comes to ornithology, continually at odds in the seeking of rare magical birds. The competition for Birder of the Year puts them in close contact as they find themselves on the same side in the quest to find and protect the endangered caladrius bird, with powerful chemistry and unexpected romantic feelings arising with each moment they spend together.

The Ornithologist’s Field Guide

to Love is a lighthearted, humorous historical fantasy romp with scintillating chemistry between its two leads. Beth considers herself socially awkward, dry and unlikable, but for Devon, it was practically love at first sight. Devon loves her sharp mind and thinks she’s beautiful, enjoying every moment he spends with her. Beth is drawn to the devilishly handsome, charming and intelligent ornithologist with his adventurous air. Devon is not used to women wanting him more than just a few fun hours, but finds he could see forever with Beth. They fit together so well and make a couple to root for.

India Horton’s prose is bright and punny, with tons of imagination as various magical birds with specific powers are an essential part of the storyline. The scholarly tone adds authenticity to the story as it’s centered

on leads who are very much grounded in academia. Plenty of quirky secondary characters who interact with Beth and Devon on their adventures add to the zany humor. This is a fun, refreshing romance with distinct and likable leads for readers who like a healthy dose of fantasy and adventure in their historical romance.

Danielle Hill

Rebel Heart (Starlight Cove #6)

Brighton Walsh

Bright Publishing L.L.C

Trade Paperback and Mass Market

978-1685180396

★★★★★

Harper Davidson returns to Starlight Cove after 12 years to write an article in Brighton Walsh’s *Rebel Heart* (Starlight Cove #6) and ends up rooming with her first love, Levi, who brutally broke her heart. Walsh draws you into this beautifully written, steamy, passionate, and angsty second-chance love story reuniting childhood best friends-to-lovers-to-enemies from the very first scene, and you are unable to stop reading until it’s over all too soon.

Walsh keeps you guessing how things went down between Levi and Harper as they circle each other with their intensely hot, scorching chemistry and the emotional connection that’s still as strong all these years later. Harper and Levi share intensely emotional scenes in which Walsh develops their relationship by alternating flashbacks between the present and the past that seamlessly fit within the novel’s narrative flow without affecting its pacing. There’s so much between them left unsaid or unexpressed that remains unresolved, and you just want them to say the things they keep bottled up inside that are killing them slowly. The moments between them are richly detailed, passionate, and full of emotion. Walsh

Contemporary Romance

Rule Breakers Fall Hardest (The Boys #6)

Micalea Smeltzer

Self Published

Trade Paperback and Mass Market

979-8328038775

★★★★★

Rosie Thomas agrees to marry her childhood crush/best friend-turned-enemy Daire Hendricks, despite their animosity and hateful words since their friendship ended. But they never intend/expect to fall for each other or dream they might get their best friend back.

They learn to be partners in an unusual situation while dealing with family drama, maturing along the way, especially Daire, who becomes a man different from the one we meet at the beginning of *Rule Breakers Fall the Hardest*. Daire's attitude toward Rosie in the novel's first part is not okay—how he talks to her and treats her is mean-spirited and unfair double standards. However, Rosie holds her own with him when he says these rude, judgmental, and sexist things and returns the favor with terrific comebacks. But, some of their back-and-forth barbs and banter are quite funny and entertaining. Further, over time, you realize what may lie behind one of his favorite lines of attack and why he's acting out in that way. It's maddening because Rosie receives more than her share of judgment and "bullying" from all fronts. But the worst comes from her mother. The fact that Daire used to be her safe place from her family makes it more painful to read scenes where he treats her that way. For a good chunk of the novel, Smeltzer keeps you guessing what drove best friends apart. It's sad how they go at each other when you realize how much time they lost and the reason for it.

From its opening scenes, the reader is drawn in by Smeltzer's likable, flawed, and conflicted characters. The situation in which they find themselves keeps readers turning the pages. Her love scenes are steamy, emotional, sensual, funny, and excellently evolve Daire and Rosie's relationship and characters. It's fascinating reading about Daire and Rosie adjusting to marriage and living together in forced proximity after years of hatred, fighting their intense sexual tension and chemistry, and the romantic feelings that begin to develop between them or resurface and deepen.

Smeltzer wonderfully balances the book's tones. *Rule Breakers Fall Hardest* is a deeply romantic, and fast-paced read that's perfect for fans of marriages of convenience, childhood friends-to-enemies, childhood crushes, new adult, and hockey romances.

Lacy Hill

balances the novel's intense emotional moments with hilarious, steamy, and nostalgic scenes.

She just as efficiently develops the secondary characters and their relationships with the primary characters and each other as Levi and Harper. Levi's relationship with his siblings rings true to life. They are hard on each other and love to give one another a

hard time, but their love and support for each other are clear, and they will do anything to help one another. It's hard not to fall in love with the complex, fallible characters she excellently develops with her expressive writing.

Walsh's storytelling style and how her writing flows so beautifully with her exceptional world-building and vibrant and detailed description that

uses the characters' senses, emotions, and quirks to make you feel like you are right there with them in each moment is exceptional. Her natural-sounding dialogue is colorful with hilarious, snarky banter and intense emotional and intimate conversations that grab hold of your imagination and heart.

Sweet, hilarious, seriously steamy and sexy, emotional, and fast-paced, *Rebel Heart* is a beautifully written, captivating, and incredibly romantic novel perfect for fans of childhood friends to enemies-to-lovers, forced proximity, close quarters, friends-to-lovers, first love, family-centered, and angsty/steamy romances.

Lacy Hill

Right Where We Left Us

Jen Devon

St. Martin's Griffin

Trade Paperback

978-1250822024

★★★★^{1/2}

Jen Devon's *Right Where We Left Us* follows the tempestuous, on-again, off-again love story between former secret teen lovers Temperance Jean Madigan and Duncan Brady as they are forced together for a summer wedding at the Brady's Vineyard. After years of being virtual strangers engaging in small talk, adversarial banter, and messy secret hookups now and again, can they finally get things right this summer?

Duncan and Temperance's lives are intricately tied because their siblings are married, and friends' lives are also romantically tied. So, even if they wanted to avoid being around each other, they couldn't. They have a lifetime of moments and knowledge of each other that have become a part of who they are, linking them together. Duncan and Temperance have a shared sense of humor. Their eyes are always on each other, and their physical attraction and awareness are like a live wire constantly drawing them back to each

Contemporary Romance

other. As much as they love each other, their relationship is messy and rife with unresolved issues and emotional connections.

Devon's writing style and storytelling are beautiful and vibrant with details that make it easy for readers to visualize and experience every moment. Her world building is rich and extensive. Despite how thoroughly she dives into her characters' physical, emotional, and thought worlds, Devon doesn't waste words.

Right Where We Left Us may be the best-written second-chance romance in years without unnecessary drama. It's multi-layered, sweet, passionate, sexy, steamy, funny, and full of rich moments between Duncan and Temperance that show you that these characters are meant to be together. These two have never stopped loving and will always love one another. They just needed time and life experience to grow into the people they needed to be and mature to be capable of living together with the intensity of the love and connection that they shared, especially in light of the external pressure that Duncan's family's business and Temperance's relationship with her parents were exerting on them. Sweet, steamy, funny, sexy, angsty, nostalgic, emotional, romantic, and fast-paced, *Right Where We Left Us* is a beautifully written love story perfect for fans of first love, friends-to-lovers, on-again-off-again, small-town, forbidden love, secret lovers, and second-chance romance.

Lacy Hill

Things Left Unsaid: 7C's: A Pigeon Creek Series #1

G.A. Mazurke

Serena Akeroyd Publishing Ltd.

Trade Paperback

979-8326951854

☆☆☆

G.A. Mazurke's *Things Left*

Unsaid focuses on Colton Korhonen, the eldest Korhonen son, and Susanne McAllister, the granddaughter of his family's long-time sworn enemy, whose father and grandmother, respectively, force them into a contract marriage for purposes of birthing an heir to save both their families' generational land holds. It's an emotional and romantic love story about two people who once shared a deep bond connection until a horrible tragedy and misunderstanding tore them apart, profoundly changing and ruining their lives.

Colt and Zee reluctantly settle into married life and try to make the best of the situation. However, the past is always there between them. A barrier that separates them, though there is a fiery, simmering attraction and the remnants of their childhood connection and friendship longing to be rekindled. Zee and Colt's relationship is a slow burn that's worth the wait. Mazurke wonderfully transitions their relationship from animosity, anger, and distrust to reluctant allies to lovers through tense, angsty, sexy, sweet, and intimate interactions and love scenes. Their intensely sexual, emotional, and passionate love scenes help develop, evolve, and reveal their characters and further her multi-layered plot. Colt and Zee are characters who find each other at critical points in their lives and help to save one another. That bond never went away despite everything. I love how they care for each other, supporting, encouraging, and balancing one another. The things that they do now and did for each other in the past out of love are what love is all about.

Mazurke seamlessly develops their love story, alternating between the present and flashbacks to the past without slowing the novel's pacing. Her expressive and vibrant writing with detailed descriptions places readers in each scene with the characters who are distinct, engaging, and complex,

complementing her character-driven story. You can't help but love Colt, Zee, her friends, and his brothers. Even the unlikable characters are intriguing.

Sweet, steamy, angsty, sexy, emotional, romantic, and fast-paced, *Things Left Unsaid* is a compelling read highly recommended for fans of childhood friends-to-foes, friends-to-lovers, contract marriages, marriages of convenience, small-town romances, family-centered romance, small-town romances, romantic suspense.

Lacy Hill



SEPT 13-14, 2024
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Noir Party
50+ Authors
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11:30 am to 4:00 pm

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Sept. 13 - 14, 2024



Historical Romance

Reviews

A Gamble at Sunset

Vanessa Riley

Kensington

E-book

978-1420154887

☆☆☆

A Gamble at Sunset is the start of a new series about the daughters of a coal entrepreneur, the Wilcoxes, whose options have been limited by their financial ruin after the eldest daughter's failed marriage to a gambling wastrel. When they are befriended by the powerful Duke of Torrance, they have the ability to improve their situation, including making favorable marriages. The situation is complicated by Geor-

gina getting caught in a compromising position, a passionate kiss in the garden, with the third son of a marquess, Lord Mark Sebastian, a dreamy music composer with aspirations to write an award winning arrangement. The Duke hatches a scheme for a fake engagement, although Lord Mark is already very smitten with Georgina. Georgina understands the gamble they would be undertaking together, as she is black and many in the *ton* fail to hide their prejudice against her race and her origins as a tradesman's daughter. However, can she ignore what her heart is telling her?

A Gamble at Sunset is refreshing with its distinctive writing, characters and storyline. It examines the lives

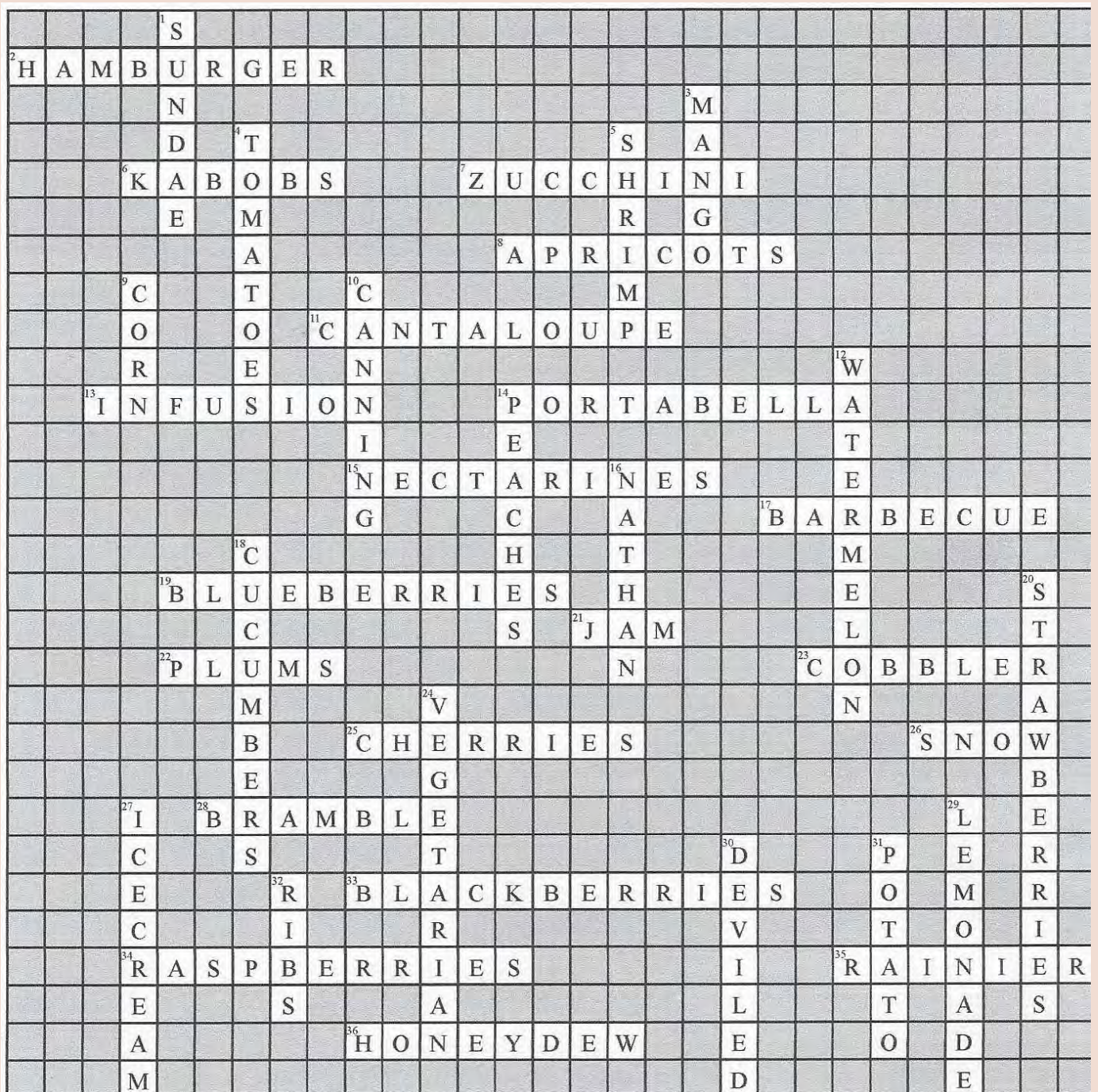
of black Britons and the impact of racism and classicism on relationships. Although there are plenty of witty, lighter moments, there is also a lot of *pathos* and angst in this novel, as the sisters have faced their share of troubles.

Georgina is a strong-minded person, very loving and devoted to her family, and extremely practical. She rightly has reservations about a relationship with Mark, but some readers may not like how much she fights her feelings for him. Mark is a gentle hero with an artistic heart. He falls deeply for Georgina, but also has to acknowledge that their world would not be as kind and accepting of their match. He is forced to realize that if he wants Geor-

Historical

gina, he has to be willing to fight society and his family for her. He evolves over the book more so than Georgina as he has to move forward in his inner maturity if he wants a life with her. The writing did feel disjointed at times, and it took a while to get into the feel of the prose, but the unique feel really makes an impact. The characters are well-developed, and feel like real people with all their flaws and beauty, and the family focused storyline is so heart-warming. A very nuanced and complex romance that gives readers so much to ponder and experience, *A Gamble at Sunset* is a promising start to a new series worth following.

Danielle Hill



Paranormal Romance Reviews

Fantasy

Vampires

Shape Shifters

Time Travel

Werewolves...

Crimson Moon Hideaway: Skin Deep

Jennifer Wedmore

Celtic Hearts Press

E-book

B0CW1GXM9J

★★★★★

Stephen was venturing out of Black Hollow for the first time. His cousin Derrick and his fiancée Raveena were headed to Crimson Moon Hideaway to check out the resort as a possible honeymoon destination. Somehow, he was along for the ride, but he wasn't comfortable being in public as a former cursed human, also known as a zombie. Then he saw her, he knew right away she was the one, but would she love a zombie?

Verise missed the Deep Blue Sea Expo but decided to check out the resort anyway. What she didn't expect to happen was that her Selkie skin was stolen, no one knew what happened and she met the possible love of her life. Could the best thing that ever happened to her, be at the same time, as the worst? Could she learn to live as a human or would she find her Selkie hide and go back to the sea?

Skin Deep is a Crimson Moon



Hideaway/Black Hollow crossover story that can be read as a standalone but would be enjoyed more if you're at least acquainted with Black Hollow. This story deals with learning to be comfortable in your own skin and loving who you are. I really enjoyed revisiting with Derrick, Raveena and Stephen and meeting Verise. A magical romance.

D. Antonio

Masquerade

O.O. Sangoyomi

Tor Publishing Group

E-book

978-1250904294

★★★★ 1/2

Òdòdó has the humblest of origins, the daughter of a blacksmith, a class of women who are rejected by men and their society. Her life is grueling—the only beauty is the flowers she makes from metal scraps. When she is abducted by a vagrant who takes a fancy to her to be his bride, she realizes that he is the King of Yorùbáland. Òdòdó is torn between love for her mother and the allure that being the bride of a king poses. She must make difficult choices, face political and court intrigue, physical danger, emotional devastation, and increasingly harrowing circumstances to realize her destiny.

Masquerade is an epic story of a young woman in the process of discovering who she is, the potential she

holds, and the unexpected power inside of her. Readers will learn about the pre-colonial history of the Yorùbáland empire in an engaging and emotional tale. While this is not straight fantasy, there is a mythical feel to the storytelling, where gods subtly interact with humans and influence their events and society. The human drama is a central theme of this novel, as Òdòdó has to learn to navigate the uncertain environment where one's life and wellbeing lies in the hands of a mercurial leader and those who have the most influence over him and in the court. Òdòdó emotions and thought processes, and character growth is vividly portrayed as she goes through the proverbial storm, where concepts of love, loyalty and devotion are put to the test in every way. *Masquerade* will take readers through a thought-provoking and emotionally impactful journey as they experience Òdòdó's intense self-discovery.

Danielle Hill

Wings of Dusk

R.K. Lilley

R.K. Lilley, LLC

Hardcover

978-1628780630

★★★★

R.K. Lilley's *Wings of Dusk* explores the forbidden relationship between stoic and reserved guardian



Across the Big Ocean

Escaping the famine in Ireland brings a young girl and her family on a journey and adventure across the big ocean.

Little Horses

Pepper becomes a mom, and realizes that keeping Bucky safe and sound is all part of the journey a mother takes as she deals with a curious horse who will have to learn how to get along with others.



The Adventures of Charlie and Ellie

The humorous and not-so humorous escapades of Charlie, a Boston Terrier, and Ellie, an Australian Shepherd as they go about their days knowing they have each others' backs.

Affy and Milo

A lonely Pekin duck meets a new friend and learns survival skills.



EsterLopez.com

[@EsterLopez1](https://www.instagram.com/EsterLopez1)



Battle and his strong-willed and curious chosen Venefica as she prepares to discover and embrace her divine purpose.

Lilley's unique storytelling and writing style capture your imagination from the intriguing beginning of her character-driven novel. She draws you into the story with fascinating, likable, relatable, conflicted, and complex characters you can't help but care about and become invested in their lives. Her detailed and vivid descriptions result in lovely worldbuilding that makes you feel like you are with the characters in each moment.

Although the story and its pacing start low-key and almost mundane, they gradually build intensity in step with the story's conflict and the transformation of Venefica and Battle's relationship.. These scenes also further Lilley's multilayered, complex story, laying the foundation for the intricate mythology of the Arcane world she reveals.

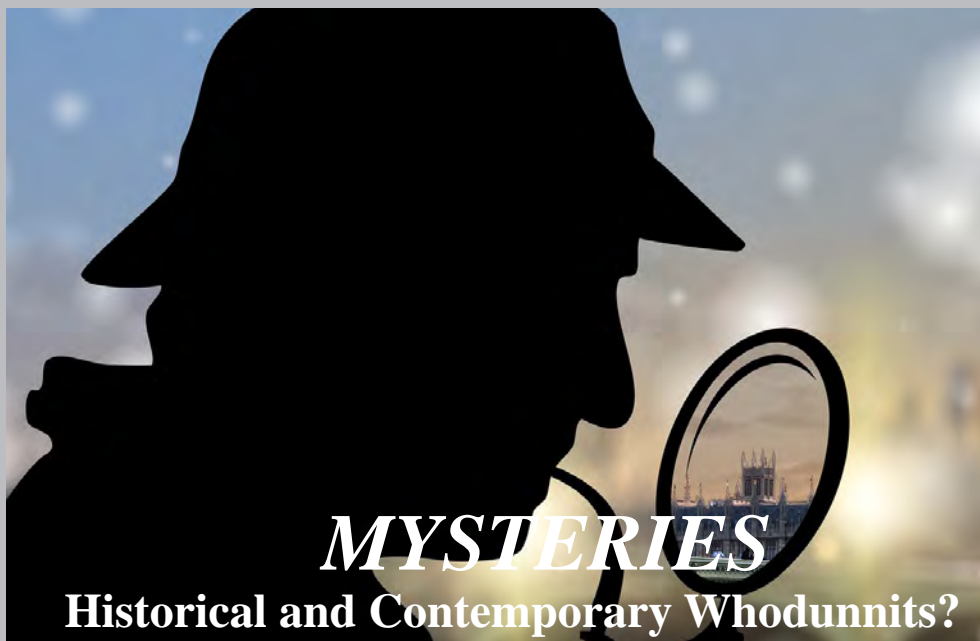
Readers will love Battle and Venefica's relationship and the strength of their connection. Their conversations

and banter are funny, emotional, and sometimes intense. Battle is so patient with Venefica, the story's first-person POV character. She is far too curious for her own good. They always try to protect, support, and give each other what they need, even when the other is stubbornly resistant to accepting their help. By writing solely from Venefica's POV, Lilley creates an excellent working partnership unbalanced by an intensely charged interpersonal relationship with so much pining, longing, and repressed desire. The intensity of repressed emotion and sexually charged energy/interest between them is something to behold. Though they do a pretty good job of hiding their interest and how much their feelings for each other have crossed the line between chosen and guardian into something more. And when those barriers come down, the heat and fire are out of control! Unsurprisingly, things get seriously steamy, passionate, and hot between them. Lilley skillfully balances the emotional and

sexual aspects of these scenes.

Emotionally intense, steamy, funny, sexy, suspenseful, fast-paced, and captivating, *Wings of Dusk* is a dystopian fantasy romance perfect for fans of forbidden love, touch-her-and-die, supernatural powers, guardian warrior MMCs, forced proximity/close quarters, soulmates, magic, and bodyguard romances.

Lacy Hil



MYSTERIES

Historical and Contemporary Whodunnits?

Echo Road (Mercy Kilpatrick #9)

Kendra Elliot & Melinda Leigh

Montlake

E-book

B0CLL19GYF

★★★★★

When two cross-country cases collide, Bree Taggart and Mercy Kilpatrick join forces to catch a serial killer in an addictive novel of suspense by bestselling authors Melinda Leigh and Kendra Elliot.

During a vicious heat wave, a county maintenance worker stumbles upon two suspicious suitcases abandoned by the side of the road. Sheriff Bree Taggart responds to find two bodies stuffed inside the luggage. The press demands action. The community is on edge. Suddenly, Bree is at the center of a media firestorm.

In Oregon, a senator's daughter goes missing. FBI Special Agent Mercy Kilpatrick agrees to keep the politically sensitive case on the down-low. When she finds a link between the disappearance and a double homicide three thousand miles away, Mercy takes the next plane out—and lands right in the middle of Bree's double homicide investigation.

To save the missing girl, Bree

and Mercy must work together to stop a killer who's playing deadly games with the press and stirring up public rage. Hungry for notoriety, he dares Bree and Mercy to catch him before he kills again.

Two of my favorite female crime-fighters meet in a twisted case that takes Mercy Kilpatrick to upstate NY and Bree Taggart's territory. They need to work together to find a sick killer who is convinced he is smarter than these two very smart women. They convince him otherwise.

This book kept me nailed to my seat and flipping pages. This is a fast-paced thriller.

D. Antonio

Ladykiller

Katharine Wood

Bantam

978-0593726440 Hardcover

978-0593726457 E-Book

★★★★★

The lives of the uber-wealthy in this thriller are certainly not carefree. While Papa Hugo Torres was an ultra-successful oil and energy mogul, his bevy of wives and his neglected children saw a less engaging side of him.

Daughter Gia was the author of one successful novel years before and hasn't done much besides travel, party,

and indulge in serial marriages since. Her best friend, Abby Corman, is the daughter of the Torres' former cook. Papa Hugo took her under his wing and provided the same privileged education he provided his own children. Gia, Abby, and Gia's brother Ben were bosom buddies growing up. Though they went separate ways, they more or less stay connected.

Now Gia has invited Abby and Ben to visit a luxury resort in Sweden to celebrate her thirtieth birthday. Gia doesn't understand that as an associate in a law firm, Abby can't just take off on a whim. But Abby manages to go and is delightfully reunited with Ben, whom she hasn't seen in a long time. Then things start to go wrong. Gia doesn't show up and keeps texting with excuses that don't ring quite true. Abby and Ben suspect there's something unsavory going on.

The new book Gia is working on provides clues to the difficulties she's facing—ones that she hasn't divulged to the others. Can they trust Gia's most recent husband? What about the friends living off her largesse in her Greek island estate? Troubles pile upon troubles but one thing is perfectly clear. There is danger in this seeming paradise.

Ladykiller is an exciting mystery and a glimpse into the darker side of the lives of the rich and famous.

Hannah Rowan

Peking Duck and Cover (A Noodle Shop Mystery)

Vivien Chen

St. Martin's Press

Mass Market

978-1250338778

★★★★★

In the latest installment in the "Noodle Shop Mystery" series, Lana Lee once again finds herself inadvertently confronted with a murder.

As Cleveland's Asia Village prepares for an epic Chinese New

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Year celebration, Lana Lee is tasked with making sure the event goes off without a hitch. Not only does she have to make sure the family restaurant, the Ho-Lee Noodle House, is prepared for the crowds, she has to

The Scented Cipher (A Nora Black Midlife Psychic Mystery Book 9)

Renee George

Barkside of the Moon Press

E-book

B0CZQTN2T7

★★★★★

My name is Nora Black, local shop owner and part-time psychic consultant in the resort town of Garden Cove. When an anonymous letter in the local paper exposes my extrasensory secret, our normally idyllic town is plagued by a series of mysterious accidents, and I find myself drawn into a deadly game of cat and mouse.

A cunning killer has targeted me by planting scent clues to a murder he plans to commit. His clues are muddy, but the message is clear: Catch me before I kill.

Thankfully, I won't have to piece together the puzzle alone. With my best friends Gilly and Pippa and my sweetheart Detective Ezra Holden by my side, we'll sniff out the trail of the would-be killer.

As the danger escalates, I'll have to rely on my unique ability to decipher the clues and outsmart my devious foe before it's too late.

Somebody out there has it in for Nora, and now she has to sniff out the culprit. This brings the danger close to home. This story had me biting my nails and flipping pages. This may be the best in the series to date.

D. Antonio

deal with nosy neighbors, such as the Mahjong Matrons, and Ian, the overbearing man in charge. The timing, the performers, the decorations, and the food all need to be exceptional.

Everything goes fine until one of the lion dancers is found dead, shot during a fireworks display just before the troupe is scheduled to go on stage. Could one of the dancers have been concerned that the newcomer might overshadow her? Could a former lover of the victim's boyfriend have been acting out of jealousy? Lana is left to sort through several sinister scenarios while threats continue to plague others.

Lana's boyfriend, Ian, a detective, is somewhat resigned to her

tendency to get involved in these situations as an amateur sleuth. Can she possibly solve the case and stop the killer before the police do?

Peking Duck and Cover presents enough red herrings to keep the reader guessing about the identity of the bad guy. Lana's relationships dealing with intrusive family members, customers, and neighbors add an extra humorous touch to the story.

Hannah Rowan





The Cheesemaker's Daughter

Kristin Vukovic

Regalo Press

979-8888454008 Trade Paperback

979-8888454015 E-Book

★★★★

In her early 20s, Marina Marzic's father shipped her off to America to keep her safe during the Yugoslavian civil war. She adapted, went to work in marketing, and married. Her marriage floundered after she lost a baby in her second trimester, and she discovered her husband was cheating on her.

Now, in 2013, when her father tells her the family cheese business on the island of Pag in Croatia is in trouble, it's almost a relief to travel back to her hometown and immerse herself in the business she grew up in.

Marina has no idea how long she intends to stay and doesn't want to tell her family the truth about her failing marriage. She struggles to keep up the quality of Pag cheese in spite of rivalries with other farms, tension between the North and South sections of the island, aging equipment, and the inability

to meet their bills. Her life is also complicated by old family rivalries and encounters with a former beau, and the betrayal of people she trusted.

Once her family discovers the secret about her marriage, they encourage her to overlook her husband's indiscretions and go back to him. At the same time, her mother and grandmother pressure her for babies, not knowing the heartache she still suffers over the loss of her child.

Marina has to do some soul-searching about her future, but for the present she focuses all of her energy on making the best cheese possible so she can win awards that could save her family's company.

This story is set in a background and time period not often explored, but the emotions and relationships provide an intensity of feelings that are relatable in any time and place.

Hannah Rowan

The Days I Loved You Most

Amy Neff

Park Row Books

978-0778310471 Hardcover

BOCGVJ1K78 E-Book

★★★★

Evelyn and Joseph are childhood sweethearts who have been together over 60 years. Together they run the inherited Oyster Shell Inn in Bernard Beach, Connecticut. When Evelyn is diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, the couple shock their children with their startling plan to live one more year before taking their lives. Naturally, their three grown children object to the idea, each approaching it in their own way. But Joseph stands firm in his intentions, unable to imagine going on without Evelyn, while she is determined to end her life before the disease becomes totally disabling.

The story follows the couple from their youth, when Joseph and Evelyn's brother Tommy enlisted in the service during World War II, through separation when Evelyn is sent to a

Booty

boarding school in Boston, through the ups and downs of their marriage to the point where they reach their surprising plan and beyond.

The Days I Loved You Most is an unusual, heartwarming story in spite of its somewhat grim premise. The characters are engaging and the challenges and family dynamics they face are realistic.

Hannah Rowan

Desperation Reef

T. Jefferson Parker

Forge

978-1250907882 Hardcover

978-1250907899 E-Book

☆☆☆☆

The Stonebreaker twins come from a surfing family in Southern California. Their parents were big wave surfers before the twins were born. Their father lost his life under a huge wave in a competition, and their mother hasn't taken part since. Instead, she runs the Barrell, a beach-side bar and restaurant.

Casey Stonebreaker fishes by day to supply the restaurant and tends bar there at night. He models between surfing competitions. He is devoutly religious in contrast to his twin, Brock, a cult leader with his own brand of religion, leading his followers to help in disaster areas throughout the world.

When out on the Pacific, Casey comes across members of a cartel slicing fins from sharks then returning the defenseless creatures to the ocean to die. He photographs this illegal activity intending to report the pirates, which puts him on the wrong side of this powerful gang.

Brock's endeavors also put him in the crosshairs of a white supremacist group who object to an encampment Brock has set up to house the homeless and immigrant families.

Danger abounds as their ene-

mies threaten the Stonebreaker family and their restaurant. Jen, Casey, and Brock prepare for the next big wave competition, the first Jen will enter in years, but their lives are in danger from more than the surf.

Suspense, danger, romance, and family ties blend into a breathtaking story that also gives a glimpse into the world of big wave surfing.

Hannah Rowan

Kyd's Game

Marc Rosenberg

Vine Leaves Press

E-book

B0CXLSZBC2

☆☆☆☆

Neil Kyd thought he had retired from the CIA and could settle down on his farm. His young daughter has a terminal illness that now has a chance when a last mission has come to his door. With the promise of an experimental cure for his daughter, he takes on a mission into Russia in trade for his services.

Betrayal shows up early with an assassination, pinning the blame on Kyd that sets him on the run along with a woman, another agent he knew in Russia. They are on the run to find an information disk that contains terrible information about a secret attack in another country. It's hide-n-seek for a while and then, for some reason, the Russian police hold back; now they know they are to find the disk before being arrested.

The betrayal is on several levels as he loses his partner while on the run, afterwards, he obtains the disk.

The story carries well; the adventure is plausible with some fair plot twists. There are moments that seem too good to be true, or too convenient. However, it's definitely a page-turner and this reader wanted to keep reading on. This a stand-alone story.

Lauren Calder

The Looney Bin

Stan Kapuchinski

Self-published

E-book

B0CHFXXT93

☆☆☆☆

Jack, a psychiatrist, works at the Palm University Mental Health Clinic. His day was going fine until one of his patients pulls a gun while in session. After a short time of angst the patient puts the gun away as he leaves saying he will not cooperate and the gun is only a fake.

This incident unnerves Jack for a long time. In the coming days, it will almost ruin his relationship with his wife. In the meantime, he goes to work with a myriad of other doctors and employees. Each has their own style of care, a few totally believing they are effective in their own unique ways—one who has therapies with the word of God, one who uses tarot cards and another who is God's gift to women. All trudge on sometimes forgetting standard practices have good reasons.

The story gets interesting quickly; it will follow Jack and his life in the clinic and home. The story parallels almost equally with other doctors' stories at the clinic and their patients as you move chapter to chapter. The author offers a unique perspective into the profession showing everyone is different even when their job is the same. There is no implication in this work of fiction that this is typical in these clinics, it is just a good story with drama mixed in with some dry humor.

Lauren Calder



It Came From the Trees

Ally Russell

Random House Children's Books

E-book

9780593646977

☆☆☆ 1/2

Jenna was so excited to go on a wilderness hike with her best friend Reese and the Cottontail Scouts in the Sturbridge Reservation. She's always been at home in the wilderness as the granddaughter of the first black Ranger in the area. But this hike becomes a nightmare when her friend is kidnapped by a creature who can only be Bigfoot, and no one believes her. Weeks later, she's back with a different troop, determined to help get Reese home, and she soon finds out that the creature has been waiting for her return. Can Jenna band together with her newfound comrades, as the creature seeks new prey?

It Came from the Trees is a genuinely frightening tale of survival. The young protagonists are facing existential danger from the violent creature

who lurks in the woods. Bigfoot is not a friendly entity in this story, instead exuding a visceral menace that taints the atmosphere of the woods. Jenna's suffering is portrayed sensitively, yet authentically, through debut author Ally Russell's effective writing. The sense of grief and guilt that Jenna feels adds an emotional weight to the story as she's determined to keep believing her friend is alive and to bring her home. Her decision to withdraw from others emotionally due to her unresolved issues from her friend's disappearance is challenged as she meets a group of young scouts who are kind and decent, and who start to become important to her. Readers will feel like they are in the forest, walking in Jenna and the other troops' shoes. The sense of danger and foreboding is tangible, and the atmosphere stays tense throughout.

The story also touches on systemic racism in which the disappearance of brown and black children is not treated with the same urgency as white children and the bigotry exhibited towards Jenna and Reese as black

children by the previous, predominantly white scout group. Jenna's assertions that her friend was stolen are dismissed, and her character and that of her friend is called into question because of her race. This hits the reader as a double blow, along with the very real jeopardy faced by both girls, as a result. *It Came from the Trees* is a phenomenal debut novel that offers legitimate horror as well as emotional tension from beginning to end. Ally Russell has brought a higher level of terror and relevance to the Bigfoot legend for a postmillennial audience.

Danielle Hill

Late!

Didn't quite make in the last issue



Includes all genre and all time periods

Can't Block My Love (Hockey Gods #1)

Xavier Neal

Xavier Neal

E-Book

978-1704227577

☆☆☆☆

The lives of former childhood friends unexpectedly collide in Xavier Neal's *Can't Block My Love* when Remington Ronald Rutledge III (Ren) and Poppy agree to help each other after he jeopardizes his chances of playing hockey this season after all these years.

Poppy is more than capable of standing up to Ren. She doesn't back down or let him get away with treating her with a lack of respect. She also calls him out on his lack of respect for other women. Unfortunately, Poppy doesn't cope well in social situations and isn't extremely comfortable with people. She loves her cats and the animals she works with at the shelter.

Poppy and Ren's relationship develop through a number of ways and love scenes. From their first interaction, Ren and Poppy's banter flows between them so quickly, funny, and enjoyable to read. As they spend time together and get to know each other again, the connection between them reforms, renews, and strengthens. He's so good to and for her as she is for him. Ren and Poppy talk to each other, share dreams, and support each other. They can comfortably be themselves together.

Neal's active and down-to-earth writing, and colorful dialogue draw readers into her intriguing multi-layered romance. At first, you can't imagine how Neal could make Ren likable, let alone deserve Poppy. But she did that! And, well before the book was halfway over, investing you in the characters, their lives, and the story. She deftly develops her fascinating, messy, fallible, conflicted, relatable, and likable characters through humorous and emotional interactions and conversations featuring colorful

dialogue.

While some characters' language and behavior are outrageously sexist, offensive, and trashy, the overall themes and story are absorbing, thoughtful, angsty, entertaining, and worthwhile if you can get past that content. Hilarious, raunchy, steamy, sweet, emotional, and fast-paced, *Can't Block My Love*, is an entertaining read that should appeal to fans of grumpy x sunshine, forced proximity, interracial romance, childhood friends reconnecting, opposites attract, fake relationships, and bad boy/good girl romances.

Lacy Hill

Hard to Fake (Denver Kodiaks #1)

Piper Lawson

Piper Lawson Books

E-Book

978-1998947165

☆☆☆☆

Social media influencer Brooke Ellis learns her ex is one of her sorority sister's dates for her sorority's reunion weekend. She asks her brother's basketball teammate/best friend to be her fake boyfriend and come with her to the reunion. He agrees even though she's off-limits to him because he wants to help her and protect her from her ex.

Lawson establishes Miles and Brooke's friendship/relationship as separate from his friendship with her brother. He loves pushing her buttons and getting under her skin but also takes it upon himself to look out for and protect her. She stands up to him and likes getting under his skin equally. Their banter and snark are funny, sexy, and essentially foreplay. An intense chemistry simmers between Brooke and Miles that becomes difficult to ignore and deny once they spend time pretending to be girlfriend and boyfriend. Lawson smoothly transitions Miles and Brooke's relationship from friends to lovers with humorous and snarky banter, sweet, sexy, and steamy interactions, and an intimate, heated love scene that reveals their characters while furthering the plot. Their first kiss

Late!

is sexy and steamy.

Brooke and Miles are sweet, kind, authentic, likable, and thoughtful people who genuinely care about the people in their lives and try to advocate and look out for them. A perfect match, they balance, support, and encourage each other to be their best and follow their dreams. With more in common than either knows, each struggles to be loved and respected for more than their outward accomplishments and appearances. But they also keep secrets from people in their lives. However, they grow comfortable enough with each other to be vulnerable and share those secrets. Lawson terrifically explores the double standards and pressures on Brooke that her brother doesn't have to deal with regarding her reputation and the image she presents.

Brooke consistently stands up for the people in her life and the world around her to be viewed and treated fairly beyond superficial attributes such as appearance and bank accounts. Hopefully, as the series progresses, she will use this fire to champion and protect herself. Lawson nominally touches on the challenges of being Black in a white sorority through her character, Brooke. Unfortunately, without brief context clues and this discussion, readers are left wondering whether Brooke is Black. Lawson barely describes Lawson's appearance, focusing more on Miles'. Although it barely affects the story, for readers for whom a Black heroine is a draw, her description/development matters.

Despite the novel's short length, Lawson explores fascinating and significant topics. *Hard to Fake* is the first of three connected books about this couple's relationship. Sweet, steamy, hilarious, sexy, and emotional, *Hard to Fake* is a quick entertaining read that draws readers in from the opening.

Lacy Hill

Unbroken Heroes #3

The Hero She Craves

Anna Hackett

Anna Hackett

Mass Market

978-1923134191

☆☆☆☆

In Anna Hackett's romantic suspense, *The Hero She Craves*, Marine biologist Halle Bradshaw boards former Navy Seal/covert ops team member Lorenzo "Ren" Santoro's research ship for a top-secret Navy research project trip. This tests his determination to stay away from her. She's the off-limits woman of his dreams he can't stop thinking about—his best friend/mentor's daughter. Unexpectedly, troubling things happen to Halle, suggesting someone's targeting her highly classified project.

He keeps her safe until they abandon ship with a relentless enemy pursuing them through the sea into a jungle-covered island. Forced together under dangerous circumstances, Ren and Halle cannot continue denying and hiding their connection, attraction, and feelings for each other. Neither can Ren persist in pretending that his demons aren't keeping him from having peace or being happy. Halle's heart desires Ren, and she refuses to give up on him. They must stay alive and survive what's coming for them so that she can convince him to take a chance on love.

Funny, charming, strong, and stubborn, Ren is a tough, skilled, retired soldier burdened with baggage from his military career. Ren has tried to avoid Halle, believing he's not good enough for her. After their kiss one night, Ren wants more from her than he could ever hope to deserve. But Ren's never stopped wanting her. A 23-year-old post-graduate, Halle loves her work, the ocean, and Ren. Halle is intelligent, hardworking, and stubborn, and because of how she lost her mom, she chooses to live her life without regrets and takes risks. Halle knows what she

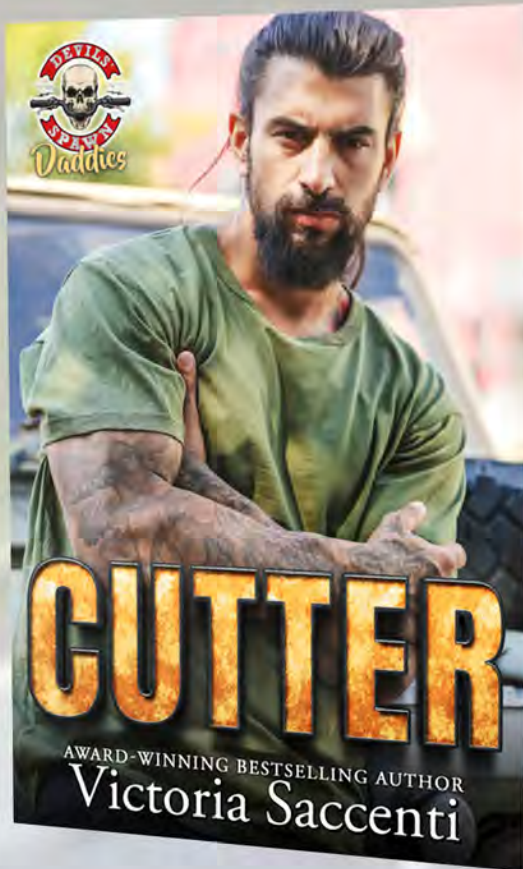
wants and goes after it, and she wants Ren.

Hackett's active writing and storytelling style draw the reader into the novel and the characters' lives, keeping them invested until the last scene. Her vibrant and detailed descriptions immerse the reader with the characters. Halle and Ren are authentic, complex, conflicted, relatable, and likable. Hackett develops them through humorous, charged conversations, interactions, intimate moments, and intensely emotional, sensual, and steamy love scenes that reveal and evolve their characters and further the plot. Her colorful and natural-sounding dialogue suits her characters, setting, and theme.

Halle and Ren desire each other and have deep feelings for one another. Their profound connection and fiery and intense chemistry are displayed by their charged conversations and interactions. Halle and Ren make a perfect match. She's strong and fearless, trusts him implicitly, listens to him, and encourages him to talk about his feelings and demons. She helps him find peace, happiness, and contentment. He puts her needs first, respects, protects, and keeps her safe and alive.

Hackett's thrilling, well-constructed action sequences keep readers on the edge of their seats. She terrifically balances the book's romance and suspense. Emotional, sweet, steamy, hilarious, sexy, suspenseful, fast-paced, and action-packed, *The Hero She Craves* is a perfect romance for fans of touch-her-and-die, crush/perceived unrequited, age gap, forbidden love, best friend's daughter, exotic locales, military, and action/adventure romances.

Lacy Hill



The cops label him “trouble” on sight.

Between the Devils' Spawn MC cut on his back and the blood on his hands, Cutter isn't surprised he's landed in police custody for doing the right thing—again. The pretty cop who slapped cuffs on him years ago walks into the interrogation room, only now she's a detective.

Emily Mayhew knew Cutter was innocent back then, but as a rookie she could only watch him be railroaded straight to jail. Now she needs his help. The Sons of Chaos MC is running guns, drugs, and humans—and they can smell “cop” a mile away.

Infiltrating this gang requires the real deal. It also requires a tight perimeter of secrecy to keep her jealous colleagues' dirty fingers out of it. Working with Cutter, the man who fuels her most sensuous submissive dreams, will be the adrenaline rush of Emily's life.

18+ DD/Mg dynamics

Devils' Spawn Daddies



He pushed her away for her own safety. Instead, he made her a target.

With another joint investigation with the Garden City police department under way, the Devils' Spawn MC has finally left its outlaw past behind and gone legit. Yet Barron Priestly would bet his Devils' Spawn cut that the danger isn't over. Which makes his regret for pushing Yoanni Sanz away sting that much harder.

Yoanni hoped a long leave of absence would cure her ache for Barron. Instead, the memory of passion they shared is just as vivid as the pain of its ending. A series of escalating threats sharpens her loneliness to fear—until Barron steps in to reclaim his place at her side. And Yoanni's inner Little weeps for joy.

But with danger hiding in plain sight, the next attack could come from anywhere—and no bubble of protection is without its weaknesses...

VictoriaSaccentiWrites.com