

January/February 2024

Affaire de Coeur

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Valentine Favorites



Pam Binder



Deborah Camp



Affaire de Coeur

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January/February, 2024

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Editorial

by Louise B. Snead

I cannot believe we rolled up on another year. 2023 went by so fast and, quite honestly, I was glad to see it go. It's my sincere hope that the things that made 2023 negative—war, crime, strikes (or the necessity for them), all the isms, inflation, and the losses of family members and friends—are in our rearview mirrors.

I am optimistic for 2024, and I look at the new year as a clean slate. I set goals (I prefer not to call them resolutions) without knowing whether they are doable or not, but having faith that they will somehow get done. I try to learn something every single day. My lessons come from all corners of the Earth and from all age groups. One thing I've learned this year is that no matter how desperate my plight seems, there is always someone who is worse off, someone who would really appreciate an act of kindness from you.

I am hoping we as a people become more patient, more tolerant, and more charitable. I am also depending on us, not only to be more appreciative of each other and the positive happening in our lives, but to show and/or tell those who make it happen. There is no smile prettier than the one you get when you've done something nice for someone because it warms you as well as the person who smiled.

I have great friends and good co-workers. They are supportive, helpful, and kind enough to laugh at my foibles. I can only hope I can be all of those things to them. Admittedly, I don't tell them often enough how important they are to me. So, I will grab this opportunity and thank Pam, Sheila (who has been with AdC since 2002), Lani, Hannah, Lacy, and Danielle. They are my 'ride or die', without whom AdC would not have existed.

Most importantly of all, I am going to ask you to take care of yourself. Your health is important. Don't stay away from a doctor because you are afraid of what they might tell you. Give them a chance by seeing them

soon enough to detect problems early. Pamper yourself with massages, facials, or a full spa day. You deserve it! Take that road trip or mini-vacation you have denied yourself for so long. Treat yourself like you would treat your grandchild. Stop criticizing yourself.

If you can, rescue an animal. On Christmas Eve, I learned there was a 'kill list' to be carried out on 16 large dogs on January 2nd. The reason? Too many big dogs. On New Year's Eve, I dragged my daughter and my husband to the shelter and selected one of their 'primary' dogs, scheduled to die in two days. My timing was lousy. I had things to do before I was ready to adopt. I really didn't care what breed. I didn't care how old he or she was. My goal was to save a life. Meet Niko, formerly known as Einstein. He is one of the smartest, most beautiful, sweet tempered dogs I have ever seen. He is a joy! My chiweenie has already given him the rules according to her, and I am already spoiling him rotten. Please give them a chance. Their only sin was to be born big.



For it to be the shortest month, February is a month chocked full of holidays and occasions to celebrate--Black History Month, Chinese New Year, Groundhog Day, Presidents Lincoln and Washington's birthday, and Valentine's Day. Think of February as a metaphor for celebrating multicutures, animals, history and love. Why can't we celebrate these things all year?

If I may borrow from *Hamil-*

ton, I ask you to raise a glass to all the possibilities 2024 has to offer. I hope the best of everything comes your way but, if not, you can shrug your shoulders and move on. On behalf of the staff of *Affaire de Coeur* and myself, Happy New Year!



Dear QWERTY

by Pamela Ackerson

Social Proof



Social Proof

What is it?

Well, it's just another newfangled name for 'word-of-mouth'.

It's all under the concept of marketing. A good

marketing plan will include word-of-mouth promotions.

Get people talking about it! If no one knows your product exists then no one can talk about it.

It is one of the most basic in the list of marketing plans and is one of the most important actions needed to make a successful campaign.

You've heard the expression of "going viral." You've heard people talking about using influencers to market their products. That is adding the polish onto word-of-mouth advertising. Potential buyers are relying on the opinions of others to influence their decisions on whether or not to purchase something. The goal is to have your product recommended by these promoters to reach their followers and convince them to click on the buy button.

So let's see if we can throw some estimates out there for you.

- Over 90% of people trust recommendations from family and friends.
- Over 85% of viewers/readers trust personal reviews over advertising. Consequently it's the reason why Amazon puts so much importance on buyer reviews.
- Word-of-Mouth = Social Proof
- Over 90% of the shoppers only need a handful (let's say a dozen) of reviews. They really don't go deeper. Most will look at the positive reviews and a couple of the negative reviews. Don't fool yourself. If you have negative reviews, they will read them

Where the need for the hundreds or thousands of reviews came from doesn't make marketing sense. If you have

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hundreds of reviews, most buyers will only look at the most recent positive and negative reviews. Your goal should be keeping the reviews positive.

I'm sure you've heard or read about how Amazon will promote you for free if you have "so-and-so" amount of reviews. The reality is that will only promote you if your reviews are 4.5 and higher, and you're making a lot of sales. It's not in their interest to promote someone for free just because the seller has 100 reviews and an average 4 star rating. Unless you want to pay for it. Negative reviews, obviously, don't benefit you as the seller. That means you need to keep the buyers happy because those bad reviews will hurt your chances of the next sale.

I'm sure somewhere along the line, you've gone to a shopping channel where they're harping, "over one million sold". What they're saying is to trust those buyers, so you should buy, too.

Another good example, waiting lists. Waiting lists create a need and desire. Authors want to get into a book signing event, and a waiting list for readers to get into the event, or share a meal with authors. These waiting lists show that it's something the buyer wants to do. If people are waiting in line, then it must be awesome. They don't want to miss out. They want in! So, here's to you getting people to "Talk About It". You've got yourself a great book, spread the word.



The Spotlight is Shining on Ms. January

PAM BINDER



Pam Binder Carves Bestselling Niche in Time

First came Pam Binder's imaginary friend – a dragon – when she was three. Five years later the precocious child tumbled down a flight of stairs and had a near-death, out-of-body experience. And always, in the background, influencing the girl who would one day become a nationally bestselling author was her eccentric, artistic grandmother. During Binder's formative years, New Orleans' Irene Zollinger took delight in exposing her granddaughter to the joy of the arts and the mystique of the historic French Quarter.

Looking back, Pam Binder knows that, by the time she was nine years old and attending New Orleans' 200-year-old Ursuline Academy, the die was cast. As a result of these unique, early life influences on her impressionable mind, she was destined to cultivate her God-given talent as a writer, in a most unusual style. One day she would gift readers across the country with unique stories richly textured with time-bending flights of fantasy, other-worldliness and a reverence for history.

Now an award-winning *New York Times*, *USA Today* and Amazon bestselling author based in suburban Seattle, Pam has eleven novels and seven novellas to her credit. Drawn to Celtic legends and anything Irish or Scottish, the prolific author blends historical events, characters, and myths into her young adult, romance, historical, time travel, contemporary and fantasy fiction.

Pam is president of the Pacific Northwest Writers Association and annually chairs the group's Pacific Northwest Writers Conference. Devoted to helping aspiring authors succeed, she teaches two year-long courses, "Write Your Story" and "After the First Draft." She also presents frequently at reader, writer and library conventions.



Pam Binder

Christmas Proposal

Christmas in the Castle

Time is an Illusion,
and Love, the Only Reality

Step back in time to Regency
England as the worlds of
an American heiress and an
English Duke collide.

PamBinder.com
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***Pam Binder is offering you a
Sneak Peek***

Excerpt

A Christmas Proposal by Pam Binder

Madeline Mercer is illegitimate, her mother, a brothel owner in America. At Madeline's boarding school, a professor threatens to expose their secret. So, Madeline's mother proposes that she marry an English nobleman, whose power could protect them from scandal. On the road to Conclarton Castle in Regency England, Madeline befriends a soldier and risks her mother's plans and her heart.

Robert Oswyn, Eighth Duke of Conclarton, never wanted the title. As the spare, he would marry for love. While fighting against Napoleon, he learns his father and elder brother are dead. Believing they were murdered, he returns from the Peninsular Wars and vows to find their killer. In the magical wintry days leading up to Christmas, Madeline helps him discover the truth, and her kindness, inner beauty, and desire to help others wins his love.

But will duty and secrets keep them apart?

An Affaire de Coeur



Chapter One

Boston, 1814

What a bumblebroth I've made of things.

It was not the first time Miss Madeline Louise Mercer had made that comment in the last twenty-four hours.

Gas lamps spread ribbons of cream-colored light on the street as Madeline stepped from the carriage that had transported her from Bradford Academy to the back entrance of The Feathers, Boston's most notorious brothel. She wore the latest fashion, a traveling ensemble of warm green velvet, with lace-and-satin-trimmed sleeves and a matching bonnet.

She paid the driver handsomely, assuring him he had indeed transported her to the right address, then left the worried man and entered a world she had hoped she would never see again.

The back entry's waiting room walls were wallpapered in red velvet. Paintings of half-naked men and women frolicked in meadows, above a marble bust of Bacchus, the Greek god of wine, and nude statues and busts of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses. A gold and crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling. Mahogany tables were polished to a high shine, and chairs and sofas were upholstered with red, black, and gold silk. The entry was a mere sampling of the opulent and decadent atmosphere that awaited an exclusive clientele. Her fellow students at the academy would be scandalized if they knew she was here. They judged without knowing. Her feelings were tumbled and confused, for this was home...the only one she had ever known.

Madeline removed her gloves, set down her satchel, and braced for a

world she hadn't seen in over ten years.

On the eve of her fourteenth birthday, her mother had sent her to boarding school at Ursuline Academy for girls in New Orleans. She had excelled and moved from there to more advanced courses at Bradford Academy, in Massachusetts, with instructions to keep this part of her life a secret. After her mother had made generous donations to Ursuline Academy and then Bradford, the administrators were willing to accept the story that her mother was the wealthy widow of a railroad tycoon. Once again, Madeline thrived and made friends.

But nothing lasts forever.

She had had an offer of marriage from the son of one of her professors, which she had declined. She was fond of him in the way a person was fond of a brother or a cherished cousin. She was not in love with him, nor was she seeking love. Her mother had lectured her on its follies and pitfalls. Madeline's father had abandoned her and her mother before Madeline was born, confirming that, for women, love came at a price at times too dear to pay.

Then an offer of a different sort from a married professor was made, and this time it came with threats. The threat was straightforward: accept his offer and become his mistress or he would reveal her mother's profession. For additional inducement, he promised he would recommend her for a teaching position at Bradford. She did not trust him any further than she could toss his pear-shaped hide.

Madeline had stalled, asked the professor if she could consider his offer for a fortnight, and then, needing her mother's advice, she had hired a carriage and returned home. Her mother was many things: the successful owner of an establishment too exclusive to be considered as a brothel, wise in managing her wealth, kind and generous with her employees, and above all, a loving mother. Her mother would also know how to handle the professor.

Madeline heard a commotion in the hallway: a heated argument between a gentleman and a lady. Then Madeline's mother's voice, lifted, strong and clear above the shouts and accusations, demanding that the gentleman leave at once or be tossed out on his ear.

Memories flooded back, rooting Madeline's feet to the thick carpeted floor.

Her mother had created a safe place for her girls, employing a physician to assist with pregnancies and diseases, hiring maids and cooks to assure the house was clean and the food of the highest quality, as well as loyal guards to protect the girls if her clientele became violent. The violence was the ugly side of her mother's business, and though her mother was reluctant to send Madeline away, she had felt she didn't have a choice.

Another reason for sending Madeline to boarding school was that there could be little hope of securing a suitable marriage for her if gentlemen, and their marriage-minded mamas, knew of her mother's occupation. In many ways, Boston's wealthy elite were not that different from England's *beau monde*.

Angry voices grew louder. More insults. More threats. Madeline heard a slap. A woman cried for mercy, prompting Madeline to wonder why a guard had not appeared. Perhaps he had been overpowered.

Worried for the safety of both the woman and her mother, Madeline scanned the area in the entry for something to use as a weapon. She reached for a bust of Zeus and ran toward the sound of her mother's voice.

The front room was dimly lit. In its center, a middle-aged man had his back turned toward Madeline. He hurled insults at Madeline's mother as he towered over a woman kneeling on the ground. The man was well-dressed, in a somber black coat and breeches, with tight, pumpkin-orange hose—his legs reminded Madeline of a pair of stuffed sausages.

I do not want my money returned. I want the baggage in my bed.



Her mother, in her signature red velvet evening gown, spoke soothingly, her countenance composed, as she helped the frightened woman stand. You know the rules of my establishment: chief among them is that you do not hit a woman. I have asked you to leave and never return.

I will ruin you! I will shut you down, but first... He reached for a side-arm.

Madeline saw the danger and did not hesitate. She swung the plaster bust and smashed it over the man's head. His mouth gaped open like that of a beached whale, and he slumped to his knees.

A large man, his mop of black hair falling over his forehead and almost to the bloody gash under his right eye, rushed down the stairs. Apologies, madam. Taking care of a congressman deep in his cup and wielding a knife. Had to tie him up before he caused harm. The girls are watching him. He took in the situation. The middle-aged man on his

knees, a woman with a bruised eye, and Madeline holding what was left of the bust. He nodded toward Madeline's mother. Want me to finish him off?

By all means, Liam. Do what you do best.

Liam balled up his fists and hit the man squarely in the nose, to render him unconscious, before he scooped the man up in his arms and slumped him on his shoulders like a bag of potatoes.

Her mother glanced toward her daughter. I see you haven't lost your grit. You were always the first one to leap into the fray.

You were a good influence.

I'll have this lowlife returned to his manor, Liam said. There will be calls to shut us down.

There always are, her mother said, almost under her breath, rubbing

the back of her neck as Liam headed toward the back entry. The women in the Temperance League will launch a new campaign. No matter that it is the men who need temperance, not us. But that is the way of the world.

Her mother was in her early forties, still trim and lovely, but for the first time Madeline noticed the dark circles under her mother's eyes. Mother, are you well? Were you harmed?

Her mother waved away Madeline's concern. Madeline, what did you use to hit the judge with?

Madeline held up a section of plaster that had once been a bust of Zeus, eying her mother more closely. Her mother's shoulders were rounded as though she carried a heavy burden, Madeline wanted to lift that burden, but she didn't know how to begin. Her mother was independent and prided herself on not needing anyone's help.

An Interview with Cover Model Golden Czermak

Brought to You by Debra Parmley



Debra: I'm excited today to be interviewing Golden Czermak, who knows the book cover business from every direction—cover model, photographer, and author. Welcome to Cover Model Corner, Golden. Let's jump right in.

What was the first cover you appeared on, and how did this come about?

Golden: My very first book cover was for *Mr. Right Now: Vol 3. Drink on Us*. By author HJ Bellus. The photograph was taken by my friend Randy Sewell (owner of RLS Models Photography). It was back when I first started down my path of fitness, also growing my own photography company at that same time.

Debra: You were off to a great start in so many directions at once! 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?

Golden: Somewhere exotic (and warm)! I love taking shots at the beach—the water lends itself well to motion and action, while the skies tend to add a great mood, especially at sunrise or

sunset.

Debra: I agree. There is nothing quite like the beach with the sea and sky and all the changing colors and moods. Beyond romance novel cover shots, what other projects or jobs keep you busy?

Golden: I'm primarily a romance book cover photographer; my brand is FuriousFotog®. Those sessions keep me busy along with my fitness routine. Additionally, I am also a cover designer and author myself—kind of an over-achiever, lol.

Debra: I first met you, as a photographer, before I learned you are also a cover model and author, and why I couldn't wait to interview you. I'm sure readers have seen your work on many covers. There are so many questions I could ask, but what's one question you wish an interviewer would ask you?

Golden: The source of my work ethic: my parents, especially my mother.

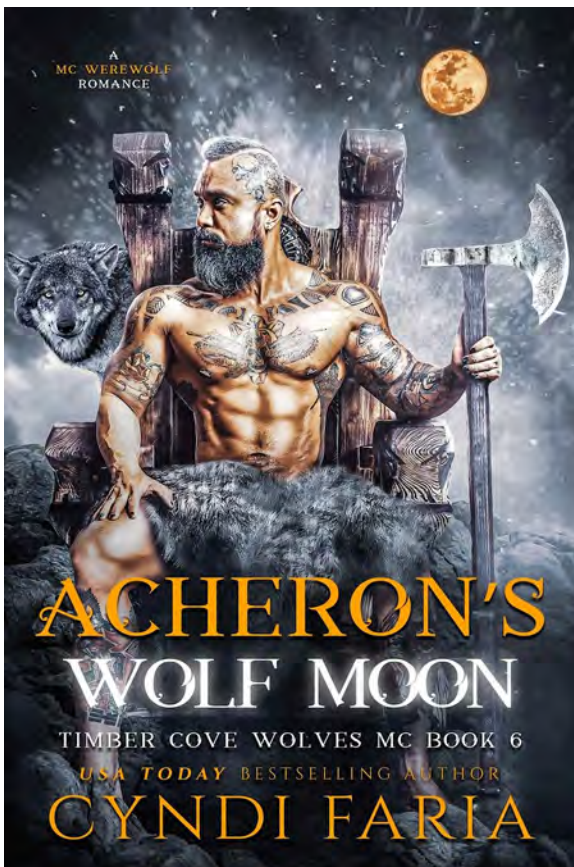
Debra: It's clear you have a strong work ethic to accomplish so much, and

I suspect you have many stories to tell. If you wrote a book, what would it be about?

Golden: I actually *have* written 18! My favorite, and my reader's, is *The Secret Life of Cooper Bennett*. It's a paranormal suspense that I wrote as a standalone novel but had my arm twisted to do a direct sequel, which I tied into another one of my PNR series (*Journeyman*). It's done well, so I also have it and the sequel as dual-narration audiobooks and a graphic novel edition of the first book.

Debra: Eighteen! That is a lot, along with your other work. I'm glad you've stepped out from behind the camera to tell us about your books and I'm thinking we might be reading about your parents, especially your mother, in a memoir one day.

Another area you've worked hard at is your fitness. This next 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?

Golden: I work out 6 days a week for about an hour each day (with that hour taking up my full focus to push myself as hard as possible). I alternate between a standard body part split (chest, back, legs, shoulders, and arms) and a push-pull-legs routine about once a quarter. That's mainly to keep things fresh.

Diet will vary depending on my goals, but it's primarily either "cutting" phase or "bulking" phase, the former being where I try to stay lean and the latter where I try to pack on weight – some of it fat and some muscle – to grow.

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

Golden: 1.) Exercise is important but diet is more so. You can exercise excessively but with the wrong intake of food your results won't be as good as they can be.

2.) Do not obsess over the scale. It's a number, sure, and seeing them go down is great, but when trying to recompose your body those numbers can go down slower than you'd like them to, so I tend to go by the mirror instead. That said, it is important to track progress so checkpoints on the scale are valuable.

3. Track your progress (even include a dreaded "day one" photo) to compare yourself

to. Progress takes a lot of time and some days the results can get lost along the way. Having something to compare against helps get through those times, showing that even small amounts of progress adds up over time.

Debra: That is wonderful advice. Now let's say it's your birthday dinner and the calories don't count. What's on the menu and what are you drinking?

Golden: Since I am Asian, it'd be a Korean dish called bibimbap (meat – spicy chicken for me - and assorted veggies mixed with rice). I normally drink water or unsweet tea (I know. I'm a heathen!), but if I'm socializing, I will also have a long island iced tea or dirty vodka martini.

Debra: Now I must try this Korean dish!

Describe the perfect romantic evening:

Golden: No big frills or fancy places... just at home, cuddling.

Debra: Something so simple but can mean so much.

Please share one unusual fact about you or your life:

Golden: I have a chemical engineering degree and over 13 years' experience in OSHA/EPA compliance and regulatory auditing – including radiation and explosives safety. Graphic design and photography were hobbies to keep me sane, but I was able to take a leap of faith in 2014 and make that a full-time career. You can imagine the hilarity of going through engineering school only to take photos of half-naked men full-time.

Debra: Oh, that is hilarious! Your degree and your experience are more achievements on your list of many. You've accomplished a lot. Now eight Quickie questions. Watching the sunrise or watching the sunset and the stars?

Golden: BOTH are magical times.

Debra: I so agree. The beach or the mountains?

Golden: Beach

Debra: Primitive camping or luxury hotel?

Golden: Hotel... I do like the stars but not too much the bugs.

Debra: Bugs eww. Not a fan of those either, especially the biting kind. Snow skiing or water skiing?

Golden: Never done either :O

Debra: Favorite movie:

Golden: *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King.*

Debra: Best book you ever read:

Golden: Stephen King's IT.

Debra: Fav. Sport to play:

Golden: Bodybuilding

Debra: Fav. Sport to watch:

Golden: Bodybuilding

Thank you for this interview, Golden! Readers can stay up to date with Golden's work by visiting.

Website: www.furiousfotog.co



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Affaire de Coeur

The Spotlight is Shining on Ms. February

Deborah Camp



Author of more than 50 novels, Deborah lives in Oklahoma. She has been a full-time writer since she graduated from the University of Tulsa. She worked for a few years as a reporter for newspapers before becoming a freelance writer. Deborah's first novel was published in the late 1970s and her books have been published by Jove, New American Library, Harlequin, Silhouette, and Avon. She has been inducted into the Oklahoma Authors Hall of Fame and she is a charter member of the Romance Writers of America. She is also a member of the Author's Guild.

AdC: *Tell us about the genre(s) you write.*

D.C.: I write both contemporary and historical romances.

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

D.C.: I love bad boys and sassy girls. I like men that are a little mysterious, too. My female protagonists (the one in the historicals) are usually a bit ahead of their time. More independent than most women.

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

D.C.: Not at the moment. I'm wrapping up a contemporary romance and

I'm outlining my next western historical.

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

D.C.: I'd say that Trudy Tucker in my romantic suspense series, "The Mind's Eye" is most similar to me. She has a problem with self-esteem and has always felt a bit out-of-step with others her age. I associated closely with her vulnerability and amazement that a handsome devil like Levi Wolfe would fall in love with her.

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

D.C.: I'd be in Kansas. Both of the books I'm working on are set there, but they are set in different centuries!

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

D.C.: Probably not. My heroines are the brave ones. I'm a chicken!

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

D.C.: I wish I could play piano by ear. I so envy people who are proficient in

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piano. I also wouldn't mind being fluent in another language. I can speak and understand some French and German, but I'm far from fluent in either one. My significant other was fluent in English, French, German, and Italian. He could also converse, but not fluently, in Spanish and Swedish. I used to love to listen to him conducting business in different languages on the phone. Of course, he could say anything to me in French and I'd melt. Even if it wasn't all that melt-worthy!

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

D.C.: Laundry and any sort of housework. The older I get the more I hate those activities. I sometimes procrastinate writing certain scenes – ones that I know will be difficult. But I've been at this long enough to know that I must forge on, so I don't allow myself to put any writing off for long.

AdC: What's something about you -- personality traits, habits, background, etc., that has been useful in your writing?

D.C.: I like to research things and I am naturally curious. In fact, a few

friends have accused me of being "nosey." I don't see it that way. I'm just interested in people – especially in how lovers met, how they knew they were in love, how they proposed marriage, and that sort of thing. But I also love to hear heroic stories. I'm in awe of Holocaust survivors.

Interviewing people was my favorite part of being a reporter. I think there is an interesting story in everyone. When I meet people, I tend to pepper them with questions, which I know can be intimidating, but I'm genuinely interested in their answers. I find it odd when people don't turn the tables and ask me stuff.

I mean, I've known some people for years and they knew very little about me because they never asked. I find that extremely peculiar. Think about it --- what makes a good bartender or hair stylist? They ask questions and listen to your answers! Almost everyone likes to talk about themselves or, at the very least, offer their opinion on subjects. So, yeah, if curiosity killed the cat, I'd be long gone!

AdC: Please give us the following contact information:

Personal web page www.deborah-camp.com

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

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The Chosen

By Deborah Camp

Olivia turned to see Alexander striding toward them, all decked out in a polo uniform. Red shirt with the number three on it, white riding breeches, knee guards, and black riding boots. He smiled broadly when she placed her hands on her hips and gave him a thorough once-over. *Damn, if he didn't look sexy in that get-up! And with an English accent to go with it? Get outta here!*

"You're going to be a player?"

"Didn't I tell you that?"

"No, you did not."

He stopped in front of her, took her by the waist, and planted a kiss on her cheek. "Sorry. I thought you knew."

"I wondered why you sent a car and why you decided to come early."

"Had to prepare for the match," he said, looping an arm around her and guiding her toward the horse trailer. "Thanks, Arnie! Stay if you wish and watch the match. If not, we'll be ready to leave around one."

"One? How long is a match?" Olivia asked.

"A couple of hours. We're only playing four chukkers today because of the heat. Sometimes we play six. We're set to begin at ten-thirty." He walked her around the trailer where three horses stood. One was saddled.

"Are these yours?"

"I co-own them with a friend and they're stabled at his place. This is Streak," he said, patting the gray, saddled one. "She has a much longer name, but we just call her Streak."

"Why are the others here?"

"For the match." He smiled at her raised eyebrows. "Polo is an aggressive game. The horses tire after a few minutes and we don't want to overwork them. Some riders change horses six or eight times during a match. I'm going with these three today. They're hardy girls."

"All mares," Olivia noted, stroking the side of a chestnut one. They all had their manes clipped and their tails tightly braided. They also wore guards around their legs, up to their knees.

"That's right. We have a couple of geldings, but the mares have a better temperament. Do you ever ride?"

"Yes, but not polo ponies. We have horses on the farm. I haven't gone on a horse ride, though, in several years."

"We can remedy that."

She gave a little start, realizing that he stood right behind her. She turned slowly and tipped up her face to him. "Not today. I'm not dressed for it."

He grinned down at her. "Right. But you do look very pretty today."

"Thanks." She smiled and looked away from him, suddenly struck with a shyness she rarely felt. "So do you. Like something out of one of my romance novels. All you need is a riding crop."

"Will a mallet do?"

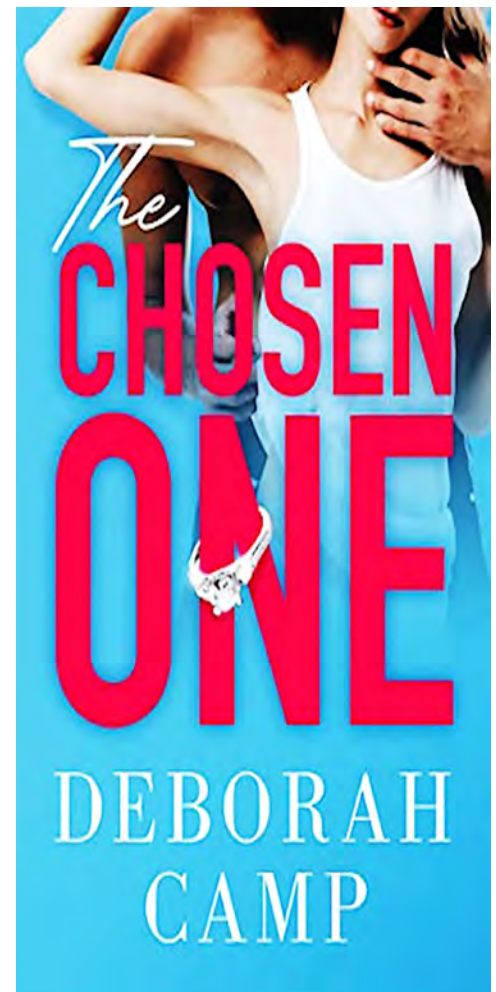
She laughed and edged sideways, out of his magnetic field. "Not quite the same."

A bugle sounded over the loud speaker. Alexander yanked some leather gloves from his back pocket and slipped them on.

"Time to ride," he said.

"Where am I supposed to go?"

He nodded in the direction of the large playing field. "There are bleachers



or you can stand on the sidelines. Come back here to the trailer at half-time. I'll have a bit of time then and I can answer any questions you might have about the game."

"Okay." She started to leave, but his gloved hand closed over hers and he swung her around to face him.

"Wish me luck?" Sunshine sparkled in the depths of his eyes.

"Good luck, Alexander."

He pursed his lips in an attractive pout. "Oh, we can do better than that, can't we?"

She blinked up at him as he lowered his head and his mouth settled on hers. He pressed harder as he wound an arm around her waist and pulled her close against him. Her hands came up automatically and she flattened her palms against the wall of his chest. The kiss wasn't casual. It was masterful and seared through her body. His lips massaged hers, parting them with authoritative expertise so that the tip of his tongue could find hers. She heard his quick intake of breath before he slowly released it in a sigh. For long



seconds, she was lost in him and the way his mouth commanded hers, lifting and adjusting, stroking and releasing. His tongue caresses were light and teasing, lapping at hers, and moistening her lips. She tasted breath mints and his own unique flavor that was instantly addictive.

Her knees weakened and her core tightened. She clutched his biceps where muscles rippled. He smelled of grass and hay, leather and lust. Desire unfurled wings in her stomach and sent tendrils down between her legs. She became a vessel of feelings, devoid of rational thoughts.

When his lips peeled slowly from hers, she forced her eyes open and the world spun around her like a kaleidoscope gone mad. This man was dangerous. Oh so dangerous to her libido.

"That's more like it," he whispered as his dark, dark eyes explored every inch of her face.

Coming back to herself, Ol-

ivia drew in a deep breath and let her hands fall away from him while her lips throbbed from his sensual assault. The next thing she knew, he'd mounted his horse and was moving away from her. She watched him, admiring his straight back and the easy way his body moved in the saddle. He looked over his shoulder at her once, gave a quick nod, and then he kicked Streak into a canter.

Feeling trembly, Olivia ambled toward the crowd of spectators and breathed deeply, trying to dispel the effects of that kiss. What was wrong with her that she would feel faint just because a man kissed her? She wasn't an untried virgin. She'd been kissed, for God's sake. Many, many times. But never quite like that. Never with such finesse, such *purpose*. If kisses were like the written word, she'd received love notes before. Alexander had written a discourse.

Cover Model continued

& www.goldenczermak.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/furiousfotog

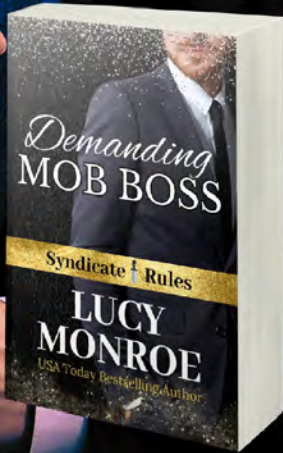
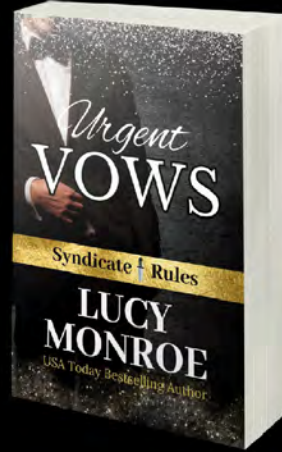
Professional Instagram: @furiousfotog

Personal Instagram: @fitfotog

Debra Parmley is an author of suspense, military romantic suspense, historical romance, fairytale romance, and urban fantasy romance, who lives in a motorhome fulltime with her husband as they travel the U.S. She has interviewed many cover models in her Cover Model Corner since 2011 and enjoys sharing the 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

Syndicate Rules

MAFIA ROMANCE BY LUCY MONROE



AdC Loves Conferences

Meet the Authors

Meet the Authors Book Fair was held at the Eau Gallie Civic Center in Melbourne, FL. on November 18 & 19, 2023 from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM.

During the event, attendees were lucky enough to have the book fair at the same time as the Melbourne Arts Festival. We shared a room with incredibly talented authors and many of the finest ceramic and porcelain artists from the Brevard County area.

Both days were filled with meeting fantastic authors and incredible readers!



Hostess and author Valerie Allen



Author Brad Haizlip



Author Marlene Potts



Author Tamalyn Scott



Pam Ackerson

PUZZLER

Where Would America's Music Be Without African Americans?

Across

2. This queen dominated hip-hop for three decades.
4. #30 Across's real surname.
7. Jazz singer who lost her yellow basket.
11. Educated at Juilliard, this singer, pianist extraordinaire was a civil rights activist.
12. This country singer wants to be rocked. Mama, like a wagon wheel.
17. Blues man who traded his soul at the crossroads.
18. This opera singer integrated the White House.
19. This blues man had a guitar named Lucille.
21. ___ Smith "Empress of the Blues"
23. ___ Lewis, jazz pianist who recorded with Earth, Wind and Fire.
24. African-American country singer.
27. She's on a midnight train to Georgia.
30. Satchmo played this instrument.
32. A child of destiny, she became a superstar.
33. He wrote the words to the "Negro National Anthem."
34. Queen of disco.
36. "Hidie Ho".
37. Found his thrill on Blueberry Hill.
38. Guitarist whose rendition of the National Anthem is unequalled.
39. *Voulez-vous coucher avec elles?*

Down

1. Gospel singer, most influential in the 20th century.
3. Her gospel album *Amazing Grace* has never been outsold.
5. ___ Shakur, poet, actor, rapper.
6. "Day-O"
8. His rendition of the National Anthem

at the NBA finals became a classic.

9. "The Twist."

10. Songstress, pianist whose hit was "Broken-Hearted Melody."

13. Aka 'Bird' -- Eastwood did a movie about this great musician.

14. This opera singer was the first to have a leading performance at the Met.

15. This King made the "Christmas Song" famous.

16. Chances are you will know this Johnnie.

17. ___ Gillespie's jaws got huge when he blew his trumpet.

21. Notoriously large hip-hop rapper

from New York.

22. Blind singer who has Georgia on his mind.

25. He took the A Train.

26. The center of music in Detroit where careers were born.

28. This singer, pianist, composer was King of Gospel.

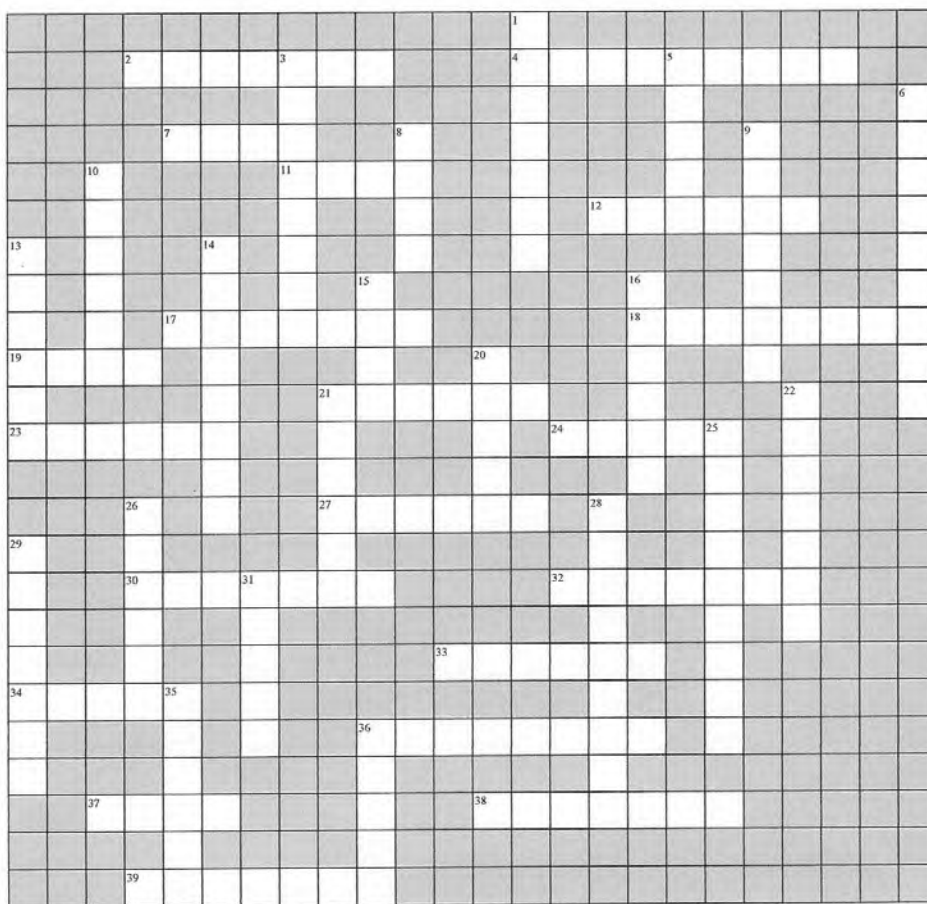
29. She wore a flower in her hair and sang "God Bless the Child."

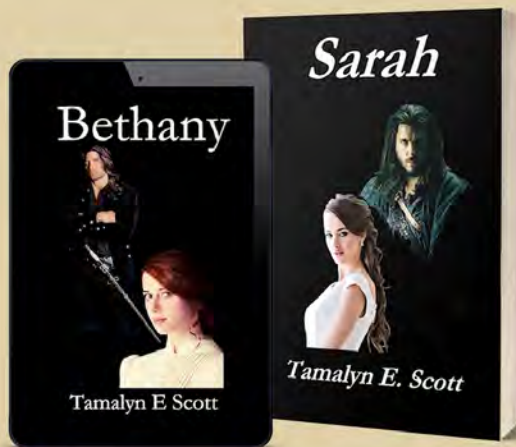
31. Davis, controversial trumpeteer.

35. Queen of Soul.

36. Singer, civil rights activist who went from Soul Stirrer to "You send me."

answers on page 24





Sarah

Sarah was shocked to learn she inherited her grandmother's estate. From the stories her grandmother whispered, Beckham was a grand and mysterious place, rich with history, secret passageways, hidden rooms, and even ghosts! And now...it was hers.

Bethany

All Bethany wanted, was a new gown for her birthday ball. Her brother insisted upon escorting her to the big city of Wellington. Their trip came to an abrupt stop as Lord Andrews intercepted them requesting Daniel's immediate assistance.

Gracey

After "The Great War" of years past, by the Grace of God. Man survived. A different kind of military was formed to protect, preserve and defend peace. The secrets of the past are guarded from infiltrators trying to obtain information, and the means to control the world. The men, who dedicate their lives to God and Union, live by this oath and would give their lives to protect the world from this ever happening again.

Rebecca

For days they traveled without seeing a single person. The sound of hooves thundering in the distance brought two enormous men in a cloud of dust. The men questioned her for what seemed hours about her destination and finally moved on. But something was strange about those men. They offered to escort her to Oak Grove. Why? Why would they do that? Who were they?



TamalynsBooks.com



Jocelyn

The week of Jocelyn's twenty-first birthday, Lord McKenna had returned from an extended European stay, bringing Jocelyn a considerable surprise. He brought back the best doctor money could buy in hopes of helping Jocelyn speak again. Lord McKenna also informed Jocelyn's mother that a special guest would arrive with the next ship.

Tamalyn is a writer, an artist and loves all music. Tamalyn's love taking people on a journey to a place where they actually become the main character and experience something amazing. Currently, Tamalyn lives in Florida, married her very own knight and is finally...living happily ever after...



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



Contemporary Romance



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.

Authors,

We'd love to review your books! Are you brave enough for an honest review? If so, send it in at least three months before the pub date to adcreviews@att.net

Frenemy Fix-Up
Yahrah St. John
Afterglow Books by Harlequin - Romance
Trade Paperback
978-1335041586
★★★★

Former high school classmates Colin Anderson and Shay Davis make an agreement that he'll help her with expanding her yoga studio if she will be his trainer, help him to get in shape, and improve his health in 90 days.

Shay is living her dream. She owns a thriving yoga studio that she's ready to expand. She doesn't let people close except for the Gems, her best friends. Recently divorced, Shay avoids men and relationships to keep from getting hurt again. But when she sees Colin again, and he's even more handsome and sexier than in high school, he tests her resolve until he opens his rude, judgmental, and egotistical mouth.

Colin Anderson has a plan for his life, and he's been working overtime on an IPO to achieve his goals. When

Colin receives a wake-up call that makes him realize he needs to change his lifestyle or he might not live to enjoy the plans he's made and worked so hard for. He turns to Shay, hoping her expertise can save him. Then Colin can focus on pursuing the right woman for him—his high school girlfriend.

Shay and Colin are polar opposites with a fiery chemistry and ridiculous attraction. Both fight it initially, firm in their beliefs that they're entirely wrong for each other. Colin doesn't want to want Shay because she's not the right woman for him—she doesn't fit his lifestyle. Shay can't get involved with Colin because she fears being hurt again. The more time they spend together in his yoga sessions, the more complicated things become because of the intensity of their attraction. Ultimately, Colin and Shay must rethink their ideas of who the right person for them should be and what they want, step outside their comfort zones, and let go of their fears because the clock is ticking.

Yahrah's writing is vivid. Her colorful and natural-sounding dialogue fits her characters and story.

Contemporary Romance

She develops her complex, fallible, and likable characters with emotionally-charged interactions and love scenes that reveal their characters and further the plot.

A fast-paced, sexy, humorous, emotional, angsty, and steamy enemies-to-lovers romance, *The Frenemy Fix-Up* explores themes of friendship, health issues, mental health issues, following your dreams, self-discovery, and self-esteem.

Lacy Hill

Frostbitten (Deep Ops #6)

Rebecca Zanetti

Lyrical Underground

Mass Market

978--1516111282

★★★★☆

Millicent Frost and Scott Terentson join forces after she's targeted by lethal enemies determined to kill her. Millie has been taken off her temporary assignment with the Deep Op's team to help bust a bank scam. Unfortunately, the bust goes awry. Her career—and life—potentially in jeopardy, Millie returns to her hometown to help out with her family's hunting and fishing business run by her aunt. Things take an even worse turn when Millie's ex and family business rival is murdered, and she's the number one suspect.

Scott and Millie are complete opposites who have always given each other a lot of space. Millie asks Scott for his help, and though it's probably more trouble than he needs right now, there's no way he won't help her. As Millie and Scott work together to solve the murder, the danger intensifies with repeated attempts on their lives. But being in close quarters under these circumstances, they also can no longer deny their attraction.

Brilliant, with a gift for solving mysteries and inventing gadgets and electronics, Millie is a woman of science with a passion for design and machinery. But she's not as comfortable or skilled with people as she is with gadgets and electronics. Because of childhood trauma, she doesn't like lawyers, which makes her feelings for Scott complicated. She finds him

A Love Song for Ricki Wilde

Tia Williams

Grand Central Publishing

Hardcover

978-1538726709

★★★★☆



Ricki Wilde, a misfit artist, discovers herself, love, magic, and where she belongs in modern Harlem when she leaves home to prove herself to her father and socialite sisters during a leap year

Flighty, zany, idiosyncratic, but talented, and artistic, Ricki is the youngest daughter of Atlanta's powerful Wilde dynasty. However, she's terrible at being a Wilde and doesn't fit in with them at all. Unlike her famous socialite sisters, who perfectly fit their assigned roles, Ricki, a hopeless romantic and dreamer, thinks of the exciting life she knows is waiting for her apart from her family.

Ms. Della, a customer at her family's funeral home, invites her to rent the bottom floor of her Harlem brownstone, giving Ricki the chance of a lifetime to start fresh and have the life she wants. Ricki leaves home, letting go of her family and their wealth, and her past chaotic romantic failures to make her dream of opening a flower shop a reality. As she settles into her new home, she discovers all the effervescent drama, music, history, and stories of the Harlem Renaissance that still live within her new neighborhood underneath the surface. While exploring her neighborhood on a February night, the Ricki encounters a mysterious, handsome stranger who changes her life forever.

Williams' gorgeous writing, imaginative storytelling, and vivid descriptions building draw the reader into this multilayered, absorbing story. She creates likable characters and their relationships through and number of techniques, keeping the reader engrossed until the end.

The narrative of *A Love Song for Ricki Wilde* unfolds unexpectedly, taking the reader on a journey that entertains and informs without affecting the novel's pacing. Williams perfectly balances the novel's romance, humor, angst, and dramatic moments. Funny, sexy, intensely emotional, steamy, and suspenseful, *A Love Song for Ricki Wilde* is a creative, beautifully written, romantic love story.

Lacy Hill

irresistible.

Scott is a primal loner who uses his legal skills to help clients in trouble or caught in tricky binds. A former Marine, he's still healing from a bullet taken protecting a Deep Ops member. Because of his past, he doesn't think he's good enough for Millie though he has been drawn to her from their first meeting.

Zanetti's dynamic writing and storytelling, vibrant with detailed description and rich worldbuilding, capture readers' imagination and draw them into the novel from the opening scene. She skillfully develops complex, fallible, and relatable characters readers can't help but love and root for their success. Zanetti outdoes herself with

the mystery, suspense, action, steam, romance, and intensity in this one.

Multilayered, suspenseful, thrilling, and action-packed, *Frostbitten* is hard to put down once you start reading until you reach the end. Sexy, action-packed, suspenseful, steamy, and funny, *Frostbitten* is an enthralling, fast-paced novel highly recommended for mystery/thriller, action, and steamy romantic suspense fans.

Lacy Hill

Contemporary Romance

The Night Island

Jayne Ann Krentz

Berkley

E-book

B0C1YCHX1Q

★★★★★



The disappearance of a mysterious informant leads two people desperate for answers to an island of deadly deception. Talia March, Pallas Llewellyn, and Amelia Rivers, bonded by a night none of them can remember, are dedicated to uncovering the mystery of what really happened to them months ago—an experience that amplified innate psychic abilities in each of them. The women suspect they were test subjects years earlier and that there are more people like them. All they have to do is find the list of others who took that same test. When Talia follows up on a lead from Phoebe, a fan of the trio's podcast, she discovers that the informant has vanished.

Talia isn't the only one looking for Phoebe, however. Luke Rand, a hunted and haunted man who is chasing the same list that Talia is after, also shows up at the meeting place. It's clear he has his own agenda, and they are instantly suspicious of each other. When a killer begins to stalk them, they realize they have to join forces to find Phoebe and the list.

The rocky investigation leads Talia and Luke to a rustic, remote retreat on Night Island in the Pacific Northwest, where the Unplugged Experience promises to rejuvenate guests. Upon their arrival, Talia and Luke discover they are quite literally cut off from the outside world when none of their high-tech devices work on the island. It soon becomes clear that Phoebe is not the first person to disappear into the strange gardens that surround the Unplugged Experience retreat. And then the first mysterious death occurs. . . .

Another fantastic adventure from the pen of Jayne Ann Krentz. In this installment we are introduced to more characters who have experienced a lost night and increased psychic abilities. Talia and Luke have their hands full and abilities tested in their search for answers. Looking forward to Amelia's tale.

D. Antonio

When Grumpy Met Sunshine

Charlotte Stein

St. Martin's Press

Trade Paperback 978-1250867933

E-Book 978-1250867957

★★★★★

Be careful reading this book in public unless you're prepared for nervous stares from strangers when you burst out laughing.

Mabel Willicker faces a tough assignment when she takes on the task of ghostwriting the biography of famed former British football (aka soccer) star Alfie Harding. She's been warned about his prickly nature, but when confronted with the man himself, she realizes that rumors of his grouchy personality weren't exaggerated; they were understated.

Though Mabel needs the work, she can't stomach his snarky attitude and walks out of the initial interview. It turns out Alfie is intrigued, probably not accustomed to people calling him out for his rude behavior. Alfie begrudgingly agrees to allow Mabel to interview him, though more subjects are off limits than on. Mabel tries to ignore her attraction to this gruff man, certain that he would never be interested in a slightly plump, very cheerful woman like her. But Fate has other ideas. Because he's constantly tailed by paparazzi, the tabloids get wind of the "mystery woman" spending time with Alfie, and due to some rash statements on his part, Alfie and Mabel are soon caught up in a charade, pretending to be in love. Mabel discovers there's more to Alfie than meets the eye, but the each is convinced that the other

couldn't possibly want them. Maybe this blindness goes on a bit too long before they have to decide whether they're really pretending.

The characters are delightful, the humor engaging but tempered by some very serious emotional issues. This book sizzles, tugs at the heartstrings, and makes you laugh all at once.

Hannah Rowen

Watchers of the Night (The Night Guardians - Book 1)

Charlene Parris

HARLEQUIN - Romance

Mass Market

978-133559389

★★★★★

Forensic investigator Cynthia Cornwall investigates the explosion that injures and kills members of Detective Adam Silberg's father's motorcycle club, including his father. Despite the risks, Cynthia keeps Adam in the loop about the arson investigation. The deeper they get into the case, the more dangerous it becomes. To survive, they'll have to trust one another. Cynthia's left to decide whether their relationship is genuine and strong enough to withstand the investigation's outcome.

A beautiful, brilliant, African American criminal investigator, Cynthia has experienced tragedies in her past that still haunt her. Although she is calm under pressure, intensely private, and has trouble opening up, Cynthia chooses to take a chance and share the information with Adam because she knows how difficult it is to experience the tragedy of losing someone you love and not have answers. She tends to overstep her authority and has conflicts with other officers. But she must always be tough and prove herself because she's a woman, even though she excels at forensic investigations.

Adam is driven by grief to solve his father's death. An experienced detective, Adam is biracial with a Lebanese mother. Adam's father was his best friend and mentor. Losing him suddenly like that is difficult to accept. Cynthia fears Adam is too good to be true because he treats her with respect,

Contemporary Romance

listens to her without talking down to her, and trusts her.

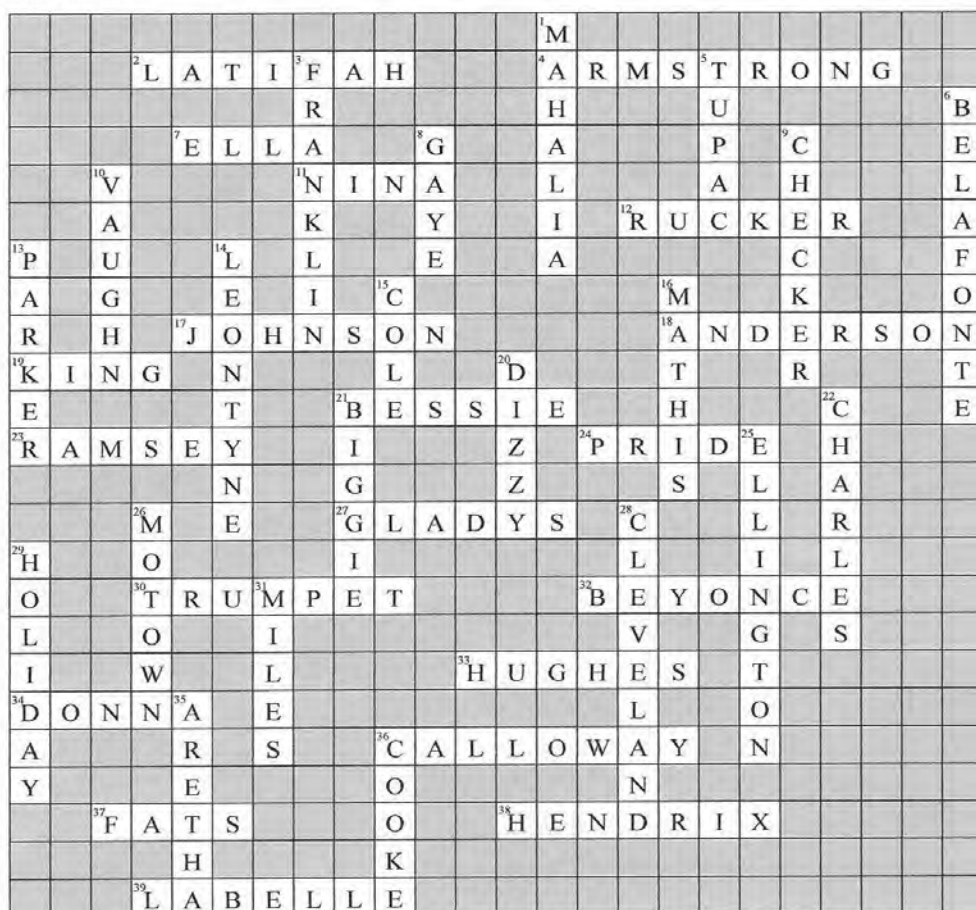
Parris's active writing style doesn't waste words with vivid descriptions involving the characters' senses, fully engaging the reader in each moment. Her dialogue is dynamic and natural sounding, and she skillfully develops her complex, relatable, and likable characters with intriguing interactions. Parris takes you through the full spectrum of emotions with

this thrilling novel that has a nice balance between suspense and romance and is full of unexpected twists and turns. Steamy, suspenseful, funny, and sexy, *Watchers of the Night* is a fast-paced, captivating romance I highly recommend for mystery/thriller, romantic suspense, and interracial romance fans.
Lacy Hill



where would America's music be without African American

Louise B. Snad



Debra Parmley not only writes hot books, she knows the hot men who pose on their covers.

See her "Cover Model Corner" column in

Affaire de Coeur

Paranormal Romance Reviews

Fantasy

Vampires

Shape Shifters

Time Travel

Werewolves...

Moonlit Betrayal

Milly Taiden

Latin Goddess

Press

E-book

B0BZQY2KHK

★★★★★



Private investigator Kiera Moore lives life as she wants and answers to no one. She left that behind long ago, and now lives as a lone wolf shifter ... no pack, no alpha, no problem! That's all great until an investigation brings her face-to-face with the first man who could make her strong will shatter...her mate.

Elijah Winds, the new alpha CC, keeps finding the bodies of his murdered pack mates and doesn't have a clue why his people are being targeted. So when PI Kiera comes to investigate, he has an extra problem added to the mix. She's stunning, smart-mouthed, intelligent, and he can't keep his hands off her. The killer is smart, leaving no evidence behind and quickly manipulating Kiera and Elijah, turning the pack against them. If Elijah can't get Kiera to open her heart to him, then the only happy ending will be for the rogue wolf



wanting power over the pack.

Kiera has been burned before, and it has forced her into becoming the tough, take-no-prisoners, lone wolf she is. When she meets her mate the new alpha of the Northern Winds pack, over a dead body it's as far from a meet cute as you can get. Kiera is determined to do her job without alpha interference. Elijah has the patience of an alpha predator, and he has to tap into that to win Kiera's heart.

Moonlight Betrayal is first in what looks to be a fantastic new series by Milly Taiden. I loved watching Kiera and Elijah find what worked for them.
D. Antonio

Once Upon a Time in Beverly Hills

Elaine Franklin

EFH Press

E-book

979-8986974507

★★★★★

Joanna Leighton is seduced by treats, and her weight shows it. However, in TV land being overweight is a huge no-no. Her weight has placed a huge chip on her shoulder, not just industry standards but for her personal self-worth.

When the morning show she worked for was given and award and

sited to go national, she was told she had two months to lose weight or lose her job. It was devastating. Unfortunately, she didn't have the discipline to exercise or watch what she ate and wishes don't take the weight off...or did they?

A fun read!

Lauren Calder

Wolf on the Edge

Paige Tyler

Self-Published

E-book

B0CN593Z6M

★★★★★



He can't be a werewolf without a pack...

For SWAT member Carter Nelson, everything is on the line. Something has triggered the omega wolf in him causing violent outbursts and blackouts. Losing control means losing his pack, so when he's ordered to see psychiatrist Hadley Delacroix, he grudgingly agrees. However, the more time they spend together, Carter begins to suspect she's The One, but dating your shrink breaks all the rules. He needs her as his therapist, but he craves her as his soul mate. The decision is out

Paranormal Romance

Warrior's Hope (Dark Protectors #16)

Rebecca Zanetti

Lyrical Press

Trade Paperback

978-1516110797

★★★★★



Hope Kayrs-Kyllwood chooses between her best friend and the leader of the Kurjan nation—the difference between life and death for her and her people.

Because she's the only female vampire born and the heir/descendant of two powerful, immortal families, the weight of fate and destiny rests upon Hope Kayrs-Kyllwood's shoulders. She's carried it since birth and is prepared to make the required sacrifice to end the war between her Realm and the Kurjan nation. At a crossroads in her life, her heart is torn between two futures and two vastly different men—Paxton and Drake.

An alpha, demon-hybrid vampire, Paxton's been Hope's best friend and self-appointed protector since childhood. He's always known his path is to protect Hope with his life, and he's prepared and willing to kill and die to keep her safe without reservation or thought for his own life. Drake, leader of the Kurjan nation, deeply believes mating Hope will offer him the means to avoid war with the Realm. Hope must decide where her loyalties lie and whom she can trust before time runs out and deadly factions pursuing her take her choices and free will from her.

Zanetti's active writing style, colorful dialogue, exciting action sequences, deft character development and worldbuilding draw readers in from the first scene, keeping them glued to the novel as the pages fly by. She transitions Hope's and Paxton's relationship from close childhood friends to uneasy allies to lovers with funny, snarky, steamy interactions and intensely emotional and sexy love scenes. Paxton is a dominating and deadly fighter and warrior. Hope is gorgeous, fearless, and willing to fight for her beliefs. Their attraction is intense and fiery, with a deep connection strengthened by their long, deep friendship. Paxton and Hope's spark-filled interactions, snarky banter, and emotionally and sexually intense make-out/love scenes are well-written.

Zanetti writes thrilling fight scenes, action/adventure sequences, political intrigue, and suspense in this multilayered, complex story with excellent character interactions and development. A steamy, emotional, sexy, angsty, action-packed, romantic read, *Warrior's Hope* explores themes of betrayal/treason, war, toxic/abusive parents, self-discovery, soulmates, family, friendship, first love, brotherhood, and secrets.

Lacy Hill

of his hands when a serial killer with supernatural abilities targets Hadley. Carter will risk it all to save his mate, but he's running out of time...

Wolf on the Edge is fast-paced with lots of action and a lot of heart. My heart bled for Carter. I hated he was having such control issues. His life had blown up before was it going to deal

him another life altering blow? This story had me flipping pages to find out. A great addition to the series.

D. Antonio



Rockets Above Us
Beaches Beside Us
and a Book in our Hands

The 8th Annual Space
Coast Book Lovers Event
Cape Canaveral, FL
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SpaceCoastBookLovers.com





Erotica

Some Like It Hot!!!

Same Sex Couples

SM

Multi Couples

The Heartbox

Ryan Magnus
Self-published

E-book

B0CL9NRPNG

☆☆☆

Young, abused Marie Baker has been wronged. Her mother was murdered, and she is determined to bring to justice her killer. Marie begins a journey on the horse she took when she ran thinking she is being hunted by the law. She is under suspicion for killing her adopted mother, a bloody heart is tucked away in Marie's keepsake box.

People help her along the way as she puts her life together, learning to survive. Detective Thomas Payne is trying to put together the facts so he can understand an unknown killer. Some tales point to Marie, but there is no evidence and he is not convinced. He would need to find her.

The two have their own journeys, he meets many people as he goes town to

town, much time will go by before there is a break in the case.

Marie travels to an island where a ship must drop her off in shallow water so she may swim to shore. There on the shore Marie meets a madam. Miss Louise Grant. Louise helps Marie, she gives her a man to get money. Eventually she becomes adept in the trade while falling in love with a man. She finds he has cheated on her, she does not tolerate betrayal and he is killed, she puts a memento into her keepsake box, her heart box and moves on. She meets the detective and they get married, and it's a happy marriage for many years even though he is gone on business for long periods. Unfortunately Marie suspects he has become unfaithful but comes to terms with it. Thomas has gotten very sick and Marie can't stand to see him suffer. Thinking she has ended his life she puts his ring finger into her heartbox.

Justice has not caught up with Marie.

This story is about Marie

surviving and coping after a cruel life start. It is also about a detective, who is good at his work. Both stories will eventually come together. The world in which it is built on is fabricated in a time of sailing ships, it has illustrations that help indicate the time period and look of the world for perspective. There are non-detailed sex scenes in the story, enough to carry it through.

Kitty Lane

LITERARY LOVE SAVANNAH 2023

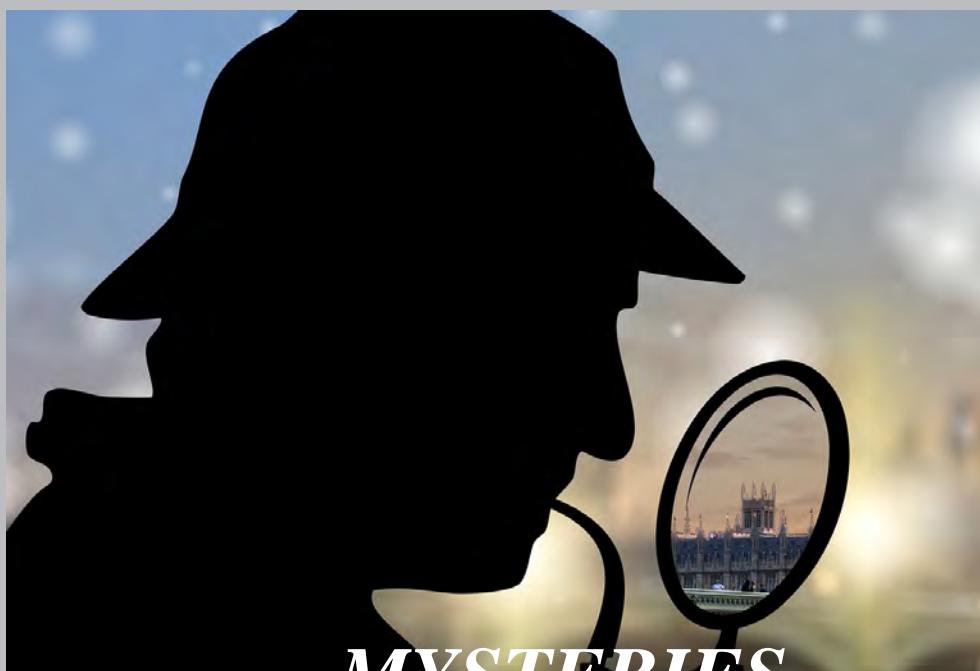
July 19-23, 2023
Savannah, Georgia



**Four days of adult
reader fun
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MYSTERIES

Historical and Contemporary Whodunnits?

A Fatal Groove

Olivia Blacke

St. Martin's Press

E-book

B0B8X2LKG3

★★★★★



It's springtime in Cedar River, Texas. The annual Bluebonnet Festival is brewing, and the whole town is in harmony. Juni Jessup and her sisters Tansy and Maggie thought opening Sip & Spin Records was going to be their biggest hurdle, but the frappuccino hits the fan when the mayor drops dead--poisoned by their delicious coffee.

Since Tansy was the one to brew the coffee and Juni was the unfortunate citizen who stumbled upon the mayor's body, the sisters find themselves in hot water. Family is everything to the Jessups; so with Tansy under suspicion, the sisters spring into action.

Between the town festivities, a good old-fashioned treasure hunt, and an accidental cow in the mix, Juni will have to pull out all the stops to find the mayor's killer.

Juni finds another body and the fun begins. This small town cozy will have you laughing and scratching your head, trying to figure out who done it.

Truly enjoyable.

D. Antonio

Last Note of Warning

Katharine Schellman

Minotaur Books

978-1250325792 Hardcover

978-1250325808 E-Book

★★★★★

What's a girl to do when she's the perfect scapegoat, charged with a murder she didn't commit? Vivian Kelly, who delivers fancy custom dresses to wealthy clients by day but works as a dance hall girl in the Nightingale speakeasy by night in 1920's New York City during prohibition, seems an easy target for harried police officials to blame in the death of a prominent businessman they can close the case quickly and satisfy the public and the powers that be in the city.

Vivian enjoyed a cozy chat with Mr. Buchanan while waiting for his wife to return home so she could try on her new dress. When a housekeeper called Buchanan away to meet a colleague in his office, an exhausted Vivian fell asleep while sitting in his study. After waking abruptly, she went in search of someone to tell that she was leaving, not having time to wait

for the client to return. That's when she made the shocking discovery of Buchanan's body slumped over his desk, stabbed to death.

The police considered Vivian their prime suspect, since she was the last person known to see the man alive. Only because the police commissioner was the uncle of her boyfriend, Leo, Vivian was granted a reprieve of one week before going off to jail, during which she was determined to find the real killer.

Sleuthing was not an easy task, and each discovery made it more difficult to trust even her dearest friends. Vivian single-mindedly pursued the clues up until the last agonizing second. But would she find the real killer before her time was up? She was sure that if she failed, she'd go to prison and never return.

Vivian is no shrinking violet, and her quest for the truth keeps the reader rooting for her success right to the nail-biting conclusion.

Hannah Rowan

One Wrong Word

Hank Phillippi Ryan

Tor Forge

978-1250849496 Hardcover

978-1250849526 E-Book

★★★★★

Arden Ward specializes in rescuing the reputations of her clients, generally public figures who are faced with bad publicity. But false accusations by the wife of a client put her job on the line.

In a final case, she is tasked with cleaning up the image of the "Parking Garage Killer," wealthy Boston real estate mogul Ned Banister, charged with mowing down a skateboard rider in a deserted parking garage after leaving a company New Year's Eve party, and charged with being under the influence. His wife hires Arden because even though her husband is acquitted, public opinion is still against her, and she finds herself and her children ostracized.

But the more Arden works on the case, the more the facts stop adding

Mysteries

up, the more players with questionable motives begin to surface, and the more danger Arden herself faces.

One Wrong Word is a gripping whodunit! Just when it seems clear who the “bad guys” are things take another turn. It’s a very hard book to put down.

Hannah Rowan

The Seafarer’s Secret

Carol Ann Collins

Beaufort Books

978-0825310287 Trade Paperback

978-0825309076 E-Book

☆☆☆☆

By local standards, Eva Knightly is a newcomer to Eden, North Carolina, a small town on the Outer Banks. Yet Eva plays an important role as historian for the local historical museum as she prepares for the annual Bluebeard festival which brings crowds of tourists to the small town each year.

Police chief William Templeton still mourns the loss of his ex-wife Catharine, who died in what was believed to be a freak accident. But when another woman turns up dead a year later, that assumption come into question. Both women had antique gold coins in their possession. Was it just a coincidence? And where did the coins come from?

Local legend has it that notorious pirate Bluebeard buried his treasure on the island before his ship went down. Could these coins be part of that treasure? The mystery heightens when the local pastor finds yet more gold coins in his collection basket.

Chief Templeton is officially off the case because of the connection to his ex-wife, but that doesn’t stop him from teaming up with Eva in an effort to find out just what’s going on in their once quiet little town. Along the way, it’s possible that William and Eva discover more than the answers to the

mystery, but also a way to start their romantic lives over again.

The Seafarer’s Secret blends romance and a unique twist on an old legend. Did Bluebeard really bury his treasure in Eden? Excerpts from a journal from the 1700s written by a woman who may have been the pirate’s lover only heighten the suspense.

Hannah Rowan

Still Waters

Matt Goldman

Tor Forge

978-1250325679 Hardcover

978-1250325693 Paperback

978-1250325686 E-Book

☆☆☆☆

Liv and Gabe Ahlstrom are siblings who live on opposite coasts. Neither has any desire to revisit Leech Lake in Minnesota, where they grew up. The estranged siblings come together for the funeral of their older brother, Mack, staying in the lakeside resort owned by their family.

Liv is a successful entrepreneur who runs a fashion agency in Manhattan while Gabe is a ne’er-do-well aspiring rock star who tends bar in Los Angeles while he waits for his big break. Neither has much respect for the others way of life.

Their visit is off to a strange start when they both receive an email from their newly deceased brother informing them that someone is trying to kill him. If they receive the email, it states, that means someone has succeeded. They don’t know if it’s real or if their brother was delusional, and they don’t get any support from the police.

An uncle they haven’t seen in ages is running the resort, which has undergone many changes since they last visited. They also reunite with a cousin who is all grown up and who has plans to turn the resort property into a wind farm. A neighbor who owns

competing resorts around the lake also has designs on the property.

Liv and Gabe have first right of refusal before the resort can be sold, which may be why they’re receiving various threats that are putting their own lives in danger. It’s a race against time while they wade through a host of possible suspects and a variety of motives for the untimely deaths of people associated with the resort.

The Ahlstrom siblings face so many choices as they struggle to repair their relationship, decide what to do with the resort, and puzzle over which of the people from their pasts they can trust. Their dilemmas will keep the reader guessing until the exciting climax of the story.

Hannah Rowan

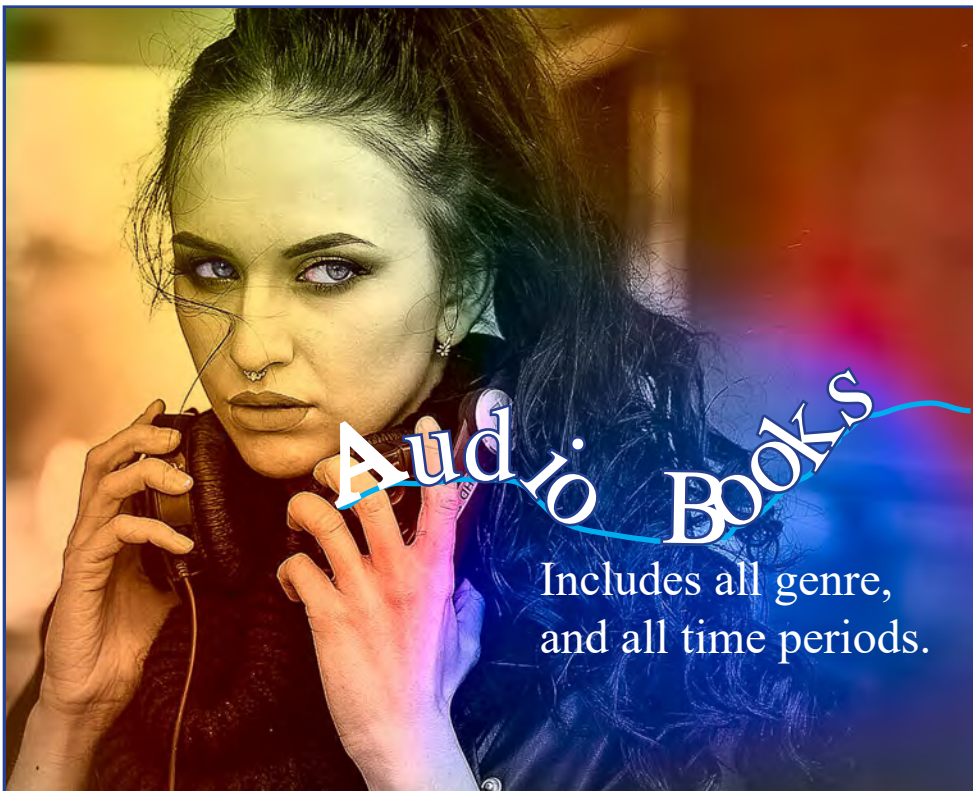
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Somebody That I Used to Know: A Novel

Dana L. Davis
Narrated by
Kimberly Woods
Brilliance Audio
B09RTL3WQ
Cd's
★★★★★



Childhood best friends Dylan Woods and Langston, who lost touch a decade ago after Langston moved to L.A., became a worldwide renowned teen R&B artist named Legendary—then ghosted her—unexpectedly reunite when he comes to stay with her family years later.

Dylan's goal is acceptance into Juilliard. She doesn't think about Langston much these days and how he left her behind and never contacted her again. Feelings of anger and hurt resurface when her parents reveal he's coming to stay with them temporarily. Everyone in her family is thrilled except for Dylan. However, after spending time with him again and discovering he still has their bucket list, Dylan wonders if Langston isn't as different as she feared.

Langston asks Dylan for her help completing the list. As they do so, Dylan remembers their past, how good things were between them, their shared love of music, and who she used to be back when they were inseparable. Dylan's feelings for

Langston slowly shift from friendship to something deeper. Could she be falling for her ex-best friend?

Dylan is focused on music, improving her skills, and practicing her violin to get into Juilliard—something she's chosen for herself. Gifted, arrogant, and entitled, Langston lost himself in stardom and being Legendary; so it's refreshing and healing to be home with his best friend—who knows and appreciates the real him. Langston can be himself and let down his guard. He needs time away from the spotlight for personal reasons.

Dylan and Langston reconnect and relearn each other and the differences time and maturity have made to their personalities. Dylan's become less fun and silly and doesn't take time to enjoy life. Alternatively, Langston is all about living and freedom of self-expression. Their personalities balance one another, giving them a safe space to be themselves without having to pretend or use facades. Dylan learns to relax and have fun again and discovers new music. Langston understands the importance of self-restraint, responsibility, and making sacrifices for others.

Woods' expressive and vibrant narration brings Davis's story novel to life, capturing the reader's imagination from the first scene. Her voice perfectly fits Dylan, Langston, and the secondary characters, complementing Woods' lyrical writing and storytelling style. Woods' becomes each

character, regardless of age or gender. No one could've done better.

Davis's writing and storytelling are beautiful, and her use of language is gorgeous and lyrical. Her authentic dialogue suits her characters, story, and theme, giving them distinct voices. She combines detailed descriptions to create visual imagery, rich world-building, and imaginative storytelling to draw readers into her multilayered story. She explores issues of racial identity with nuance and subtlety—especially—within the context of adoption.

Somebody That I Used to Know is a beautifully written and entrancing YA/ teen romance read/listen exploring self-discovery, self-identity, racial identity, adoption, music, friendship, falling in love, and first love.
Lacy Hill

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The Art of Mediation

*Michael E. Fraidenburg and
Terry Teale*

CCPress

E-book

B0CR6T8HK7

★★★★ 1/2

The Art of Mediation is a practical guide written by two experienced mediators. It covers the principles of mediation that set the stage for all life skills as well as a career in mediation. Even if you aren't planning on making mediation a career choice, this book will guide you in day-to-day life with people and work. It gives the reader realistic skills that make their life's journey successful and fulfilling.

This book is well worth the read. This reader wishes a book like this was available years ago. It would've made life much easier dealing with difficult situations.

Kitty Lane

Dump and Chase: Living the Dream

Joe Custodi
Self-published

E-book

B0CKC5ZKDF

★★★★ 1/2

Joe, from Buffalo is down on his luck. He is experiencing, a divorce and a job that doesn't pay well. Witnessing a murder in his hometown of Buffalo doesn't help his overall outlook in life. With encouragement from his friend Joel, Joe decides to go to Fort Myers Florida. With little money but a solid motivation he begins his trek.

Joe arrives in Florida in the nick of time as a snow storm covers his home town. He bounces between small bars meeting various personalities. He's taken through various escapades with application of beer and following all his favorite sports. He loves Florida and is content with his life. However, Joe's in for the absolute surprise of his life.

Dump and Chase begins with a rundown list of a few personalities the reader will encounter. Chapter three starts the story with a murder concerning his girlfriend. It proves to be

prudent to leave by himself and get to Florida. From there, Joe drifts from bar to bar, interacting with various personalities and going through some escapades. This continues throughout the story until the surprise ending.

If you want to follow Joe and his travels in southern Florida then this book is for you.

Lauren Calder

Emotional Trauma No More: How to Treat the Overwhelming Symptoms of Narcissistic Abuse

Cara Bramlett, PA-C
Self-published

E-book

B0CNSBKL3G

★★★★

A book that helps the reader think through what they're going through in a positive and thorough manner. *Emotional Trauma No More* is such a book. There are techniques that can be used to help deal with the exhaustive emotions that people go through who've been in a negative relationship.

It will help the reader manage

Booty

their lives and keep control of the chaotic emotions they're experiencing. Anyone who's unsure of what to do, how to move forward should get this book. It's chock full of down-to-earth and to-the-point suggestions on how to understand the whys of their own behavior and that of the people causing the abuse.

Lauren Calder

Mr. Jimmy from Around the Way

Jeffrey Blount
Beaufort Books
E-book
B0CGVVS2DW
★★★★ 1/2

James Ferguson made a huge mistake that took away the life he's worked hard for all his life. He purchases a property out in the middle of nowhere, an impoverished town where he could hide. He strived to be alone, but being alone left him to his memories and thoughts.

Living among the poor and angry had put him in a precarious position, especially when the anger was directed at him. As he re-learned who he was, where he was from, the light he'd lost began to return.

Mr. Jimmy from Around the Way was written with a deep understanding of human behavior. It's one of those stories that'll stick with you for a long time. Bravo!

Lauren Calder

Suicide in Suffolk

D Ayres
Self-published
E-book
B0CM8CSJ4R
★★★★ 1/2

Officer PC Cooper of Suffolk, England, has her early morning disrupted by an old man and his hearse. He leads Cooper to his vehicle and shows the body of young woman with a story. Cecil Whitford has high suspicion that his corpse had been murdered and not the sui-

Random in Death

JD Robb
St. Martin's Press
978-1250289544 Hardcover
978-1250289551 E-Book
★★★★★



Some time in the future, someone is targeting teenage girls, injecting them with a fatal dose of fast-acting chemicals. Eve Dallas and her team are racing against time to capture the killer before he attacks his next victim. The concoctions he uses in his syringe give a clue that they're dealing with a highly intelligent but evil criminal. The way he delivers the doses lets them know that he intends to inflict a great deal of pain in the short bit of time the victims have left. This fast-paced story reflects the urgency of their investigation.

Fans of Eve Dallas may notice that Eve has softened over the years in some ways, notably in her relationship with her husband Roark and her interactions with her co-workers. Yet her determination to find the criminals who are hurting young girls is as strong as ever. Although *Random in Death* is book #58 in the "In Death" series, readers can be satisfied with reading it as a stand-alone book, though it may very well tempt them to explore more of the stories.

Hannah Rowan

cide that had been put forth.

With suspicion and caution she listens to his concern, then over the course of a few days she is having doubts as well. Cecil is cleared but does not stop his inquiries. He wants justice. Cecil, once a highly experienced and worldly naval doctor, has seen this before.

Another suicide comes and there is an appearance, though faint, that there is evidence linking the two. Incomplete work from a medical examiner has shielded a culprit. Cecil trudges on, along with PC Cooper's diligence they must buck against the establishment to find the justice needed. There is plenty of excitement.

Suicide in Suffolk gets right into it. The mortician is a man of honor and dignity and is willing to risk his reputation for justice. It is easy to read and does not lead to unnecessary dead ends. It will keep you interest consistently throughout to the end.

Kitty Lane



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Y A

A Bittersweet Collection of Tales and Stories

Miranda Pardee

Self-published

E-book

B0BLTJ7CQ8

☆☆☆

“DraGone” is a story of genocide and revenge. To show true bravery, the dragons are killed off, except one lone survivor. Bertha, a kind witch, has found Amanda, the dragon, and wants to help save her. Bertha gives her a potion to transform her into a human shape.

A peasant named Ben joins them to find the last dragon, but Amanda has other plans.

“The Queen and Her Castle” begins when the queen has locked herself within her castle with the assistance of a witch who casts a spell to hide all the openings. The queen sets out a challenge—any man who could break through the barrier would be her husband. This creates more problems than she could possibly imagine.

“Toxic” is a story of a creature

who’s been turned into a poisonous being and is hidden in a cave. A merman arrives one day and wants jewels for his girlfriend, declaring that the creature’s poison will not harm him. A battle arises between the creature, the dastardly pirate who cursed him, and the merman.

A Bittersweet Collection of Tales and Stories is a very difficult read, since the book and stories were not traditionally formatted. There are no paragraphs, no indentations nor spaces to let the reader know there is a change. The dialogue was formatted in the midst of the narrations and mixed in with different POVs. Most of the stories were interesting and very different. Kudos for the author for attempting to step out of the box.

Lauren Calder

The Getaway List

Emma Lord

Wednesday Books

Hardcover

978-1250903990

☆☆☆☆

Riley realizes that she’s wasted four years being the “good kid” her mom wants, and she no longer knows who she is anymore or what she wants. To rediscover herself, she packs and moves to New York for the summer, where her childhood best friend Tom, who co-created *The Getaway List*—a list of adventures for them to share since the move separated them. Distance from her mom and being with her best friend will hopefully give her time for self-discovery and to plan her future.

Nerdy book lovers, Tom and Riley were pranksters who were always getting into trouble together. Riley used to be an adventurous risk-taker, while Tom was the more responsible one. To keep Riley out of trouble after Tom moved, her mother pushed her to join all the extracurricular activities until she

became overcommitted. This left Riley feeling lost and unlike herself, just reading fantasy books and fan fic in her free time—but no longer inspired to write.

Since Tom's mom, a renowned scriptwriter, moved them to New York for her career, he'd become increasingly more distant, neither texting nor responding to Riley's texts. However, when Riley arrives without notice at Tom's place, it's like nothing's changed—their connection and friendship are still just as strong as when they were young children. However, to Riley's surprise, her feelings for Tom have intensified, and there's a new intensity of emotion or feeling between them. Meanwhile, Riley and Tom make new friends they explore the city with and tackle *The Getaway List*. Ultimately Riley discovers that the most rewarding quest involves her heart and not leaving home.

Lord's vivid description pulls the reader into each moment with her complex, and fallible characters she skillfully develops. Her creative and multilayered story captures readers' imagination and touches their hearts. Her dialogue is colorful and suitable for her characters, setting, and story. Lord balances madcap, lighthearted moments with dramatic, intensely emotional ones without affecting the novel's excellent pacing or thoughtful and nuanced exploration of weighty, relevant themes. Sweet, funny, angsty, and romantic, *The Getaway List* is a fast-paced YA romance that explores the transition from best friends to lovers, following your dreams, self-discovery, self-confidence, parent/child relationships, and creative expression.

Lacy Hill

Ghost Roast

Shawneé Gibbs and Shawnelle Gibb

Illustrations by Emily Cannon and Aishwarya Tandon

Harper Children's Books

E-book

978-0358141808

☆☆☆☆

Chelsea Grant has tried to distance herself from her father's reputation as a Ghost Hunter, but working for him over the summer makes that impossible. Chelsea can see and communicate with ghosts. When her father gets a case at an estate in New Orleans, she sees multiple spirits, particularly a handsome young ghost named Oliver, and forms a connection with him. Her father believes all hauntings are bad and need to be banished, but Chelsea knows that Oliver and Marie, the spirit of a young black woman, are different. Can she help protect these kindly spirits that make the Manor their home after death?

Ghost Roast is a graphic novel that succeeds on many levels. Good writing and good art make for such a very satisfying experience. For its length, the characters are absolutely believable and three-dimensional. Initially, Chelsea acts like a typical teen, just wanting to hang out with her friends, and embarrassed by her parents. However, the writing gives the reader a chance to get to know Chelsea and to see that she is a kind, caring girl, trying to find out who she is outside of her parents' shadow. While her values don't completely align with her parents', their loving relationship is a welcome highlight. The color palette is warm and pastel, but works so well and gives the reader a very immersive feeling of being in the bright, warm environment of New Orleans in the summer. The haunting is depicted in such a visually appealing manner, pale but vibrant blues that contrast with the overall warm background colors. The

drawings are pleasing as well. Each character looks distinctive.

Ghost Roast presents ghost hunting from the perspective of a young black person whose heritage has inexplicably been shaped by the aftermath of American chattel slavery. This grounds the story and makes it more realistic for readers who are from a similar background, as one is likely to ask themselves what life would have been like for someone who looked like them in that time period. Chelsea interacts with Oliver realistically, unafraid to ask the hard question. How could he be okay with his family having owned slaves? The story asks the reader to ponder just what are the figurative ghosts that would haunt a property like Harrington Manor, which used to be a plantation where human beings were enslaved? The resolution made sense and adds another layer of appeal. It doesn't excuse slavery, but also reveals some nuance to the complexities of familial relationships in that time period.

Ghost Roast is appealing on numerous levels. It's a story with a lead black female teen who is coming into her own and finding herself. But also, it's a fun ghost story with an uplifting message. History cannot be ignored, but we can choose to learn from it to make the future more ideal. The writing team of Shawneé Gibbs and Shawnelle Gibbs with the illustrative team of Emily Cannon and Aishwarya Tandon has done good work with *Ghost Roast*.
Danielle Hill

Late!

Didn't quite make in the last issue



Includes all genre and all time periods

Bookshops & Bone Dust (Legends & Lattes #0)

Travis Baldree

Tor Trade

Trade Paperback
978-1250886101

☆☆☆☆

Viv is a young battle-hungry orc mercenary. She and her comrades are pursuing an evil necromancer, Varine the Pale. After killing a score of Varine's undead followers, Viv is wounded. Rackam, her commander, sends Viv back to the nearest town. When he returns this way, if she is healed, Viv can rejoin the group.

Viv's injury precludes her from following her normal training regime. Out of sheer boredom, she visits the town's bookstore. The place is so cluttered that Viv knocks over books with every step she takes. Viv apologizes to Fern, the owner. Fern says that if she buys a book, they'll call it even. Viv has no idea what book to get. Fern recommends one. Viv returns to the inn

and begins idly reading while she eats. Before Viv knows it, hours have passed. By morning she's finished the book. Maybe this reading thing isn't so boring after all.

On the way back to the bookstore, Viv stops by the bakery and meets a flirty dwarf named Maylee. Soon the two are seeing each other. Viv warns that she's leaving as soon as Rackam returns. Maylee says they should enjoy their time together no matter how short it may be.

Viv notices a suspiciously pale traveler lurking around the village. Something about him raises her hackles. Could he be a scout for Varine?

This prequel is an enjoyable stand-alone book.
Sheila Griffin

Calamity (Uncharted Hearts, 1)

Constance Fay

Tor Trade

Trade Paperback
978-1250330413

☆☆☆☆



Temperance Reed has been banished from her wealthy family. She was literally branded a traitor even though the treason was committed by her brother. Years pass and Temper becomes the captain of a beat-up starship with a ragtag crew of misfits. They've become her family. The crew is hired by the leader of one of the ruling families to search for a rare mineral on an uninhabited planet. The catch? The leader's son must accompany them. Temper figures he'll be another worthless, spoiled rich boy. She couldn't be more wrong! Not only is Arcadio Escajeda handsome, he isn't a snob and actually has a brain in his head.

The ship lands and the crew finds two groups of people already there. One of them are members of a fanatical cult and the other are untrained soldiers hired by a different ruling family. Both groups would be happy to kill Temper and her crew.

There is an undeniable attraction between Temper and Arcadio. She plans to enjoy the time they have together. Of course, nothing can come of it. When they return to civilization, he'll be forced to marry a social equal. But Temper will worry about that when they get home. That is if they make it home.

This is a fantastic start to a new series. This reviewer is anxious to read the next installment. It's a great book.
Sheila Griffin

A Cover for Murder

Sue Minix

HarperCollins

E-book

978-0008659790

☆☆☆☆

Jen Dawson is juggling writing

her latest in a mystery book series with running a bookstore in sleepy Riddletown, South Carolina. The bookstore is barely staying open, with Jen working on a solution to increase its profits. So, a rival opening a used bookstore is the last thing she needs. When the rival is murdered, Jen is the prime suspect. She needs to find the killer because she can't meet her book deadline from jail.

A Cover for Murder is a fast-paced, well-plotted cozy mystery. Jen is an inquisitive and determined amateur sleuth who's not afraid to get involved in police business. While the cast of characters, and in particular, the list of suspects is small, the whodunnit keeps the reader's interest without making it too easy to guess the culprit. The characters are distinctive and likeable, and Jen's relationships with them grounds her in the story very well. In particular, Jen's German Shepherd Dog Savannah is an adorable scene-stealer. The small-town cozy vibe was well done, but a little more humor and exploration into the quirky aspects of its characters would be appreciated. Additionally, there was a missed opportunity to integrate tidbits about well-known mystery and crime novels, given the bookstore theme and the lead character being a mystery writer. *A Cover for Murder* is a quick and enjoyable read for fans of small-town cozy mysteries.

Danielle Hill

Dark Factory

Kathe Koja

Meerkat Press

Trade Paperback

978-1946154750

☆☆

Ari Regon is the designer of Dark Factory, a one-of-a-kind, state-of-the-art dance club. There are three stories of DJs, drinks, and customizable reality. Guests wear "tiaras" that allow them to blend virtual reality with curated sights, sounds and even smells to

experience a world unlike any other.

Max Caspar is an acquaintance of Ari's. He also designs immersive experiences. But their visions are very different. Ari takes an indoor location and allows patrons to make their fantasies come true. Max wants to enhance nature to create a Garden of Eden-like experience.

Ari tries to recruit Max. At first, he isn't interested. Then Max's world falls apart leaving him broke, homeless and alone. The job alters Max's perceptions about reality. He works to turn these perceptions into a virtual experience - initially as a game. His goal is to turn the game into the next level of immersive experiences.

Unexpectedly Ari gets fired. He tries, and fails, to recreate the Dark Factory experience at many different venues. He falls in love with Felix Perez, a DJ whose mixing work drives guests to altered states. As Ari struggles to find his place, Felix's star is on the rise.

This is one of the most confusing books this reviewer has ever read. The plot was virtually impossible to follow.

Sheila Griffin

Dark Park

Kathe Koja

Meerkat Press

Trade Paperback

978-1946154880

★ 1/2

Sergey Kendricks, a visionary filmmaker, is contacted to document Felix the DJ's meteoric rise. Meanwhile, Max Caspar sinks deeper into the unstable gaming landscape of Birds of Paradise.

This novella takes place not long after the end of *Dark Factory*. If readers enjoy the first story, they will also enjoy the second.

Sheila Griffin

Hotshot Heroes for the Holidays (Book 9: Hotshot Heroes-)

Lisa Childs

HARLEQUIN – Romance

Mass Market

978-1335593849

☆☆☆☆

Firefighter Trent Miles and police detective Heather Bolton pretend to be in a relationship to draw out a killer. Trent returns home from fighting forest fires with the Huron Hotshot firefighter team and responds to a fire, never expecting it to be his own home with a dead body inside.

Initially, Detective Bolton is uncertain about whether Trent is involved. But when it appears Trent's not responsible, Heather suggests pretending to be his girlfriend to draw the killer out, putting Trent and herself in close quarters under a murderer's crosshairs. At the same time, their explosive chemistry simmers and inevitably grows stronger. Will they find the killer before the flames can consume them?

A local biracial, Black firefighter and part of an elite forest fighter group, Trent is protective, caring, and loyal. His life has become too complicated recently because his relationship with his sister is going through a rough patch. The Huron firefighting team is experiencing problems like sabotage, secrets, threats, and lies. Now, someone's determined to kill him, and the last thing he wants is for anyone else to be hurt in the process.

Heather is determined to discover the person responsible for murdering the victim found in Trent's house—and who keeps trying to kill them. She didn't expect staying focused on the case to be so difficult because of her awareness of Trent and the unexpectedly intense attraction between them.

Child's vibrant description, well-constructed action draw readers

Late!

into the novel and keep them reading till the last scene. She nicely balances the novel's suspense and romance. Hotshot Hero for the Holidays is a fast-paced, suspenseful novel exploring themes of revenge, betrayal, corporate greed, falling in love, trust, family, teamwork, sexism, and second chances.

Lacy Hill

Second Dukes the Charm (Her Majesty's Rebels, 1)

Kate Bateman

St. Martin's Paperback

Mass Market

978-1250907363

☆☆☆

Tess Townsend is nineteen when her father forces her to wed the Duke of Wansford, a lecherous old man. Luckily the duke dies before consummating the marriage. Tess and her two best friends, Daisy and Ellie, use her inheritance to form a detective agency that helps women who have nowhere else to turn.

Daisy and Ellie figure out a way for Tess to safely experience passion. They'll attend Tom Careby's masquerade. He always invites sexy members of the lower classes who are ready for a discrete romp. Tess fails to lose her virginity. But she does have an exciting interlude with a handsome man.

Justin Thornton is a very distant relative of the deceased duke. A series of unfortunate events lead to him being named duke. Justin goes to London to find a wife and meet the dowager duchess. To his stunned delight, the dowager is the woman he dallied with at Careby's masquerade! Justin proposes a marriage of convenience with benefits. After ensuring her independence and wealth will not be compromised, Tess agrees.

The two fall in love. When several accidents occur Justin wonders

if Tess could be trying to kill him. Will Justin be able to overcome his distrust and enjoy his life with Tess?

This is a typical historical romance. Making the detective agency a more central part of the story would lead to a more interesting series.

Sheila Griffin

Up On The Woof Top (A Chet & Bernie Mystery, 14)

Spencer Quinn

Forge Books

Hardcover

978-1250843302

☆☆☆ 1/2

Chet, the dog, and his human partner, private investigator Bernie Little, have been hired to find a missing reindeer. Dame Ariadne Carlisle, the renowned author of a series of best-selling cozy mysteries, is working on her 100th book. Well, the truth is she's trying to start her 100th book. Ariadne's got a bad case of writer's block.

To say Ariadne loves Christmas is an understatement. All of her books are set at Christmas. Ariadne's home is called The North Pole. The drive leading to her door is paved with red and green bricks. The cottages in Ariadne's writers' complex are named Dickenson and Cratchit. She imported nine reindeer and their herders from Lapland. Ariadne's favorite reindeer, Rudy, is missing. Her assistant, Chaz, thinks finding Rudy will break the blockage.

Chet discovers a man at the bottom of Devil's Purse, a deep mountain gorge. It's Chaz. He's unconscious and barely breathing. Decades ago, Ariadne's boyfriend was found in the same spot. Teddy had been shot and his body tossed into the ravine. Bernie has a hunch that the incidents are related. Now all he has to do is figure out how. Oh and find the lost reindeer.

This reviewer did not enjoy Chet's narration. But since this is the

latest in a long-running series, it's clear that some people do enjoy this writing style.

Sheila Griffin

Vamp

Loren D. Estleman

Tor Forge

978-1250892478 Hardcover

978-125089248 eBook

☆☆☆½

Vintage film aficionados should be particularly intrigued by Loren Estleman's latest Valentino novel. Film detective Valentino tends to become embroiled in murder cases and this story is no exception.

Movie maven Valentino owns the vintage Oracle Theater, which he's restoring. A friend asks for his help in restoring an old drive-in theater as well, at which point Valentino seeks help from a shady Russian character who wants two problems solved in return. He wants to find his long-lost daughter, and he wants to find out who's trying to blackmail him, even if it's his daughter who's doing it.

Valentino is excited at the prospect of discovering the last remaining copy of the film Cleopatra, starring movie star Theda Bara. Unfortunately, all of these quests combine to put him in some precarious situations, including the discovery of a body in his car. He can't be sure whom to trust when people he thought were friends are betraying him and people he thought were rivals might actually be trying to help..

In spite of that, the story is somewhat slow-moving and packed with Hollywood movie trivia since Valentino is immersed in that world/

Hannah Rowan



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Happy Valentine's Day

