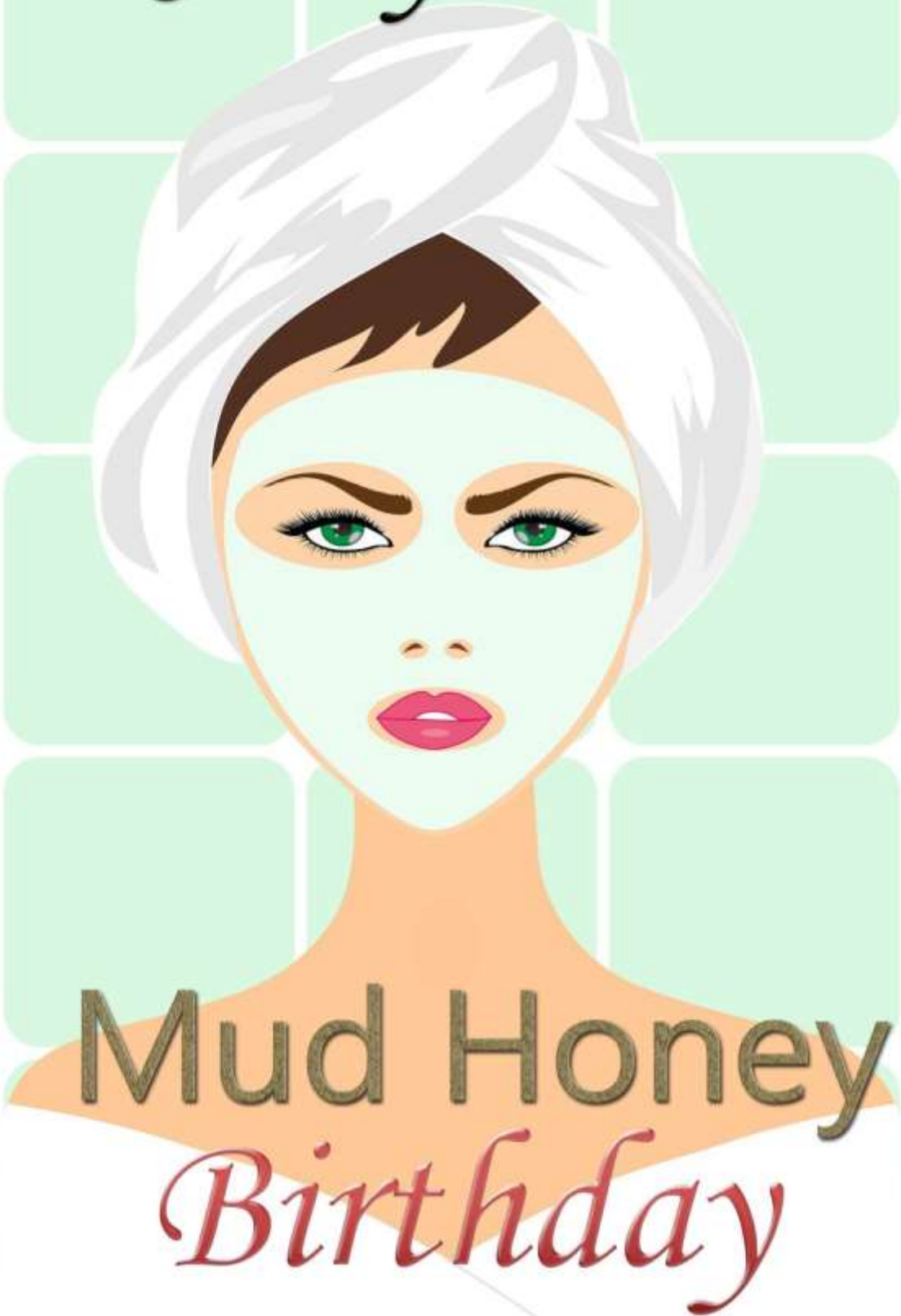


Carolyn Wren



Mud Honey
Birthday

Mud Honey Birthday

By Carolyn Wren

A short sweet contemporary romance, suitable for all ages

For more books, please visit the 'books' section of the website WWW.CAROLYNWREN.COM

Mud Honey Birthday

By

Carolyn Wren

“Get inside, now.”

Eve scowled as Deb, her oldest and dearest friend, jabbed her in the chest with a sharp fingernail. “Do I have to go?”

Deb sighed, “Evie, I bought you a day spa voucher, hours of pampering bliss on your birthday. You’re acting like it’s a dentist appointment, complete with drill.”

Eve rubbed the tight muscles in her neck. “You know I love your gift, but the office is busy and the temp is struggling. Maybe I could do it next week, instead?”

The jabbing resumed, with intent. “Not *only* is it your birthday, you’re supposed to be on vacation. Stop thinking about work! Have you seen yourself lately? You’re so tense, your body is starting to resemble the hunchback of Notre Dame.” Deb hitched her slender shoulders, bent down and let one arm swing by her side. She added an exaggerated limp and a mournful groan. The accurate, if somewhat disturbing impersonation, caused an elderly lady wheeling a shopping trolley to jerk in alarm and cross to the other side of the street. There was a reason her pal was an actress and not an accountant like Eve.

“Fine, I get the hint.” Eve relented, before Deb’s impromptu performance resulted in someone calling for an ambulance, or the police. “I’m going, but if my monthly reports are late because I’m not there...”

“The world as we know it will end. Yes, you’ve told me, several times.” Deb gave her a shove towards the door.

The receptionist, a vision of perfect skin and perfect blond hair, glanced up as Eve entered the dimly lit, incense scented salon. Her perfect, brilliant blue eyes shone with sympathy. *Sympathy?* Yeah, great way to make a girl feel instantly inferior.

“Miss North? You’re here for our renewal package, I believe?” Because you *obviously* need it. The rest of the sentence was implied.

“Yes.” Eve plastered a cheery smile on her face. Maybe Deb’s acting skills were catching.

“Please come this way. We’ll start with a full body massage, a salt exfoliation, followed by an organic mud and honey wrap, then finish with a natural rain shower.”

“Wonderful,” Eve muttered, “oily, salty, dirty, sticky *and* wet.” With reluctance, she followed Miss Blond and Perfect along a barely visible candlelit corridor, to a room playing tinkling new age music.

“Please undress and lay down. Someone will be with you shortly.”

An hour later, clad only in hilariously ugly paper panties, Eve purred in contentment. “Deb, I take it all back. I seriously love you.”

“Pardon?” Her spa technician, Jen, who was neither blond nor perfect, but very friendly, looked up from rubbing coarse sea salt into Eve’s lower leg.

“Sorry, I’m talking to myself. To be honest, I had no idea this would be so wonderful.”

Jen nodded. “You’ll fall asleep during the wrap, everyone does.” After rinsing the salt, she slathered a thick mixture of mud and honey on to Eve’s body from neck to toe, and wrapped her in plastic and a blanket.

“I’ll come back in half an hour. Just relax, and let the mud do its work.” Jen dimmed the lights, leaving Eve to doze.

The gooey mix felt odd but not unpleasant against her skin, sort of squelchy and tingly. Eve sighed, surrendering to her pampering. Maybe this was something she should do on a regular basis. Relaxing was great. Mud was healthy, warm...itchy.

Itchy?

“Jen?” Eve squirmed inside her plastic and woolen prison. “Jen? I don’t think this is supposed to happen—” dammit, the itching was getting worse, rapidly turning into a hot, prickly sensation. Giving up all hopes of rescue, Eve wriggled off the table, slipped on the sticky residue and landed flat on her back. *Ouch*. Ripping off the clinging plastic didn’t help, either. Her whole body stung and burned.

Water! The receptionist had said something about a shower. Eve grabbed the blanket and scrambled for the door, stumbling into the darkened corridor.

Which way? Left, or Right? *Whatever. I’ll either find the bathroom, or burst in on some poor person having a Brazilian. Okay, that’s a horrible thought.* “Jen? Blondy? Anyone?” Was everyone at lunch? Had a natural disaster occurred during her half hour alone, causing the entire spa to evacuate?

“Left it is, then.” Eve clutched the blanket tighter to her body, and ran, for one whole second, before coming to a crashing halt against a broad male chest.

“What?” Her astonished victim grabbed her arms to steady her, his fingers sliding off her muddy skin. “Are you okay?”

“My skin’s burning. I’m looking for the shower.”

“Quick. In here.” Opening a door, he pushed her inside, putting an arm around her bare waist when she slid on the tiles. Still holding her, he wrenched the plastic curtain aside and stepped into the shower, cranking the dials to maximum, so the water gushed down in a torrent.

“I think you’re having an allergic reaction.”

“You think?” Her words came out as a high pitched squeak. Eve threw the blanket aside and scrubbed at her skin, desperate to remove the source of her irritation. She slipped, falling against him.

Strong hands clamped around her waist. “Look, I’m frightened you’ll collapse and hurt yourself if I let go. I swear I’m not ogling, or trying to grope you.”

“You know what? At this point, I don’t even *care*.” Eve tried for a laugh. It came out as a frantic sob. She couldn’t see anything. At some point during her exertions, the disposable hair-net had fallen off. Her shoulder length curls, mixed with mud, honey and water, were now a gummy matted mess, covering her eyes with all the efficiency of a blindfold. *Whatever!* The soothing water cascading over both of them was beginning to ease the infernal itching. She kept up her scrubbing while he held her. “It’s working, oh thank God.”

“Good. I’m going to get out now, and let you—” her drenched rescuer took a step backwards, tripped over the sodden discarded blanket, fell back *into* the cubicle, and both of them crashed to the shower floor in a tangle of limbs.

“Ouch.” Eve managed to push her snarled hair aside, and found herself staring into a pair of startled, chocolate brown eyes.

He let out a choked laugh. “That didn’t go as planned.”

“It’s a recurring theme, this morning.” *Gorgeous*. He was drop dead gorgeous. Blond wavy hair, darkened by water, hung in wet tendrils around his face. A white shirt, stained with her mud mixture was plastered to his muscled chest like a loving second skin.

“What’s going on?” Eve tore her gaze from Mr. Tall Dark Wet and Beautiful to see Miss Blond and Perfect standing at the door, the rosebud mouth pursed with shock and disapproval. “Miss North, what are you doing to Doctor Adams?”

Eve’s hackles rose. “Excuse me? What am *I* doing?”

Her hero Doctor came to her rescue. “I think the relevant question should be, what ingredients do you use in these spa products? Your client had a bad reaction and needed urgent assistance.”

Eve had the distinct satisfaction of seeing the perfect mask slip as the receptionist stammered an apology, turned, and ran.

“Um, hi?” Eve became acutely aware of their current predicament, and acutely embarrassed by it.

“Hi. Should we consider getting up again? Or just spend the rest of our lives here.”

She shrugged, searching for an air of unruffled poise, and under the current circumstances, probably not finding it. “I’m game for another attempt, if you are.”

Sliding his arm back around her, and rising with caution, he maneuvered them from the cubicle. Adding to his growing list of brownie points, he took a giant fluffy towel from the shelf, and wrapped it around her, cloak style. “How are you feeling?”

“Better.” Eve grimaced, and tossed aside any pretense of dignity. “Mortified.”

“Don’t be, please.” He plucked at his wet clothes with a wry expression. “I only came here for a deep tissue massage. My work colleagues think I’m too tense. You?”

“Ditto. A birthday treat from a friend to reduce my stress. It’s not working.”

He grinned. *Dear Lord, that smile could melt the polar ice caps.* “Understandable. Mike Adams, at your service. Is a handshake in order? Or should we just skip that part.”

“Eve North. Yep, I think we’ve crossed into second date territory by now.” Eve blushed, cursing her motor mouth.

He chuckled. *Damn, that chuckle’s even sexier than the grin!* “I hate first dates, anyway. They’re always so awkward, don’t you think?”

A clamor of voices, and the sound of stiletto heels on marble flooring interrupted the bizarre, but strangely enjoyable conversation. Two examples of blond perfection now stood in the doorway. *Wow, are they cloning them?*

“Doctor Adams,” Clone Two said. “I’m the manager. Are you alright?”

Eve almost rolled her eyes. *Seriously? Do I even exist to the staff of this spa?*

“I think I’ll forgo my massage appointment today,” he said to the agitated woman. “Eve needs a calming lotion for her skin, and we both need to clean up before I invite her out to lunch.”

“Lunch?” Eve peered at him through a soggy curl hanging over one eye.

That gorgeous mouth tilted at the corner as he regarded her with a hopeful expression. “Unless you have plans with your friend, of course. It is your birthday, after all.”

“No.”

Disappointment flitted across his handsome face. “No to lunch?”

“No to plans. Yes to lunch.”

“Brilliant.” His grin broadened.

Something clicked into place in the universe, something pretty amazing. Eve smiled back. *Happy birthday to me.*

The End