

Have You Been Naughty or Nice?

Thanksgiving &
Christmas Memories from:
J. L. Campbell
Kisha Green
Susan D. Peters
Angelia Vernon Menchan
Christine Pauls
Anita L. Roseboro

Strong Black Woman
by *Cerece Rennie Murphy*

Arts & Entertainment: Shook One
by *Sierra Kay*



It's the most beautiful time ...

(Did you hear the actual song in your head? Bonus points if you sang it with me). Holidays. We love them. We ... oh who am I kidding, holidays are like any other days. It's we make of them. Some family members and friends, we can't wait to lay eyes on. Others, not so much. But the one thing that people can agree on—good food, great music, and an awesome hand of Spades, Bid Whist, or Monopoly.

The authors in this issue of the magazine, share their favorite holidays. Some prefer Thanksgiving, others Christmas. Amazingly, no one wanted of 'fess up to what they do on New Years Eve. Probably because I asked them to keep it PG, but that's another story for another issue.

Whatever holiday you choose to celebrate, please keep your sanity. You'll need it for the next season.

Naleighna Kai
Editor-in-Chief

J. L. Woodson
Art Director

The 15th Annual Cavalcade of Authors

September 27-29, 2019



The 15th Annual Cavalcade of Authors is back in its original location--The Windy City. The Cavalcade of Authors is the ultimate event where readers and book clubs have a unique experience with their favorite authors. Hosts, J. L. Woodson and Naleighna Kai, would love for you to join us for a weekend of private dinners, Chicago tours, intimate chats, dancing, games, and so much more. New York Times bestselling author, S. L. Jennings joins us once again, along with National bestselling authors who are sponsored by Slamor's: Naleighna Kai, Earl Sewell, Ann Clay, London St. Charles; as well as Sierra Kay, MarZe Scott, J. L. Campbell, Janice Pernell. This year we welcome authors who are new to the Cavalcade: National bestselling authors: Lisa Watson and Michelle D. Rayford, Nicole Hampton, and Terri Ann Johnson. We welcome Stephanie Fazekas-Hardy and Anita Roseboro as well. Many others to the author lineup will be added each month.

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ENTERTAINMENT



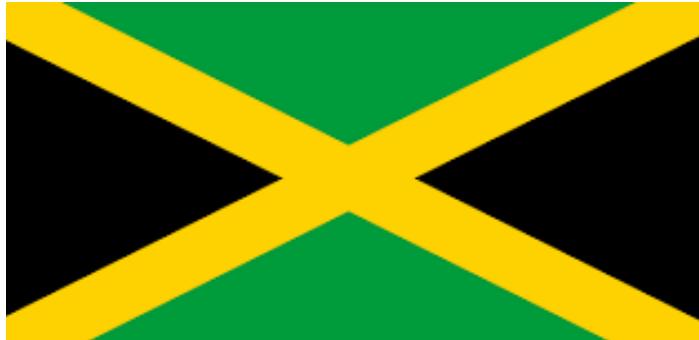
Favorite Holiday: I Love Thanksgiving

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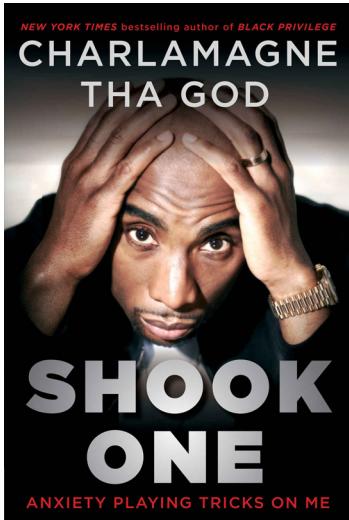
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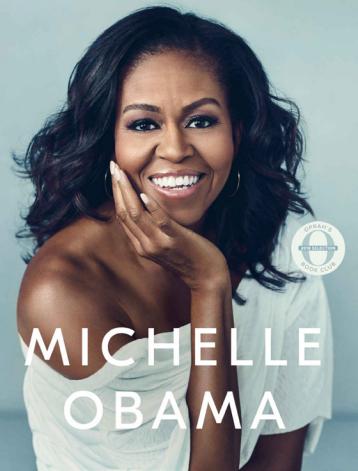
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Sugar & Spice
The Anthology Cookbook



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London St. Charles * Sierra Kay * Lisa Watson
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Michelle D. Rayford * Kisha Green * Susan D. Peters
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The latest from
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I just love Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving has always been my favorite holiday. Even as a kid with Christmas coming. Thanksgiving meant everyone would gather at my grandma's home, or later my aunt's, for food, laughter and fun.

These memories have fueled my writing life. Little snippets of conversations morphed into novels or novellas. Photographic memories that flip through my mind can make me smile until my jaws ache. Let me take you on a journey of the people who have impacted my life:

My Aunt Jenny, who lived in New Jersey, often came and everyone adored her. She was glamorous, husky-voiced, and left Florida for New Jersey as soon as she graduated high school in 1943. She was the non-cooking sister of six, and I loved how they teased her about it. The sisters' laughter filled the air as they joked, played cards, and had what they called 'beverages.' And though they were home, they were always dressed sharply with nice hairdos and jeweled fingers. None wore a hint of makeup.

I would sit in the corner quietly with a book, soaking up their words and gestures. Those six women defined the word "woman" to me. Though they were born between 1912 and 1930, and were as different as could be in many ways, they were close. My mom made macaroni and cheese and potato salad; Aunt Elouise baked sweet potato pies and cooked dressing; Aunt Alice prepared cakes, always a lemon coconut among them; Aunt Lossie brought rice and Grandma and Aunt Sadie always prepared a groaning board of meat, turkeys, ham, chicken and wild game.

My grandma was very religious and didn't mingle in her daughters' conversations, but was always in her rocking chair, smiling with her hands in her lap. Throughout the evening, they all checked on her, bringing her food. There were usually people stopping to speak to her and she would yell to her girls to fix so and so a plate. They always grumbled about her feeding everybody, but they did as she asked.

I had one uncle who lived away, he resided in Miami and was the eldest of the ten children. He was childless and lived with his second wife. We loved him because he was laidback and generous. He was the uncle with the

most money. He worked for Mercedes Benz for more than forty years and always drove them, even in the 50s, 60s and 70s. He was known to love Chivas Regal neat and for feeding his dog, Lady, T-bone steaks. I recall the conversations of his sisters calling him a fool for buying steaks for a 'damn' dog. But they kept that among themselves because they knew at the end of the evening, he would give them all a couple of hundred dollars which they folded and slid inside their bras. As they played cards and had beverages, the house filled with laughter and conversation. He would always slide me a twenty. I'm not sure what, if anything, he gave to the others but me, I got twenty ... the other kids were usually outside running or of somewhere. He called me Brainy Girl and always asked what I was reading. I recall he smelled of cologne and scotch and was also very proper.

My saddest memory of Thanksgiving was 2002, my mom had fought a years long battle with breast cancer and cancer was winning. Sitting at the dining room with her, my husband ,and sons aged, twenty two- and seventeen-years old son, my heart ached. She was only able to eat a couple of bites ... the cancer had taken her taste buds, energy, and affected her swallowing. After dinner, I sat on the side of the tub bathing her and she looked up at me and said, "Angel, this is it for me, I'm tired now. I'll make it to Christmas and your birthday ..."

I shushed her, I didn't want to hear that. January 24, five days after my birthday she took her last breath surrounded by her children, grandchildren, sisters and brothers and my in-laws. My sister and I held her hands.

I thought that painful event would ruin the holiday for me but the very next year we all filled my auntie's living room, eating the red velvet cakes I baked, laughing, talking with music playing in the background. On the drive home that night I realized that as sad as the previous Thanksgiving had been, the ones moving forward will be as filled with joy.

This year Aunt Alice, at 86, is the last of ten, but I know that my sister, myself, our children and various others will fill every surface in that living room being Thankful

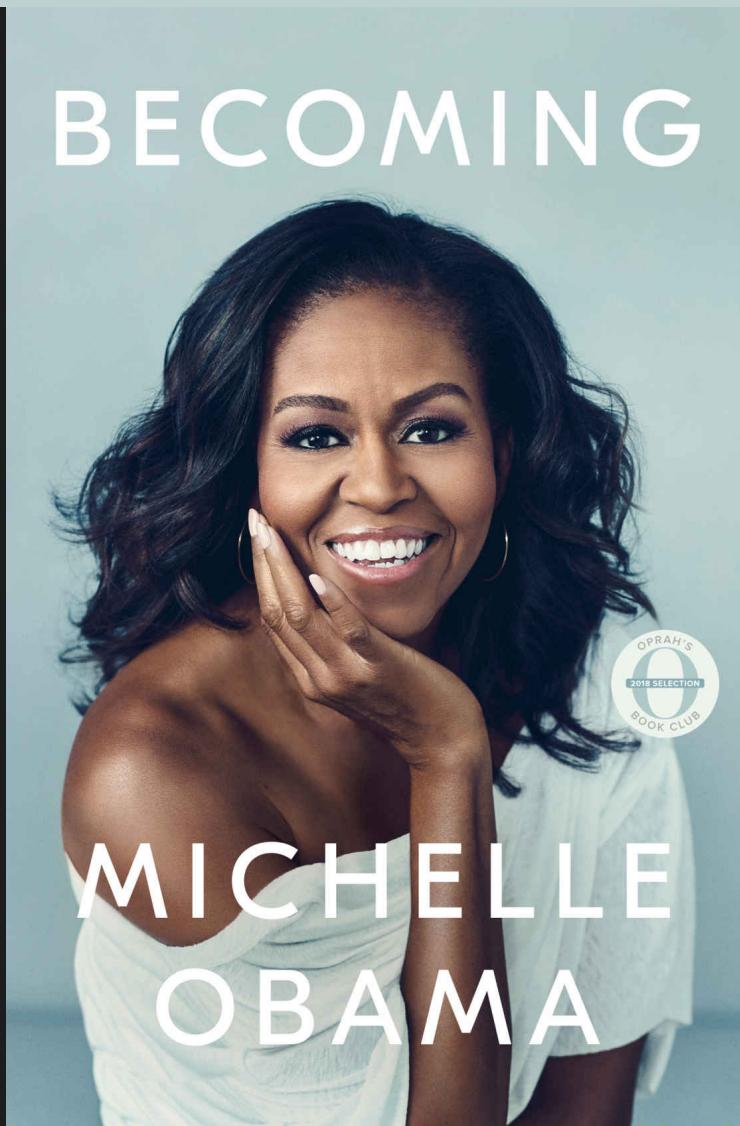
--Angelia Vernon Menchan

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NEW RELEASE!!!



In a life filled with meaning and accomplishment, Michelle Obama has emerged as one of the most iconic and compelling women of our era. As First Lady of the United States of America—the first African American to serve in that role—she helped create the most welcoming and inclusive White House in history, while also establishing herself as a powerful advocate for women and girls in the U.S. and around the world, dramatically changing the ways that families pursue healthier and more active lives, and standing with her husband as he led America through some of its most harrowing moments. Along the way, she showed us a few dance moves, crushed Carpool Karaoke, and raised two down-to-earth daughters under an unforgiving media glare.

In her memoir, a work of deep reflection and mesmerizing storytelling, Michelle Obama invites readers into her world, chronicling the experiences that have shaped her—from her childhood on the South Side of Chicago to her years as an executive balancing the demands of motherhood and work, to her time spent at the world's most famous address. With unerring honesty and lively wit, she describes her triumphs and her disappointments, both public and private, telling her full story as she has lived it—in her own words and on her own terms. Warm, wise, and revelatory, *Becoming* is the deeply personal reckoning of a woman of soul and substance who has steadily defied expectations—and whose story inspires us to do the same.

OUR GIFT TO YOU

Tasty cuisine from the talented authors and friends of Sugar & Spice. In this first edition of the Sugar & Spice The Anthology COOKBOOK, get our stories, our lives, and a delicious taste of home for the holidays with recipes that are sure to tempt every palate.

Click the book to download your FREE copy . . .



The image shows the front cover of the "Sugar & Spice The Anthology Cookbook". The title is at the top in a large, stylized font, with "Sugar" in blue and "Spice" in red. Below it, "The Anthology Cookbook" is written in a smaller, sans-serif font. The main visual is a photograph of a man and a woman in a kitchen. The man, wearing a denim shirt and apron, is leaning over the woman, who is wearing a striped sweater, as they both look at a small bowl she is holding. They appear to be tasting something. In the background, there's a stove with a pot on it and some vegetables on the counter.

Naleighna Kai * S. L. Jennings * Pat G'Orge-Walker
J. L. Campbell * Siera London * Janice Pernell
London St. Charles * Sierra Kay * Lisa Watson
Terri Ann Johnson * Karen D. Bradley * Anita L. Roseboro
Michelle D. Rayford * Kisha Green * Susan D. Peters
Cerece Rennie Murphy * Vikkas Bhardwaj

Christmas 1989: The beginning of the end

by Susan D. Peters

Author's Note: My home was Liberia, West Africa from 1979-early August of 1990. This excerpt from my memoir, Sweet Liberia, Lessons from the Coal Pot shares the flavor of our last Christmas in Liberia and what would become a life threatening experience.

In remembering our last Christmas Eve in Liberia it was my eldest daughter Binah's 21st birthday, her entry into womanhood and the beginning of the end of our lives in Liberia.

A married man, actually the husband of a friend, angled to have me as his mistress. He handed me a white business envelope containing two hundred dollars, "an early Christmas gift," he had said. I wasn't about to turn the money down but I also wasn't going to bed with him. Shame

on him if he thought two hundred dollars was getting him anything but my perennial smile! In the privacy of my room, I touched that envelope to my forehead, repeating this affirmation, "Every good and perfect gift comes from God."

I used the money to buy a small television set for the children. In Liberia, there was television programming for a few hours each evening, but on Christmas Eve and Day there were daylong reruns of I Love Lucy, the Brady Bunch, and Fred Sanford—I thought it was a creative way to introduce my children, immersed in Liberian culture, to American values.

Thankfully, in Liberia media hype about Christmas was non-existent—no commercials, or constant reminders that you needed money to be happy. The residents of Chubor Road were easygoing folks who planned to cook and share food with family and make friends happy. If they belonged to a church, they planned to attend and be thankful. Some people would 'go walkabout.' There was simply the enjoyment of being together. I was enthralled with the anticipation of sitting around the television with my family and sharing a sweet family day. What warmed me most was the fact that my children were grateful for everything I was able to provide for them. They were my strength and inspiration.

To celebrate Christmas Eve, we had invited a fellow Chicagoan, to share dinner with us. Ron Watkins was witty, urbane, and attractive. He had recently come to Liberia to run a diamond mining expedition. His swagger reminded me of what I missed about the Black men in America. There was obvious, instant chemistry with Ron, something I had not experienced in a very long

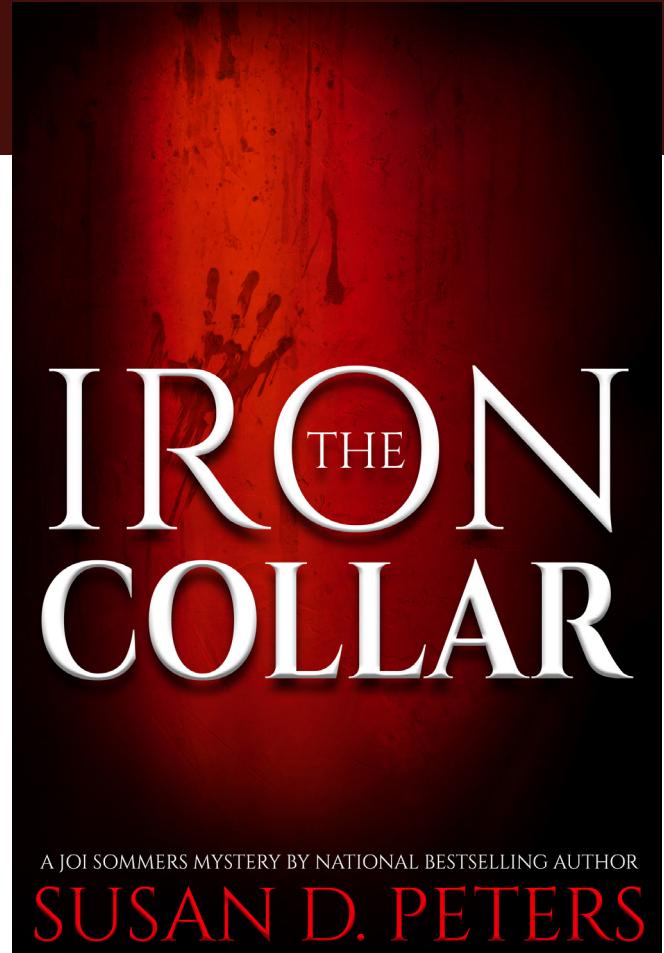
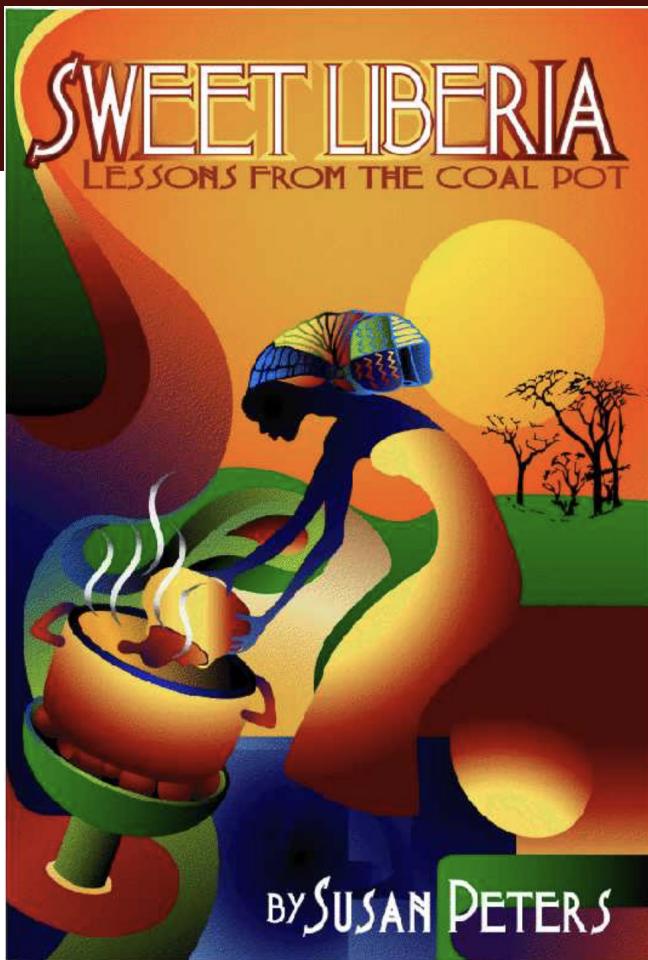
time. I was still raw from the breakup with my husband, Christmas Eve dinner with my children and a handsome Black man was exactly what I needed. Talking with Ron was as easy as turning on a faucet and running water. Finally, there was nothing to translate, nothing to misunderstand.

He probably felt a sense of cultural isolation too because he seemed equally excited about sharing a vegan dinner date with five children and a grandchild. How brave was that? I remember laboriously and lovingly preparing savory, hot palm butter (sans meat) with Binah hovering over me to ensure that the Country Rice was perfect. We also prepared potato greens and there was soda pop for the children and a couple of icy bottles of Club Beer. After dinner, Ron and I talked comfortably as the children kept a watchful eye on their mother, who they hadn't seen in the company of a man in quite a while.

I honestly cannot remember whether there was an announcement on television or the radio, but that evening, along with the rest of the Republic of Liberia, we learned that Charles Taylor's rebel troops, reported to have been training in Sierra Leone, had crossed Liberia's

northern border. Thus, December 24, 1989, marked the beginning of the rebel incursion that what would spiral into the hellish Liberian Civil War.

As Ron and I sipped beer and flirted, my middle daughter Zevah, her younger sister Tikvah and a friend played the clapping game NaFo in the front yard; my boys walked to the soccer field to watch the games, and all over, people fellowshiped. Yet, while most of Liberia enjoyed a sweet day with their family, life-altering changes rode towards Liberia leaving behind a trail of blood.



Many have wondered what it would be like to pack up our things and move to a new country, but none of us have imagined having to flee our new homeland with our children and barely more than the clothes on our back. Yet, Susan Peters managed to do just that while maintaining her faith which would eventually help her rebuild her life and uplift her heart and soul. This book is a wonderful and eye-opening experience that shouldn't be missed!

--Naleighna Kai, National Best-selling author of Speak It into Existence.

Four years after closing the gruesome murder of church Elder Dennis Gregg, in *Broken Dolls*, Detective Joi Sommers and her partner Russell Wilkerson are summoned to a South Suburban commuter college where the body of a sexy coed is found garroted in the chemistry lab. From their first horrified glimpse at the corpse they recognize they have been tasked with an extraordinary case.

The evidentiary trail leads them to similarly murdered victims. Is this a pattern, or a series of random coincidences? Tracking the wanton killer from the South Suburban hamlet to Chicago's trendy North side, their investigation thickens and threatens to excavate darkly hidden appetites.

Susan's memoir of eleven years as an expatriate "Sweet Liberia, Lessons from the Coal Pot," received the Black Excellence Award for Non-Fiction from the African American Alliance of Chicago and the Mate E. Palmer award for Non-Fiction from the Illinois Press Women's Association. Her most recent release, the second Joi Sommers Mystery, "The Iron Collar" is available now. For information on her books visit www.susandpeters.com.

Christmas the Jamaican Way

As one Jamaican Christmas Carol tells it, we don't have snow or sleighs on the island but we do have fun during the holiday season. These days, the Yuletide season begins in October, which is when some people start playing Carols. Halloween is not observed, however, since we have expats and American diplomats resident in Jamaica, that tradition has crept into our culture in the form of theme parties.

Black Friday sales have been on the rise and in 2018, many business people have hopped on the bandwagon. We'll see islandwide participation at commercial outlets and that will extend to Cyber Monday.

Since my son was a toddler, I've tried to decorate my tree by November 25, which is also something of a personal milestone. At this point, I would have survived one of the most demanding tournaments on the local golfing calendar—which falls on the last weekend in November. Decorating my tree is a celebration for making it past that hurdle. That's when my family goes into preparation mode.

The holidays look different based on where you live and the make up of your family. In *The Vet's Christmas Pet*, Toni, a single mother shares her family traditions with the vet who's made her the unwilling owner of a pet. In Toni's view, while Matthias is trying to court her, he's also pandering to her daughter's whims and spoiling her in the process. Matthias enjoys Jade's stimulating conversations and his role as honorary uncle, which allows him to come bringing gifts.

Christmas Market is standard on the eve of Christmas and this is the time when some parents shop for their children's presents. In every major town, a section of the roadway is taken over by vendors so people can shop until dawn on Christmas morning. In the plazas, people windowshop late into the night and sleep in on Christmas Day.

J.L. Campbell features Jamaican culture in her stories and writes contemporary romance, romantic suspense, and women's fiction with compelling characters. Visit her website at www.joylcampbell.com or connect with her on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter

For us Jamaicans, December is the time when gungo (congo) peas / pigeon peas are plentiful. They replace red peas/kidney beans in our rice and peas (a weekly staple). Sorrel blooms in abundance, too, and the burgundy petals of this herb are steeped in hot water to make a tangy, flavorful drink. Householders infuse sorrel with pimento seeds, sweeten it with sugar, then lace it with rum and wine. The drink is bottled and left to 'mature' but can be had immediately.

The night before Christmas, leg hams are boiled or baked (sometimes both). Next, the ham is scored, flavored, and decorated with cloves, cherries, honey, and pineapples and put back in the oven to give it a nice glaze. Between Christmas and New Year, we consume ham slices at every meal. Roasters are popular at this time and Christmas dinner comes with a range of meats, seasoned days in advance and pot-roasted to perfection.

Christmas isn't the same without dark fruit cake, also known as black cake or Christmas cake. Months in advance, housewives soak a range of fruits—including currants, prunes, and raisins—in rum and wine in preparation for baking. Adults and children alike gorge themselves on this delicious treat concocted from family recipes that have been passed down from one generation to the next.

With a heavier dose of fruits, nuts, and grape juice added, dark fruit cake is served at weddings. Some folks enjoy their fruit cake recipe, prepared with minor differences, as a pudding enhanced with brandy sauce.

The celebration outside the home continues with parties and Christmas services, and for those who want to start the new year right, church at midnight on



THE VET'S *Christmas* PET

a novella



J.L. CAMPBELL

Shook One

You always wonder if people are who you believe them to be. It's not how they act when all attention is focused on them. It's what happens in between those moments that matter. By that litmus test, then Charlamagne Tha God is the real deal.

Charlamagne Tha God, New York Times bestselling author of Black Privilege and co-host of Power 105.1's The Breakfast Club, released his second novel Shook One: Anxiety Playing Tricks on Me, which discusses how he has achieved success over his battle with anxiety.

The book signing was held at Barnes and Noble on the DePaul University Loop Campus and moderated by WGCI radio personality Kendra G on October 27, 2018.

Now, here's the thing. I go to these events expecting people to be pleasant and inoffensive. After all, they are there to sell books. Though I will admit that it's hard to sell a book if you offend everyone in the audience.

So, the fact that he said all the right things didn't faze me. He talked about his faith, his career ups and downs, and future plans. He spoke of how he had to have faith in himself because he didn't have a degree or a Plan B.

He ended by saying while thankful, he doesn't know we fuck with him, referencing the full room of people that gathered to support the new book and meet him in person.

After the hour-long talk/question and answer session, we all lined up to get our books signed. That's when I became truly impressed with Charlamagne.

Anyone who's done an event knows there's someone somewhere tapping a watch, encouraging the crowd to move it along with a soft smile and a gentle push.

I saw that lady in the Shook One jacket with the wrap it up hand motion when it was time to transition to the

actual signing part of the event.

Looking at the length of the line and calculating how much time was left for the event, I figured at one point they'd need to toss books like t-shirts at a basketball game.

Through this process, I watched Charlamagne interact. Some people got their book signed and kept it moving. Others had stories to share.

However, Charlamagne took time to engage and listen. Not the fake smile and nod with an "Isn't that nice" expression. He listened in the I'm-going-to-exist-with-you-in-the-moment kind of way. Ignoring the perceived pressure of the snaking line, he gave his fans a true moment of his time. At that moment, what was important to them was important to him.

Not everyone is like that.

Years ago, I interviewed one "star." After the interview, I was left with the impression, "Wow. You're not that big to be that dismissive." At the same event, my interview with Morris Chestnut was the polar opposite. Morris was engaged, gracious and eloquent. For the record, I hold him in high esteem and will fight you for saying a bad word about that man. Real talk. We can go.

I felt that authenticity in my exchange with Charlamagne. Because of it, I'm going to read every word of Shook One. I don't mean download the audio version and half-listen while I'm stuck in traffic. No, I'm going to find a quiet corner and read the prose word for word.

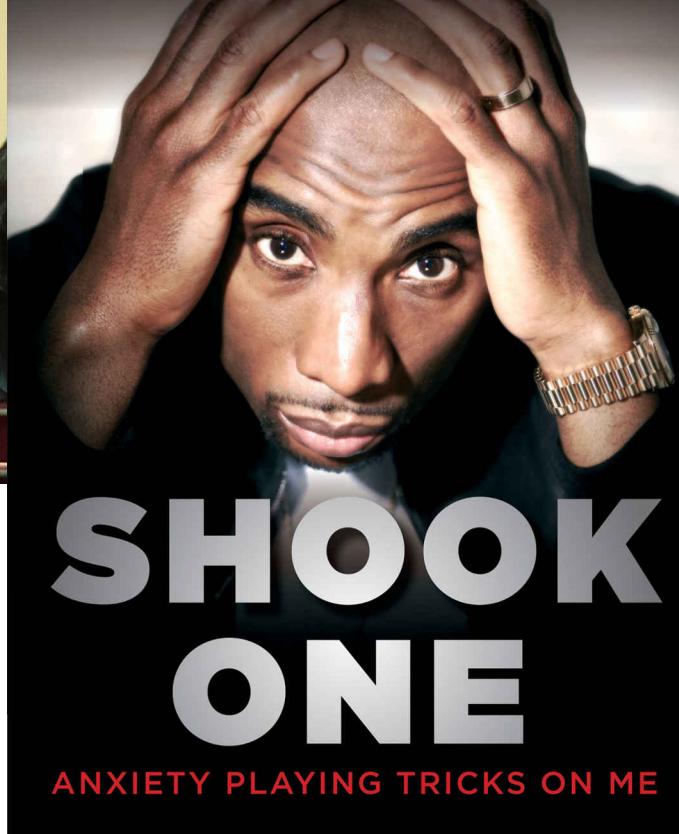
So to answer his question, why I believe people fuck with him is because he puts himself out there to engage with people. He's getting back what he's giving out.

Easy as that.

Sierra Kay

NEW YORK TIMES bestselling author of *BLACK PRIVILEGE*

CHARLAMAGNE THA GOD



Sierra Kay is a master storyteller with an M.A. in Writing from DePaul University. Her accomplishments include a Nuyorican Poets Cafe Short Story Slam win and featured comedy sketches on stages in theaters around Chicago including at Second City. She is an award-winning suspense novelist. Her novels *From Behind the Curtain*, *In the Midst of Fire*, and *At the Touch of Love* are available online with *Sweet Whispers of the Devil*, which is her contribution to the anthology, *Sugar*.

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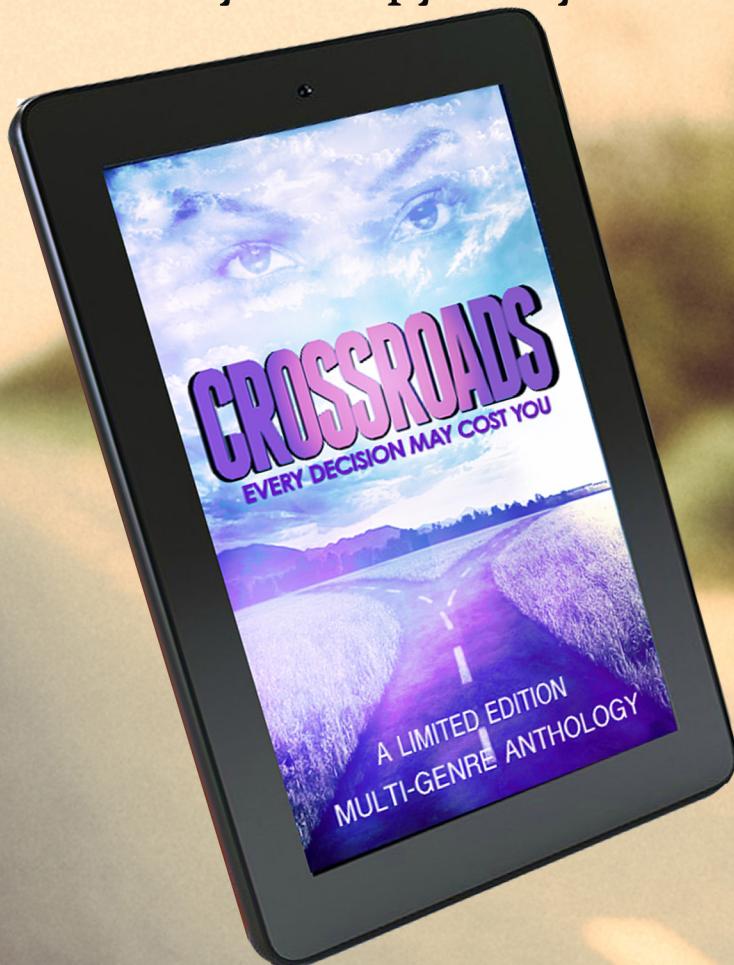
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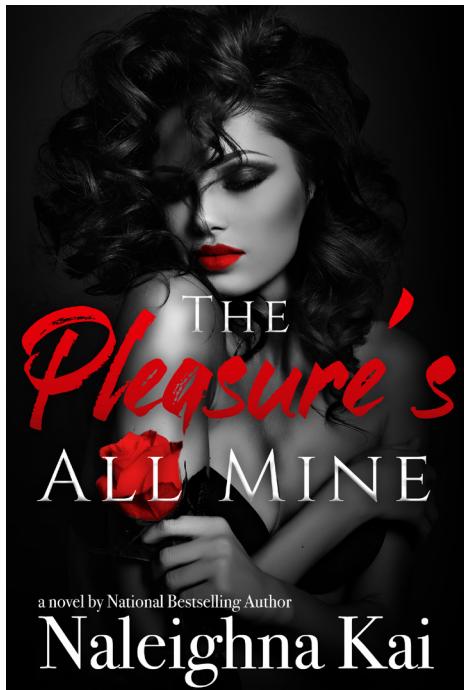
A Little Christmas Humor

When I was a little girl ... no, let's fast forward to a funnier year. I was a grown woman when I made my grandmother laugh so hard her dentures slipped. See, what had happened was, I lived in what was called a shotgun duplex on the South Side of Chicago. This meant we had an eat-in kitchen instead of a full dining room. One Christmas, we expected a lot of people over and erected one of those fold-out tables that took up a nice chunk of space in the living room. The unfortunate thing about that table was that we didn't have the proper seating for it, so the sofa, loveseat and a handful of regular chairs were situated around it.

If you're about my age, you might remember that Lily Tomlin child character sitting in that big chair with her baby doll or some other toy. That's kind of what it felt like, though I was about twenty-something or close to it. The table's edge came to a center point right across my bosom. No position was comfortable. After trying to navigate the table and my "girls" and things weren't working out quite right, I finally became frustrated and without thinking, I lifted my bosom—size 44 DD's and just dropped them on the table so they wouldn't keep getting sliced every time the table moved. My grandmother, who we affectionately called "Dearest", was the only other person at the table when those puppies made a loud thud that shook that fold-up something fierce.

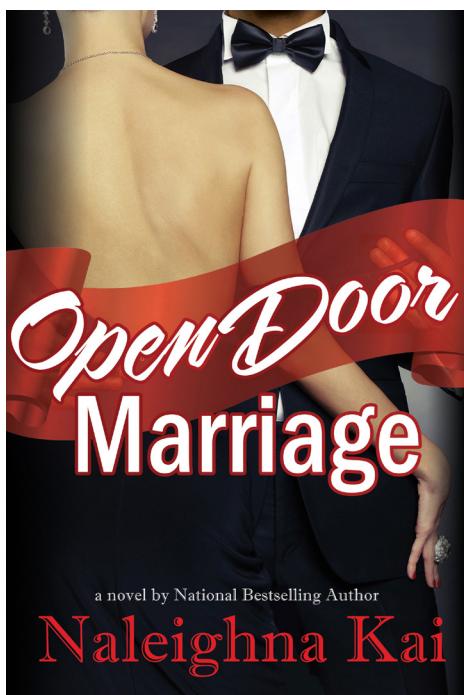
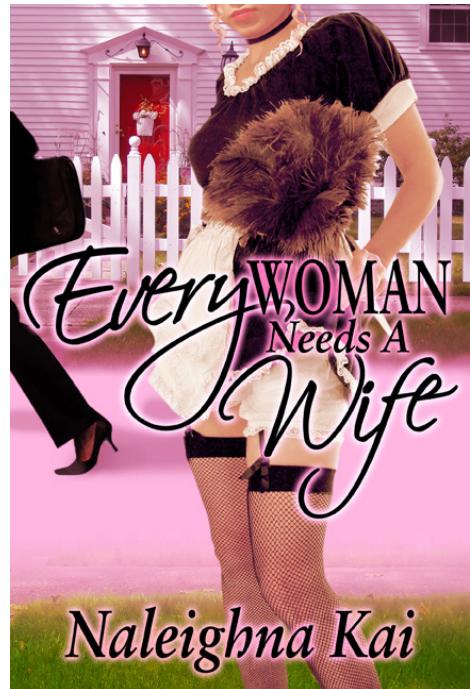
She gasped, looked at me and leaned back laughing so hard and long that everyone came to find out what was going on. The moment she had to cup her hand over her mouth, and leave the dining room in order to get herself together, will be something I will never forget. Every time she laid eyes on me after that day, we would point to my girls and start laughing all over again.

Click the book to enter to win a free copy of:



Another dynamic book from Naleighna Kai ...

"When reading The Pleasure's All Mine, I knew that Naleighna Kai had done it again. She had a hit with Every Woman Needs a Wife, but she has another great book on her hands with The Pleasure's All Mine. While reading, you can easily place yourself in the story. Whether it be an emotional scene with her best friend, being a mother, or being someone that is just looking for some spice in their life. Kai has a way of putting real life issues in a fictional book. Once you start reading this book, you won't want to put it down. Every emotion you can think, you'll certainly have while reading this book. This was one of the best books I've read because of how relative the story is. I recommend you read The Pleasure's All Mine. -- Urban Reviews Online



"While reading Open Door Marriage, those questions hit me like a ton of bricks. I wanted answers to all of the madness transpiring within this story, and needless to say, the author, Naleighna Kai, delivered in a major way. I love that she continues to take risks with stories that revolve around relationships, and they are never the same ole relationship stories that we tend to read over and over again. We can always expect shocking and uniquely written storylines with unexpected twists and turns. And the one thing we are guaranteed from this author is a darn good read."

--Brenda Hampton, National Bestselling Author of the Naughty Series

Interview with Naomi Simpson

Naomi Simpson is a woman caught between a rock and a hard place. Circumstances in her life have compelled her to take part in a desperate plan to make a lot of money in a short period of time. A victim of the circumstances of her own life, I sat down with her to try and get to the heart of the kind of person she really is and how she could possibly take part in such a heinous act. Guarded, afraid and desperate, she opened up to me as much as I think she could.

JD: Tell us about you. Who is Naomi Simpson? Really?

Naomi: I'm—a wife. I've got two kids, boys. I work as a dispatcher at a distribution center in...

JD: But who you, Naomi?

Naomi: I don't—I don't understand what you're asking.

JD: Okay, well, your husband's name is Thomas?

Naomi: Yes.

JD: How long have the two of you been together?

Naomi: Since high school.

JD: Are you happy? Are you and Thomas happy together?

Naomi:

JD: Naomi?

Naomi: Thomas is happy, but he thinks that I am too.

JD: You're not, though.

Naomi: I take that back. I'm happy when I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing.

JD: What does mean?

Naomi: I'm happy when he's happy.

JD: You can't be happy on your own, though?

Naomi: I will be.

JD: When?

Naomi: When this over. When I have my part of the money and that woman's home with her man.

JD: What do you plan on doing to make yourself happy, Naomi?

Naomi: Getting my boys and getting the hell away from Thomas.

JD: Don't cry. Please. It's all right.

Naomi: No, it's not all right yet. But it will be. I'm getting so far away from him that he'll never find us. I found a man on a website who can make documents look official; you know? Like birth certificates and driver's licenses. It costs a pretty penny, but it's worth it.

JD: Is that why you went along with this scheme to kidnap that woman?

Naomi: It's the craziest thing I've ever done, and believe me, if I wasn't desperate... But I am. I've got to save my children from their father.

JD: Why? What does he do to them?

Naomi: It's not what he does to them. It's what he does to me and what they see. They're boys and I don't want them growing up to be the kind of monster their father is. I don't want them to think it's ever okay to hurt another person.

JD: Thomas is abusive?

Naomi: (Nodding)

JD: Why not just report him to the police? Why put yourself in such a precarious and dangerous situation, kidnapping someone at the risk of being caught?

Naomi: I have reported him. Especially back in the beginning when we first got married. He beat on me so bad that I was afraid I'd lose our baby, our first one. So, I managed to get away from him and called the police from my neighbor's house to have him arrested.

JD: And he was arrested?

Naomi: I hung up before telling the police who I was and who he was.

JD: Why, Naomi?

Naomi: My neighbor's let me stay a few days. They were good friends of ours. And the woman's husband went to our house to get Thomas to settle down.

JD: But why didn't you have him arrested and press charges?

Naomi: I just needed to calm down. Thomas did too, and after a few days, he came by and apologized, said he'd never do it again.

JD: You believed him?

Naomi: If I'd reported him, he'd have lost his job, and since I wasn't working, we'd have lost the house, and I'd have had to move back home with a baby... It just—I believed him. I needed to.

JD: What's going to happen to that woman you helped to kidnap?

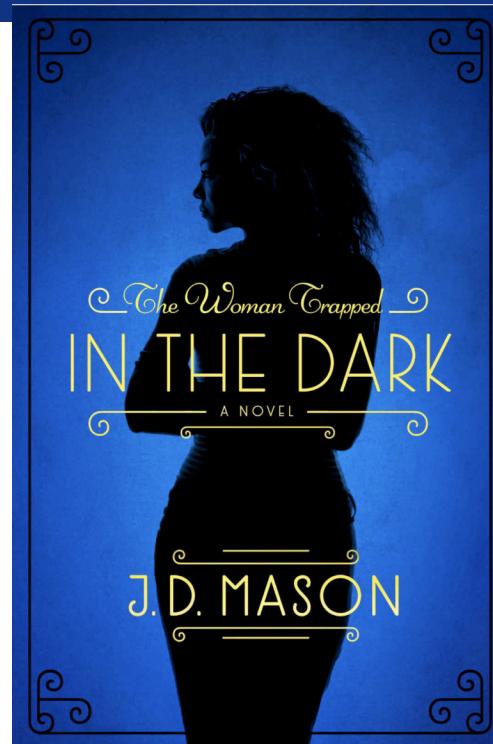
Naomi: Nothing. They're supposed to be back home by the weekend.

JD: Supposed to? I'm sure she's terrified.

Naomi: Of course, she is. I'd be scared as hell, but she's safe. Nothing can hurt her where we're keeping her.

JD: Do you feel guilty about your role in this?

Naomi: I can imagine what she must going through, but I can't think on that too long. I have to think about saving me and my children. She'll be fine. She may not think so, but I know so. DJ promised that she'd be fine, otherwise I wouldn't be doing this. I have to get me and my boys someplace safe, though. And this is the only way—The money I get from this will be enough to help us get as far away from Thomas as possible and start over, fresh. She'll be fine.



The Woman Trapped in the Dark is the propulsive third novel in J.D. Mason's contemporary trilogy about unforgettable love, scorching desire, and dangerous secrets.

Marriage can be deadly.

People disparaged their relationship. Enemies tried to tear them apart. But even so, Abby Rhodes and Jordan Gatewood fought hard to be together. Now, they are looking to settle into a life of married bliss. But sometimes the greatest threat stems from the person you trust the most.

Someone is hunting Abby. She has been taken prisoner, held captive by those who would stop at nothing to destroy Jordan. Now he must figure out how his dark and murky past holds the key to finding her.

Every moment, hour, or day that these people keep her locked in this place slowly robs Abby of any hope she has of surviving this nightmare. She wants to believe that Jordan will save her, but it doesn't take long for Abby to realize that it's up to her to find a way out of this terrifying ordeal before it's too late.

Everyone has a story to tell

(it's simply a matter of how to tell it well)

Part 11

This writing craft article is continued from Part 1 in the previous issue of the magazine and is taken from *Baring it All: The Ins and Outs of Publishing*.

Once I had a beginning and wrote my ending, I then found a method that made my writing flow faster and easier. I put together all the advice and suggestions Susan Malone, Naleighna Kai, Mary B. Morrison, and Christine Meister had given me, and I created what I call The Red Line method.

I first drew a railroad track and had a picture of a station at the beginning and one at the end. Then I used the beginning and end of my story line as the starting point and final destination of that railroad track. The “high points,” or major drama in the story, became different mid-point “stations” along the track. My first editor, Susan Mary Malone, later explained that the *high points* are called *plot points*.

Between each station there were little *tracks*, which were the details (minor points). Basically I had about three details leading to the first station and three going away from the first station. Those going away from the first station led up to the next station, and so on



until I got to the end of the line. Some people would consider this as a form of an outline, but outlines were a little too strict for me. I needed some way of keeping track of the entire story, while also having the freedom to write what I wanted when I wanted. A lot of authors experience writer’s block, and I believe that is because they’re stuck on the next move or direction for the book. A lot of times that comes from the one-chapter method. Write one chapter, then the next, the next, the next, and BAM! The train comes to a halt and the story sits for days, a week, a month before the author can tackle it again.

Like my mother and some of the other authors in this book, I don’t write in chronological order. I flow up and down the tracks and write what moves me. But here’s the thing—having that Red Line helps you, the writer, keep track of where the piece you’re writing at the moment actually fits in the story.

We have the stations, the train, and the track, but what about the passengers? Think of your main character (protagonist) as someone who gets on at the beginning of the line and looks out of the window for the entire trip, but takes time to reflect on their past, notice the

J. L. Woodson

scenery (setting) and the people getting on and off the train. Some people (friends, family, enemies) might even ride with the main character for a while or even make it all the way to the end of the line. We call them *supporting characters*. They are also looking around and watching what's going on, but they might see things a little differently than the main character (and might even have some "dirt" on the main character they'd like to share with anyone who'll listen). Speaking of dirt, it's always a good thing to add a person the reader will hate (antagonist), who has their parts of the story to tell and makes things interesting.

You might want to have all the main and supporting characters on the train by the second station (the first fifty pages). And if the characters have some narrative (where they tell the reader what's going on inside their heads), then their way of thinking and their observations are called "viewpoints." All viewpoint characters are important enough to have some background information written about them, but be sure the information you reveal about supporting characters doesn't overpower the information written about the main characters.

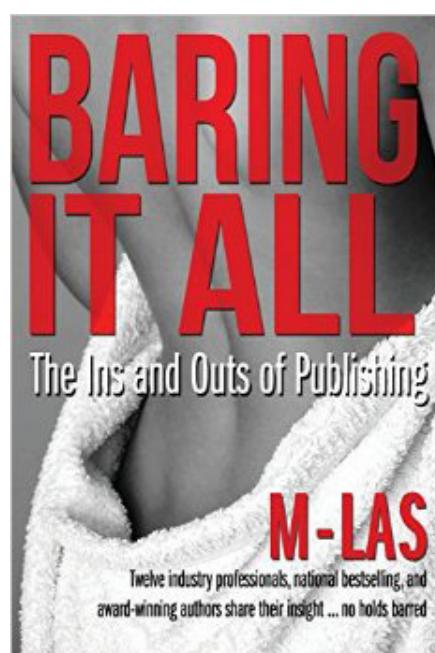
One piece of advice I received from my developmental editor is to try to use only one viewpoint per chapter. This avoids what is called "head hopping," where the story switches viewpoint from paragraph to paragraph or even sentence to sentence. Writing it so that the reader is in *one* head, *one* mind, *one* vision at a time makes for a smoother read. If you're going to change a viewpoint mid-chapter, then put a two-line break or three asterisks (* * *) to show the transition. The writer should also do the same if the scene or the time changes in the middle of a chapter.

More can be said about my Red Line, which I named for a Chicago subway. You are the conductor, but your editors (developmental, content and line) are your co-conductors, and they can help keep the story

on track. Using this tool really helped my writing flow easier.

I drew a diagram of The Red Line on a poster and hung it on my bedroom wall. It stayed there during the time I wrote my first two novels. It's on my website, so you can check it out for yourself. I also posted my other handwritten notes from when I was fifteen. I could have typed them or created the drawings on the computer, but sharing them like this reminds me of passing my homework notes to another classmate. I just hope you can read my writing.

Once you're done creating all of the passengers, the tracks, stations and the elements that make up the train itself, put the text in a single document in the order in which it belongs. Read it through from beginning to end to smooth it out. Then read it out loud. And a tip from my literary godmother, Victoria Christopher Murray, is that you should first read narrative only. Then go back in and read only the dialogue. Hearing how your book "sounds" means you'll find times where you've written something entirely different from what you actually meant to say. Finally my mother's tip is to read it from *last chapter* to *first chapter*. Only after you've done this should you go on to the next step: developmental editing. But that's another element of writing for another part of this book.



The one book that will save writers from trial and terror when launching their literary career.

Strong Black Woman

Strong. Black. Woman

Is there any other kind?

Whether we are making the best of a bad situation or breaking down the door to change it, we are unstoppable. This has been proven over and over again. The very fact that we are here is a testament to the faith and endurance of countless Black women who chose hope when there was nothing but darkness for as far as the eye could see. I am a beneficiary of their vision. Their courage and their strength runs through my veins which is why I am so humbled by the honor of being a Black woman and bringing Black characters to life in my work.

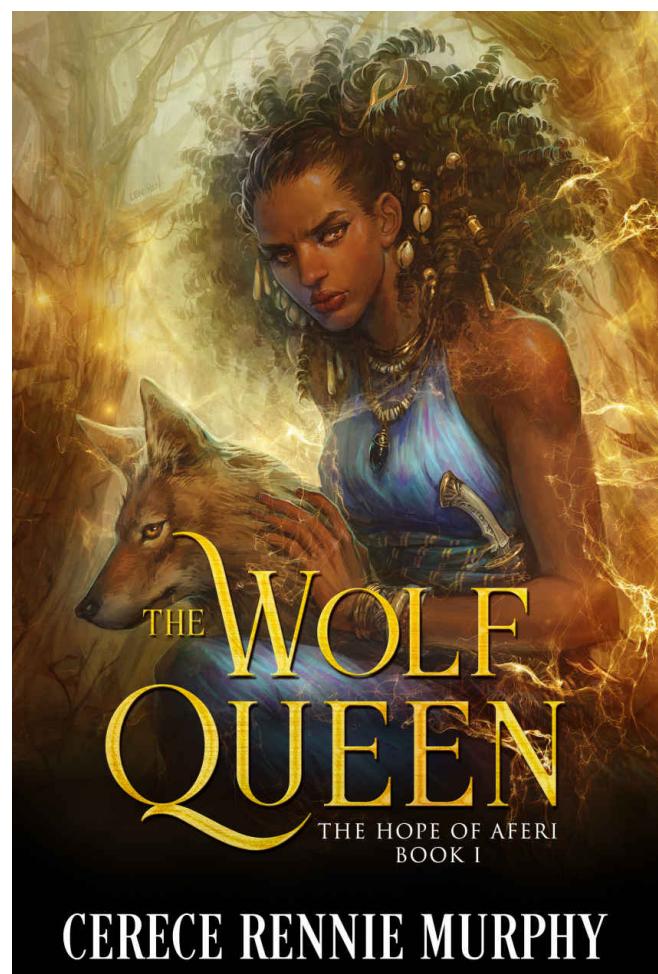
But I have a confession to make. For a long time, I felt surprised whenever I heard a Black woman say that she felt underrepresented. To be honest, I have never felt underrepresented. Ever. In my life, I have always felt bathed in a continuous stream of positive images of Black woman doing extraordinary things, both great and small.

But the reason for this has nothing to do with representation (positive or otherwise) in the media, the pulpit, or our forms of government. I have never looked to these sources to show me who I am or what I can be. When I want to see myself, I look to the women I know exist, the community of Black woman I see in the real world.

I don't know when I decided this, but it was early. I have vague memories of reading Tess of the D'Urbervilles and watching the women running behind Indiana Jones in his Temple of Doom and thinking how helpless and stupid they all seemed. On TV it was worse. All these women did was be dismissed in one disrespectful way or another. Very few of the women I saw in movies and TV were Black and I think this was a relief to me. I didn't want to see a Black woman get treated the way John Ritter treated his roommates on Threes Company.

I didn't want a Black woman anywhere near James Bond. In my child's mind, I felt sorry for how White women were expected to be and just assumed that Black women had opted out of such foolishness, preferring to live in the real world, where women are smart and capable. The few Black women I did see on TV were proud, intelligent, and made sense to me. They reminded me of the women I knew, and the quality of their presence was worth more to me than the quantity of bad portrayals I saw of women across the board.

In my writing and in my life, I continue to be guided by their example, the example of real woman. In my work, I write complex woman because there is no other kind of woman. We are strong in our weakness and weak in our strength. Both at once. We are human. We are extraordinary because we are women. And in my mind, there is no stronger force in the universe.



Cerece Rennie Murphy

About #1 National Bestseller The Wolf Queen

To fight for her future, she must first discover the magic of her past

Once great and powerful sorcerers, the Amasiti were hunted to the brink of extinction by the Hir and his followers. For four hundred years, their legacy faded from memory waiting for the hope of Aferi to be renewed...

In the Land of Yet
At the edge of the Forbidden Forest
A young woman lives alone.

Forced to fend for herself after the brutal murder of her family, Ameenah Yemini has made a life for herself as a master tanner and farmer, only venturing into the world to earn her living then return to the safety and seclusion of her home.

Until a chance encounter brings her work to the attention of the powerful Hir

And her careful life begins to unravel.

Drawn to the hidden magic that lingers in everything she touches, the new Hir insists on having her for himself, using the people around her to force Ameenah into his grasp.

When she realizes that her greatest enemy may hold the key to a secret she thought lost to her forever, Ameenah is determined to reclaim her stolen past. But, at what cost? As an ancient power waits to be unleashed, Ameenah's choices will make the difference between awakening a new magic or delivering it into the hands of evil.

Praise for The Wolf Queen

Fluid, skillful, beautiful, and powerful. Those four words sum up this author's writing style. The story blends a perfect parallel in what happens to be our current life ills of with centuries in the future will. The strong female lead, Ameenah, is not only admirable in her vulnerability, but in the steps she takes to find the courage to stand up to an evil waiting to rip their world apart despite everyone, including those she trusts, saying she should give in. Evil, in this story, takes the form of a man, more correctly, a series of men whose need for dominance takes on a clever cloak of peace-keeping and philanthropy—by making the people love them by showing grace and favor. My heart hurt watching the people of that kingdom embrace the lies and actions of a man so cold-hearted that he would use entire groups to bring one woman to her knees.

Ms. Murphy's world-building is amazing. The place within felt as if it could have existed centuries ago, but it securely is a world that is a future landscape, rich textures of people who are balanced between history, magic, and folklore. The touch of romance is just enough to make our hearts soar and make us feel for a couple whose relationship seems doomed for several reasons—our heroine's self-discovery and slated destiny, his affiliation with her nemesis, and time. I am waiting with bated breath to see how they are going to navigate the new developments in their lives. One of the most powerful women in this story is the heroine's mother who exuded a strength and courage that, even in her sacrifice, made the story all the more believable and graceful.

Though the book is part of a growing series, I lovethe fact that the author knows how to end the current book without leaving the reader hanging or forcing us to wait a kabillion years for a sequel to get answers. That's a skill set that is sorely lacking these days.

--Naleighna Kai

HOLIDAY MEMORIES

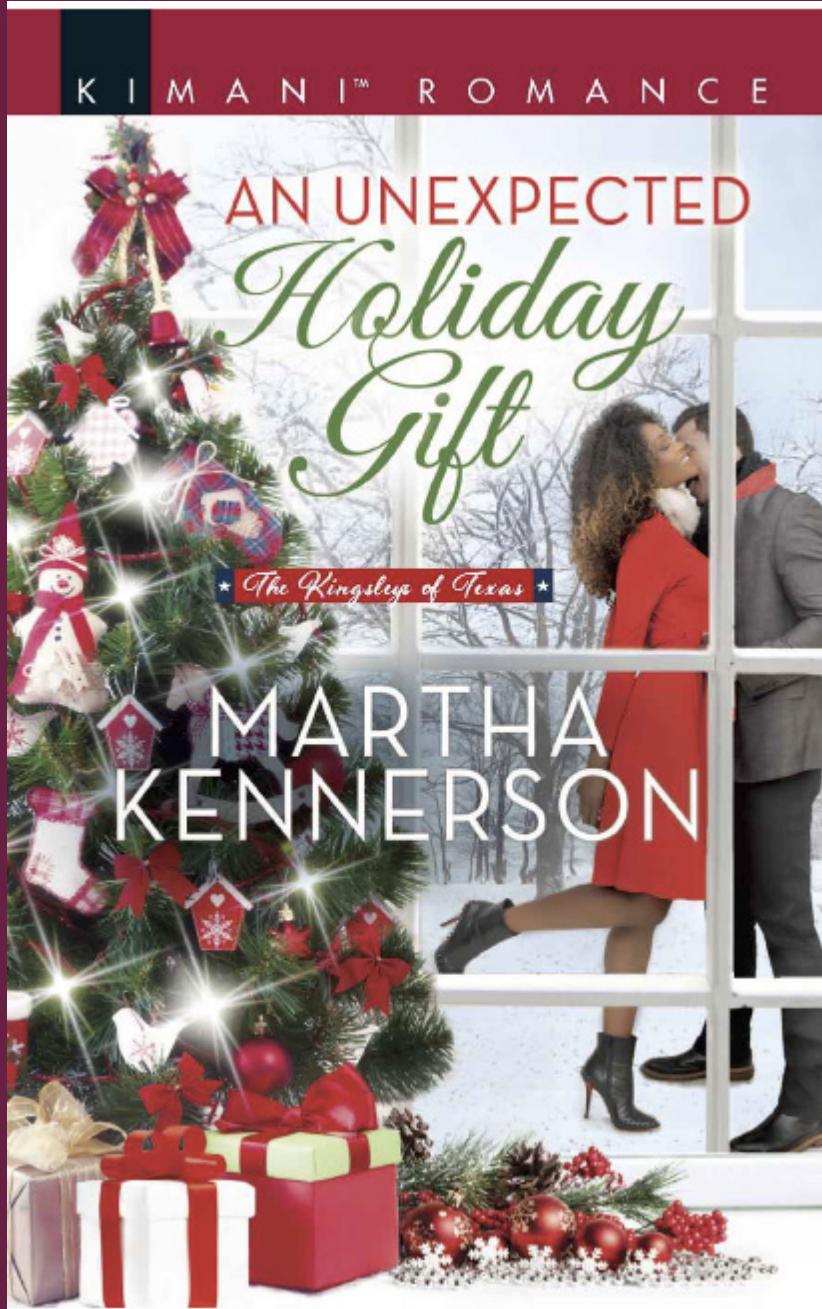
Christine Pauls

Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday. It's that special time of year we all feel extremely loved and blessed. It's also a tradition to have my daughters, son-in-law and grandchildren together in the same place, gathered around a table full of turkey with all the fixings and let's not forget my youngest daughter's yummy sweet potato pie. We relish in chatter and laughter until our stomachs are full, then several games of Monopoly is on deck. There's so much trash-talking; it's hilarious.

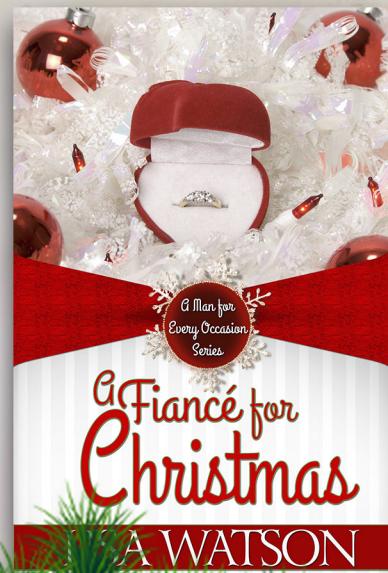
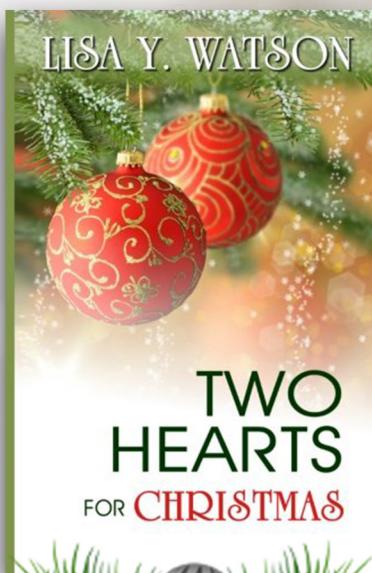
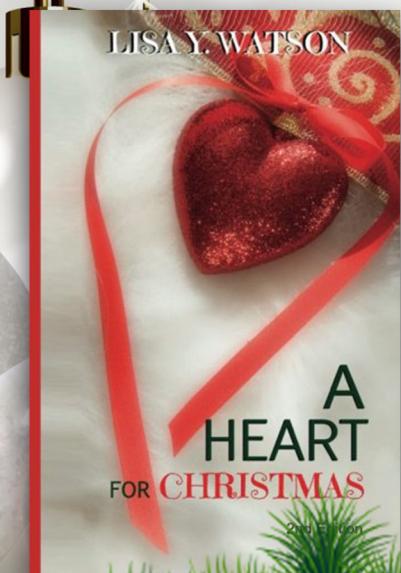


Christine Pauls a native of Wilmington, DE is the author of To Begin Again, Belinda's Song and One Good Thing, her newest release. She penned her first novel in 2012. The mother of two and grandmother of three is an accountant by day in the banking industry. She is also a book reviewer and beta-reader when requested.

Wishing Everyone a Wondrous Holiday Season!



Celebrate the Season with Family, Good Cheer...



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Thanksgiving Memory

Kisha Green



I have so many memories but the favorites are those when my mother was alive, but I carry on her tradition through her delicious recipes. The holidays are simply the best. I mean who can turn down turkey, stuffing, collard greens, baked macaroni and cheese, pie, eggnog, those butter cookies in the blue tin? Not this foodie!

This is the time of the year, where I am suddenly in an awesome mood, I think it's the anticipation of the family time, good food and conversation. Picking out the best outfit simply to sit with a plate and look cute in the living room while watching football and eating good food. #Goodtimes

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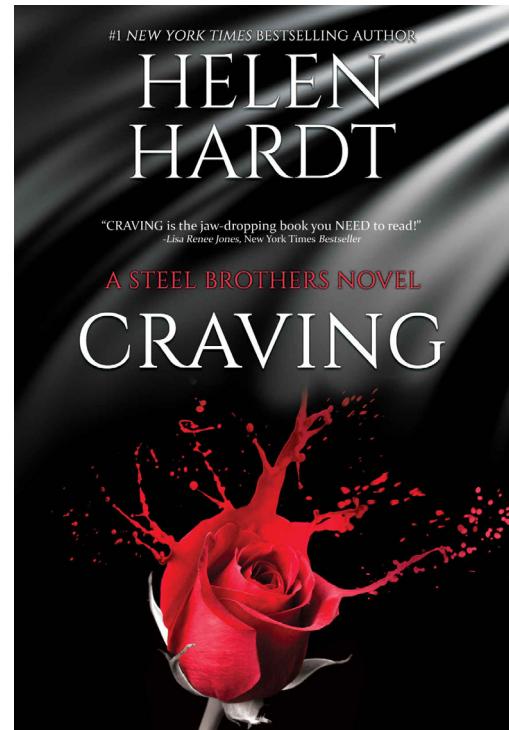
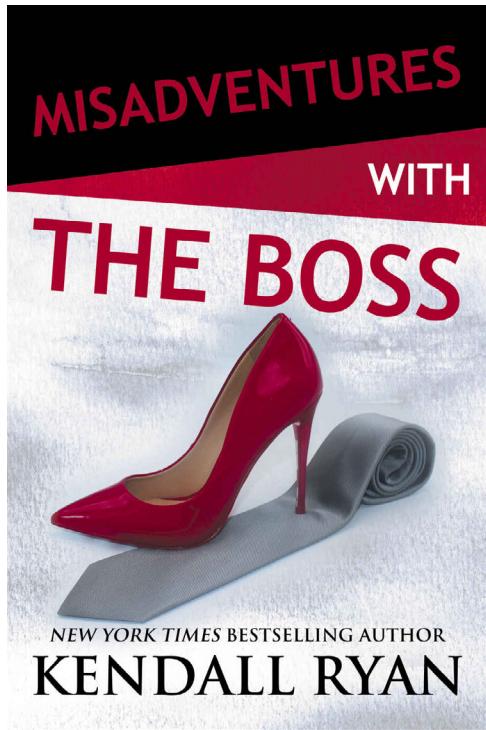
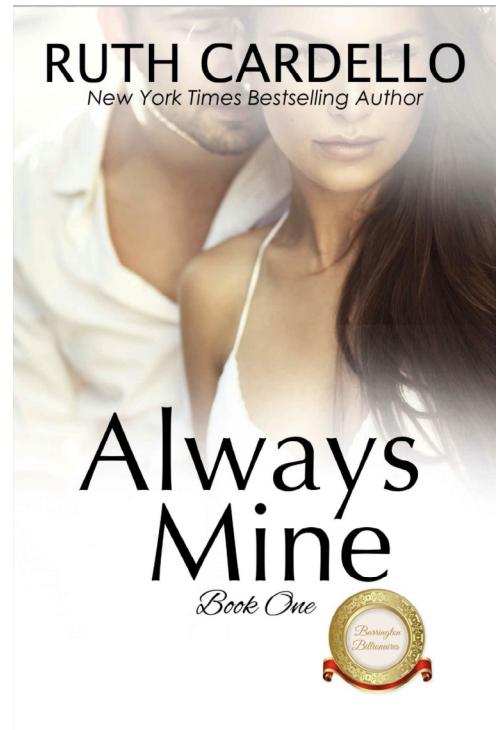
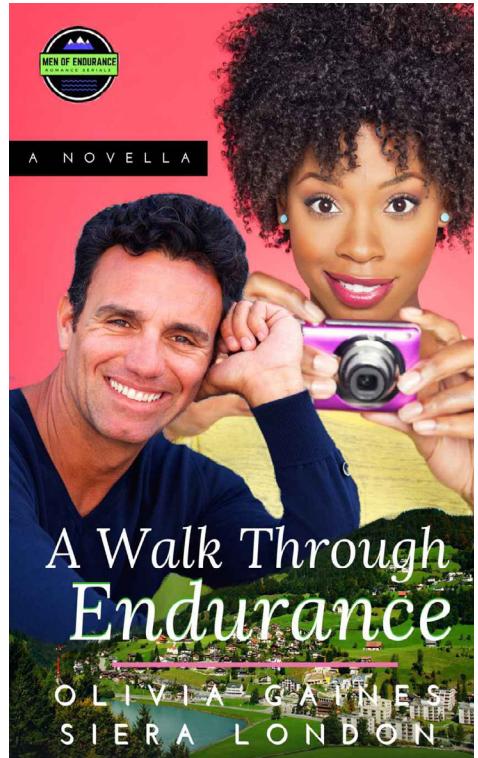
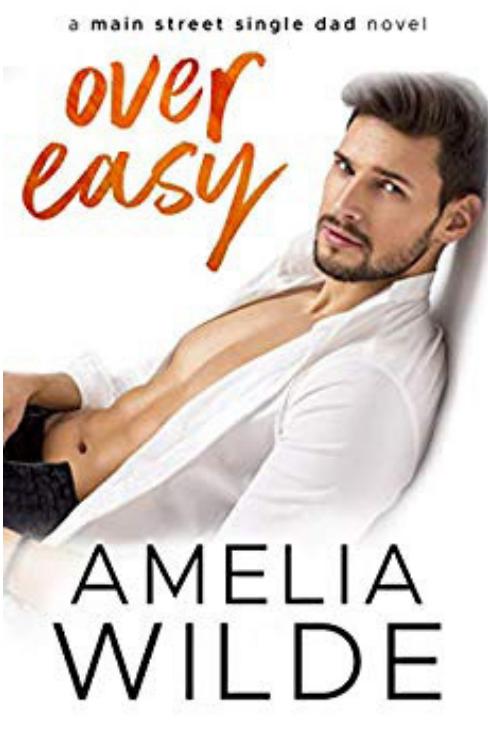
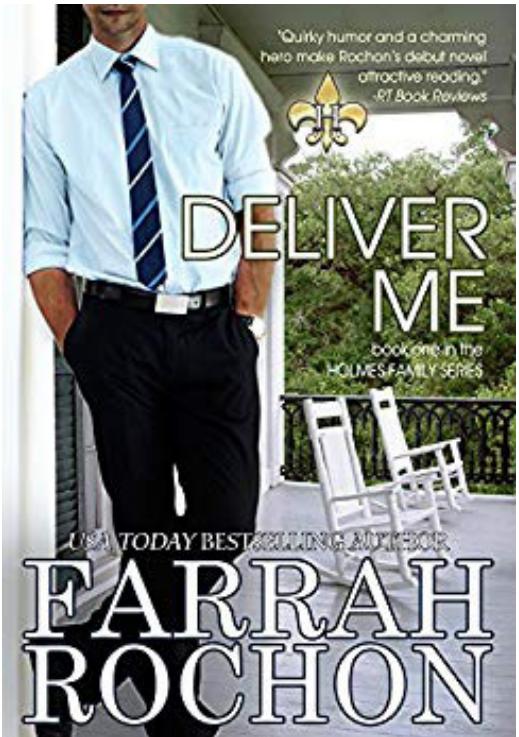
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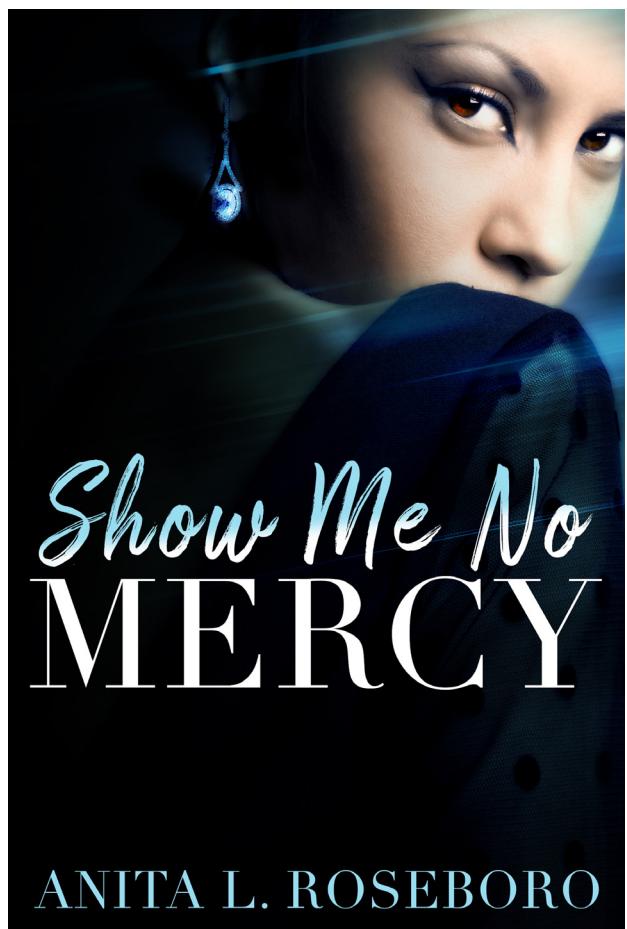
Anita L. Roseboro

As a child, my best holiday was Christmas. My fondest memories are of going to bed early, to wake up and see if what we hand-picked out of the Sears Wish Book was under the tree. Anything that was unexpected was a 'Bonus'. After a hearty breakfast, my two brothers and I would dress and go play with our cousins who lived in the neighborhood. Of course, we compared gifts to see who had the best ones, which baby doll did the most, or who had the fastest bicycle with the most gears, or even who received the coolest games.

Through time we age, families split, or relocate, we grow up and start families of our own. Loved ones slip away to glory and the special moments that meant the most to us as a child, suddenly aren't the same. You learn to treasure the people in your life, not the gifts, or trinkets. The warmth shared with friends, the intimacy with a loved one, laughter of your children takes the forefront as you reach maturity. Those years gone and forgotten.

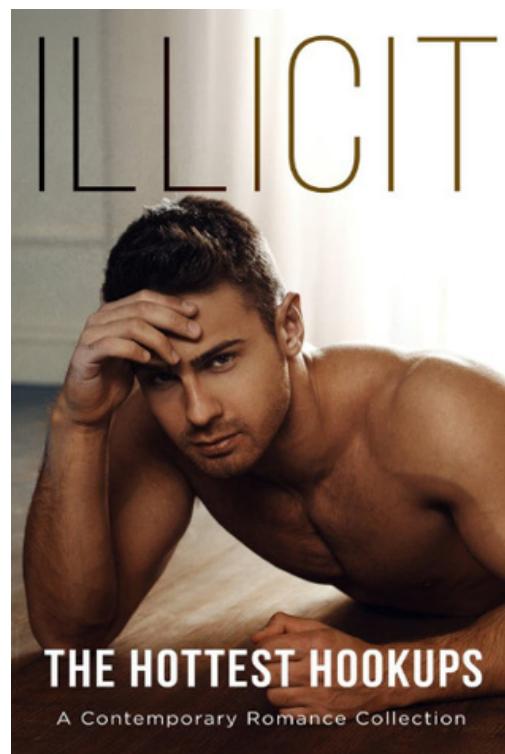
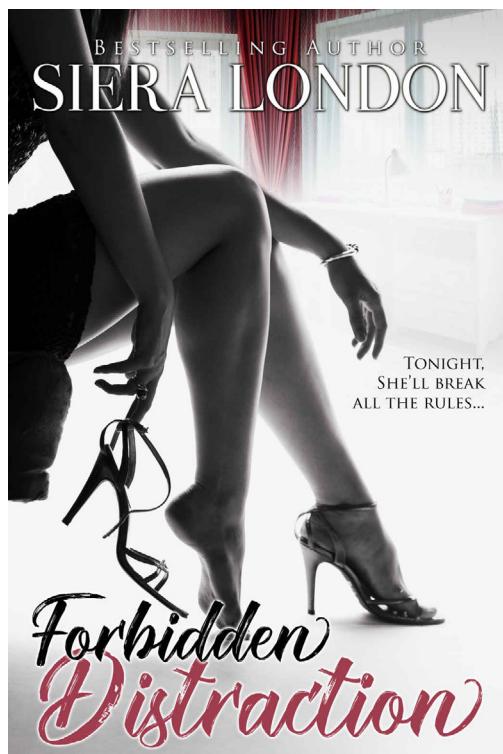
Memories of when my mom was alive, and now that my father's remembrances of our lives together have faded, it's pertinent to create new experiences for him in the moment. Preparing for the amazing future that's waiting has become a necessity. Spending time with family members, and friends reflecting on years past is wonderful, but in the pinnacle years of my life, I've come to love the simplicity of solitude. The memories that I cherish have become the best type of company.

Be sure to check out Anita's debut novel



Anita L. Roseboro-Wade, a native of North Carolina, pens poetry, articles, and stories that are centered around women's issues and thought-provoking subjects. Her poetry was recently published in the Heart Songs, a Poets and Writers Collective edited by National Bestselling Author, Deborah Mello, and Sugar an Anthology by S.L. Jennings, and Naleighna Kai, and her first novella, Show Me No Mercy. Visit her on the web www.anitalroseboro.com

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A Gift Returned. Illustrated by Ella Mahoney

THE WOLF
QUEEN
THE HOPE OF AFERI
BOOK ONE

The Amasiti have always been one with the village, the earth, life itself. From first we came, it has been our purpose to bring knowledge and wisdom to the land of Yet and all the seas beyond. We were not a part of The Way. We were The Way. They called us Mother and so it was for a thousand years – until the time of the Hir descended.

The talent to heal, to see, to lead was given to us by birth from the Goddess, handed down to the descendants of Amalaki to each girl child within Her bloodline because only women have the power to create.

But for all our gifts, we did not see what was to come.

With no Mother to receive my account of events and no chance of living past this day, I commit the story of the Fall of Elan to this parchment in hopes of preserving it against the treachery and deceit of these times. So that our descendants, who must now hide within the belly of lesser shadows, will one day know and reclaim that which has been stolen.

I write to you of the future as though it is past because I have seen it and it will be, though I will not be here to tell it. My name is Aferi and because of what I have done, I wear the poison chains. I am the last sorceress of Elan.

* * *

To truly understand the Amasiti, you must first understand the language of dance. To the Amasiti, the body is more than just a sacred vessel, it is a channel through which, if trained properly, wisdom can be formed into the shape of a woman's hip. Even our greeting to each other is a dance. A soft curve of the palm held over the heart, fingers held just so, so that the evidence of intention is unmistakable. An open call from one goddess to another.

The Amasiti learn to dance early, with bare soles to bare earth so that there is no interruption in the flow of energy between the knowledge of the earth and the wisdom of the heavens. In this way, we become the current between the sky and the great depths below. In dance, every fiber of our bodies is a conveyor of information, a force to bind our will to the world around us and make it so. Each movement conveys a sequence of truth that is known and understood by us alone. It is forbidden for anyone outside the Amasiti to witness our dance. For we have always understood that knowledge of the dance without the ability to control the power it summons, could only breed confusion and chaos, which is exactly what our world has become.

The Time Before...

There is a beauty that rests so deeply within the soul that it can only be witnessed by those who hunger for the same boundless splendor. Elan had such a soul. Elan was such a place. It was my home.

Though I am sure it existed, I never found a single person who could recall a time when the glittering towers and paved roads of Elan did not shine with a brilliance that could be seen from every corner of Yet. From the last quiver of the 4th moon to the first rise of the 2nd sun, the city could be seen clear across the wild planes of Simhar to the west and at the farthest regions of Kiveer in the south. Crowning the highest peak of the teardrop shaped peninsula, ships used Elan's luminesce as a beacon from which to navigate. Merchants and travelers came to the city for the robust trade, then lingered to experience the wisdom imparted by the Amasiti and the way of being that wisdom inspired. As news of the city's uncommon convergence of knowledge, food, and culture spread, Elan became known as the Shore of Light and for a long time, it was.

Because of its vitality, it was often assumed that the Amasiti founded the city, but this is not true. The Amasiti did not build the city of Elan, or any other that we inhabited, though I will not deny that the light of our influence shaped everything we touched. The Amasiti came to Elan as healers, teachers, diviners, and sages to ease the burden of mankind and keep the search for life's meaning awake in the hearts of those who would seek its truth.

The Amasiti founded their first temple, The Great Temple of Amalaki, at the center of the city. The location, along with its carving and rounded structure, were designed to make it easy for us to become one with the city and the city to become one with us. The Temple functioned as a home for all Mothers, a headquarters for the Amasiti, and a place of knowledge open to the city and all who would come.

I was born within Elan's Great Temple, the third daughter of the fourth sorceress of Elan, though truly, within the Mother's temple, I was everyone's child. My mother's love for me was made more precious by the magnitude of affection that surrounded it. I sat on every lap and proved my knowledge with anyone who would teach me. Thus was our custom, to love each child as our own. I counted myself among hundreds of siblings throughout the sisterhood of the Amasiti and relished my childhood for as long as it lasted.

Whether through the presence of our magic or the work of our hands, we were taught to be a blessing to every community that welcomed us. In our youth, all Amasiti tilled the fields, cooked the food, washed the clothes, and fetched the water so that we understood the lives of those we served.

But, while we were loved for the fruit of our toil, we were revered for our power. At night, while those around us slept, through our dance we gained knowledge from the earth, wisdom from above, then shaped it into a power that would serve the world.

~

The magic of our gifts comes differently to each of us, but one who is well proved can often see a thread of what our talent will be from the time we learn to make our first words. For me, it began with the soil. Though it has been more than 20 years since the last yam I dug from the ground, I can still remember the tug of earth beneath my fingernails and how the sweetness of the smell tickled the back of my throat. As a small child, I would sneak the dirt and the yams into my bed at night to comfort me, driving my mothers mad each morning.

From digging the dirt, I learned by smell, which vegetables and herbs would flourish best in which fields. By seven, my talent brought me to other towns and villages to help increase their harvests and cultivate the best produce to sell at the great markets at Nehor and Seht. In gratitude, the people in nearby towns (without an Amalaki temple) began to call me Aferi (of the soil) in their native tongue and it is the only name I have answered to since.

My awakening to the deeper meaning of my power came with a dream that shook the foundations of the Temple. I saw myself rising from the vast universe below, cutting through oceans, rocks and the underpinnings of our world like a shooting star. I burned hot and furious as I flew, but I welcomed the heat and the friction that spoke of my coming. I arose from the dream to find my bed sheets soaked with sweat and my clothes burned to ether. Around me the Mothers, my mothers kneeled before me in prayer and welcome.

I was 14 years old and The Mother was alive within me.

News of the earthquake that my awakening caused travelled quickly on the tongues of those who witnessed and those who had merely heard the story of the Awakening of Aferi. But as the whispers of rumor and legend returned, they brought a trail of danger right to our doorstep. At least, that is what I tell myself in times when blame and guilt feel more manageable than the truth. In reality trouble was already waiting like fertile



A Whisper of Truth. Illustrated by Ella Mahoney

THE WOLF
QUEEN
THE HOPE OF AFERI
BOOK ONE

soil. The news of my awakened power merely provided the seed it needed to fester and grow strong. The danger was closer than I ever realized.

The Mothers brought almost as many daughters as sons into the world during their time, but only girl children could enter into the Amasiti and so our brothers were often moved to the outer circles of the temple or adopted as valued apprentices at the age of 13 when we began our ordination as Amalaki priestesses. But, even though our paths diverged, we always loved our brothers – some more than others.

When I think of my childhood, I think of Safaro always at my side. Though he was a year older than I. We did everything together. Pulling up weeds from the garden that I would feed him until it made our bellies sick. Carrying pails of water. Competing to pick the most blue greens or pluck the highest sparrow fruit on the tree. In faith, he was, as all the other boys around me, a brother, but in truth he was much more than that.

We shared our first kiss at the dawning of our adulthood and caressed our maturing bodies together under the sheltering leaves of the sap tree until we were sweaty and giddy with excitement. I planned to love him forever, but it was not enough.

When he asked me to marry him, I laughed. A high, breathless sound that carried no weight at all.

“What nonsense is this?” I asked trying to squint past the sun in my eyes. I felt sure he was making fun of me, the way he always did.

It was only when I did not hear his laughter beside mine that I shifted my gaze to see his face. He was not smiling back at me. I had hurt him, though with all my heart, I had not meant to. Confused, I reached for him.

“Safi...what have I done? Tell me?”

“Is my love a joke? I speak truly, Aferi. I want you to be with me and only me.”

“I am with you. I will always be with you.” I still did not understand.

“I am almost a man, Aferi.”

My smile felt tentative as it tugged its way across my mouth, but I closed the distance between us. Slowly, I stroked the taut muscles of his abdomen, then rested my hand at the knot that held the wrap about his waist in place. “I know,” I answered searching his face for the openness that had always been there.

His hand came over mine, hard and unmovable.

"Listen to me, Aferi. I want more than this. I want us to be together. I want someone to bear my children and raise them."

"I will have our children and we will raise them together." Slipping my hand away, I gripped his face between my palms. "You know I want this, too."

Not finding what he wanted in my eyes, he turned away.

"I want a wife, Aferi. I want you to be my wife."

A bitter taste spread across my tongue, but my heart refused to focus on anything, but trying to unravel the meaning behind the words I could not fathom.

"The Amasiti do not marry You know this."

Only then did he turn to me, wild and desperate. He grabbed my hands and squeezed hard.

"Then renounce them and come with me. Be my wife!"

"Renounce them?" I felt the bile rising, mixing with the taste of fear. "I am them. You ask this as if I could step out on my own skin."

His expression turned hard as he dropped my hands.

"You think because you are Amasiti that you are better than me!" he yelled.

I was not prepared to defend who I was to anyone, least of all him. I struggled for the words that I had never had to speak before.

"I am different than you are, not better. We are meant for different things."

"Why? I could learn the dances. I know..." His voice cut off.

I did not realize that I had stepped away until he reached for me again and I was out of range.

"Knowledge is not wisdom unless it is proved, Safi. You have not been given this power. You have other gifts."

I remember how his eyes, his whole being, seemed suddenly cast in shadow as he stared back at me.

"If you loved me as I love you, you would do this for me."

The pain swirling in my belly froze at his words, anchoring me to where I stood.

"I would never ask you to be anything other than who you are. I have loved you since I was old enough to know what love was. I would never ask you to change for me. How could you ask me to change for you?"

"I want you to belong to me! Only me as a wife should."

The words were like lightning in my ears, burning away something between us forever.

"I don't belong to anyone. Even in the Amasiti, we choose our sisterhood, but we do not belong to the Amasiti. Our first duty is always to be in possession of ourselves, it is the one thing we can never give away."

The Goddess was in me and I was my own center. Safaro walked away from me that night full of anger and hurt and though I cried where I stood, I did not reach and I did not waiver.

He left the next morning. I did not see him again for many years, but I always knew that I would.

~

After Safi left, we continued on, understanding our gifts and sharing our wisdom with those we served. Among the villages there was no need for jealousy. All we had was shared. Because of our reputation as healers, we were rarely, if ever, feared. But for some, the events of my awakening became a herald of the Amasiti's power and how it could be used in the hands of those who coveted it.

The first attack I'd ever heard of came from a village far beyond the Keveer region. I was well into my powers by then, a young woman of 23 years. It was said that a man, a stranger from a northern village by his garb, had touched a Mother without her permission in the market square. At first, I hardly believed it. None of us did.

He was dragged away by the mob, but when it came time for him to be brought to the Elders for judgment, he was nowhere to be found. Rumor spread that the assailant had been an Aet, an evil spirit that vanished into thin air. But the Mothers knew that this was not so. For evil is born of the earth, the actions and consequences of man pushed out like a spitting cauldron. For in our own way, we are all creators of light and darkness. But a spirit's only power is to create light and illuminate what was misunderstood. Sometimes, the truth can kill, but that was not what happened in the marketplace. The trespasser only meant to take what was not his, seeking to steal the amulet worn by each Mother as a symbol of the earth's willingness to bind its power with hers. At the time, it did not occur to us that someone might have helped the criminal escape.



A Rare Thing. Illustrated by Ella Mahoney

THE WOLF
QUEEN
THE HOPE OF AFERI
BOOK ONE

The Mothers pondered and prayed as to what this infraction could mean, and in our deliberations our dance began to take on more rigid lines of protection and defense. More and more, we danced with our eyes open to the new possibility of prying gazes. The notion of needing to not just keep, but defend out secrets was born.

But defense was not a concept that was natural to the Amasiti. We were created to give to this world. Our training, our knowledge rituals were all done in service of the power we were given and our duty to see that it was put to the best use. We served those around us with love, openness and in return, they gave us their trust, heeded our counsel, and respected our ways.

I do not know when or how word of our power – of my power reached the Hir, but by the time I learned that it had, there was no uncertainty about who was responsible for bringing our secrets to him.

Things began happening that had never happened before – harassment, threats, rape....murder. Mothers were rarely the victims of these attacks, but they were always the targets. By then, the Hir knew our true weakness, the people we loved and the communities we served.

And as the Hir's cruelty spread from the south, without mercy or reason, the order of the world was lost. Horror poured into our world until we were surrounded.

When the Hir began riding into the first of the villages at the northern tip of Kiveer demanding submission of the Mothers, the Amasiti refused until they understood the price that those around them would be forced to pay for their defiance. He started with the youngest child in the village first. It was as expedient as it was horrific. To protect those whom they had always served, the Mothers accepted the poison chains that the Hir's sorcerers created to allow the Hir and his emissaries to bind with the Mothers and use her power as their own.

Children stopped reaching for the safety of their parent's arms because they knew that their mothers and fathers could no longer protect them. Instead, we were forced to send them away, scattering our future to the winds and breaking the will of our people.

As the news of the Hir's coming spread, the villages became unsafe for the Mothers to inhabit. Those willing to break faith with the Amasiti traded their decency for the baser needs of food, shelter and the hope of protection. Those who resisted were killed, enslaved or tortured to madness, their lives left in ruins.

By the time the Mother's thought to use their power to fight, it was far too late. In truth, we had never done it before – organized our power into a force of destruction.

We were created by the Amalaki to bring life and create life. Becoming a vessel of war was unthinkable. So when the Hir began taking the Amasiti, many of the powers they sought to corrupt could not be used to their advantage, but they kept searching. Many Mothers chose to ascend from this life, which is their right as keepers of The Way, rather than see their power exploited. I could not.

I knew deep within me that the Mother had made me different for a reason. So when Safaro came for me, I was not afraid. The truth can sometimes kill and I knew that I would find a way, even if it cost me my life.

I called on each of my sisters within the Temples to send me the youngest of our awakened, all those with talents in water, earth, and anything related to animals. to send child Mothers with water, earth, and animal talents to me. They were to be stripped of the blue silk gowns that would identify them as Amasiti and come to Elan alone with only a trusted male to carry them, who would pose as their father. Helping them from the wagons or carriages where they'd hidden on their long journeys, I looked into their eyes. I had said nothing to them, yet, somehow, each of them knew. Like me, The Mother had made them different. They arrived frightened, but determined in just enough time to hid them before Safaro slipped past Elan's defenses disguised as a prodigal son returned.

By the time I saw him walking towards me again, almost no trace of the boy I loved had survived. His face was sunken and pocked from what I guessed was too much of the Hir's rich food and not enough of the grains and vegetables that keep the Amasiti strong and youthful long into our lives. He knew better, but had chosen to trade what is proven for a soulless power that answered to neither knowledge nor wisdom.

I knelt before Safaro, as I swore I would never do when we were children, and accepted his chain, then watched as his pride swelled, eclipsing any possibility that he would discover my plan. Blind purpose and certain victory propelled him forward without the slightest concern for why a woman who had defied him every day of her life would have surrendered so easily. I bowed my head and followed him, prepared to betray everything I knew to preserve the hope of what we could become.

Like a slave, he brought me dutifully to his master who sat outside the battlefield on a tall, white horambus that was draped in blood red velvet. The Hir spared only a second to regarded me with contempt before sending me with Safaro to the center of the battle where our right to exist would be decided.

All around me, from every corner of our world, the people of Yet fought against the tyranny of the Hir. Closing my eyes, I could smell their desire to live, to protect their loved ones, and see them survive past this day as if the earth itself was calling out to me. I looked to Safaro for any sign of the boy I knew, but he was nowhere to be found. He knew as I did, that while their resolve was as hard as iron, the people of Yet were not warriors. Worse, we'd only had months to prepare. From the power lust look in his eyes as he surveyed the battle, I knew that the Hir had been planning the expansion of his Kingdom his entire life.

The final battle came to our doorstep just outside the city of Elan, where our defenses had held as fiercely as they could, but it was only a matter of time. The people of Elan, the peoples of Yet had given no ground easily, with mounting casual on both sides, but the Hir had too much of everything we lacked, weapons, men, strategy, and now the most powerful Amasiti at his beck and call.

With me at the their side, they pressed forward. The poison chain connected my will to Safaro's, so that the power between us acted as one, except only one of us understood the true meaning behind the Hir's command to create an earthquake that would swallow his enemies. Safaro could wield my power, but only I could give it the purpose that would call it into being.

I knew what the Hir's soul was meant to be. His greatest enemies were not in front of him; he was surrounded by them, masking the truth of his insanity behind greed and false adulation.

And so, when I spread my hands wide and bellowed across the sky "I am the Sorceress of Elan – now and always," I did what I was meant to do – create.

The boats of Elan were just out of firing range. Only the strongest swimmers were allowed to keep the front. It would be difficult for them to escape, but they had a better chance than anyone who was not privy to my plan.

I felt the fissure crack open far beneath me, then bubble up and break with a diagonal energy just 100 feet from where I stood. The fissure would only hold for a few minutes, announcing itself as a warning of things to come, so that my people would have some time to retreat, before the break folded back on itself and consume everything standing.

Safaro watched with satisfaction as the people of Yet began to run. He did not understand until he watched them forego the high ground of Elan and run into the sea. He rushed forward just as the fissure we created together broke open into a chasm that pulled the dirt right out from under the footing of the Hir's army.

The people of Yet continued to scatter into the sea as the chasm trapped and swallowed the Hir's front line. As soon as the last one was safe, I took it all – the land that held Elan to the shore of Yet fell away allowing the water to rise up, pounding out new territory as it ripped through the City's foundation. But it was not enough. It was only then that I understood that creation and destruction are often the same thing. As the sea gained purchase, I opened up the foundation of Elan itself – breaking it from the bottom like an egg.

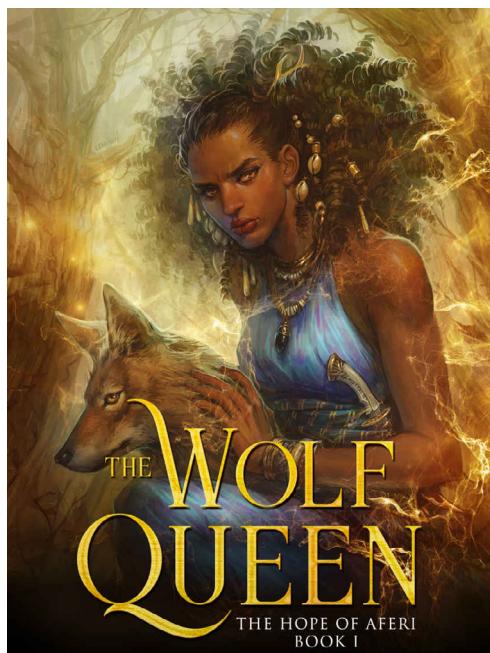
The power of the sea did the rest opening her arms to the island in an eternal embrace that left only the tip of the island visible with the children I had left their clinging to the ancient trees for their dear tender lives.

Fear, terror, and isolation had burned through their innocence, but in exchange I had given them something else – a chance to survive and create something new to evolve in to a sorceress that was also a warrior.

As Safaro twisted the poison chain around my neck with his last breath, I imagined I could see the eyes of all those Amasiti children and hoped only for their forgiveness.

And in the burning light of my ascension, I floated away to the dying screams of the Hir, Safaro, and all his murderous men and was at peace.

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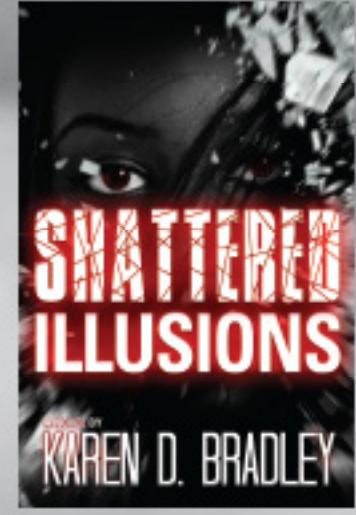
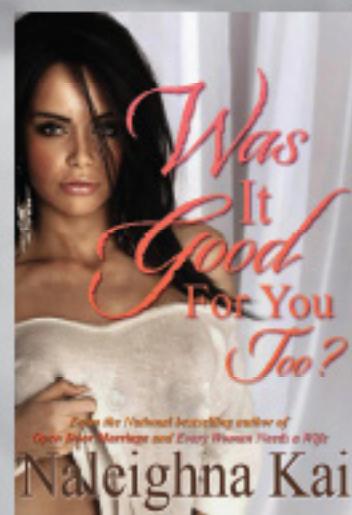
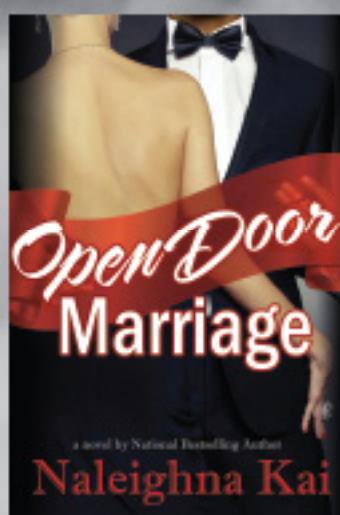
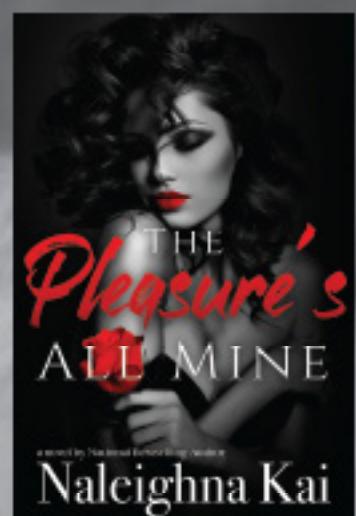
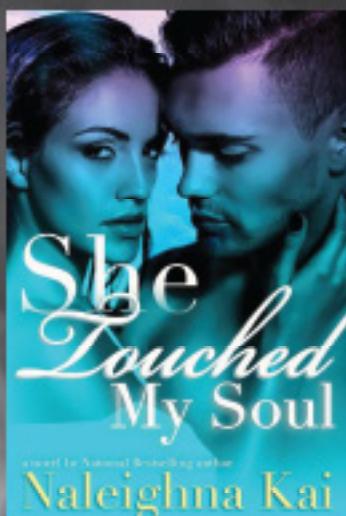
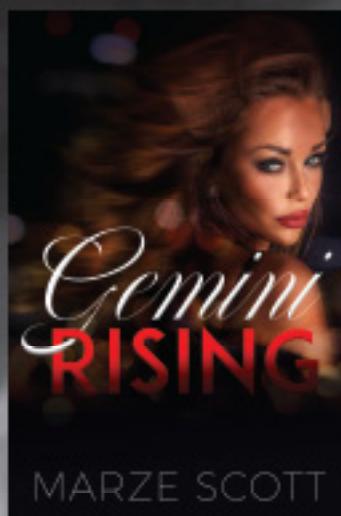
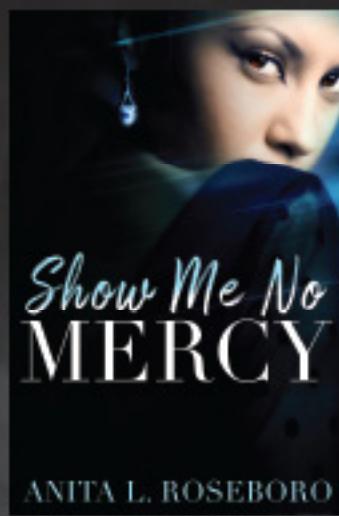
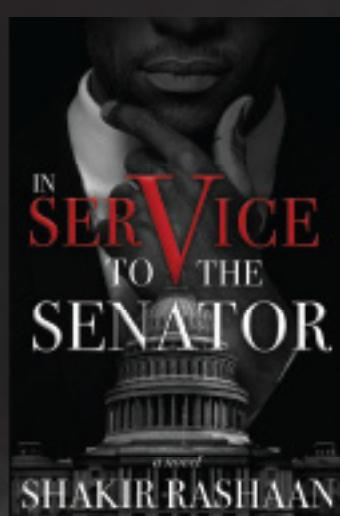
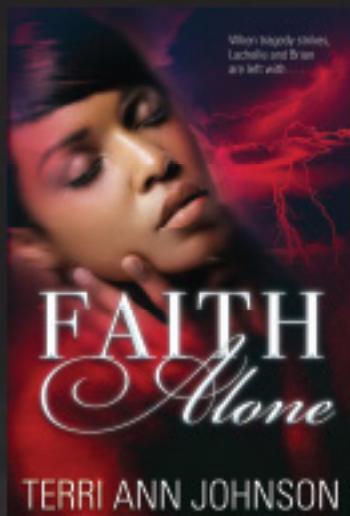
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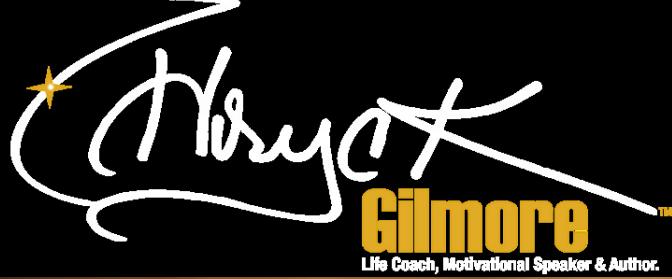
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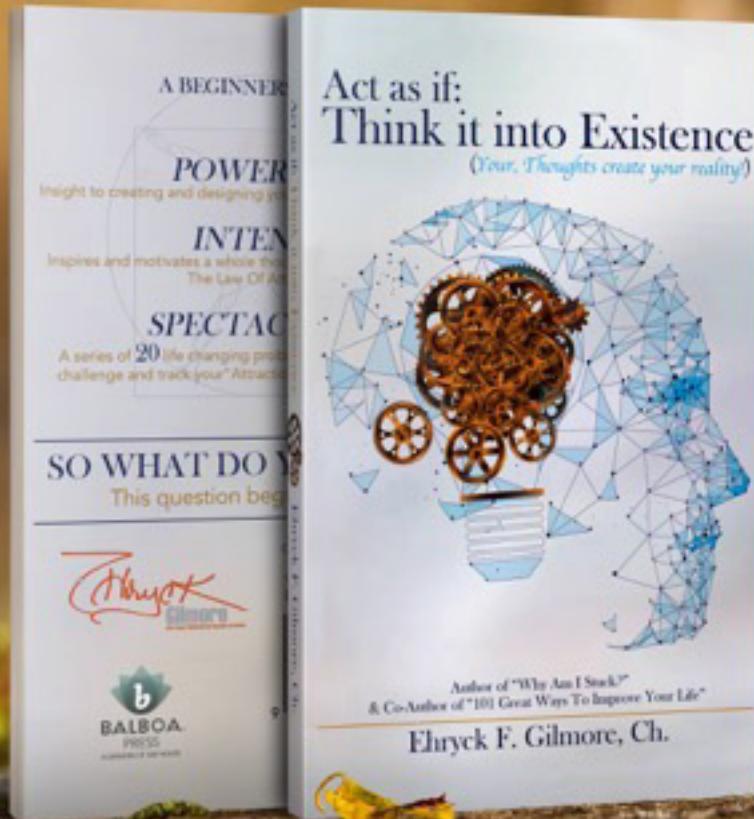


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