



Three Shades of Summer

Written by Wendi Coffman Porter

World Design by Richard W. Porter III

“ *Shade is and was, a real person. She will eventually be released again on this world and this universe, and while I may not be there to see it. I can only image the havoc she will wreak in her wake. I do embellish her stories a little, artistic liberty after all, but I will tell you this, in every single story there is the honest truth hidden among the pages.* ”

-Leon Hamilton

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Fauchun 18th, 26551

Legal councilwoman Sadie Feelari, aka the CEO Helena Cartwright, aka the master burglar known as Shade, nodded her thanks to the barmaid as she set down the warm mead in front of her. It smelled of warm honey and an expertly arranged palate of spices. It was the number two reason, the beautiful white-haired elf frequented this establishment.

Par usual, she had come a little earlier than the typical clientele, so that she could have the small table under the stairs to herself. In reality, the table had a horrible view of the room, let alone the door, but it was quiet. And no matter how unruly the bar got; the stairs gave a certain level of protection from the rowdy crowd.

The Honeyed Rat was rather large, and poorly situated pub, in a little-known area of the capital city of Bugrasi. If you didn't know it was here, it was difficult to find and almost rarely had non-local guests. Yet, despite its hole-in-the-wall location, the Honeyed Rat packed in the customers, wall to wall, every single evening.

Like most places in the capital city of Bugrasi, the Honeyed Rat had no power, plumbing or air circulation. Its patrons did not know of germs, which meant that it and they reeked to high heaven of body odors, rotten food and sex. Yet despite the horrendous smell and semi-lethal food, Sadie liked it here. There was no place in this new, apocalyptic version of Taius, that she felt at home per se, but at least this place was something she understood.

It didn't hurt that the mead was spectacular, and the ability to garner city wide knowledge was unsurpassed. Even the various guild halls sprinkled throughout the city used the Honeyed Rat to gather local intelligence. This was mostly because of the clientele which comprised the staff of the wealthy. Be they merchant houses or noble houses, the clientele here knew all the dirty little secrets of the world. Making this hole in the wall pub, literally the pulse of the free world.

So, despite its tendency to need repairs by morning, and its odor, the Honeyed Rat was Sadie's favorite place in this unknown world. At least so far, anyway. She'd only been out of prison for just over a month, which meant that she knew little to nothing of the world and its inhabitants. What little she knew; she was learning here. Taking a sip

of the amazing, mulled honey wine, or mead as the humans called it these days, she caught the attention of her favorite server.

The cleanest of the five barmaids in the tavern winked at her and nodded.

"Whatcha need luv?" The smile clearly hoped for something more than something as simple as a candle.

"Could I get a lantern or candle?" The elf set a leather-bound book on the table. The title embossed on the cover was Three Shades of Summer.

The serving woman pouted but scurried off to find something for her best paying patron.

When Sadie had first come to the Honeyed Rat, she and the owner had a falling out. Because of her clothing, and her propensity to be clean, she could understand the mistaken identity, but after convincing him she was no noble, he had allowed her to stay. They banned nobles from the tavern because of past events, in which a prominent noble died during one of the many brawls. It was probably for the best, since the patrons felt far more relaxed and able to blow off steam after a hard day serving their pampered employers.

Of course it took telling him she was, in fact, an ex-convict, that was simply trying to find a safe place to drink where they wouldn't judge her for her past, or enticed into recidivism. That, and the silver she'd paid for the entire bar to have drinks on her for an hour, had done the trick. After several bar brawls where she held her own, they decided she was indeed one of them. Or at the very least, that she wasn't a threat. Now she came here at least three or four times a week to enjoy a drink, good gossip, and some untethered company.

A candle with a small silver mirror behind the tiny flame appeared on the table, and the elf smiled warmly up at the woman.

"Thank you, Angel." Shade called Angelica by the nickname that she'd given her on their first night together.

The woman winked knowingly and shuffled off to deal with a shouting patron from across the bar.

Taking a deep breath and another sip of mead, Shade pulled back the leather cover to read the foreword written by her deceased partner.



Reality is a finicky thing, mostly because it is 100% dictated by the observer. I am often chastised about these stories that I share with my many readers. The claims are such things as “you shouldn’t embellish your stories beyond believability.” Or, “Your utterly fictitious character of Shade is ridiculous, make her more relate-able for your readers.” Yet my books sell in the tens of billions every time. Shade’s renown existed long before I began these stories. The entire Tharward arm of the galaxy watched her trial with bated breath. So, even if I embellish a little, my readers seem perfectly happy with that. Hence, I will let the numbers speak for themselves.

Now, for you, my beloved readers. Here is the truth... Shade is, and was, a proper elf. They will eventually release her again into this galaxy, and while I may not be there to see it. I can only image the havoc she will wreak in her wake.

I embellish her stories a little, artistic liberty and all, but I will tell you this, in every story there is truth hidden within the pages. Each story I have written to date was an actual event that was not only told to me by the Shade herself, but corroborated by research and interviews of the people who called her friend, and even the occasional enemy. She never told me the entire story, and I never asked her to. But these are the stories of her life. I bring them to you because I don’t want her forgotten. She did not receive a proportionate punishment for her transgressions on the world. And I, for one, will love her always, no matter what happens.

A final note to my readers, this will be my final chronicle of Shade. I felt it only fitting that I end at the beginning. That first fateful day that I saw the exquisite creature, known as Shade.

A warm breeze drifted over the soft crystal blue surf. The surf was licking softly at the pillars of the small dock. The sound was tranquil, except for the occasional break in the water’s surface tension, as easily a dozen sea creatures fought for the food being casually tossed into the water.

Sploosh. The frenzy began, as the ten to twelve reef sharks fought each other for the uncooked ground beef. As the food vanished, the creatures slowed and lazily circled under the dock, waiting for another. The tall graceful elven creature with pure white hair and golden, sun-kissed skin only barely covered, in a jet black bikini, tore another piece of meat from the ball in her hand and tossed it in the water. She’d been doing this every morning for a week now. She loved the frenzy of it. The hysterical grab for food at any cost always made her smile.

Some called her sadistic, but the reality of it was that she was simply a fan of nature. Nature always won out, no matter how advanced the species became. If you caressed the strings on the harp of life well enough, you could trigger the natural beast inside of anything.

Tossing the last piece into the water, she strolled past her small bungalow towards the beach at the other end of the dock. Once there, she rinsed her hands in the surf and turned towards the closest beach-front bar. She couldn't help but wonder if this was the type of place she would go, if she ever took an actual vacation.

Skimming the crowd carefully as she approached, the relaxed nature of the lounging resort guests amazed her. Easily eighty plus people, in various states of dress, lounged on chairs and blankets across the pure white sands in front of her. Several children splash in the water near their parents, playing various games, and pelting each other with floats of various types. One young boy was running through the sunning patrons with a massive water-gun that was easily as long as he was tall.

He noticed the beautiful white-haired elf and b-lined straight for her. She smirked and paused as she waited for him to approach. He didn't slow as he began pulling the trigger to douse her. With a deft spin that belied the grace of a dancer, she sidestepped the stream of water and closed with the young man. Her hand swung out blindingly fast and snatched the barrel of the gun. Lifting it up and out of his grasp, she spun it with expertise that hinted at far more than a simple prankster and doused the boy point blank in the face. He sputtered and reeled backwards so hard that he tripped and landed roughly on his ass in the sand.

The resounding applause from the fifty or more patrons that the boy had been terrorizing all morning was almost deafening.

The charming elf chuckled and swung open the cartridge that held the water, allowing it to drain completely. Kneeling down in front of him, she smiled kindly.

"I told you Bernard, you won't catch me by surprise. But nice try. Next time don't run directly at me, try coming in from the side." Tousling his hair, she set the weapon in his lap and stood to continue towards the bar.

"Good morning, Miss Helena." The heavily accented bartender smiled so brightly that she could see all of his teeth. "Your usual?"

"Yes, please Gadanu." She replied and turned to lean against the bar and continue examining the crowd. So far, she hadn't found what she was looking for, but she had a better feeling about today.

"That was impressive." A deep masculine voice spoke up at the end of the bar.