

EAT, READ, LOVE

Romance and Recipes from the Ruby-Slippered Sisterhood

www.RubySlipperedReader.com

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Who We Are

The Ruby-Slippered Sisterhood formed on March 25, 2009, the day that the 2009 Golden Heart® nominations were announced. The Golden Heart® is the highest honor in romance writing for unpublished manuscripts and is presented by Romance Writers of America®. On that day, we banded together via an email loop to squeal, gush, and exchange questions of “OMG, what next?”

After a round of introductions, blurbs, and congratulations, the usual chatter started. Two questions came up the most: “What are you going wear to the awards ceremony?” and “What are we going to call ourselves?”

We searched high and low for a name that could adequately communicate our support for one another, our path on this arduous journey toward publication, and our unique sense(s) of style(s). Finally, came a gem of a suggestion:

“The Ruby-Slippered Sisterhood”

Not only did the name embody our discussions of shoes, clothes, and make-up for the big night, it also spoke to the long road to publication and empowering ourselves as writers to follow our dreams, no matter how difficult that road could be. Like Dorothy, we had learned there was no wizard with the magic to take us where we long to be. Perseverance, practice, and faith in ourselves pave our yellow-brick road.

Soon we were clicking our heels together for good luck and procuring our signature ruby slippers. Our motto was born:

“There’s no place like the best-seller lists!”

What We’ve Come To Do

The Ruby-Slippered Sisterhood blog (<http://www.rubyslipperedsisterhood.com>) documents our journey and hopefully provide entertainment, inspiration, and encouragement for new writers along the way.

We invite you to follow our journey as it continues. Some of our sisters have sold, many have signed with agents, and others have reached publishing’s highest honors including the NY Times Bestseller List and the RITA® Award. But every one of us has been inspired to continue pursuing our dreams, whatever they may be.

We hope you'll enjoy this collection of our characters' favorite recipes -- inspired by our books. And that maybe you'll get to know us a little bit in the process. But most of all, we hope you'll eat, read, love!!!

Love, The Ruby-Slippered Sisterhood

Vivi Andrews, Vanessa Barneveld, Anne Barton, Elisa Beatty, Anne Marie Becker, Tina Beckett, Liz Bemis, Shea Berkley, Jennifer Bray-Weber, Amanda Brice, Kat Brookes, Lindsey Brookes, Shoshana Brown, C. J. Chase, McKenna Chase, Shelley Coriell, Louisa Cornell, Laurie DeSalvo, Elizabeth Devlin, Sally Eggert, Elizabeth Essex, Sharon Fisher, Kelly Fitzpatrick, Jacqueline Floyd, Addison Fox, Katie Graykowski, Yvonne Harris, Elise Hayes, Rita Henuber, Tamara Hogan, Kim Howe, Jacqui Jacobi, Cara Lynn James, Darynda Jones, Autumn Jordon, Cynthia Justlin, Laurie Kellogg, L.L. Kellogg, Diane Kelly, Elizabeth Langston, Kim Law, Diana Layne, Jeannie Lin, June Love, Gwynlyn MacKenzie, Heather McCollum, Virginia McCullough, Jamie Michele, L.A. Mitchell, Laura Navarre, Nikki Navarre, Kate Parker, Bev Pettersen, Hope Ramsay, Sara Ramsey, Kelly Ann Riley, Cate Rowan, Jenna Stewart, Joan Swan, Tatia Talbot, Liz Talley, Dani Wade, and Kayla Westra

MAIN DISHES

Allergen-Free Pad Thai

From *Codename: Dancer* by Amanda Brice
Genre: Humorous Young Adult Mystery

6 oz. dried rice noodles
1 tsp. cornstarch
1 tsp. canola oil, plus extra for stir-frying
10 oz diced chicken
½ cup of ½ inch pieces of scallion
3 red chili peppers, chopped
2 Tbsp. garlic, chopped
¼ cup vegetarian mushroom sauce (*find in Asian market or online – this is the vegetarian version of oyster sauce*)
¼ cup fresh lemon juice
3 Tbsp. sugar
¼ cup bean sprouts
½ cup roasted, salted sunflower seeds
¼ cup fresh basil leaves, chopped

¼ cup fresh cilantro leaves, chopped
½ tsp. red pepper flakes
½ tsp. ground black pepper

Soak noodles in hot water for 30 minutes. Drain, cover, and set aside. Mix cornstarch with 1 tsp canola oil. Pour over diced chicken and stir to coat. In another bowl, stir together mushroom sauce, lemon juice, and sugar.

Heat 3 Tbsp. canola oil over medium-high heat. Add chicken, and cook until brown.

Set chicken aside, increase heat to high, then add 3 more Tbsp canola oil. Add scallions, chili peppers, and garlic and stir-fry until garlic just browns.

Add noodles and stir until they're coated. Add mushroom sauce mixture and stir.

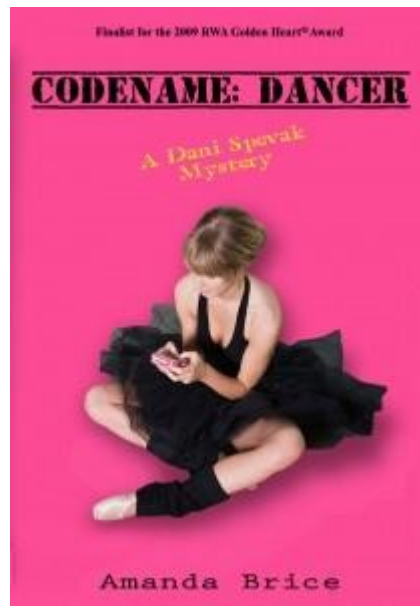
Add chicken back in, stir. Add remaining ingredients one at a time, stirring all the while: bean sprouts, sunflower seeds, basil, red pepper, black pepper. Serve piping hot!

Note: This is the closest I've found to real Pad Thai without containing any of the common allergens found in the traditional recipe: shellfish, peanut, sesame, or egg. Of course, if you don't have food allergies, you may prefer the taste of the original.

Aspiring ballerina Dani Spevak is thrilled when hit TV show Teen Celebrity Dance Off comes to the campus of her performing arts boarding school. She trades the barre for the ballroom and gets set to cha-cha-cha to stardom with Hollywood wonderboy Nick Galliano.

At first their partnership is awkward, because Dani is in awe of her longtime teen idol crush. But soon their chemistry is heating up the dance floor and the attraction moves into real life.

Her excitement is short-lived, because someone wants her off the show. Bombs, poisoning, arson... Will Dani's 15 minutes of fame be over before she reaches age 15? Dani and her friends are suddenly at the center of some serious sabotage. And if she doesn't find out who is behind it, her next pirouette could be her last.



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EXCERPT from *Codename: Dancer*:

After another hour or so of practicing (or rather, trying to practice but failing miserably), Nick suggested that we take a break and find something to eat.

I scooped up my dance bag and trotted behind him like a love struck little puppy into the lobby. I knew I was acting like an idiot. I could hear Whitney's voice in my head: *Act natural, Dani. And whatever you do, don't let him know you're interested.*

"So, what'll it be?" Again, that smile. He was killing me. "Reese's or Snickers?"

"Neither. I'm allergic to peanuts."

"Man, that sucks." His brown eyes flooded with concern. Could he be any more perfect? Sensitive, in touch with his feelings, and looked like a male model! "Okay, Lays or Doritos?"

I couldn't exactly eat either of those options, considering I had costumes to fit into, but I didn't want him to think I was a prissy little girly-girl. My mom always told me that guys like girls who eat.

I could do some crunches later, right? A hundred ought to do it. A hundred before dinner, I mean. There was still time for more tonight.

"Doritos." I shot him my most charming smile, hoping that if he was dazzled by my looks he might not notice my lack of a chest. "And a Diet Coke, please."

Nick popped some coins into the machine. Out spit the snacks. He tossed me a bag of chips as though it was a football, ripped open his own bag, and plopped himself down on a couch,

stretching out his long legs. I felt silly standing there while he lounged, so I joined him on the couch.

“So . . .” I didn’t know what to say. “Fun session, huh?”

He shoved a handful of potato chips in his mouth and crunched down loudly. “I guess it was okay.”

“Yeah, you’re right. It wasn’t that great.” *Shut up, Dani. You’re not even making any sense.*

Sticky Rice and Chinese Sausage in Banana Leaves

From *My Fair Concubine* by Jeannie Lin
Genre: Historical Romance



Sticky Rice:

1 ½ cup glutinous rice - uncooked
Water

Follow instructions on package to cook in rice cooker (recommended)

OR

Use the traditional Asian “finger” or “one-knuckle method”: Place rice in small pot with enough water to cover rice and an additional ½ inch layer on top. Bring water to a boil and then immediately reduce heat to low. Cover to steam. Check every 10 minutes and stir. Should be done in approximate 30 minutes. *There is no rational reason why this should work, but it does.*

Banana Leaf packets:

Prepared glutinous rice, approx 3 cups
Chinese sausage*
1tbsp soy sauce
1tsp sugar
1 tsp sesame oil
Fresh or dried banana leaves cut into rectangles for wrapping*
**available at Asian food stores in refrigerated or frozen section*

Mix together soy sauce, sugar and sesame oil. Feel free to experiment with the proportions to taste. Combine sauce with prepared rice and stir until evenly distributed.

Slice Chinese sausage thinly on a diagonal. As an alternative, you can brown ground pork or dice pork belly with your own seasonings. The fattier the pork, the better!

Put a small handful of rice in the center of a rectangle of banana leaf. Arrange several slices of sausage on top. Wrap into small rectangular packets and use thin strips of the banana leaf to tie off.

Place packets seam down in steamer and steam for approximately 10-15 minutes. Unwrap and enjoy! Packets can also be refrigerated after steaming and reheated in steamer or microwave.

During the Tang Dynasty, the imperial court used a practice called *heqin*, or peace marriage, to form alliances with their barbarian neighbors. The alliance brides were officially recognized as Tang princesses, however often it was the Emperor's niece, palace concubines, or daughters of high-ranking officials who were sent to the frontier instead of a true princess with royal blood.

Chang Fei Long has been called back home upon the death of his father to learn that the family is swimming in debt. Before his death, his father arranged for Fei Long's sister to become an alliance bride to regain favor with the imperial court. When Pearl begs for mercy, he can't bring himself to force her into marriage and exile to a barbarian land. As a result, he has to come up with another false princess to go in her place.

Yan Ling is a servant at the tea house where Fei Long goes to brood about his troubles. When she mistakes his musings as a proposition for sex, she dumps a pot of tea on him and gets thrown out into the streets. Now homeless and destitute, Yan Ling begrudgingly accepts Fei Long's offer to train her as a replacement princess.

This lighter look into Tang Dynasty culture takes place in the capital city of Changan, going from courtyard mansions to the infamous entertainment district to the seedier parts of the city. In an homage to the classic story of *My Fair Lady*, Fei Long and Yan Ling are joined by a clever maid and a flamboyant actor as they work to fool imperial rivals and navigate the complicated landscape of their growing attraction.



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EXCERPT from *My Fair Concubine*:

Clever vendors had set their food stalls within the gardens. The carts were arranged beside small clusters of benches and tables. Fei Long chose one beside a carp pond and Yan Ling waited for him to be seated first before settling in across from him.

A pot of hot tea was set down between them. Fei Long faced her as they dined on parcels of sticky rice and pork steamed in banana leaves along with red bean pastries and a bowl of boiled peanuts. Yan Ling unwrapped the leaves, careful to keep her fingers from sticking to the rice, and took a bite.

It was a perfect mouthful. The rice was fragrant and slightly sweet against the saltiness of the pork. She chewed happily and washed it down with a sip of tea, already glancing wistfully toward the cart to see if there was the possibility of more.

“Is it like this every night?” she asked.

“In the spring and summertime,” he said. “This was always the best time in the city.”

“Only during festivals would you see it like this out in the provinces.” She swept her gaze across the park once more before taking a pastry. It was almost as good as the rice.

“You should eat more,” Fei Long sat back to watch her with one arm draped over the edge of the table. There was a rare carelessness to his posture.

“Are you developing a brotherly affection toward me?” she teased.

Her heart raced at her boldness. To be with Fei Long like this, exchanging idle conversation. The two of them weren’t like master and servant at all.

Pernil al Horno (Puerto Rican Roasted Pork Shoulder)

From *Avenging Angel* by Anne Marie Becker
Genre: Romantic Suspense

1 boneless pork shoulder (about 5 lbs.), skin on
7 garlic cloves
½ tsp. black pepper
1 tsp. crushed oregano
5 tsp. salt
2 tbsp. white wine vinegar
1 ½ tbsp. olive oil

Place pork, fat-side up, in a roasting pan fitted with a rack insert. Using a sharp knife, score the surface of the meat with small slits.

Crush the garlic cloves and place into small bowl. Mix with pepper, oregano, salt, vinegar and olive oil until it forms a paste.

Rub paste all over the pork, being sure to get it into the incisions. Cover pork with plastic wrap and marinate in the refrigerator for at least 3 hours or up to overnight.

Allow the meat to sit at room temperature for 30 minutes before cooking. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Roast pork for 3 hours (or about 30 mins per pound), uncovered, until the skin is crispy-brown. Let the meat rest on a cutting board for 10 minutes before slicing.

When his friend's niece is murdered, Detective Noah Crandall vows to track down the killer. Since the victim worked in an art gallery with the well-connected and well-heeled Vanessa Knight, Noah questions her first. Despite the chemistry between them, Noah tells himself a relationship would be impossible. He's a loner and their backgrounds are worlds apart.

Drawn to Noah and horrified by the death of her intern, Vanessa shares her insights into the New York City art world. As they work together on the case, she's tempted to explore the possibility of a real relationship with the sexy outsider who ignites her desire. But what Vanessa doesn't realize is that in order to complete his gruesome series of paintings, the killer has targeted her to become his next victim...



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EXCERPT from *Avenging Angel*:

Natalee had such a caring and close family. It wasn't fair that they'd lost her. The funeral Vanessa had attended for her own grandfather a few months ago had been a stilted, sedate affair followed by a catered buffet. Every clink of a polished silver fork against a bone-china plate could be heard in the absence of conversation. Here, colorful mismatched pots and platters piled with food lined every available counter and table space. The comforting sounds of easy conversation and, yes, even laughter, surrounded her.

Noah handed her a paper plate and spooned some kind of delicious-smelling rice dish onto it. "*Arroz con gandules*. You'll love it. And that's *pernil*."

"Looks like a pork shoulder."

"It is. Taste it." He placed a slice on her plate before loading his own.

After they'd selected their food, he led her outside to the building's common area, where they claimed a couple of folding lawn chairs placed under a shade tree. She observed her surroundings as she managed a few bites.

Seeing what had drawn her attention, he gave a sad smile. "The neighborhood really pulls together in a crisis."

She balanced her plate on her lap. "Was your family close?" The expression in his eyes was suddenly shuttered. Recognizing she'd struck a painful chord, she rushed on. "My family isn't close either. Not like this."

"They've got something special here, all right." Admiration was clear in his voice. "They always have."

“I’m going to have this someday.” At her quiet words, his gaze swung to her. “The family, the closeness.” *The unconditional love.*

He studied her a moment before nodding. “I believe you will.”

“But you won’t?”

He shook his head. “It’s not for everyone.”

Yeah, right.

Jalapeño Chicken

From *Welcome, Caller, This is Chloe* by Shelley Coriell
Genre: Young Adult Contemporary



- 4 chicken breasts, cooked and cubed
- 1 T. olive oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 t. minced garlic
- 1/2 c. fresh roasted diced green chilies (canned okay)
- 1 T. minced jalapeño (more if your crew likes spicy)
- 1 t. cumin
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 cans reduced-fat cream of chicken soup

9-oz fresh spinach, chopped
8-oz reduced fat sour cream
1 ½ cup shredded jack cheese
12 6-inch corn tortillas cut into quarters
1/2 c. tortilla chips, crushed (optional)

In large saucepan, sauté onion and olive oil until translucent. Add garlic, chilies, and jalapeño and sauté. Add cumin, salt, pepper, soup, and spinach and heat. Add sour cream and chicken breasts.

In greased 2.5-quart casserole dish, layer 1/3 each of tortilla quarters, chicken mixture, and jack cheese. Repeat twice. If desired, top with tortilla chips for nice crunch. Bake uncovered at 375 degrees for 45 minutes or until golden and bubbly.

Big-hearted Chloe Camden is the queen of her universe until her best friend shreds her reputation and her school counselor axes her junior independent study project. Chloe is forced to take on a meaningful project in order to pass, and so she joins her school's struggling radio station, where the other students don't find her too queenly.

Ostracized by her former BFs and struggling with her beloved Grams's mental deterioration, lonely Chloe ends up hosting a call-in show that gets the station much-needed publicity and, in the end, trouble. She also befriends radio techie and loner Duncan Moore, a quiet soul with a romantic heart. On and off the air, Chloe faces her loneliness and helps others find the fun and joy in everyday life.

Readers will fall in love with Chloe as she falls in love with the radio station and the misfits who call it home.



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EXCERPT from *Welcome, Caller, This is Chloe*:

With the last tumbler of chilies roasted, I slipped out of my burrito shell and started to clean the salsa bar. Josie opened a paper bag of roasted chilies and poured the charred but now limp mass onto a cutting board.

“You too quiet.” Josie scraped the blackened, papery skins from the chilies. “Why you no talk? You always talk.”

I snapped a lid on the guacamole. “I’ve been thinking.”

“About?” With a sharp knife, Josie slit a chili down the middle and slid the blade along the flesh, scraping away the membrane and seeds. Using the knife in a rocking motion, she chopped the veggie into small pieces.

“Chilies.” I stacked the toppings and put them in the insulated cooler. All the while, an ache throbbed in the center of my chest, keeping time with the crashing waves on the beach below. For the last two weeks I’d been roasted like a chili thanks to Brie, and a few days ago I’d been sliced and diced by Duncan, who didn’t want to come to the Tardeada with me and who’d been avoiding me since trashball. “Things haven’t been too good lately in my universe.” I pointed to the cutting board. “I’ve been tumbled and roasted then steamed and scraped and chopped.”

Ana squeezed my shoulder. “That good, Rojita.”

“Sí, good.” Josie picked up a raw chili. It was long and lime green, smooth and shiny. “This chili okay. Good for pico de gallo. But,” she pointed her knife at the soft, smoky, roasted chilies, “better with fire. Better for salsas, pollo deshebrada, calabacitas, todos. Fire is—how you say—flavor.”

Grandma Rose’s Varenyky (Ukrainian Pierogies)

From *Pas de Death* by Amanda Brice
(Coming Winter 2013)

Genre: Humorous Young Adult Mystery

**Dough:**

3 cups all-purpose flour
5 oz. real sour cream (full fat, not fat-free!)
4 Tbsp. butter, softened
1 egg

Potato Cheese Filling:

2 ½ cups cold mashed potatoes
1 ¼ cup shredded cheddar cheese
½ cup cottage cheese
1 Tbsp. grated onion
2 Tbsp. bacon fat or butter
Salt and pepper, to taste

Sauerkraut Filling:

3 cups sauerkraut
1 medium onion, chopped
4 Tbsp. bacon fat or butter
2 Tbsp. sour cream

Cherry Filling:

2 lbs. sour cherries, pitted
½ cup sugar
1-2 Tbsp. butter

Note: Dough recipe yields enough for 50-60 dumplings. Each filling recipe yields the same, so if you wish to make a mixture of varenyky varieties, then reduce the amounts of ingredients for each filling, or increase the amount of dough.

Mix together fillings of your choice and set in bowls for later.

Sift flour into large mixing bowl. Fold in sour cream and butter. Mix, using dough blending tool or fork. Blend the lumps into small pieces in an even consistency.

Beat egg in a measuring cup. Add enough water to make $\frac{3}{4}$ cup total liquid, then beat to uniform consistency.

Fold egg mixture into dry ingredients, first using a spoon, then kneading the dough with your hands. If it is still sticky after you've thoroughly combined the ingredients, then gradually add flour until the dough is the proper consistency.

Roll dough into a ball and cover with a damp cloth until you are ready to use it. Soak the cloth and wring it out so that it is damp, but not dripping.

Sprinkle flour onto work surface. Pinch off a baseball size piece of dough. Form it into a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch to 1 inch thick rope. With a knife, cut the rope into uniform cubes of dough. Roll dough cubes into ball, then flatten them on your work surface, ending up with an almost perfect circle of dough.

Using a rolling pin, roll out dough circle. Scoop 1 heaping spoonful of your filling in the center of the dough, concentrated in the middle, away from the edges. Fold the dough in half, pinching the varenyky shut along the edges, keeping the filling away from the seams. Use your fingers to firmly pinch the dumpling closed. The seams should be about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide. (If it does not stick, make sure there isn't too much flour on the edges. If it looks clean and still won't stick, then your dough might not have enough liquid, so return dough to bowl, sprinkle on water, and knead it for a few minutes.)

Pat the varenyky to distribute filling evenly inside the dumpling. There should be no holes in the dough, although if there is, you can patch it with extra dough. Double check the seam, ensuring it is sealed tightly so no filling will leak out during cooking.

Using a wide-slotted spoon (plastic works best, since metal spoons have sharper edges and are more likely to accidentally cut the dumpling), lower the varenyky into boiling water. Once in the pot, give the water a gentle swirl to keep the dumpling from sticking to the bottom when it first goes in the water.

When the varenyky is completely floating flat on top of the water, scoop up the dumpling from underneath and remove it from the pot, allowing it to drain for a few seconds. Then gently lay it on a drying tray. Continue with rest of dough and fillings.

If you are not going to prepare these to eat in a day or two, it is best to freeze them. Once dry, stack the dumplings in layers between wax paper on a cookie sheet small enough to fit in your freezer. Freeze overnight and then remove them from the pan, placing them in freezer bags. Pop them back into the freezer until you're ready to cook.

If cooking frozen dumplings, do not defrost first – remove directly from freezer to skillet.

Melt 4 Tbsp butter (or 2 Tbsp oil) in a skillet over medium heat. Sauté sliced onions until translucent, about 5 minutes. Place varenyky directly on top of onions. (If using frozen varenyky, add a little water to skillet.) Do not stir. The onions will keep the dumplings from burning. Cover and cook about 10 minutes. Add a little water and use a spatula to move around the pan if they appear to be sticking. Cook until they turn a light golden brown, then flip dumplings over, and cook until other side is golden.

(Note: Needless to say, fruit dumplings are not cooked with onions. Usually the fruit ones are served immediately after the boiling stage, although you can fry to crisp them up, as well. Sprinkle with powdered sugar.)

Aspiring ballerina Dani Spevak is back home in New Jersey for the summer. What was supposed to be a simple day trip into New York City to visit her friends at the Manhattan Ballet Conservatory turns deadly when Dani discovers that the world of professional ballet can be cutthroat – literally.



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EXCERPT from *Pas de Death*:

“How thin should it be?” I asked. Given my history with the word “thin,” this would have been a loaded question in any other context. Guess it was a good thing I wasn’t at dance school this summer.

As if you could actually call my injury “a good thing.” Silver linings, and all that.

Grandma Rose pushed a wisp of dark hair from her eyes, leaving a splotch of flour like those old-fashioned powdered wigs that George Washington wore. (I had a feeling my vain grandmother wouldn’t exactly be pleased to know I’d compared her fashion sense to a guy who’d been dead two hundred years.)

“You’ll know it when you see it.”

“Oh please, Rose. ‘I know it when I see it?’” Mom snorted. “What is this, the Supreme Court? We’re talking about potato-filled dough, not obscenity.”

Did I mention my mom was a law professor? I rolled the dough...and my eyes.

“Too thin, and they fall apart when you boil them. Your varenyky will just be a bowl of wet noodles. Extremely yummy ones, but wet noodles all the same.” Grandma Rose grinned.

“Too thick, and they’ll be difficult to cook. The outside will be tough and the inside will be raw.”

“But what exactly does that mean? How thin?”

“I’m sorry, Dani, but it really is something you’ll have to learn on your own. Trial and error.” She glanced up from her work and made eye contact with me. “Kinda like love.”

Angelo the Mobster’s Pasta Primavera

From ***The Good Daughter*** by Diana Layne

Genre: Romantic Suspense



- 2 carrots, peeled and julienned
- 2 small zucchini, julienned
- 2 yellow squash, julienned
- 1 onion, thinly sliced
- 1 yellow bell pepper, julienned
- 1 red pepper, julienned
- 2 or 3 cloves of garlic, chopped
- ¼ cup olive oil
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper
- 1 Tbsp. dried Italian herbs OR a small handful of fresh basil and fresh oregano, chopped

1 pound farfalle (bowtie pasta)
Cherry tomatoes (about a dozen)
2-3 Tbsp. sundried tomatoes chopped
Grated Parmesan for garnish

Preheat oven to 450 degrees Fahrenheit.

On a large heavy-duty baking sheet, toss the vegetables with the oil, salt, pepper and dried or fresh chopped herbs. Arrange evenly over the baking sheet. (You might need to use a second baking sheet.) Bake until the carrots are tender and the vegetables are beginning to brown. Stir after the first 10 minutes, cook about 20 minutes total.

While vegetables are cooking, cook the pasta in a large pot of boiling salted water. Only until “al dente” firm to the bite. Drain, reserving one cup of the cooking liquid.

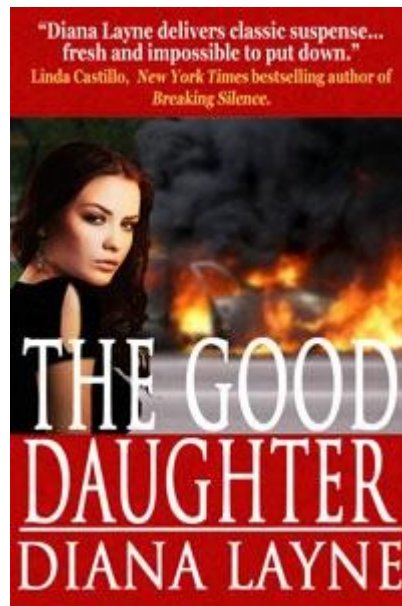
Toss the drained pasta with the vegetable mixture in a large bowl. Toss in the chopped sundried tomatoes, cherry tomato halves and enough cooking liquid to moisten. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with grated Parmesan and serve immediately.

Note: This makes a lot, can be eaten as a side dish or main dish. I have also added leftover chopped bacon. Leftover chopped chicken, pork or steak will also work well. But it's great as a vegetable and pasta dish!

Most good daughters would say they owe their fathers everything. Marisa Peruzzo, mafia princess, would.

She owed him for killing her fiancé.
She owed him for destroying her mother.
She owed him for chaining her to the ‘family business’.
And she owed him for taking away her lifelong friend.

Payback's a bitch.



www.dianalayne.com

EXCERPT from *The Good Daughter*:

Dave sat up straighter when she entered the bar. Sandro had promised the contact would have useful information and be immediately recognizable, but he never specified male or female. Was this his informant? Carlo Peruzzo's daughter. The Mafia princess herself.

Her gaze scanned the room until she saw him. Though her lips were pressed in a straight line, a sparkle flashed in her eyes as if she knew just how she had shocked him.

Dave realized his heart rate had kicked up a few notches when their eyes had locked. His jaw would have dropped if he hadn't been the kind of guy trained not to show his emotions.

She walked purposefully toward him, making her way through the crowded tables. Black designer jeans hugged nice curvy hips, and her full breasts were covered with a pink plaid, pearl-button western shirt. Interesting color choice. A leather belt wrapped around her waist, and his focus narrowed. Best he could tell the belt was pink, too. And there were some kind of pink jewels inlaid in the buckle.

He hid a smile. The only thing that would complete the color coordination was if she had on—he looked down, yep, pink cowboy boots. Pretty-in-pink cowgirl-Mafia princess. That certainly wasn't an image he expected to see. With her head high, and her gaze fixed on him she seemed unaware of—or unaffected by—the attention she garnered. And she certainly got a fair share of stares. He saw more than one man pause with a drink halfway to his mouth, head swiveling to keep track as she walked past.

Dave had never seen the high-and-mighty Mafia daughter in anything other than expensive business suits, with her hair pulled back and her makeup understated, but tonight she wore this chic knock-off cowgirl look well. With her dark wavy hair swinging free around her shoulders, her smooth olive skin glowing, and lips a luscious color of pink to match as well, she could raise the lust level in a saint.

Dave was no saint.

Olivia's Seafood Salad

From *Under Fire* by Rita Henuber
Genre: Romantic Suspense/Thriller



Seafood poaching liquid:

celery stalk
1 medium carrot
1 small onion, quartered
1 bay leaf
1 lemon, diced
1 garlic clove, whole
1 Tbsp. kosher salt
2 quarts water

Salad:

1 head of Bibb lettuce
1 heart of palm, rinsed, patted dry, & julienned
¼ red pepper, julienned
Kalamata olives (as many as you'd like)
6 small/thin green onions (5 inches long from white part up), julienned
1 medium tomato, sliced
1 Tbsp. chopped fresh parsley or cilantro
1 Tbsp. chopped fresh basil leaves
6 Tbsp. freshly squeezed lemon juice (about 1 lemon)
1/3 cup high quality olive oil
1 clove garlic, crushed
Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper

Seafood:

Whole 1 ½ lbs. lobster
6 cleaned calamari tubes, cut into 1-inch-thick rings
4 large scallops
6 large shrimp

Overlap lettuce leaves on a large plate. Chop two cups tender inside leaves. Mix the lemon juice and olive oil together and put in the crushed garlic clove.

Cook lobster in a separate pot of boiling salted water for approximately 8 minutes. Once cooked remove the lobster meat from the shell, and cut into pieces.

Poach the seafood in a large saucepan with a colander insert. In the bottom of the pan, combine the celery, carrot, onion, bay leaf, diced lemon, garlic, salt, and water. Bring to a boil.

Place the calamari in the colander and cook in simmering water for 2 minutes. Be careful not to overcook as it will become rubbery. Remove from the water, transfer to a large bowl, and set aside.

Place the scallops in the colander and cook until opaque, about 3 to 4 minutes. Remove from the water and transfer to the bowl with the calamari. Cut in half.

Place the shrimp in the colander and cook until pink, about 3 minutes. Remove, peel, devein.

To prepare the salad, gently toss the chopped lettuce, julienned bell peppers, heart of palm, green onion, olives parsley, basil, together in a serving bowl. Place on the large platter with tomato slices on the sides. Arrange seafood on top. Drizzle the oil and lemon mixture over the salad (remove the garlic clove first) Season with the salt and generous grindings of pepper. Serve immediately with a side of garlic bread and a chilled white wine. Serves 2.

Coast Guard helicopter pilot Olivia Carver is on a very personal mission. Her twin brother, an undercover officer, was murdered by a drug cartel and she won't stop until she finds the man responsible for his death.

In the course of her own investigation, Olivia meets informant Rico Cortes. He's mysterious and sexy and despite her reservations, the two share a night of passion. But Rico turns out to be more than a one night stand. He's a DEA agent, deep undercover in Miami's drug world, and possibly the one man who can help Olivia find the justice she seeks.

When Rico realizes his cover is blown, he isn't sure whether it was someone in the cartel or an inside agent. Olivia is the only one he can trust and together they venture on a dangerous, rogue mission to infiltrate a drug lord's inner circle...with Olivia as bait.



<http://www.ritahenuber.com>

EXCERPT from *Under Fire*:

In the suite, Olivia found her purchases neatly hanging or in drawers. The bedside clock read five. She'd skipped lunch and was hungry. The Replay opened at eleven and Silva never arrived before midnight. If she ate now she could sleep and make it to the club by one.

Scanning the hotel's room service menu, she was horrified to find a meal with wine and dessert plus tip would cost two hundred dollars. She ordered a seventy-five-dollar seafood salad. No wine or dessert. A young man arrived with the tray in less than twenty minutes and set the table on the balcony.

The salad was worth every cent. Chunks of lobster, shrimp, crab, and scallops melted in her mouth. She regretted not ordering the carafe of Sauvignon Blanc room service recommended.

Stomach full, she stretched out on the chaise to nap. Thoughts about what was to come kept sleep at bay. Tonight she would come face to face with the man responsible for Danny's death. She'd waited a long time for this. Keeping her emotions in check wouldn't be easy. Rico convinced her that killing Silva outright would serve no purpose but hers. Another man would step into his place before his body was cold. The most important thing was to find how the cartel was getting the information about undercovers.

She wanted the person who sold Danny out. Then she would kill them both.

Alaskan Crab Cakes

From *Doctor's Mile-High Fling* by Tina Beckett

Genre: Harlequin Medical Romance



2 cups crab meat
1 cup fresh bread crumbs
¼ cup chopped green onion
3 Tbsp fresh chopped parsley
¼ cup celery chopped
3 tablespoons mayonnaise
1 beaten egg
Couple drops of bottled hot pepper sauce (or more, according to taste)
¼ tsp salt (or to taste)
Pinch of pepper (or to taste)
Flour
Canola oil

Two hours in advance or overnight: Combine all ingredients except flour and canola oil. Put mixture in the refrigerator to allow the flavors to blend.

Shape the mixture into 4 patties and coat each with flour. In a large skillet, heat the oil. Place patties in the skillet and cook for about 5 minutes, or until golden brown. Gently turn patties and cook on the other side for another 5 minutes. Serve with lemon wedges

Three things occur to medical pilot Blake Taylor as Dr Molly McKinna boards his plane:

- 1) Why would someone petrified of flying take a job in remotest Alaska?
- 2) His new colleague is a city girl through and through – this should be interesting!
- 3) His resolve to be all work and no play is slipping by the minute...!



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EXCERPT from *Doctor's Mile-High Fling*:

"I don't blame you for not wanting to fly with me again, but..." she paused as if gathering her thoughts. "I'd appreciate it if you'd give me a lift home tomorrow. I promise you won't have to 'sweet talk' me onto the plane."

Despite the sun shining down on them, super-chilled air quickly found its way into the collar and sleeves of his leather jacket. He could do without the constant wind on the islands. Or the reminder of how his marriage had crashed and burned. Against his better judgment, he asked, "You sure?"

"Sure you won't have to sweet talk me?"

He shifted his weight, trying not to think about how he might like to do just that. "No, I meant are you sure you want *me* to fly you home? I was serious about hooking you up an experienced pilot."

Glancing at his face, she bumped him with her shoulder and squinched her nose. "You've seen how I handle rough weather. Do you really want to foist that on some other unsuspecting soul?"

So she *could* laugh at herself. His shoulders lost some of their tension.

Actually, now that they were on the ground, she was charming and funny. "Well, since you put it that way, maybe it would be better for everyone if we stuck to our original arrangement. For this trip, anyway."

“My thoughts exactly.” She wrapped the flapping ends of her jacket around herself and zipped it tight. The stiff breeze played with her hair, lifting the short strands up and away from her face, before allowing them to fall in delightful disarray. “Now, if you could point me in the direction of the nearest diner, I have two urgent needs.”

“Food?”

“That’s second on my list. The first is to find a heater that actually works. No offense, but my toes are still frozen from the flight.” She pursed her lips. “But I *could* go for a nice hot meal, now that my stomach’s starting to settle down. The cold is good for something, anyway.”

“I know where they make a mean crab cake. I could show you around the island afterwards.” He shoved his hands into the pockets of his leather coat, trying to keep the cold from encroaching any further. It was evidently disrupting his thought processes. “You’ve seriously never been here before?”

“Nope. First time, remember?”

Just like that flight out. Hard to believe she’d lived in Alaska all her life and had never visited the islands.

Sharon had called Unalaska “quaint” on her first visit. Until she realized there was no mall. No fashion boutiques. Just simple, hard-working folks. She’d quickly felt trapped—had run back home before six months were up. He’d do well to keep that in mind, before he went and did something stupid.

Like offer to eat lunch with Molly and show her the sights? Who knew how long she’d even stick around?

She was terrified of flying. Her *mother* was afraid of flying. If she had a dog, a cat, or a chipmunk, it would probably be petrified as well. It didn’t bode well for someone who’d be medevacing patients on a regular basis. Even as he told himself distance was his friend in a situation like this, he’d already committed himself as tour-guide-for-a-day.

Damn. No backing out, now. But after lunch and a quick trip around the island, he’d put his pro-distance plan into motion.

Easy-Peasy Meatloaf

From ***Chase Me*** by Tamara Hogan
Genre: Urban Fantasy Romance

1 ½ pounds ground beef
1 egg
1 onion, chopped

1 cup milk
1 cup dried bread crumbs OR cracker crumbs
2 Tbsp. brown sugar
1 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
2 Tbsp. yellow mustard
1/3 cup ketchup
Salt and pepper to taste

In a large bowl, combine ground beef, egg, onion, milk, crumbs, and Worcestershire sauce. Season with salt and pepper to taste, and place mixture in a 5 x 9 loaf pan.

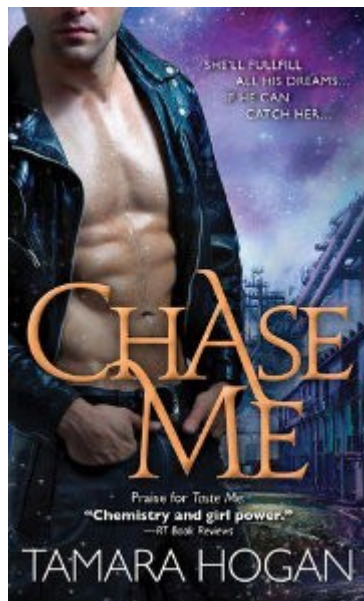
In a separate bowl, combine brown sugar, mustard and ketchup. Mix well, and pour over meatloaf.

Bake at 350° F. for one hour.

The secrets she's uncovering will be his to keep...

Centuries ago, when their ship crashed into Earth, paranormals of all types settled secretly into our world, quietly going about their business with humans none the wiser. Self-ruling and careful to stay below humanity's radar, all is threatened when Valkyrie archaeologist Lorin Schlessinger and her werewolf geologist partner Gabe Lupinsky inadvertently draw evil attention to Earth and its treasured natural resources.

As the threat intensifies, Lorin and Gabe struggle to contain the chaos they've unleashed, and to resist their explosive mutual attraction.



www.tamarahogan.com

EXCERPT from *Chase Me*:

Lorin parked in the overflow lot, and they walked to the restaurant. The scent of cinnamon rolls and grilled beef hit him as soon as he opened the door, making his stomach growl. The hostess seated them at a table for two near the windows and handed them plastic-coated menus. While he loved fine dining, he also appreciated casual family cafés like this one, with their bright lights, worn Formica tables, plastic tumblers of ice water, and the menus featuring meatloaf, hot beef sandwiches and BLTs.

He needed meat.

He picked up the menu, opened it—and the words swam, then disappeared into the void. *Damn it.* He held the menu out at arms' length, and when that didn't work, brought it close again.

"Need some help?"

Her matter-of-fact offer made his diaphragm clutch, but after a blink and a tilt of his head, the blurry black letters finally formed words. "I've got it, thanks."

When the middle-aged waitress came to take their order, Lorin said, "I'll have the meatloaf with double mashed potatoes and gravy, a side of onion rings, and..." She pursed her lips. "A piece of apple pie with extra whipped cream, please."

The waitress didn't blink at her order, just scribbled on her pad. "And how about you, sweetie?"

Gabe shoved aside thoughts of what he could do with extra whipped cream. "Hamburger and fries, please." He'd snatch a bite of Lorin's pie for dessert.

As the waitress walked away, Lorin smirked. "No green salad?"

Was he really so predictable? "I decided to indulge myself. I'll run it off tonight."

Indulging. Running. Ordinary words suddenly seemed spoken in bold font, and Lorin's dilated pupils indicated that she felt it too. Shifting in her red vinyl chair, she fiddled with her napkin-wrapped silverware, removing the paper ring that secured the bundle. Her breathing was a little fast, and her pulse throbbed at her neck.

Just the two of them, sitting at a restaurant. No weathered picnic table, no noisy, rowdy crew, no blaring tunes. No paperwork, no ticks and mosquitoes, no meeting agenda.

It felt like...a date.

'Hide the Peas, Please' Chicken Pot Pie

From *Intrusion* by Cynthia Justlin

Genre: Romantic Suspense

Crust:

1 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
¼ tsp salt
¼ cup butter (or Crisco All-Vegetable Shortening)
4 to 5 tablespoons cold water

Stir together flour and salt. Cut in shortening using a pastry cutter or food processor until the mixture resembles crumbs. Sprinkle cold water, one tablespoon at a time, over the mixture and blend until dough is moistened. Form dough into a ball.

Filling:

1 ½ cups cooked chicken
1 medium onion
12-oz can evaporated skim milk
¼ cup all-purpose flour
¼ cup water
1 tsp chicken bouillon
½ tsp dried thyme
1 pinch of pepper
10-ounce package of frozen peas and carrots

On a lightly floured surface, roll dough into a rectangle to fit a 13x9 inch glass baking dish.

Sauté onion in a medium saucepan. In a small mixing bowl, stir all but 1 tablespoon of the milk into flour until smooth. Add flour/milk mixture into saucepan along with water, bouillon, thyme and pepper. Cook and stir until thickened and bubbly. Stir in the frozen peas and carrots and chicken. Transfer to baking dish. Place crust over chicken mixture. Fold the edges of crust under and crimp with a fork. Brush the crust with the reserved milk. Bake for 30 minutes at 375 degrees, until the chicken mixture is heated through and the pastry is golden brown.

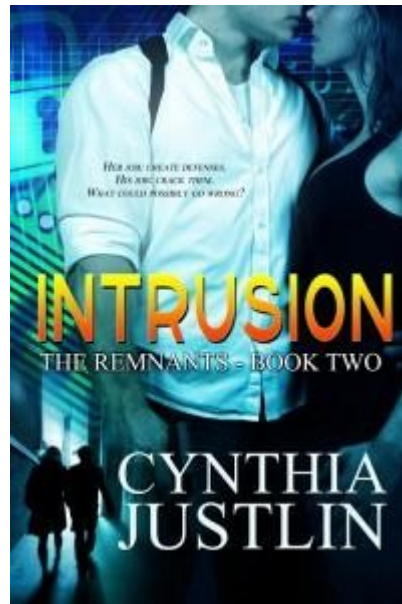
Her job: create defenses. His job: crack them. What could possibly go wrong?

Nanotechnologist Dr. Audra McCain attributes her success to her ability to distance herself from messy emotional entanglements that threaten her focus. But when she is framed for the theft of her dynamic armor prototype, she finds herself on the run with a man whose talent lies in hacking through the toughest of defenses.

Ever since a shattered knee ended his career in the Special Forces, Cameron Scott has felt like an intruder in his own life. Hiding his discontent behind a need-to-win mentality, he earns his living testing security systems by breaking them. When Nanodyne hires him to evaluate their system, Cam discovers someone has already breached the company at the highest level. Now he's on a mission to find out who.

As Audra and Cam play cat and mouse with a ruthless thief out to use the prototype for his own sinister cause, they'll have to break rules, violate security, and fight their growing

attraction. But when love makes an unauthorized attack, Cam realizes he may have finally found the one firewall he can't breach: Audra's heart.



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EXCERPT from *Intrusion*:

He sat down and Audra set a steaming bowl of chili in front of him, followed by heaping plate of—God, no—peas. “Thanks. This looks...good.” All except the damn peas.

“I have to wonder what you’ve been eating at home if this looks good to you.” Her laughing gaze zeroed in on his face and her lips turned up into a full-blown smile. “It was either chili or pea soup. Your friend must have really liked peas. There are cans of it everywhere.”

He suppressed a shudder. Ben always had been a masochist. Cam picked up his fork and waited until Audra’s focus was fixed on her own plate before he speared a pea on the tines. He grimaced and popped it into his mouth. The little green vegetable stuck in his throat and he forced it down by sheer willpower.

He blinked, but when he opened his eyes the small mound of peas was still there. He had to get rid of them. He dug his fork into the offensive greens and shoveled them into his mouth as quickly as possible.

The taste of his own memories gagged him and threatened the mouthful he tried to swallow.

“Wow. You must be really hungry.”

The peas slid down his throat, one big ball of his tainted past.

He shrugged. “Not really.”

“Ah, then you’re one of those health enthusiasts with a love affair for veggies.”

“Hardly.” *Be a man and eat your peas, son.* He shuddered. “I try to get them out of the way as quick as possible. My dad—”

Wasn’t worth talking about. He shook his head and reached for his knife, hoping to end all talk of the man who’d made sure to hammer home the lesson that losers were unlovable.

But Audra wouldn’t let it go. “No, what?” She raised a brow, her amber eyes light with curiosity for once, instead of shuddered with their usual darkness. “Come on, you show me yours, I’ll show you mine.”

He grinned. “That’s an interesting invitation, Dr. McCain. Exactly what are you agreeing to show me?”

SOUPS/STEW

Cole’s Poorman’s Stew

From *In The Presence Of Evil* by Autumn Jordon
Genre: Romantic Suspense



1 ½ pound ground beef
3 medium potatoes, peeled & diced
2 large carrots, sliced
½ medium onion, diced
2 large stalks of celery, sliced
1 cup of frozen peas
1 lb. box farfalle pasta
2 cans beef broth
1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
Salt, pepper, and parsley

Heat an 8 quart kettle on medium heat. Add oil and then potatoes, carrots, celery, onion and beef. Stir until beef is browned.

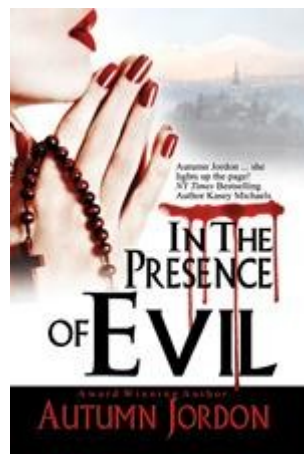
Cover the mixture with water. Add peas and parsley and bring to a boil. Add beef broth and bring to a boil again. Then add the pasta. Cook about 15 minutes, until vegetables and pasta are done. Salt and pepper to taste. You can add water or more broth if you'd like more of soup texture. Makes about 8 quarts.

This is one of my family's favorite meals for a chilly day. Enjoy!

In handcuffs for a murder and nowhere to turn, Gina Rizzo's only hope to stay out of jail is to accept the help of the man who years ago broke her heart, and who still makes her tremble with desire.

Staring death down is easier for Marine Cole Hanson than facing the woman who stole his soul and then betrayed him. However, when Cole returns home for the holidays and sees Gina in handcuffs, old feelings flare and even though he doesn't trust her with his heart, he willingly steps up as her alibi.

When Gina's life is threatened, Cole vows to protect her. However, staying alive becomes an undertaking for the two while they track a murder. Their only hope is to trust each other again, but if they do, will their rekindled love lead to their demise?



www.autumnjordan.com

EXCERPT from *In The Presence of Evil*:

The change in Mountain Pine had started months ago with the unsolved murder of the bank's previous president.

Gina's appetite vanished as her stomach rolled. Cole continued to scoop bite after bite. She dropped her spoon and it clanked against the bowl. "How can you think there was someone lurking around outside, who you might need to kill, and still eat like there was no tomorrow?"

"Because I'm hungry." He held up four fingers with his free hand while he continued to spoon with the other. "That's four questions."

"Will you knock that off? I'm serious."

His thumb popped up. "Five."

She grabbed his hand intending to hurt him for being so nonchalant and continuing to play the stupid question game, but Cole's fingers tightened around hers, and Gina's center turned to liquid while the rough pad of his thumb stroked the sensitive skin on the back of her hand. Her heart thumped against her ribs and echoed through her soul. Cole's smothering gaze made her wonder if he heard it too.

"What is it you really want to know, Gina?"

She couldn't breathe while imagining what she wanted from Cole, one night, in his arms. No questions. No promises for a tomorrow.

Her throat was dryer than a November milkweed. "I'd ah—"

He raised her hand to his warm lips and softly brushed them across her fingertips, sending crackling charges to her womb.

"You know what I'd like, Gina." His black lashes did little to mask his desire. "I'd like to get to know you all over again."

New Mexico Green Chile Stew

From *First Grave on the Right* by Darynda Jones
Genre: Paranormal Mystery



1 tablespoon vegetable oil
2 pounds cubed beef stew meat (or chicken)
1 onion, chopped
1 10-oz. can diced tomatoes with green chile peppers
1 1/2 cups beef (or chicken) broth
1 4-oz can chopped green chile peppers
1 tsp. garlic salt
Salt to taste
Ground black pepper to taste
2 large potatoes, peeled and cubed

In a large pot over medium heat, heat the oil and brown the stew meat (or cook the chicken fully) and the onions until onions are translucent; about 5 minutes.

Pour in the diced tomatoes with chiles, beef (or chicken) broth and chile peppers. Stir in the garlic salt. Salt and pepper to taste.

Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 1 hour. Add a little more beef broth or water if needed during simmering.

Stir in cubed potatoes to the mixture and simmer for an additional 30 minutes or until potatoes are tender.

This is a New Mexico favorite and is delightful made with either beef or chicken. Add a bit of Devil's Dust to spice up this warm dish even more.

A smashing, award-winning debut novel that introduces Charley Davidson: part-time private investigator and full-time grim reaper.

Charley sees dead people. That's right, she sees dead people. And it's her job to convince them to "go into the light." But when these very dead people have died under less than ideal circumstances (i.e. murder), sometimes they want Charley to bring the bad guys to justice. Complicating matters are the intensely hot dreams she's been having about an entity who has been following her all her life...and it turns out he might not be dead after all. In fact, he might be something else entirely.



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EXCERPT from *First Grave on the Right*:

Trusting the living had never been my strong suit. But this was Cookie. The best friend I'd ever had. She'd accepted everything I'd ever told her without doubt or contempt or instantaneous musings of monetary gain.

"And you think I won't be able to handle what you tell me?"

"No. That's just it. If anyone can handle it, you can. I just don't know if I want to do that to you." I put a hand on her arm and leaned forward, willing her to understand. "It's not always better knowing."

"It's late," she said, slipping papers into a file folder. "And you need to get to bed."

Had I hurt her feelings? Did she think I didn't want her to know? The thought of sharing every part of my life with a very best friend whom I could confide in completely was like finding the pot of green chile stew at the end of the rainbow. Did I dare? Could I risk one of the best things that had ever happened to me?

Cock-a-Leekie Stew

From *Prophecy: Book One of The Dragonfly Chronicles* by Heather McCollum

Genre: Historical Romance with Paranormal Elements

A Scottish stew mentioned as early as the 16th century. Modern versions include potatoes and celery and exclude the prunes. Served often at Kylkern Castle, home of the Macleans.

1 boiling fowl, about 4lb, including legs and wings
1 lb leeks (about 12) cleaned and cut into 1-inch pieces
4 pints stock or water
1 oz long grained rice
4oz cooked, prunes (stones removed)
One teaspoon brown sugar
Salt and pepper
Garni of bay leaf, parsley, thyme
Some recipes also have 3 chopped rashers of streaky bacon

Put the fowl and bacon in a large saucepan and cover with water. Bring to the boil and remove any scum. Add three-quarters of the leeks, (green as well as white sections), herbs (tied together in a bundle), salt and pepper and return to the boil. Simmer gently for 2-3 hours, adding more water if necessary.

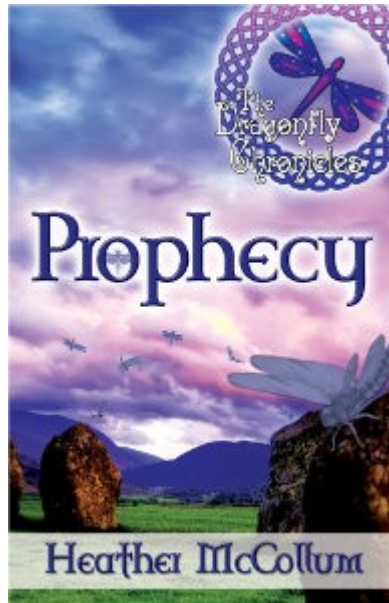
Remove the bird. Some thrifty chefs use the bird as another course, others cut the meat into small pieces and add them back to the soup (include some pieces of chicken in it when served). Add the rice and drained prunes and the remaining leeks and simmer for another 30 minutes. Check for flavor and serve with a little chopped parsley.

Serves 6/8 people

Serena Faw must shut out the barrage of thoughts from everyone around her. Her telepathic powers reveal the darkness and true intentions behind every false smile. When her adopted brother is accused of murder, the only man who can help her is the one person she cannot read. Can she trust him with the life of her brother? Can she trust him with her heart?

Keenan Maclean is the younger brother to the new chief of the Macleans. A dark prophecy shadows him. One brother will live wed to a witch and one will die. Keenan is raised to defend his clan and die.

Serena and Keenan hunt a loyalist murderer before the Battle of Culloden and fall in love despite the prophecy's warning that she heralds his death.



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EXCERPT from *Prophecy*:

As long as the music played, Serena would continue to dance as the flame. She never tired as the serenity of the blazing ribbons of fire and the dance kept the voices, the unending thoughts of others, at bay. She heard them only as a whisper; saw them only as a blank wall surrounding her on the edge of light. Around and around she moved, watching with half seeing eyes the web of thoughts held out at the edge. She leaned against it evenly to keep the thoughts from seeping inward, into her circle.

As she rounded the fire once more, pushing against the wills of her audience, a hole in the wall appeared. Curiously she danced toward it. Reaching out with her mind, Serena leaned into the hole. Her mind fell through it and her protective wall shattered. “No!” she whispered frantically.

Images bludgeoned her. Naked flesh, her naked flesh, pressed from behind, shoved into beds. Her mouth on the men, her lips skimming over sweaty skin.

“No,” she gasped as if for air. Quickly she flung hard at the shards of carnal images. She took a wrong step, her body flailing. She felt it, or rather didn’t feel it, the void. She fell against it, against him. She stared up at the dark, silent mountain holding her.

The man was a giant. He stood taller than any man she had known. His face glowed with the light of the fire, accenting a slash across his left cheek from his ear to his jaw. The scar accentuated the square set of his serious face. His eyes stared back into hers, they were light but she couldn’t tell the color. They narrowed as if trying to read her. Read her? Shocked, Serena realized that she could not read him. Not at all, as if he were a hole, silence in the noise of thoughts flowing around her.

His arms steadied her as he gazed into her eyes. “Who are ye, lass?”

Serena was mesmerized. Never before had she met someone who was blank to her. Someone with whom she could not read their thoughts, their emotions.

“Lass, are ye hurt?” he asked, his sensual mouth forming the deeply accented words.

Serena glanced at his hands wrapped around her bare upper arms. Nothing, she read nothing from him. Serena snatched off her glove. His scar. Scars, chiseled into skin during battle, were extremely powerful. Even her defenses could not block the gruesome details.

Serena held her breath as she traced her finger down the length of the slightly puckered skin, from his ear hidden in waves of dark hair to the rough squareness of his chin. The muscles in his jaw jumped at her touch. His lips opened on a ragged breath.

No jolt shot down through her arm and up behind her eyes. No visions of blood stained iron, muddy grime and anguished cries of war victims. Just the void. He was the first person she had ever met whom she knew absolutely nothing about.

“What are you?” she whispered. “A demon?”

The man’s face relaxed. “Some have called me worse.”

Almost-Medieval Leek Soup

Inspired by *Lady Unbound* by Elise Hayes
Genre: Medieval Romance

1 large onion, finely chopped
1 Tbsp. butter
3 or 4 leeks, tender and well-washed
3 spt. chicken or vegetable bouillon powder
1 cup water
1 pint milk
Salt, pepper, and tarragon to taste

Sauté the onions in the butter until translucent (but don’t allow to brown). Add the milk, bouillon powder, and water (or 8 oz of canned bouillon, if you prefer). Heat and add the chopped leeks. Bring just to the edge of a boil and then remove from heat. Let sit for 15 minutes. Serve.

Tips:

Don’t use the tougher, dark green portion of the leek stem
Substitute 8 oz of chicken or vegetable broth for the bouillon and water, if preferred.

My characters in this 12th century story don't eat leek soup – but I didn't think anyone would be interested in the roasted eel my heroine and hero do eat, while dining with a wealthy merchant and his family in Norwich!

Yes, during the medieval period eels were a popular dish, especially on Lenten Fridays. Eels (and lampreys) could be served in stews and soups, but could also be roasted and jellied (I know...jellied eels do *not* sound appetizing to me). So enjoy the leek soup, instead! It also has very clear medieval credentials, as leeks were a mainstay vegetable during the medieval period and later.

Henri's Turtle Soup

From *A Kiss in the Wind* by Jennifer Bray-Weber
Genre: Historical Pirate Romance

3 lbs. turtle meat
3 qts. Water
4 potatoes, cubed
3 diced carrots
2 diced onions
Salt (to taste)
Thyme (to taste)
6 pimento grains (allspice)
Lime peel
Pinch of sage
Sherry (to taste)

Boil turtle in water approximately 2 hours or until meat is almost tender.

Add vegetables, salt, thyme, allspice, lime peel, sage, and simmer covered for 1 hour.

Add sherry to taste when serving.

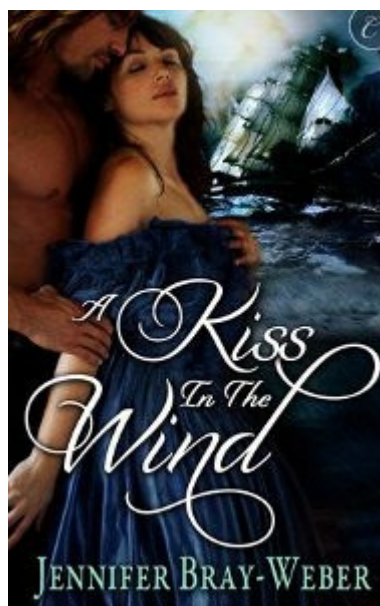
Variation #1: For thicker soup, add 1 oz. of corn flour mixed with a little liquid for every quart of the soup. Shake all ingredients. Serve in cocktail or martini glass. Garnish with lime.

Variation #2: Delete sherry. Add 1 cup milk with flour to thicken. May also add 1 cup each of celery, turnips, and peas to vegetables in step 2.

Marisol Castellan is desperate to find her younger brother to reclaim the love of family her father never provided them. She manages to intercept a message containing her brother's whereabouts, but must find a way to meet the ship he's on.

Blade Tyburn has been known by many names – privateer, opportunist, pirate, and his favorite, libertine. All true. What he is not is tolerant. He’s furious to realize a vital keepsake from his troubled childhood was stolen by the wench he saved in the inn.

But Marisol strikes a bargain—the cameo for passage to her brother. Blade agrees, and, though he knows his childhood sins make him unworthy of love, he begins to crave it with beautiful Marisol aboard ship. Marisol can’t allow herself distraction from her all-important mission, and besides, her murderous father would never allow a match with such a powerful rival no matter how attractive he’s become to her. And when her brother is found with the silver and a fishy story, Blade has reason to be more suspicious of Marisol and her intentions. But will Marisol and Blade be able to survive the deadly betrayal that awaits one of them and confess their true feelings for each other? Or does their love have no more chance of survival than a kiss in the wind?



www.jbrayweber.com

EXCERPT from *A Kiss in the Wind*:

“I’d say this is the best turtle soup I’ve ever had. The spices and onions, so flavorful. Is that a hint of lime I taste?”

Blade watched Marisol bring her spoon to her mouth. She flicked her tongue to catch a dribble of the soup on her lip, bringing a delicate finger up to wipe away what escaped. The innocent action sent an undercurrent of desire rippling below his belt. He shifted in his seat as she slipped her finger into her mouth. Their eyes locked and a grin edged up her lips. She brought her spoon to her mouth again. Her gaze still on him, she puckered her lips and gently tipped the spoon to take in the juice.

Blade raised his eyebrows. *How tantalizing.* He swallowed his own spoonful of tangy broth, slowly dragging his tongue along the corner of his mouth, watching for her reaction. He smirked when she momentarily averted her stare downward. *Two could play at this game.*

She reached for the smaller platter of figs and plantains in the middle of the table. Plucking a purple fig from the fruit, she captured his gaze once more before she brought it to her mouth. The fig disappeared behind her plump lips and she nipped off the stem. *Glory be!*

He, too, selected a fig. Slowly he bit into the flesh and, chewing it leisurely, measured his success by the heat flushing up her neck.

Next, she picked a plantain from the tray. Peeling back the yellow and blackened skin, she flared a coy smile. If her seductive eyes burning into him from underneath those dark lashes were not enough to send him to explode like a flash pot, those lips wrapped around the banana surely would. Sweet, merciful heaven.

Caruru do Pará (Brazilian Shrimp Gumbo)

From *Doctor's Guide to Dating in the Jungle* by Tina Beckett
Genre: Harlequin Medical Romance



- 1 lb dried shrimp (can be found in specialty markets)
- 2 Tbsp manioc flour
- 2 Tbsp dendê oil (red palm oil, or you can substitute annatto oil)
- 3 ½ cups water, salted
- 2 cups of fresh okra, sliced
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 tomatoes, cubed
- 1 Tbsp fresh parsley, chopped

2 Tbsp fresh cilantro, chopped
2 cloves of garlic
Salt to taste

Place dried shrimp in a bowl and cover with water. Let soak overnight in the refrigerator. Drain and peel.

Bring 3 cups of water to a boil and add the shrimp. Cook for three or four minutes. Drain, straining and reserving the cooking water. Add the okra to the water and simmer until crisp/tender (about 10 minutes).

In a medium skillet, heat the olive oil. Add the shrimp and onion and sauté for about a minute, then add the tomatoes, parsley, cilantro and garlic. Cook for two more minutes, then add to the okra/water mixture. Whisk the manioc flour into ½ cup of water, then add to the pan. Simmer until thickened, then add the dendê oil. Serve with hot, cooked rice.

Rule #1 — Don't flirt with your boss!

Dr. Stevie Wilson knows the rules — but in Brazil, in the confines of their medical boat, she's finding it virtually impossible to keep away from her lethally attractive boss, Dr. Matt Palermo. Even their hammocks are on top of one another!

Rule #2 — Apply ridiculous amounts of insect repellent.

This one's easier to follow, but that won't help to banish thoughts of the hunky Matt...

Rule #3 is the biggest challenge of all — Never fall for a man who has buried his heart deep in the Amazon jungle!



www.tinabeckett.com
<http://www.facebook.com/tina.j.beckett>

EXCERPT from *Doctor's Guide to Dating in the Jungle*:

His furrowed brow made her sit a bit taller. “Is there something wrong with the way I speak?”

“Not at all. But you’ll find sentence construction is a little different here.”

“I’ve noticed.”

Tiago spoke up. “I think your accent is very nice, Miss Stefani.”

She smiled her thanks. “Stefani is my formal name, but all my friends call me Stevie. Won’t you do the same?”

“Sh-tée-vee?” He struggled to get the name out, and she noticed Nilson—busy manning the helm, his plate balanced on the control panel—mouthed the word as well.

“Perfect,” she said.

Matt just shook his head. “From Stefan, to Stefani, to Stevie. No wonder I was confused about your gender.”

“And now? Are you still confused?”

“Confused?” His lips tilted in a sardonic smile. “More than ever.”

With that cryptic statement he stood and walked to the sink, carrying his plate. Since Tiago and Nilson followed his lead, she shoveled one last mouthful of the delicious meal into her mouth and stood as well. “Thank you so much for lunch. It was wonderful.”

“I’m glad you liked it.” After Matt ducked through the door, Tiago leaned in a bit closer and whispered, “I think you will be good for Mateus. He misses his wife very much.”

Wife? Matt was married? Oh Lordy, and she’d practically insisted on playing share-sies with his bedroom. What was she thinking?

“Where is she? His wife, I mean.” The words were out before she could stop them. But she wanted to know. Because other arrangements definitely had to be made. No wonder he’d offered to sleep with the crew. Her face flamed. She’d told him not to worry about her throwing herself at him and yet she’d offered to sleep right above the man’s head. Surely he didn’t think—

“His wife is...she’s...” Tiago bowed his head and pointed skyward.

Abram's Game Day Chicken and Sausage Gumbo

From *Under the Autumn Sky* by Liz Talley
Genre: Contemporary Romance

Stock:

1 medium hen
6 chicken bouillon cubes
1 peeled onion
2 stalks celery
3 bay leaves
Salt and pepper to taste
Garlic powder
Favorite herb seasoning

Add all ingredients in large stock pot, cook chicken until done, set aside to cool. Remove chicken, pull off meat, and reserve stock.

Roux:

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup flour
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of oil

Mix together in large Dutch oven/pot, cook on low heat until color resembles the color of a pecan. Stir often and don't burn!

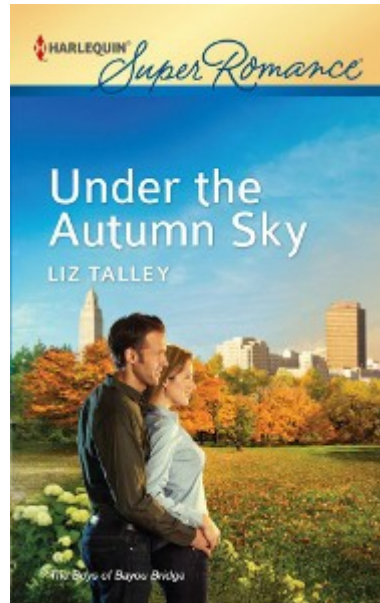
Gumbo:

4 cups chopped onion
3 celery stalks chopped
1 tsp of minced garlic
1 cup green onion tops (chives)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ bell pepper chopped
Cajun seasoning (along with salt and pepper to taste)
Chopped parsley
1 lb Andouille sausage (or smoked sausage) cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ in slices

Once roux is complete, add onions, celery and bell pepper. Cook until onions are clear. Add chopped chicken and sausage. Cover. Cook on low for 30 minutes, stirring often. Next add all seasonings along with 6-7 cups of chicken stock. Bring to a boil, cover, and lower heat to low-medium. Cook for 1 1/2 - hours and serve over rice.

Abram Dufrene has one goal – advance through the ranks of college coaching to a head coaching job. To fulfill this mission, the new tight ends coach for the Louisiana University Fighting Panthers, has to bring in high profile recruit Waylon Boyd and get him to sign with the class of 2012. Should be easy. But when he makes a side trip and runs into a breathtaking blonde at a backwoods juke joint, things get rocky.

Louise “Lou” Boyd, a heavy equipment operator for a local construction company, wants nothing to do with her friends’ night on the town. And she wants nothing to do with any man. Her goal is to get her brother and sister, for whom she serves as guardian, into college so she can start the life she put on hold when her parents died ten years before. All she has to do is survive recruiting season. She’s not looking for love...but does love ever really care?



www.liztalleybooks.com
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[Liztalleybooks](https://www.facebook.com/Liztalleybooks) on Facebook

EXCERPT from *Under the Autumn Sky*:

Waylon had spent the day taking in the sights and sounds of ULBR football. He could smell spicy jambalaya and seductive bourbon in the air along with a sort of buzz of expectation. They’d spent the morning touring more of the campus, culminating in a tailgate with gumbo, sausage sandwiches and pulled pork. He’d looked longingly at the beers in everyone’s hands, but knew he’d have to settle for a soda...even if beer went better at a tailgate.

A pass hung round his neck and later after the band came down the hill, they’d get to go on the field and watch the team warm up.

The sky was clear cerulean blue, leaves swirling with the cool wind, the sun hot on his shoulders. A good day to watch football. An even better day to play football.

The crowd moved around them, everyone in purple and black with the occasional red-clad fan sidestepping the loud ULBR fans shaking their fingers and “Panther baiting” them. All in good fun. All in the name of the game of the gods.

Football.

SIDES

Abby's Fatten-up-Mac Green Bean Casserole

From *The Memory of You* by Laurie Kellogg
Genre: Contemporary Romance

Serves 6-8 as a main dish and a crowd as a side dish.
Not for those watching their weight.



20 oz. frozen French-cut green beans
1 cup onion, finely diced
8 oz. box of sliced fresh mushrooms
3 ½ Tbsp. butter (divided)
1 Tbsp. flour
2 tsp. sugar
1 cup sour cream
1 can cream of mushroom soup
8 oz. sliced Swiss cheese
½ tsp. salt

½ tsp. black pepper, or to taste
3 cup cornflakes

Preheat oven to 350 F degrees.

Cook green beans in lightly salted water until almost tender and drain thoroughly. DO NOT OVERCOOK.

Sautee diced onion and mushrooms in 1½ Tbsp. butter until lightly browned. Stir in 1 Tbsp. flour and 2 tsp. sugar. Blend in 1 cup sour cream and 1 can of mushroom soup. Add salt and black pepper to taste.

Fold in well-drained green beans (I blot them with a paper towel) and pour into a 9 x 13 – inch baking dish. Top with slices of Swiss cheese and bake at 350 F degrees for 30 minutes.

Remove from oven and top with 3 cups of cornflakes sautéed and toasted in 2 T butter.
(*Canned fried onion rings may be substituted for buttered cornflakes, but Abby prefers the less greasy cornflakes*).

Return the casserole to the oven and bake another 10 minutes. ENJOY!!!

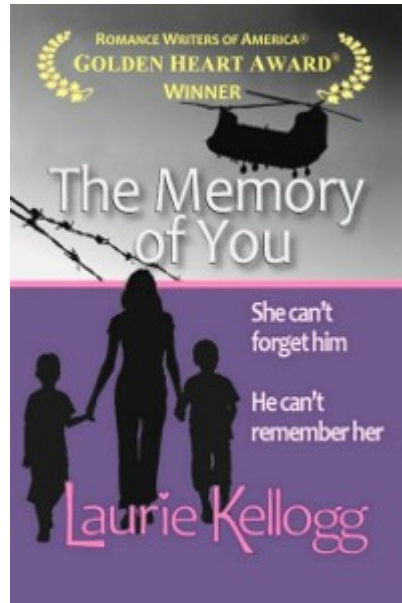
*She can't forget him—He can't remember her
Together, they must discover the healing power of unforgettable love*

The day Lieutenant Matthew Foster departed for his so-called ‘tour’ in Vietnam, he never expected a sudden change in his itinerary would include an extended stay in the horrific Hanoi Hilton. Six years later, he’s finally released with the other POWs during Operation Homecoming. Unfortunately, his memories before his capture were erased by the complimentary torture provided by the hotel’s concierge. Due to prior facial injuries and the beard concealing his gauntness, he looks nothing like the boyish photo in his military file.

When the Army informs Matt he has a wife and he was mistakenly declared dead, he’s sure Abby must have made a new life for herself. He doubts the bitter man he’s become can salvage the boy she once cared for, so to be fair to her, he decides to simply write a note to wish her well and leave. But before he does, he can’t resist going to Redemption, PA, to catch a glimpse of the woman he’d loved enough to marry.

The irony of the small town’s name is totally eclipsed by Matt’s dread that he’ll discover he’s lost something truly worth remembering. That fear becomes reality when he learns Abby is engaged, and he’s a *daddy*! Luckily, his wife doesn’t recognize him, so Matt could still walk away from the beautiful stranger who’s been starring in his X-rated dreams. However, he could never, *ever* abandon his sons.

The clock is ticking. Any day, the military will inform Abby he’s alive, and her wedding is in only six weeks. It doesn’t give Matt much time to discover if he can reclaim the love the war stole from him.



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Millie Polk's Squash Casserole

From *Home at Last Chance* by Hope Ramsay
Genre: Contemporary Romance

This is a favorite recipe at my house. We make it every Thanksgiving and there are never any leftovers. It's also my go-to recipe whenever I need a quick casserole. It's a wonderful complement to ham.

2 green zucchinis
2 yellow zucchinis
3 medium tomatoes
Italian bread crumbs
Olive oil
8 oz shredded parmesan cheese
8 oz shredded mozzarella cheese
8 oz shredded asiago cheese
2 eggs

Slice the zucchinis into thin oblong slices. Slice the tomatoes into thin slices.

In a deep casserole dish, drizzle a little olive oil, then put down a layer of zucchini slices. Sprinkle a mixture of the three cheeses over the zucchinis. Add a layer of tomatoes and then sprinkle breadcrumbs over the top. Drizzle olive oil over the breadcrumbs.

Repeat the layers until you've filled the casserole dish, ending on a layer of breadcrumbs. Beat two eggs and pour the beaten eggs over the top of the breadcrumbs.

Bake in the oven at 350 degrees for 30-40 minutes.

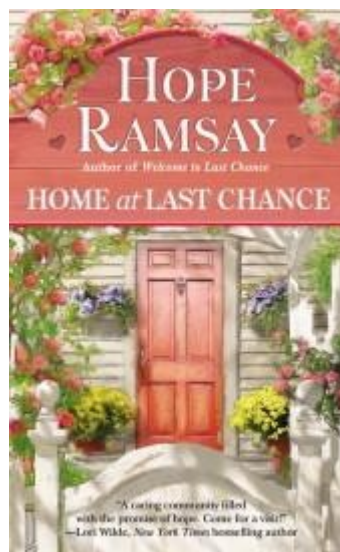
Dear Reader,

You won't believe what's happened. My son Tulane has come back home! You remember Tulane? He'd set out to find fame and fortune in the big, wide world outside of Last Chance, and I'm mighty proud. But that's not the half of it-Tulane isn't only back, he's brought a young lady with him.

Now Sarah-she does PR for Tulane's stock-car team-she's from Boston, but she's just about the sweetest girl you could meet. I think she's meant to keep Tulane out of trouble after that story in the papers, but he doesn't want to talk about it. Anyhow, the Ladies Auxiliary can't wait to start matchmaking and introduce Sarah to our Reverend Ellis. But mark my words, Sarah is tired of being a good girl. And no one is better at breaking the rules and raising Cain than my son . . .

Listen to me going on and keeping customers waiting. I best get back to work, but you come round again. The Cut 'n' Curl's got hot rollers, free coffee, and the best gossip in town.

See you real soon,
Ruby Rhodes



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EXCERPT from *Home at Last Chance*:

Hettie picked up the casserole from the passenger seat and opened the car door into the heat and humidity. One of Last Chance's citizens had passed away, and Hettie was a member of the Ladies Auxiliary. The rules for proper comportment were clear and comforting.

She entered Ruby's nice little house, paid her respects to Arlene, and then headed toward the dining room, casserole in hand.

She heard Reverend Ellis's voice before she got there. The sound of it, deep and sincere, eased the tension in her chest. It was always a marvel the way his voice resonated from the pulpit on Sunday mornings. Hettie never objected to Bill's long-winded sermons. She could listen to him for hours. He was almost as good as a cigarette for calming her nerves.

She entered the dining room, prepared to give him a big smile and a heartfelt hello. But her disquiet redoubled the instant that she saw Bill engaged in a conversation with an attractive young stranger with auburn hair.

Bill and the stranger looked perfectly matched.

Hettie wasn't sure how long she stood there transfixed. Long enough, in any case, to be caught by Miriam Randall, who came in from the kitchen, bearing a tray of cookies.

"Oh, hey, Hettie, you can put your macaroni and cheese right next to Millie's squash casserole." Miriam pointed at the spot on the dining room table.

Bacon and Egg Fried Rice

From ***Taste Me*** by Tamara Hogan
Genre: Urban Fantasy Romance

Canola oil
8 slices of bacon, chopped
4 eggs
4 c. cooked rice
Pinch of salt
Pinch of pepper
Chopped scallions to taste

Put a quarter-sized dollop of canola oil in large skillet. Heat until very hot.

Add chopped bacon, and cook until crispy.

Scoop bacon to one side of skillet, and tip the skillet so fat and oil pools on the other. Crack eggs into the fat, break yolks, and cook eggs to desired consistency.

Fold in cooked rice, taking care not to break rice grains. Continue folding/tossing until rice dries out a bit. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Right before serving, fold in chopped scallions. Serves two.

CSI meets *True Blood* in a new urban fantasy romance series with a supernatural crimes unit...

Someone has to keep the peace – and the secrets.

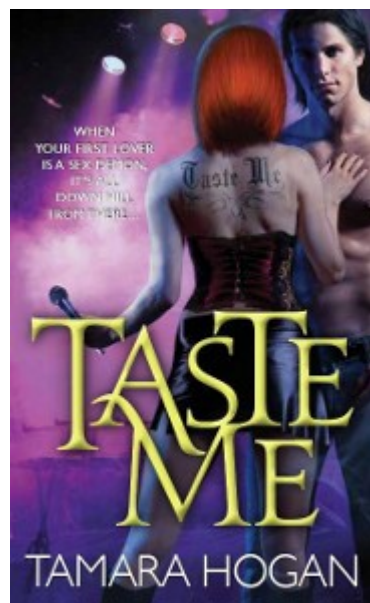
He wants her so badly he can taste it ...

Ever since their tempestuous fling years ago, incubus Lukas Sebastiani has known that siren Scarlett Fontaine was meant to be his. But when you're a demon with an insatiable desire, relationships are...complicated.

Her siren song brings men to their knees...

Rock star Scarlett Fontaine desperately need a break after a grueling tour. But with murder and mayhem surrounding her band, and Lukas guarding her body, life is going to be anything but peaceful.

Ever encounter between them creates more turmoil – and heat – until Scarlett pushes Lukas to the boiling point, and unleashes forces that go way beyond anything she can hope to control...



www.tamarahogan.com

EXCERPT from *Taste Me*:

THUNK.

What was Lukas doing? Scarlett poured coffee into the thermal mug he'd set out for her, snagged a handful of the bacon, and then padded out onto the lakeview deck, a big wooden platform without sides that supplied a level surface for the huge grill, an outdoor dining set, and cozy twin Adirondack chairs. To the left side of the deck, a pair of faded board shorts hung on the clothesline strung tautly between two sturdy birch trees. The hummingbird feeder was empty.

THUNK.

Lukas wasn't down on the dock, or over by the sauna. She walked to the edge of the deck so she could see the broad expanse of shaggy lawn on the north side of the cabin.

And there he was. Out of habit, she stepped back so he wouldn't see her, but immediately reversed herself. To hell with skulking around corners, because Holy Mother—if a man was going to chop wood looking like that, he deserved to be ogled.

Gauging from the pile of split logs, and the sweatshirt and T-shirt lying in the grass, he'd been at it for a while. The strengthening sun gleamed off his shoulders, and the waistband of his sagging cargo shorts was damp with sweat. His hair was loose but lashed to his head with a faded blue bandana.

Of Sasha's two brothers, why did she have to fall in love with Lukas? Why not Rafe, the easygoing, unabashed sensualist? He'd be far easier to have a relationship with, but some critical alchemy was missing between them. And it was definitely premature to define this... thing as a relationship. Sure, she'd slept with Lukas a handful of times, each one more memorable than the last. Though she'd mapped every inch of his body with her hands, mouth, and tongue, she hadn't spent nearly enough time touching him to take his body for granted. Despite these physical intimacies, and the front-row seat she had into his work life, she didn't have a lot more insight into his thoughts about them now than she did when they first slept together. But she was done hiding from him.

She swallowed audibly. There was definitely a cause-and-effect relationship between the line of tortoiseshell hair disappearing into Lukas's waistband, and the tugging sensation between her thighs.

And he'd seen her. He stared, pupils dark and dilated, his nostrils flaring. Her nipples pebbled under her sweatshirt.

Lukas shot her a look so feral, so frantic, that she moaned aloud. He looked wild enough to do anything. Everything.

With a twist of his wrist, he buried the head of the axe in the stump.

Scarlett ran.

Sultana's Rice

From *Kismet's Kiss* by Cate Rowan
Genre: Fantasy Romance

1 cup uncooked rice (basmati is best)
2 oz. butter
2 oz. almonds, blanched (skins removed) and halved
8 dates without pits (fresh is best, but dried ones will do if plump)
2 oz. sultanas (a particular kind of raisin, though golden raisins will work)
1 tsp. rosewater (optional)

Cook the rice.

While the cooked rice is standing, melt the butter in a frying pan. Add the almonds, stirring until they turn golden. Add the dates and sultanas (or raisins) and stir, letting the mixture cook a few more minutes.

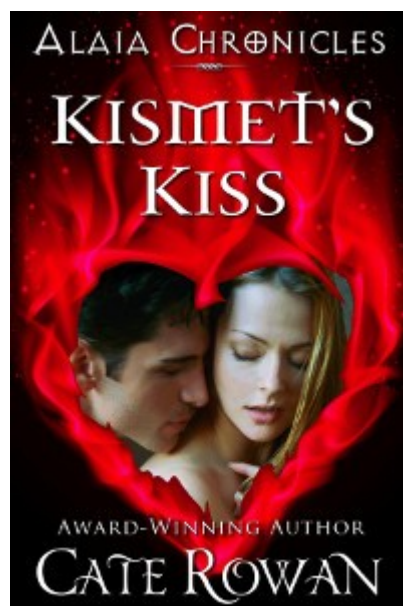
Remove from the stove. Mix in the rosewater, if used. Pile the rice on a dish and arrange the mixture on top.

Hat tip to GroupRecipes.com for the recipe, here slightly modified.

In the desert realm of Kad, a deadly epidemic strikes the palace of Sultan Kuramos. Only a magical healer from an enemy land has the skill to save his royal household, but Kuramos never imagined the healer would be a woman.

Healer Varene finds her own surprises in Kad. She expects the sultan's arrogance, but not his courage, his selfless care of the ill, or the possibility the epidemic is the hex of a vengeful goddess.

Kuramos's culture condemns Varene's mystical talents. Her presence triggers an insurrection, yet as he and the healer toil for a cure, he loses his heart to her. She falls for him as well, but how can she relinquish her homeland and her principles? He already has a harem...and his family may be cursed.



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EXCERPT from *Kismet's Kiss*:

Varene and the sultan seated themselves on silken cushions at the low stone table and surveyed the feast between them: kebabs of spiced swine and tomatoes, oven-hot pitas, rice with almonds and dates. Mango chunks and grapes piled high in a silver bowl while honeyed dumplings nestled together for dessert. She closed her eyes and sniffed the aromas in delight.

"I'm glad this pleases you." His sensual growl tickled her spine.

"Pleases?" Mischievously, she looked at him through her lashes. "If this tastes as good as it smells, I may have to admit your divinity after all."

The look he gave her sizzled with unspoken words: *There are so many more ways I could prove that to you, Varene. In your bed, in my hammam, right here in the garden...*

She dropped her gaze and popped a grape into her mouth. *Dumb, Varene. Don't tempt the lion in his own den.* But her body vibrated with a delicious tension.

They ate together, amusing themselves with small talk about the palace residents and the food. The bliss of her taste buds only inflamed the cravings of her other senses. Surreptitiously, she studied the rich timbre of his voice, the fine onyx hairs sprinkled down his arms, the play of light across his bare shoulders and muscled chest.

She swallowed one last bite of juicy mango, aware deep in every nerve that he was watching and savoring the sight of her.

"Dusk will come soon," he said. "Shall we walk in my garden?"

She rose from her pillow and ambled with him, reaching out now and then to touch a bud or smell a blossom. The air cooled and dimmed around them and crickets began to sing in the hollows.

Her thumb moved against the ring on her littlest finger, twisting it. The night felt intimate. Dangerous.

Stasia's Vinegret (Russian Potato, Beet, & Carrot Salad)

From *Underhanded* by Shoshana Brown
Genre: Young Adult Contemporary

Salad:

1 lb. beets (about 3-4)
3 medium potatoes, peeled (optional) & quartered
3 carrots, peeled (optional) & quartered
1 onion, finely chopped
2 dill pickles, diced
2 cups frozen peas, defrosted
3 green onions, finely chopped
Salt to taste

Bring a large pot of water to boil. Add beets, potatoes, and carrots, and cook until tender. (Note: potatoes and carrots will only take 5-15 minutes, while beets will take closer to 1 hour.) Drain and cool until easy to handle. Peel, coarsely dice, and add to large bowl. Add remaining ingredients.

Dressing:

1/3 cup olive oil
2 Tbsp. red wine vinegar
1 tsp. sugar
1 tsp. dry mustard

Combine ingredients in a small bowl and whisk together. Pour over salad and mix well. Chill before serving.

Sixteen-year-old Anastasia Chernov wants to escape her family of petty criminals and remake herself into the quintessential law-abiding citizen – starting by winning the election for student council vice president. But when her brother Dima bribes his way into her new boarding school and announces he's running against her, Stasia must decide if winning is important enough to return to her criminal ways.

www.shoshanabrown.com

twitter: @shoshanawrites

EXCERPT from *Underhanded*:

The chatter of twenty different conversations (half in English, half in Russian, but all way louder than they need to be) compete with the singer crooning through the wall-mounted speakers. The tables have been pushed together to form one long row down the center of the room. I'm pretty sure there are table cloths, but it's hard to tell because the tables are loaded down with beet salad, pickled vegetables, eggplant spread, caviar, three different kinds of potatoes, and an assortment of cold cuts and cheese. The scent of chicken and beef *shashlik* wafting from the kitchen tells me this is just the first course.

Lurking in the shadows of a dusty, fake plant, I scan the chairs for my parents and Dima. There's no sign of them.

If it were anyone else, I'd assume they ran into traffic, but with my family, the more logical assumption is that they've been (A) arrested or (B) are even now committing the crime that will get them arrested.

"Stasia! Over here!" My cousin Lena waves like she's trying to fan away an invisible hoard of mosquitoes.

I paste a smile on my face and thread my way through the crowd toward Lena. No point in worrying about what my parents may or may not be up to. I'm leaving in less than twenty-four hours; the Chernovs' crimes and misdemeanors are no longer my problem.

Violet Easley's Okra and Stewed Tomatoes

From *Last Chance Christmas* by Hope Ramsay
Genre: Contemporary Romance

When I was very little I thought Okra was just about the slimiest vegetable ever dreamed up by God. But then I was introduced to okra and stewed tomatoes. This dish accompanied by rice, used to be served at practically every dinner Aunt Doss ever made.

1 can of diced tomatoes
2 cups of sliced okra (I usually use the frozen kind because it's hard to find fresh where I live)
Several slices of bacon (although Aunt Doss used salt pork)
1 sharp yellow onion

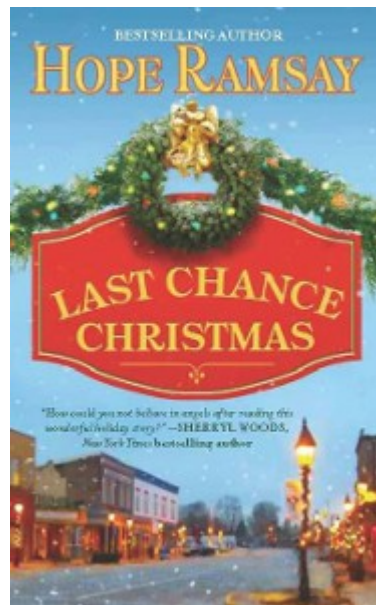
In a skillet, cook the bacon until crispy. Remove the bacon and save. Add the onions and sauté until they are tender. Add the tomatoes to the pan, including the liquid in the can. Add the okra. And simmer for 15 to 25 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve with rice.

Dear Reader,

I've been wishing for a miracle for my oldest boy, Stone, and this Christmas my prayers might just be answered! Her name is Lark, and she's here in Last Chance, looking into her father's past-and stirring up a whole mess of trouble without meaning to.

As the chief of police, Stone sure has his hands full trying to keep up with her. Ever since his wife died, Stone's put everything into raising his daughters and dodging the Christ Church Ladies' Auxiliary matchmakers. And it's clear Lark has been through some trouble and could use a place to finally call home. I only hope Stone can let go of the past soon enough to keep her . . . Goodness, I need to stop talking and finish up Jane's highlights so we can make the town tree-lighting. You come back by because the Cut 'n' Curl's got hot rollers, free coffee, fresh-baked Christmas cookies-and the best gossip in town.

See you real soon,
Ruby Rhodes



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EXCERPT from *Last Chance Christmas*:

"I was wondering," Lark asked as Ruby guided her toward a flight of stairs at the back of the apartment, "if there's someplace where I could get a food platter or something for Hettie? I feel so bad for her. I know when Pop was sick, it would have been nice if someone had sent me food. I kind of forgot to eat toward the end."

Something changed in Ruby's demeanor. "Honey, do you mean to tell me that you were dealing with your daddy's illness and no one was looking after you?"

Lark shrugged. “There wasn’t anyone to look after me.”

“Didn’t your father have friends?”

“Yeah, a few—mostly online friends, to be honest. He was a solitary man.”

“What about you?”

“Well, most of my friends are war correspondents. They’re scattered to the four winds. Anyway, I was thinking it might be nice if—”

Ruby patted her shoulder. “Honey, the food situation has been taken care of. Lessie is making squash casserole, Thelma is cooking a roast, Millie is working on some bean casserole and mac and cheese, Jenny’s bringing pies, of course.” Ruby took a big breath and continued, “Annie’s bringing a salad, and Rachel is bringing cookies. Miriam and Lillian are already over there sitting with Hettie and Lee. I’m sure Violet has the coffee going and probably some of her okra and stewed tomatoes already on the stove. Hettie’s in good hands for the moment. If you like, once I close up shop, you can come with me to pay your respects.”

Lark didn’t say a word as Ruby escorted her down the back stairway into the beauty shop. All she could think about was how nice it would have been if Ruby and Miriam and Lillian and the rest of them had been there the last couple of weeks of Pop’s life. Those weeks had been spent in the hospice by Pop’s bedside. Lark had snatched most of her meals at the McDonald’s across the way.

Being alone was the price she had to pay for living out beyond the edge.

Eat These Fries

From *Kiss That Frog: A Modern Fairy Tale* by Cate Rowan
Genre: Time-Travel Romance

2 pounds russet potatoes (about 4 large), peeled and cut into 1/4-inch by 1/4-inch fries (keep potatoes stored in a bowl of water)
2 tablespoons distilled white vinegar
Kosher salt
2 quarts peanut oil

Place potatoes and vinegar in saucepan and add 2 quarts of water and 2 tablespoons of salt. Bring to a boil over high heat. Boil for 10 minutes. Potatoes should be fully tender, but not falling apart. Drain and spread on paper towel-lined rimmed baking sheet. Allow to dry for five minutes.

Meanwhile, heat oil in 5-quart Dutch oven or large wok over high heat to 400°F. Add 1/3 of fries to oil (oil temperature should drop to around 360°F). Cook for 50 seconds, agitating

occasionally with wire mesh spider, then remove to second paper-towel lined rimmed baking sheet. Repeat with remaining potatoes (working in two more batches), allowing oil to return to 400°F after each addition. Allow potatoes to cool to room temperature, about 30 minutes. Continue with step 3, or for best results, freeze potatoes at least over night, or up to 2 months.

Return oil to 400°F over high heat. Fry half of potatoes until crisp and light golden brown, about 3 1/2 minutes, adjusting heat to maintain at around 360°F. Drain in a bowl lined with paper towels and season immediately with kosher salt. Cooked fries can be kept hot and crisp on a wire rack set on a sheet tray in a 200°F oven while second batch is cooked. Serve immediately.

Hat tip to [Serious Eats](#) for this recipe (and for dedication to discovering the perfect French fry recipe).

If the above seems like a lot of work, you can always do what *Kiss That Frog*'s Sofia and her Regency-frog-prince-come-to-life Alexander do: head to a drive-thru for a taste of classic fast food.

A cynical L.A artist reluctantly pet-sits for her young niece's and discovers magic in the terrarium.



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EXCERPT from *Kiss That Frog*:

Sofia slipped onto the 405 freeway and blasted into the fast lane, laughing. “Hungry already? I fed you crickets yesterday!”

“It seems they’re no longer sufficient, now that I’ve returned to a man-sized body.” Alexander gave her a boyish grin. “I don’t suppose this carriage of yours stocks food, does it?”

“No, but we can do the next-best thing.” She pulled off at the next exit and drove into the McDonald’s drive-thru lane. “I’m not promising this will be amazing, mind you.” She ordered, pulled up to the first window and handed over a twenty.

“Is that your money? That green paper? In Nemerre, we had paper as well as coins.”

“We still have coins,” she said, collecting her change and depositing in his hands for him to examine. “They’re just not worth much.”

He inspected a quarter as they pulled toward the second window. “George Washington, is it?”

“Yes! Very good.”

“Your Revolution happened not terribly long before I was born.”

“Keep saying things like that and you’re going to freak me out. Here, this is ours.” She handed him the paper bag and turned back for the drinks.

“Sofia, what in God’s name is that smell?” He stared, concerned, at the paper bag in his lap.

“Lunch. Does it smell good or bad to you?”

“I’m... heavens, I’m not even sure.”

“You might not be sure after you eat it, either. But don’t blame me if you get addicted.”

He pulled out the boxed fish. “I believe that’s yours. And what are these stick things?”

“Fried potatoes, also known as fries. Try ‘em.” She reached over and popped one into her mouth to demonstrate.

He took an experimental bite of his own fry, his brow scrunched in concentration. Upon tasting it, his eyes rolled back. “Saints and deities, it’s salty!”

“That’s why it’s good.”

But he didn’t seem to mind, since he was digging in the bag for more.

She studied him out the corner of her eye. He was, as wacko as it sounded, a handsome prince who had literally appeared in her living room by magic—and yet she felt comfortable enough with him to eat fast food with her usual gusto. And although she generally disliked people and their demands, she found him funny and endearing.

Not to mention hot.

What would happen if she were to let him into her world? Not just the real one, which he was already invading physically, but her inner one, her emotions, the part of her that had the capacity to love and be loved?

She wrapped her hands tightly around the wheel.

CONDIMENTS

Dare to be Different Barbeque Sauce

From *Snow Bound* by Dani Wade
(Coming Fall 2012)

Genre: Spicy Southern Romantic Suspense



6 Tbsp. sugar
1 ½ Tbsp. salt
9 Tbsp. melted butter
3 Tbsp. yellow mustard
3 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
¾ Tbsp. black pepper
2 small drops liquid smoke
Meat of choice

Mix sugar, salt, and black pepper into melted butter. Then whisk in mustard, Worcestershire sauce, and liquid smoke until all ingredients are thoroughly incorporated.

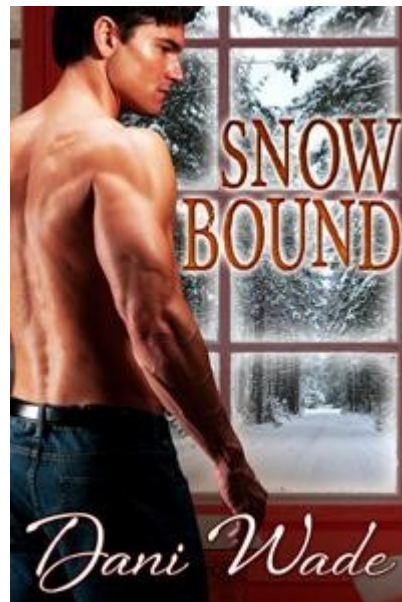
Sauce tastes great on chicken, ribs, and pork.

Grill or bake meat until halfway done. Then brush barbeque sauce onto outside of meat, alternating sides. Caution: sauce will burn if left over open flame too long.

The last thing Damon West wants is a trip to his bookish neighbor's house in the midst of the worst snowstorm Cadence, TN, has seen in a decade. Still, his military instincts are proved right when he's attacked by an unknown assailant.

Tori Anderson carefully portrayed image as a capable bookstore owner protects her from the brunt of small town gossip. But two men grappling in her backyard called for speed more than decorum. That's how the guy she'd been secretly lusting after since he'd bought the house next door sees her in a silky robe and panties—with nothing in between. Damon's sudden interest thrills her, but she can't help worrying about the unknown threat scared off by her shotgun blast.

Trapped in her house by several feet of snow, Tori finally has the chance to indulge her wildest fantasies. But which is more daunting—the attacker set on revenge or her desire for more than one night with the town's most unavailable bachelor?



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EXCERPT from *Snow Bound*:

With a sudden snap, the entire room went dark.

The transition from softly lit home office to the pitch black that can only occur living in the back of beyond like Damon did took a little adjustment, but before his eyes cleared of squiggles and colored lights he had his monster maglite palmed in his hand.

Like his eyes, he let the rest of his body adjust to the new circumstances, which he'd been anticipating since the snow started coming down a couple of hours ago. Now instead of the croon of Toby Keith, he was left with utter stillness and the sound of the wind rushing against the eaves outside. The kick of his heartbeat after the surprise had been automatically slowed, just as he'd done all the years he'd served his country in combat situations that required steady hands and complete focus.

Though a heavy snowstorm in the middle of February might not be a big deal for most parts of the country, the southern Tennessee valley was looking at a complete and total shutdown for the next few days if they received the expected five inches they'd been predicting since the day before. People here simply weren't equipped or experienced with this kind of weather, which led to scary driving scenarios and a mad rush on the local Piggly Wiggly. Luckily, Damon had managed to grab enough beer and chips to get him through, despite the little white-haired lady that had stared him down over the last bag of nacho cheese Doritos. Like a true Texas gentleman, he'd conceded and settled for Cool Ranch instead.

Alex's Killer Pasta Sauce

From ***His Witness To Evil*** by Autumn Jordon
Genre: Romantic Suspense



Sauce:

2 cans (2lbs 3oz ea.) of Italian Tomatoes

2 cans (6oz) of Tomato paste

1 pound of ground beef

½ cup of chopped onion, green pepper, & celery

2 garlic cloves minced or 2 tsp. garlic powder

½ cup sugar

1 ½ teas. of ground pepper, salt, parsley fennel seed, oregano and basil (I prefer using fresh oregano & basil but dried is okay.)

½ cup of combined Parmesan & Romano cheese

4 Tbl of butter

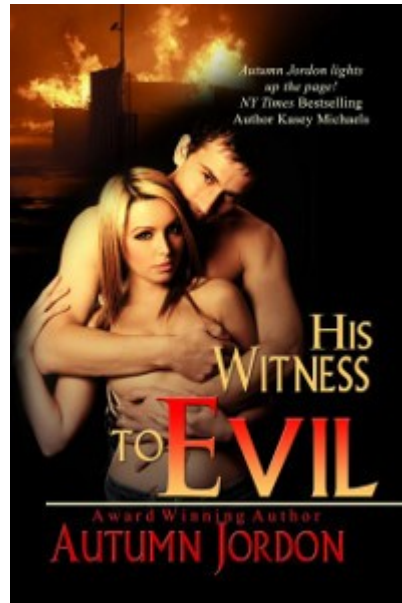
Melt the butter in a large sauce pan. Add the onion, green pepper, celery, garlic and tomatoes. Simmer until liquid evaporates. (You can chop or puree the tomatoes before adding, if you purchased or prefer whole or fresh tomatoes.) (picture shown w/ hot sausage)

Meanwhile mix ground beef with salt, pepper and cheese, and then brown. Do not drain. Add meat to the tomato mixture. Add the remaining spices and tomato paste. Simmer for one hour. Enjoy over your choice of cooked pasta!

Elementary school nurse Stephanie Boyd's ordinary world changes forever when she and her children witness a blood bath. To escape the wrath of the Russian Mafia, she has no choice but to help the FBI uncover the Mafia's mole inside the U.S. Treasury. While on the run with the handsome agent who is willing to die for them, Stephanie learns the meaning of self-sacrifice and love.

Agent John Dolton's only break in solving the case that cost him everything is a couple of kids and a beautiful widow. But keeping his witnesses safe seems impossible when their every move is foreseen by their enemy. Within weeks, Stephanie and her children soften the loner's heart and John allows himself to let go of his all-consuming sorrow.

This time John vows not to fail to protect the family he loves.



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EXCERPT from *His Witness to Evil*:

“That’s not fair to Em. She’ll sit and watch us all enjoying pasta while she eats what? Lettuce? She can have my homemade sauce, right?” Alex pointed to the pot simmering on the stove.

“Yes. She’s fine with all the ingredients.” Maybe she’d misread Alex, thinking the woman was a cold agent. Mosely actually seemed concerned about Em. Alex had a heart after all.

“Isn’t there a type of pasta she can have?” Alex rooted in the kitchen’s small desk tucked in its corner.

“Yes. But it has to be wheat free and milk free.” From the corner of her eye, Stephanie saw John cross the lawn. Relief washed over her. A second later her breath caught. He carried another priority mail package—a larger one this time.

Bobby ran up to him, probably asking his hundredth question of the day. The attachment forming between the two worried Stephanie. If Victor’s picture was in that box, they could be leaving here as early as tomorrow.

Pangs of loneliness gripped her heart. She shouldn’t be feeling heartache over a man she’d only known for a few days, but she did. Something had happened between them last night. They had grown closer and not because they’d shared their bodies.

Something more.

Annie's Favorite Hot Sauce

From *Waters Run Deep* by Liz Talley
Genre: Contemporary Romance

2 14-oz cans of stewed tomatoes
10 ³/₄ oz can of Rotel-style tomatoes
2 pods of garlic (2 tsp minced)
2 medium jalapeno peppers chopped
1 tsp. salt
3 Tbsp. cooking oil
3 Tbsp. white vinegar

Place the juices from the cans along with garlic and peppers into a blender. Blend on high speed. Add tomatoes and rest of ingredients. Blend until smooth. Serve with tortilla chips. Store sauce in refrigerator. Makes 5 cups.

Annie Perez should be allergic to kids – that's how good she is with them – but when the former FBI agent finds her first assignment with a high profile investigations firm is as an undercover nanny, she has to make lemonade from the lemons tossed at her. It's bad enough she has to arrange play dates and watch out for peanut allergies, but when she finds herself in Louisiana with an imminent threat against her charge, her days become complicated with suspects and her dreams haunted by a tall dark Cajun detective.

Nate Dufrene is the best investigator the St. Martin's parish detective's bureau has and he refuses to be distracted by his prime suspect...even if her calm detachment and pretty gray eyes have his blood pumping faster. He's determined no kid will ever disappear again on his watch just like his sister Della did years before. Throw in the off-beat Picou Dufrene, a stranger asking questions and a horror movie filmed at the historical Beau Soleil and things are going to get hot down on the bayou.



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EXCERPT from *Waters Run Deep*:

Annie walked toward the boy. “Spencer, sometimes moms have to work. Mine did when I was little, and I went to day care. I had to share my toys with a mean boy named Kyle.”

“You did?” He tipped his face to her. “Why was he mean?”

Annie sank onto the bed. “I don’t know, but he bit me once.”

“He did?”

She tugged him so he sat up. “Yep. But your mom loves you so much she hired me to be your nanny. And I won’t bite you. I promise. I’ll even share my toys.”

Spencer grinned. “You don’t have toys. You’re a grown up.”

“Oh, yeah,” Annie said, scratching her head. “I guess I need some toys.”

Spencer laughed. “You’re silly, Annie.”

Was she? Silly was as foreign to her as flirty. She looked at Tawny, who watched them from the open doorway. The actress nodded and mouthed “thank you” before disappearing.

Annie felt a flash of pleasure at the woman’s acknowledgement. Odd, she didn’t seek approval from anyone other than her boss. Of course, some would say Tawny was her boss.

“Let’s get some cereal and then we’ll take that walk. You want a bath first?”

He shook his head. “I want fruity-ohs.”

“Of course, monsieur. Coming right up.”

Spencer slid off the bed and pulled on his crocs. Much to his mother’s dismay, the rubber shoe was Spencer’s choice of footwear. Didn’t really go with the hundred dollar ripped jeans and trendy boutique shirt, but Annie had to give the boy props for choosing something easy to clean. “Annie, you’re good at fixing cereal. I think that’s kinda cooking, huh?”

“I’m no Rachel Ray, but you won’t starve.”

Devil’s Dust

From *Third Grave Dead Ahead* by Darynda Jones
Genre: Paranormal Mystery



½ cup paprika
¼ cup chili powder
¼ cup jalapeno powder
¼ cup Serrano powder
¼ cup habanero powder
3 tbsp. garlic powder
5 tbsp. salt
3 tbsp. sugar
1 tbsp. cayenne pepper
1 tbsp. ground black pepper

If using fresh peppers, they should be dehydrated and ground to powder.

Combine all ingredients and store in an airtight container.

Devil's Dust is great for grilling and sautéing vegetables and meats. It is wonderful sprinkled on hamburgers or eggs, anywhere you want to add a bit of spice to your day.

Paranormal private eye. Grim reaper extraordinaire. Whatever.

Charley Davidson is back! And she's drinking copious amounts of caffeine to stay awake because, every time she closes her eyes, she sees him: Reyes Farrow, the parthuman, part-supermodel son of Satan.

Yes, she did imprison him for all eternity, but come on. How is she supposed to solve a missing persons case, deal with an ego-driven doctor, calm her curmudgeonly dad, and take on a motorcycle gang hellbent on murder when the devil's son just won't give up?



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EXCERPT from *Third Grave Dead Ahead*:

There was a dead clown sitting in my living room. Since I wasn't particularly fond of clowns, and it was way too early for anything coherent to come out of my mouth, I pretended not to notice him. Instead, I let a loud yawn overtake me and headed toward my kitchen when a jolt of panic rocketed through me. Since nothing screamed awkward like greeting the dead in my birthday suit, I glanced down to make sure my girl parts hadn't been compromised. Fortunately, I had on a white tank and pair of plaid bottoms. My girls, also known as Danger and Will Robinson, were safe.

I mentally made the sign of the cross as I padded through my humble abode. Trying not to draw attention. Wondering if the dead clown, with his gaze following my every move, had noticed me. My apartment was a comfy cross between a storage room full of pillows and a broom closet, so it wasn't a long journey. Nor an especially enlightening one. Though I did come to a rather morbid conclusion in those few fleeting seconds.

Better a dead clown in my apartment than a live one.

DESSERTS

Triple Chocolate Cake

From *Caught on Camera* by Kim Law
Genre: Contemporary Romance

Cake:

1 pkg Devil's Food cake mix
1 (3.9oz) pkg chocolate instant pudding mix
2 c sour cream
1 c butter, softened
5 large eggs
1 t vanilla
2 c semi-sweet chocolate morsels

Beat first 6 ingredients at low speed with an electric mixer for 30 seconds or just until moistened, beat at medium speed for 2 minutes. Stir in chocolate morsels. Pour batter evenly into 3 greased and floured 9" pans.

Bake at 350 degrees for 25-30 minutes. Cool completely in pans on wire racks.

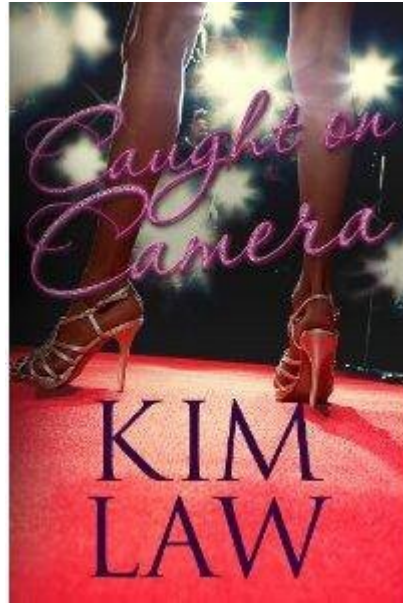
Icing:

1 - 8oz cream cheese, softened
1/2 c butter, softened
1 - 16oz confectioner's sugar
1/3 c dry cocoa
1 t vanilla

Beat cream cheese with butter until smooth. On medium speed, gradually beat in confectioner's sugar until light and fluffy. Blend in cocoa and vanilla, continue beating until smooth. Spread on cooled cake.

Beautiful Vega Zaragoza was poised to become fashion's next "it girl" when she learned the hard way that sex and politics don't mix. Now the former model spends her days behind the camera, working as a videographer to hide from public scrutiny. Her life is on autopilot until a promising new job sparks her ambition. There's just one catch: she must land an exclusive interview with JP Davenport, the golden boy of American politics and first in line for Georgia's open senatorial seat.

Charming and gorgeous, JP is also fiercely private, a charismatic enigma with his fair share of secrets—not to mention a string of romantic conquests a mile long. He could make Vega's career, or destroy what credibility she has left—because JP has made it very clear that his interest in Vega is anything but professional. Vega should know better than to trust a man like him. But kiss by heated kiss, she discovers this man may be worth the risk.



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EXCERPT from *Caught on Camera*:

The bathroom door opened and steam whooshed out, making him regret being gentlemen enough to stay out of the shower with her. Her hair, now dried, bounced lightly around her shoulders. She looked like a dark-haired angel heading toward him.

“Hi.” She smiled then looked at the floor, seemingly as nervous as she’d been when he’d last seen her. He crossed the thick rug and lifted her face to his.

“Hey.” He planted a soft kiss against her warm lips. Her lips had looked unbelievable glistening with lipstick earlier in the evening, but with the heat of the shower plumping them up, he had a hard time stopping with a simple peck. “You feeling better?”

She nodded. “Thanks.”

“I got chocolate.” He grinned when her eyes lit up. He motioned to the end of the bed. “Sit. I’ll bring it to you.”

Instead of the edge, Vega plopped herself on the turned down sheets, rearranging the pillows behind her until she was comfortably seated against the headboard. She curled her bare legs under her and patted the mattress. “Sit with me.”

“Whatever the lady wants.” He grabbed the dessert and slid it onto the bed then kicked off his shoes and joined her. When he lifted the lid, he revealed a six-layer chocolate cake so large Vega’s eyes bugged wide. He laughed out loud at the innocence of it all. “I feel like teenagers sneaking out of our parents’ houses in the middle of the night, only instead of making out in the back seat of my father’s car, we’re doing something even more forbidden.”

With the first bite already on its way to her mouth, she chose to finish its path before answering. “Mmmm, chocolate should never be forbidden.”

Summer’s Chocolate Cream Cheese Frosting

From ***Perfect Summer*** by Katie Graykowski
Genre: Contemporary Single Title

1 stick butter, softened
1/2 cup cocoa powder
16 ounces cream cheese
1-1/2 pounds powdered sugar
3 tbsps buttermilk or sour cream
1 tsp vanilla

Combine butter, cocoa, and cream cheese. Add rest of the ingredients and mix until smooth.

Since it’s not socially acceptable to eat frosting alone, bake a boxed yellow butter cake into cupcakes and slather with frosting.

EXCERPT from *Perfect Summer*:

“How do I do this?” Clint slid into the seat.

Summer leaned over his shoulder, picked up a yellow cupcake in one hand and spreading knife slathered with chocolate frosting in the other. “Just swirl it on.”

She replaced the cupcake to its original position. “Easy.”

“Can you show me another one just to make sure?”

She snagged another one and frosted it.

“One more and I’ll have it.”

Summer frosted another one.

“Could you do one of those chocolate ones?”

Summer reached farther, her breasts resting on his shoulder. She sprang back. “I’m sorry.”

Her breasts were so big they got in the way. Here Clint was offering to help her and she’d rubbed her chest all over him.

“I’m not. I was hoping to get you all the way to the pink ones before you realized.” He grinned and stared at her cleavage.

“You did that on purpose?” Was he making fun of her or did he really not mind?

“Yes ma’am.” There was no apology in his voice. “I like your boobs.”

Ryker’s Favorite Mint Brownies

From *Her Own Best Enemy* by Cynthia Justlin
Genre: Romantic Suspense

Brownie:

3 squares unsweetened chocolate
¾ cup butter
3 eggs
1 ½ cups sugar
½ tsp peppermint extract
¾ cup sifted flour
2 pinches salt
¾ cup chopped nuts (optional)

Mint frosting:

3 Tbsp butter
1 ½ cups powdered sugar
1 ½ Tbsp milk
1 tsp peppermint extract
Green food coloring

Melt chocolate and butter together over low heat on stove. In a large bowl, beat eggs until frothy. Stir in sugar and slightly cooled chocolate mixture. Add peppermint extract, flour, salt and nuts (if desired). Mix thoroughly and pour into greased 9x13 pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 20-25 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean.

For frosting, stir softened butter into powdered sugar. Add milk, peppermint extract, and a few drops of green food coloring and stir until smooth. Spread over brownies. Refrigerate. Melt 1 ½ squares of unsweetened chocolate with 1 ½ tablespoons of butter. Using a spoon, drizzle over the frosted brownies.

Desperate to track down her ex-husband who disappeared along with their son, Grace Stevens delves into his past and uncovers evidence of a shocking dual life. The man she thought was an ordinary computer consultant is in fact a former high-ranking Special Forces

officer with unique skills in military intelligence. With nowhere to turn she is forced to plead for help from Keith King, the one man she hoped to never see again. Against her better judgment she'll have to put her child's fate into his hands.

Keith has officially hit rock bottom. Framed for the theft of deadly missile components, the cynical Special Forces officer is in danger of losing the only thing he can count on: his career. His one shot at clearing his name lies in locating Grace's ex, who was working with Keith on a secret mission to take down a cutthroat military traitor. But to team up with Grace he'll need to spend 24/7 with a woman who has every reason to hate him. Out to use each other for their own agenda, desperate mother and disillusioned soldier find they must work together to stay alive, and in the process discover that sometimes even the best of enemies fall in love.



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EXCERPT from *Her Own Best Enemy*:

Keith instinctively reached out to steady Grace, but to his surprise, she straightened on her own.

“Ryker’s obsessed with marine life.” Her reed thin whisper tugged at him.

“I see that,” he said, taking in the muted blue walls that held a myriad of posters. Dolphins, sea turtles, whales. The boy even had stuffed animals to match, and a brightly colored dolphin splashed bedspread.

The inviting room made Keith think of his own childhood bedroom. Stark and impersonal, just like his mother.

He tightened his jaw. “It’s not a good idea to stay in any one place for long.”

Grace nodded, but instead of turning away from the room, she stepped deeper into it, grabbing a large stuffed dolphin off the bed. Her fingers curled around it and sank into the tattered dark gray body; her eyes squeezed shut. "I bought this for Ryker when I was pregnant. Not a night has gone by that he's slept without it." A sob caught in her throat and she buried her nose in the dolphin's stuffing.

They didn't have time for this. Keith needed answers, not hysterics. And it was clear he wouldn't find them here. Regret churned in his belly. Why had he made a deal with this woman?

He stepped forward and opened his mouth to tell Grace he'd have no problem leaving her behind if she couldn't keep it together, but his lips fell closed without uttering a word.

She was clutching that damn dolphin as if it were her lifeline. Her hair fell across her cheekbone, obscuring most of her face, but he had no trouble making out the tremble of her delicate chin. Or the gentle way her arms wrapped around the stuffed toy, cocooning it in her soft embrace.

He imagined her embrace would be like coming home.

Home. The word slammed through his mind. Home? Where the hell did that thought come from?

He snorted and stomped over to Grace. Home. Just the word left a bitter taste in his mouth. Home was a distant dream. Home was pain, and hatred...and loneliness. Not cinnamon sugar, and hugs and a sense of belonging. Those things were too good to be true.

And so was Grace.

Tiramisu (rhymes with "Caress Me, You!")

From *Thoroughbreds and Trailer Trash* by Bev Pettersen

Genre: Contemporary Romance

2 cups strong brewed coffee, cooled to room temp
½ cup cup dark rum
6 large egg yolks
2/3 cups white sugar
¼ tsp. salt
1 ½ lbs mascarpone cheese
¾ cup whipping cream
1 pkg. lady finger cookies
2 oz. semi-sweet chocolate (grated) + 1 tbsp cocoa

Mix the coffee with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of rum in baking dish and set aside. In large bowl, beat the egg yolks on low speed. Add sugar gradually, and the salt, beating at medium high until mixture is pale yellow in color (about 2 minutes).

Scrape the sides of the bowl and add remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the rum (if you have any left!) Beat at medium speed until blended. Then add the cheese and beat until there are no lumps remaining.

In medium bowl beat whipping cream until stiff peaks form. Fold this into the mascarpone mixture gradually—in three batches—until no streaks remain. Set aside.

Dip, roll and remove lady fingers, one at a time, and place them in the bottom of a 10” springform pan. The cookies should not be in the coffee mixture more than 2-3 seconds.

Spread half of the filling over the lady fingers with a rubber spatula so the lady fingers are completely covered. Spread half of the grated chocolate and then lightly dust (through fine mesh strainer) $\frac{1}{2}$ of the cocoa. Repeat this process—dipped lady fingers, cheese and chocolate. Cover and refrigerate at least 6 hours or overnight.

Buon Appetito!

TIRAMISU FUN FACTS:

The world’s most famous Italian dessert.

Believed to have been created in 1971.

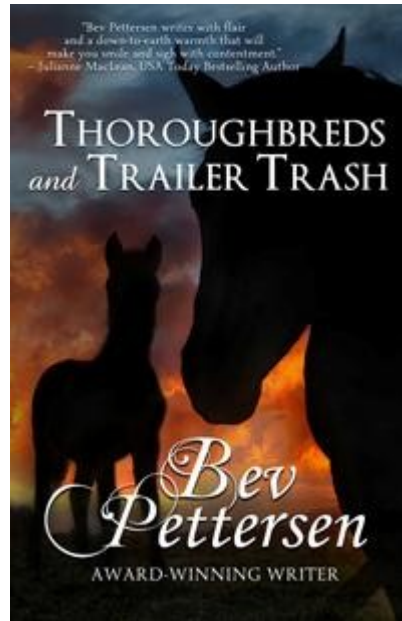
Translation of the name means “pick me up”.

Some say it originated in the city of Siena.

Also known as Tuscan Trifle.

She's broke. He's worth millions.

Jenna Murphy, a dedicated horse masseuse, relies on her job and street smarts to support what's most important...her younger sister. But when the Thoroughbred Wellness Center experiences a hostile takeover headed by a charming but ruthless corporate shark, both her heart and career are in jeopardy.



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Profiteroles

From *Party Like It's 1899* by Amanda Brice
(Coming Late 2013/Early 2014)
Genre: Young Adult Time Travel Romance

Pastry:

1 quart vanilla ice cream
6 Tbsp. unsalted butter, cut into pieces
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp salt
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour
3 large eggs

Chocolate sauce:

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar
1 cup heavy cream
7 oz fine-quality bittersweet chocolate (no more than 60% cacao, if marked), finely chopped
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. pure vanilla extract
1 Tbsp. cognac or brandy (optional)

Chill a small metal baking pan in freezer. Form 18 ice cream balls with scoop and freeze in chilled pan at least 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 425°F with rack in middle. Butter a large baking sheet.

Bring butter, water, and salt to a boil in a small heavy saucepan, stirring until butter is melted. Reduce heat to medium, then add flour all at once and cook, beating with a wooden spoon, until mixture pulls away from side of pan and forms a ball, about 30 seconds. Transfer mixture to a bowl and cool slightly, 2 to 3 minutes.

Add eggs one at a time, beating well with an electric mixer after each addition.

Transfer warm mixture to pastry bag and pipe 18 mounds (about 1 1/4 inches wide and 1 inch high) 1 inch apart on baking sheet.

Bake until puffed and golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes total. Prick each profiterole once with a skewer, then return to oven to dry, propping oven door slightly ajar, 3 minutes.

Cool on sheet on a rack.

Make chocolate sauce:

Heat sugar in a 2-quart heavy saucepan over medium heat, stirring with a fork to heat sugar evenly, until it starts to melt, then stop stirring and cook, swirling pan occasionally so sugar melts evenly, until it is dark amber.

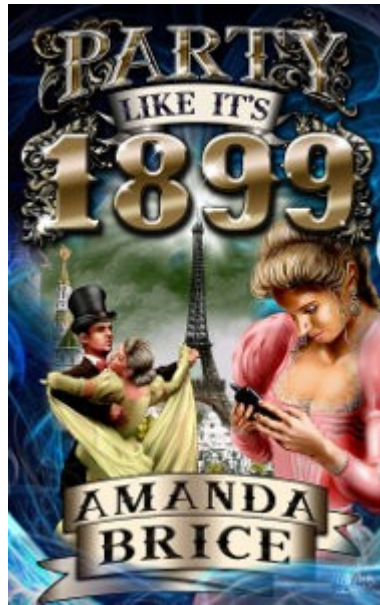
Remove from heat, then add cream and a pinch of salt (mixture will bubble and steam). Return to heat and cook, stirring, until caramel has dissolved.

Remove from heat and add chocolate, whisking until melted, then whisk in vanilla and Cognac (if using). Keep warm, covered.

Serve profiteroles:

Halve pastries horizontally, then fill each with a ball of ice cream. Put three profiteroles on each plate and drizzle generously with warm chocolate sauce.

An enchanted Jules Verne book during a French class trip to Paris sends high schoolers Julie and Ben back in time to 1899. Can they put away their animosity and iPods long enough to figure out how to get back from the Belle Epoque and maybe learn something about themselves in the process?



EXCERPT from *Party Like It's 1899*:

Half an hour later, a leering cab driver – muttering words under his breath that shouldn’t be repeated in either language – whisked us away from our hotel in the Latin Quarter to the trendy nightclub at the rue du Bourg-L’Abbé.

We pulled up in front of an unassuming 18th century townhouse on a quiet residential street with a red velvet rope outside on the sidewalk and a line of limousines wrapping around the block. Considering as most vehicles in this city looked like those circus clown cars, the limos stuck out like Balenciaga at a barn dance.

I had a bad feeling about this.

Lauren paid the driver and joined Maggie and me on the curb. She squinted as she scanned the crowd of immaculately dressed stick-figures who looked like they subsisted on a steady diet of nothing but vodka and cigarettes. We’re talking skeletal, except for these ginormous pairs of boobs that were probably as fake as the ID they were using to get in. “There they are.”

I followed her line of sight and saw Bentley and his wingmen, Eric Kelly and Jon Brier, the Harbor High quarterback and star defensive back, respectively. They were standing in a knot toward the back of the line.

Fabulous.

When we reached them, my friends launched into the traditional French cheek-skimming air kiss routine with the guys, including all the permutations guaranteed to make your head swim with the possibilities. I never know how many or which side first, but somehow it always seems to work.

Bentley leaned in, obviously expecting me to comply. I must have hesitated too long, because Maggie called out, “Oh, that’s right. I forgot Julie’s saving herself for Chace Crawford.”

I shot her a look that would win the War on Terrorism in five seconds flat if NATO could just bottle it. Why did my friends have to choose now of all times to adopt French customs? It seemed a little silly, given that we already knew these guys and it's not like we were good friends with them or anything, but I could see I wasn't getting out of it easily.

When in Paris, right?

So I dove right in. It was just a kiss. Nothing really. An integral part of French life, and even people who barely know one another will jump into an elaborate series of *bisous*. It would definitely be rude to avoid him, especially considering he already thought I was a bitch.

I leaned in to his right cheek and wound up inadvertently locking lips. Guess he planned to kiss left first. And I hated to admit it, but for just that most fleeting of moments, it was nice. Strong. Warm. Welcoming. The kiss flowed through me with the delicious decadence of a profiterole, that sinfully wonderful marriage of hot pastry and cold ice cream, creating a rush of sensations unlike anything I'd ever experienced.

I felt dirty.

Hannah's Heavenly Cinnamon-Almond Squares

From *Hypnotic Seduction* by L.L. Kellogg
Genre: Contemporary Romance

1 cup butter
1 cup granulated sugar
1 large egg, separated
1 tsp. almond extract
2 cups flour
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup chopped almonds
3 Tbsp. sugar
1 tsp. cinnamon

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Beat butter, sugar, egg yolk, and almond extract together. Blend in flour. Spread dough on an ungreased sheet pan 10X15 and press into a flat rectangle about $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick. Beat egg white until foamy. Brush foam evenly over dough. Scatter nuts over the top. Combine 3 Tbsp. sugar and 1 tsp. cinnamon and sprinkle over nuts. Bake at 350 degrees about 25 minutes or until lightly browned around the edges. Allow to partially cool and cut into 2 to 3-inch squares.

A red-hot ugly-duckling love story that's a little naughty and a lot of fun!

She has a problem relaxing with men

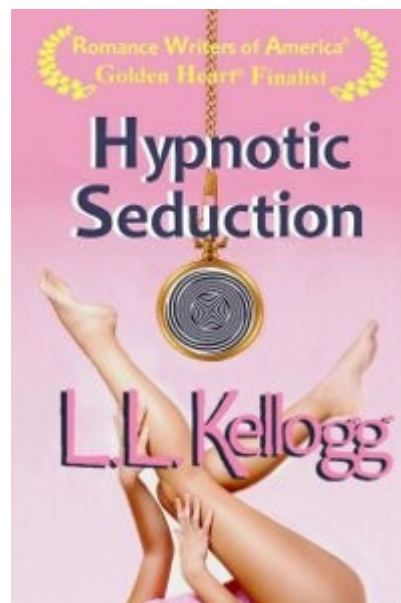
Frumpy wallflower Hannah Oliver is nearly thirty and has a serious self-image problem. Growing up in her centerfold mother's shadow and being raised by her pious grandparents has left her so self-conscious about her matronly, D-cup figure she gets tongue-tied around good-looking guys. So when Hannah discovers her fiancé/employer boinking her roommate, she's not only devastated—she's unemployed.

He's got a problem fending off women

Pharmaceutical CEO Jordan Calder has a huge image problem too—his professional image. Most guys would kill to be publicly proclaimed a world-class lover, but other men don't share his dark, shameful past. The only thing women have ever wanted Jordan for is what he can give them in and out of bed. So when his grandfather drags dowdy Hannah into his office as an executive assistant candidate, Jordan hires the mousey woman on the spot.

Could hypnosis be a solution?

After miraculously landing her plum new position, sexually frustrated Hannah resorts to hypnosis to boost her self-confidence with men, hoping to attract another mate. Unfortunately, a post-hypnotic suggestion compels her to kiss her sexy playboy boss, who she then stupidly falls for in and out of bed. Despair induces her to use similar hypnotic principles on him—in the form of subliminal messages—to convince the man she loves that he wants a happy-ever-after with her. But as everyone knows, desperate measures usually spell disaster.



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Picou Dufrene's Infamous Pecan Pralines

From *The Road to Bayou Bridge* by Liz Talley

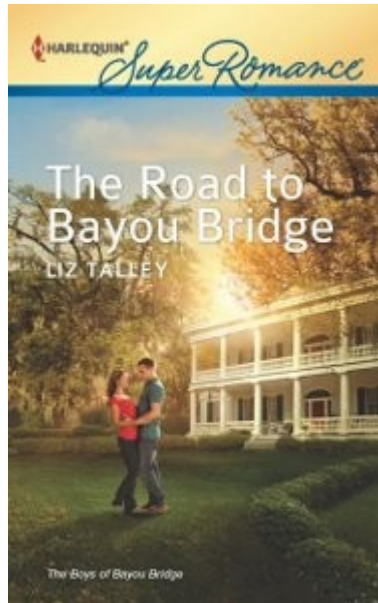
Genre: Contemporary Romance

3 cups granulated sugar, separated
2 Tbsp butter
1 tsp vanilla
½ cup evaporated milk
¼ cup cold water, set aside
1 cup pecans, chopped

In a small sauce pan, melt 1 cup of sugar until complete syrup. In separate pot stir together 2 cups sugar and the milk. Bring to boil. Add the melted sugar and cook on medium heat until candy forms a soft ball when dropped into cold water. Once soft ball stage is reached, remove pot from heat, add butter, vanilla and nuts. Beat constantly 3-5 minutes until candy is creamy looking. Dip by spoonfuls onto wax paper.

Darby Dufrene, newly discharged from the Navy and ready to start a new life, has no intention of returning to Bayou Bridge, but with his mother chewing his ear, a newly-discovered sister refusing to be part of the family, and a shocking discovery made among his old papers, he has no choice. He must go home to Bayou Bridge, Louisiana in order to untangle his past so he can start afresh...and that means getting a divorce from his wife of ten years. But first he has to tell her they're married.

Renny Latioles has spent the past ten years rebuilding a life she nearly lost the fateful night she and her high school boyfriend were to have started a new life together. Now a respected biologist with Wildlife and Fisheries, she's tasked with reintroducing the whooping crane into its former breeding grounds. When one of the cranes ends up on Beau Soleil property, she runs into her old flame and a myriad of memories.



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EXCERPT from *The Road to Bayou Bridge*:

Darby had to actually think about that. “Well, if I wanted to go to Seattle, I’d damned well go to Seattle, but as it were, I’m not moving there. After coming home and re-evaluating things, I know it’s not where I belong. Shelby knows it, too. We were both trying to shove our feet into shoes that weren’t made for us.”

His mother smiled. Big. She might as well have rubbed her hands together and drawled, “Just as I had planned.”

But she didn’t. Thank God.

“So you’re coming home? For good?”

“Don’t get the Star Wars sheets out just yet.”

“So does Renny know about this?” Picou asked, releasing his chair before leaning against the rail.

“Actually, this isn’t about Renny.”

“Renny’s a touchy subject,” Della said, eating another praline. “Goodnight, I gotta stop eating these things. I won’t fit in my clothes.”

Picou reached over and moved the plate closer to Della. “You could stand to gain a little.”

He didn’t want to talk anymore about Renny, but as he’d sat there, he felt oddly soothed by the women sitting with him on a porch over which he’d once rolled matchbox cars. A warm

sort of rightness seeped into his bones, as he thought about the way a person felt when he knew things were right.

When he found the person made for him, or in his case, rediscover. She never seemed to come along at the right time, but often it was the nick of time.

Right when a man was about to make a big mistake and force something into his life not meant to be.

Tara's Mother's Southern Pecan Pralines

From *Death, Taxes, and a French Manicure* by Diane Kelly
Genre: Humorous Romantic Mystery

This is a vegan recipe – it's healthier and makes the cows happier, too!

1-1/2 cups of pecans
1 cup granulated sugar
1 cup brown sugar
1/3 cup of coconut milk
1/3 cup Earth Balance butter substitute
1 teaspoon of vanilla

In oven, lightly toast pecans at 350 degrees for 5-7 minutes. Combine sugars, coconut milk, Earth Balance butter substitute and vanilla in a large saucepan and cook over medium high heat. Stir continuously while everything dissolves, then slowly add in the pecans while continuing to stir. Remove from heat and stir vigorously for about 5 minutes. Once you stop stirring the mixture will thicken up quickly so spoon it out immediately onto parchment paper or those great new plastic cutting boards and let the pralines set for a few hours. Then eat until you can eat no more. Yum!

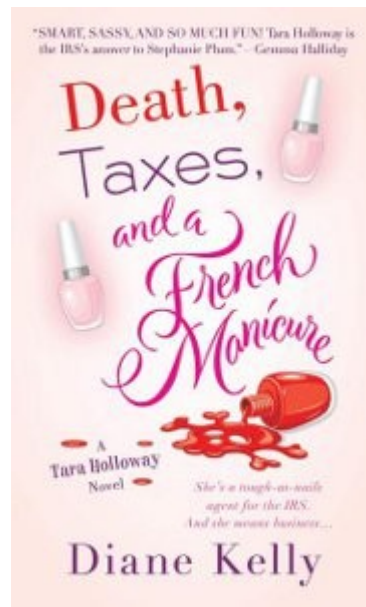
(Great for dessert or as an antidepressant!)

Watch out tax cheats. The Treasury's Criminal Investigations Division has a new special agent on its payroll. CPA Tara Holloway has traded in her adding machine for a shiny new Glock. Now she's kicking ass, taking social security numbers, and keeping the world safe for honest taxpayers. If her career isn't enough to keep her busy, Tara's hooked up with a new boyfriend, Brett Ellington. He's sweet, sexy, and successful. What more could a girl ask for?

On her first undercover mission, Tara's in hot pursuit of an ice cream man selling street drugs along with the frozen treats and failing to report his ill-gotten gains on his tax returns. Latina-debutante-turned DEA Agent Christina Marquez works with Tara to melt the ice cream man's defenses. Tara's also set her sights a sleazy con artist defrauding unwary investors

through a Bernie Madoff-style investment scam. With her love life in high gear and her career on the fast track, Tara should be ecstatic. But two major problems stand in the way.

First, Tara hasn't been completely honest with Brett about her work. Could he handle knowing she packed heat? Would he stick around if he knew she spent her days on the wrong side of the tracks trying to bust a dope-dealing scumbag? Second, Tara suspects Brett may be involved in the investment scam she's investigating. Nothing like the possibility of hauling your boyfriend off to the klink to put a damper on a relationship, huh?



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EXCERPT from *Death, Taxes, and a French Manicure*:

My partner and I had spent the afternoon huddled at a cluttered desk in the back office of an auto parts store perusing the owner's financial records, searching for evidence of tax fraud. Yeah, you got me. I work for the IRS. Not exactly the kind of career that makes a person popular at cocktail parties. But those brave enough to get to know me learn I'm actually a nice person, fun even, and they have nothing to fear. I have better things to do than nickel and dime taxpayers whose worst crime was inflating the value of the Glen Campbell albums they donated to Goodwill.

"I'll be right back, Tara." My partner smoothed the front of his starched white button-down as he stood from the folding chair. Eddie Bardin was tall, lean, and African-American, but having been raised in the upper-middle-class, predominately white Dallas suburbs, he had a hard time connecting to his roots. He'd had nothing to overcome, unless you counted his affinity for Phil Collins' music, Heineken beer, and khaki chinos, tastes which he had yet to conquer. Eddie was more L.L. Bean than L.L. Cool J.

I nodded to Eddie and tucked an errant strand of my chestnut hair behind my ear. Turning back to the spreadsheet in front of me, I flicked aside the greasy burger and onion ring wrappers the store's owner, Jack Battaglia, had left on the desk after lunch. I couldn't make

heads or tails out of the numbers on the page. Battaglia didn't know jack about keeping books and, judging from his puny salaries account, he'd been too cheap to hire a professional.

A few seconds after Eddie left the room, the door to the office banged open. Battaglia loomed in the doorway, his husky body filling the narrow space. He wore a look of purpose and his store's trademark bright green jumpsuit, the cheerful color at odds with the open box cutter clutched in his furry-knuckled fist.

"Hey!" Instinctively, I leapt from my seat, the metal chair falling over behind me and clanging to the floor.

Battaglia lunged at me. My heart whirled in my chest. There was no time to pull my gun. The best I could do was throw out my right arm to deflect his attempt to plunge the blade into my jugular. The sharp blade slid across my forearm, just above my wrist, but with so much adrenaline rocketing through my system, I felt no immediate pain. If not for the blood seeping through the sleeve of my navy nylon raid jacket, I wouldn't have even known I'd been cut. Underneath was my favorite pink silk blouse, a coup of a find on the clearance rack at Neiman Marcus Last Call, now sliced open, the blood-soaked material gaping to reveal a short but deep gash.

My jaw clamped tighter than a chastity belt on a pubescent princess. This jerk was going down.

Maggie's Amazing Pecan Pie

From *A Little Bit of Déjà Vu* by Laurie Kellogg
Genre: Contemporary Romance



Pecan Filling:

½ cup granulated sugar
½ cup brown sugar (packed)
½ cup maple syrup
½ cup dark corn syrup
5 Tbsp. butter, melted
1 Tbsp. bourbon
1 ½ tsp. vanilla extract
½ tsp ground cinnamon
4 large eggs
2 ½ cup pecans, coarsely chopped

Preheat oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit. Line 10inch pie pan with refrigerated pie crust dough. (Maggie cheats and uses Pillsbury's ready-made pie crusts. They're better than any she would make from scratch.) Cover rim of pie with foil.

Prepare Pecan Filling: In large bowl, mix sugars, syrups, butter, vanilla, bourbon, and eggs until blended. Beat in pecans and then pour the filling into the pie shell.

Bake 10 minutes and reset oven control to 350 degrees. Bake another 25 minutes, until filling is puffed and set at edges but still jiggles slightly in center. Remove foil rim and bake another 10 minutes to allow browning and for center to set. Cool on wire rack.

Winner of the Romance Writers of America® Golden Heart® award and the Pacific Northwest Writers Association® Zola award

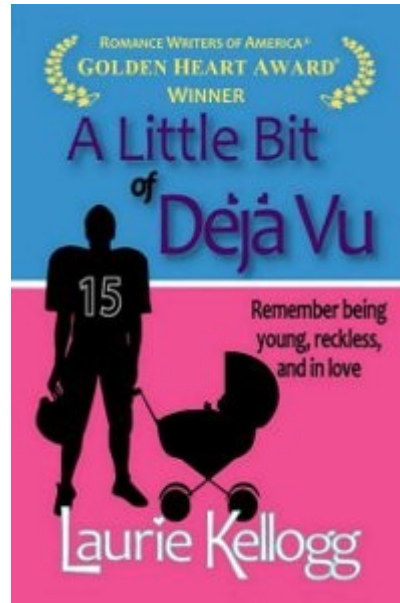
Sometimes destiny has the last word (and laugh)

Fate thrust them together
Blackmail and deception tore them apart
Nineteen years later, their children's love reunites them
Now, only truth and forgiveness can make them a family

Margie Bradford is picking up the pieces of her shattered life following her husband's death. When her cousin encourages her to make a fresh start with her teenage daughter, unsuspecting Margie takes a reading specialist job in the small town of Redemption, PA. The last person she expects to encounter is Rocket Manion, the ex-NFL quarterback and Dr. Phil wannabe who broke her heart nineteen years ago. Strangling her meddling cousin is now at the top of Margie's to-do list.

Divorced teacher and head football coach Jake Manion experiences an eerie sense of when his son announces he's gotten his girlfriend pregnant. The feeling simply grows stronger when Jake learns the girl's mother is Maggie, the same woman on whom he's wasted nearly two decades of bitterness.

While planning their kids' wedding and helping them grow up too soon, Jake attempts to pick up right where he left off—in Margie's bed. But no matter how irresistible his kisses are, she isn't stupid enough to let him hurt her again. Or is she?



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Jenny Carpenter's Secret Pie Crust

From *Last Chance Beauty Queen* by Hope Ramsay
Genre: Contemporary Romance

Pie making is all in the crust. Here is a piecrust recipe I've used for many years. I believe it originally came out of a Gourmet magazine, but I can't remember.

2 ½ cups all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon salt
¾ cup cold vegetable shortening cut into pieces

Stir together the flour and the salt, then add the shortening, using a fork. When the mixture is the consistency of coarse meal, add 4 to 6 tablespoons of ice water – enough so the mixture forms a soft dough that isn't sticky. Form into two balls. Dust lightly with flour and wrap in wax paper. Chill for at least an hour.

This will make enough for two 9-inch pie crusts. Roll out one ball for the bottom and one for the top. You can cut the top crust into strips to make a lattice work top that's quite decorative.

Fill with your favorite canned filling or make your own.

Dear Reader,

Gracious me, my beautiful daughter Rocky sure could use my help. I always knew she wasn't much interested in the local boys - but who'd have thought she'd come home with English royalty?

Trouble is, Hugh wants to buy some of our folks' land. We don't want to sell, but Rocky's job depends on her closing the deal. And though Hugh's obviously smitten, I'm not sure he's right for my Rocky. Oh, he's classy and handsome - and you should've seen the way he judged pies and fixed stock cars at our Watermelon Festival! - but what do we know about him, really? I know I sound like a nervous mother hen, but after forty happy years with my Elbert, all I want is to see my little girl find the same.

Well, time for me to quit chattering and get back to Miss Bray's wet set. Always nice talking to you, and remember: the Cut 'n Curl's got hot rollers, free coffee, and the best gossip in town.

See you real soon,
Ruby Rhodes



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EXCERPT from *Last Chance Beauty Queen*:

Before Caroline could continue, Lillian Bray interrupted. "Oh, Lord Woolham," she cried, waving her hand as she came across the room, her tent dress flowing in her wake, "I'm so glad you joined us this morning. I have a huge, huge favor to ask."

Caroline watched as Hugh stood up and put on his peer-of-the-realm mask. The transformation was subtle but unmistakable. He stood up straighter, he clasped his hands behind his back, and his mouth turned down just a little.

And of course, his eyebrow arched.

“How can I be of service, Lillian?” he said, not fumbling for her name or missing a beat.

“Well, you see, I just convinced Dale Pontius that it would be a huge mistake not to invite you to come judge the pie contest. You do like pie, don’t you, your grace?”

Hugh’s mouth twitched ever so slightly, and Caroline almost laughed out loud.

“I do like pie,” he said in his oh-so-perfect accent. “I’m particularly partial to berry pies, if you must know.”

“Oh, we have all kinds. And I’m sure Jenny Carpenter made one of her peach pies, too, darn her hide.”

“Is peach pie a problem?”

“Oh, no, it’s just that Jenny has a small grove of her own peaches right there on her daddy’s land. Her peach pies win every year.”

Hugh’s eyes sparkled. “Do they?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact.” Lillian glanced over toward Reverend Ellis. She looked worried. “There are people in this county who lust after Jenny’s pies, and I take a dim view of lust.”

Cream Cheese Pie

From ***Only Fear*** by Anne Marie Becker
Genre: Romantic Suspense

Cream Cheese Filling:

2 8-oz. pkgs cream cheese, softened
2 eggs, beaten
2 tsp. vanilla
½ tsp. lemon juice
1 cup sugar
1 9-inch prepared graham cracker pie crust

Sour Cream Topping:

1 cup sour cream
3½ Tbsp. sugar

1 tsp. vanilla

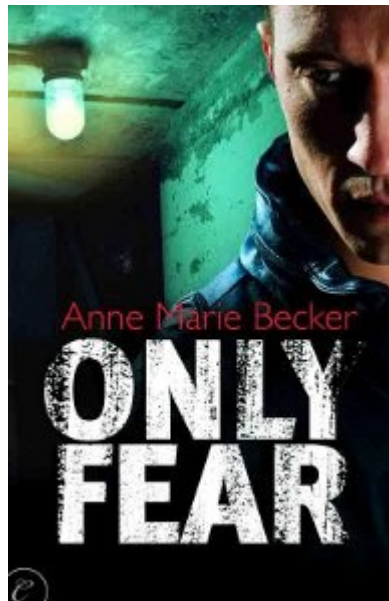
Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Combine “filling” ingredients above (except for crust) and beat on low speed until light and well mixed. Pour into crust. Bake 35 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to cool for 5 minutes. Increase oven temperature to 450 degrees F.

In small bowl, blend Sour Cream “topping” ingredients and gently spread over pie. Bake for 5 minutes. Place in refrigerator at least 5 hours before serving.

After a violent incident with a patient leaves scars on both her mind and body, psychiatrist Dr. Maggie Levine craves isolation. A radio talk show host seems to be the perfect profession, a job where she can help people from a distance while staying safe. When a strange caller begins stalking her on the air and murdering people to get her attention, Maggie realizes she can no longer close herself off from the outside world.

A personal security expert, former Secret Service Agent Ethan Townsend is no stranger to tracking down the most violent monsters of society and bringing them to justice. Still, it will take all of Ethan's skills to protect his new assignment, the irresistible Maggie, from a man intent on teaching her the ultimate lesson in fear...

2009 Golden Heart® Winner, Best Romantic Suspense



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EXCERPT from *Only Fear*:

Catching his frown, Julia grinned. “Maggie’s never brought a man to meet the family before.”

“Or a bodyguard,” Maggie muttered, her creamy skin blushing beautifully as she snatched up a menu from the table. “Make that two bodyguards,” she said, adding a smile for Becca.

As dinner progressed, Ethan enjoyed watching Maggie with her family. And Becca seemed to fit right in like a third sister. The family was comfortable with Ethan, joking with him and asking about his parents and three brothers. He entertained them with a story or two of sibling rivalry. The night was relaxed, but there was ground that needed to be covered, and the arrival of coffee and dessert reminded them the evening was almost over.

“Come home,” her mother said after Maggie had laughed at some story her father had just finished telling. And just like that, the mood changed.

Maggie’s smile froze, then slipped. The light in her eyes dimmed. “I can’t.”

“We miss you.”

“I miss you, too, but I can’t do anything until this is over.”

Nancy set down her spoon. Suddenly, nobody had the stomach to finish off the slice of cheesecake they’d opted to share. She crossed her hands in front of her like a schoolteacher about to reprimand a student. “We need each other. Now, more than ever.”

“Mom.” Maggie’s voice broke on the word.

“You’re just hurting yourself,” Julia tossed out, her gaze boring into Maggie.

Ethan shifted in his seat. His unease at getting caught in the midst of a family squabble warred with the familiar need to protect. He wanted nothing more than to take Maggie away from here, back to his place. Where she’d be his for the evening.

Nicole’s To-Die-For Apple Pie

From *Seized By Darkness* by Autumn Jordon
Genre: Romantic Suspense

**Crust:**

Shift into a bowl 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of flour and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of salt.

With a pastry cutter or knife, cut in $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of Crisco until tiny balls are formed.

Sprinkle with cold water (a tablespoon at a time) and mix until mixture forms a ball. Do not over mix.

Flatten on floured surface and roll into a circle. Place in pie pan and crimp edge. (If crust breaks, just pinch together. Do not roll again. Over working a crust makes it tough.)

Filling:

Mix together $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of both flour and sugar, one teaspoon of cinnamon and enough water to make a thick paste. Smear paste on bottom of the crust. If you like a lot of gook, increase sugar and flour to one cup.

Pare, slice, wash and drain six large Granny Smith apples. Pile high into shell.

Melt four Tablespoons of butter. Mix in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of both sugar and flour until crumbs are formed. Sprinkle crumbs on apples.

Place dabs of butter (approx. two tablespoons) on top of crumbs and sprinkle pie with cinnamon.

Bake at 350 ° for approximately 50 minutes or until apples are tender. Cover pie with a foil tent after thirty minutes, if you do not want crumbs too brown.

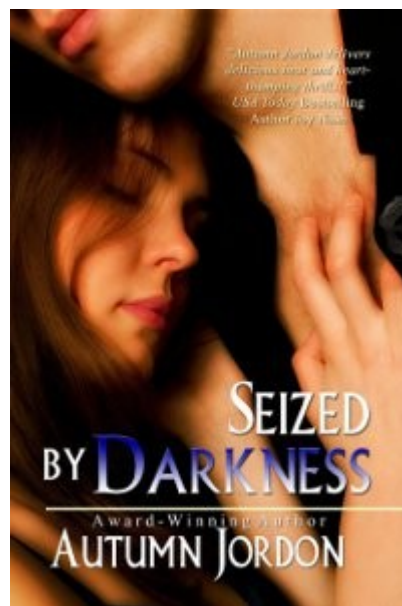
Serve warm or cold. Yummy!

For eight long years, hostage Nicole Carson has lived a nightmare as the mistress of a mafia lord. When her captor brings home another kidnapped victim, she seizes the opportunity to

save herself, her son and the young girl, leaving the Russian for dead. In order to stay alive and save the family she hasn't seen in years from the mafia family's wrath, she must disappear as if she's never existed.

A sting to bring down the largest human trafficking ring in the country goes south for U.S. Marshal William Haus and his C.U.F.F. team. C.U.F.F. catches a break when the mistress of the Russian kingpin is captured with a kidnapped victim. Will bargains with the beautiful mistress. If she helps secure evidence against the mafia, she'll earn a new life for her and her son. But when Will learns Nicole's true identity, he wants to call the operation off. Nicole begs the handsome marshal to keep her secret and allow her to put her life on the line for her family.

A game of cat and mouse plays out between the U.S. Marshal and the ruthless Russian. The prize neither man wants to give up is Nicole.



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EXCERPT from *Seized by Darkness*:

With her hands behind her back, Nicole inched along the counter. “He’s sort of a handyman.”

“Is that so? Just a handyman.” Gorgon shook his head. “You’re a beautiful woman, Katrina. No man could look at you and not want you for his own.”

“Not every man is like you.”

“True.” His chuckle sent a chill shimmering down her spine. “Did you make this for him?”

He sliced the apple pie she’d baked for Will, the man she loved. She wanted to take the knife Gorgon held and drive it through the Russian bastard’s heart, but she had to act smart. She had to buy her time for the right moment. “No. For Luka and I. For Thanksgiving.”

“Ah, yes Thanksgiving. The day Americans give thanks for their blessings. We should count our blessings each and every day, for we don’t know what tomorrow holds. Don’t you agree?” His gaze locked onto hers as he brought the slice to his lips. He didn’t trust her.

“Yes. Yes, I do.” She relaxed against the counter and out of the corner of her eye scanned the area for anything she could use as a weapon.

Susanna’s Sonker

From *Whisper Falls* by Elizabeth Langston
(Coming in Fall 2013)
Genre: Young Adult Magical Realism

2 cups fresh fruit*
¾ cup sugar, divided
¾ cup milk
¾ cup baking mix**
5 Tbsp butter, melted

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Prepare the fruit in a separate bowl; toss with 2 tablespoons of sugar. Spread evenly in buttered baking dish.

Whisk together remaining sugar, milk, and baking mix. Add butter and whisk again. Pour over fruit.

Bake for 45 minutes; the crust will be golden brown. Serve warm with vanilla ice cream.

* Note about fruit: Peaches (sliced and peeled), cherries (pitted), and blueberries are good choices. Peach-and-blueberry sonker is a delicious combination.

** Note about baking mix: To make baking mix, combine ¾ cup of flour with 1 tsp of baking powder and ¼ tsp of salt.

While training for a mountain bike race, high-school senior Mark Lewis spots a mysterious girl dressed in odd clothing, standing behind a waterfall in the woods near his North Carolina home. When she comments on the strange machine that he rides, he suspects something isn’t right. When Susanna claims to be an indentured servant from 1796, he wonders if she's crazy. Yet he feels compelled to find out more.

Mark begins a ‘long-distance’ relationship with Susanna through the shimmering – and temperamental – barrier of Whisper Falls. Curious about her world, Mark combs through history to learn about the brutal life she's trapped in. But knowledge can be dangerous. Soon

he must choose between the risk of changing history or dooming the girl he can't stop thinking about to a lifetime of misery.



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EXCERPT from *Whisper Falls*:

Dorcas twisted to and fro, her little girl skirts swishing below her knees. “I should like a tart. Could you make one?”

“I suppose I could.” My lips fought a smile. “If you were to have a tart, what kind would it be?”

There was a hopeful huff. “What kind of fruit do we have?”

“Berries and peaches.”

“Oh.” She perched on a stool by the worktable and clapped her hands, golden curls quivering. “A berry tart would be lovely.”

“Let me see what I can find.” I crossed to the pantry and reviewed the supplies stacked on ceiling-to-floor shelves. We were still low on all our staples. Most vexing. Mr. Pratt had not fetched more as he’d promised. Until my master restocked, I’d be thriftier with flour, sugar, and salt. “Would a cobbler do?” I called.

“Merciful heavens, yes,” Dorcas answered.

I laughed to hear her repeating my favorite phrase. She noticed too much.

After measuring the flour, I reached for the sugar cone and judged it with my eye. It would last us through the month. If we ran out, I could switch to honey.

Dorcas sighed with pleasure as she watched me carry ingredients to the table. “May I help?”

“No, little one,” I said with a smile. Dorcas would likely place more fruit in her mouth than in the recipe. “But I would enjoy conversation.”

“Do you want to hear the news then?”

“If you like.” I found a wooden bowl and spoon, only listening with part of my attention. Dorcas needed little encouragement.

“All right, then. Did you notice that Deborah’s in a snit today?”

Deborah Pratt was unpleasant far too often for it to be news. “What’s the reason for her snit?”

“Jacob Worth ignored her at church on Sunday.” Dorcas’ lips puckered into a tiny rosebud of despair. “I can’t wait until she’s old enough to marry and leave the house. Then I shall be the eldest daughter.”

“She’s only thirteen. I fear you have a long wait.”

“Mama says fifteen is an excellent age to marry for a clever girl. But you’re right; two years is quite a long time.” Dorcas gasped and surged onto the worktable to frown at the bowl.

“Susanna, you’re adding too much milk.”

I smiled at the top of her head. “I thought I’d make a sonker.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s a cobbler with too much milk.”

Fried Banana Nuggets (Num Chet Chien)

From *Edge of Light* by Cynthia Justlin
Genre: Romantic Thriller

This Khmer dessert is found at most trendy Cambodian restaurants.

2 large bananas
2 teaspoons of sugar
½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
12 spring roll wrappers/sheets (small size)
1 cup coconut oil for frying
Vanilla or coconut ice cream
Caramel

Crushed pineapple

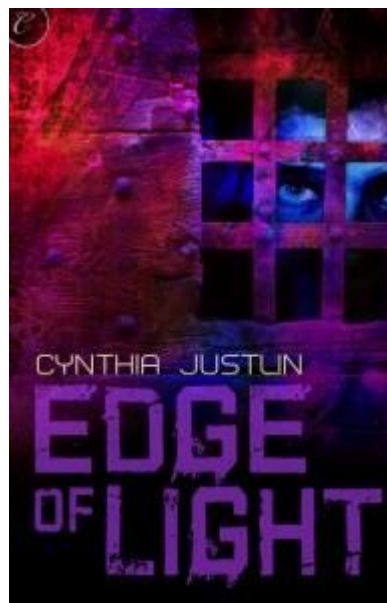
Cut bananas in half, length-wise. Cut each length into six pieces. In a small bowl, mix banana pieces with sugar and vanilla. Cut spring roll sheets in half. Wrap each banana piece in a spring roll sheet.

Heat coconut oil in a small saucepan. Once hot, drop in the banana pieces and fry until golden brown. Drain on a paper towel. Place a scoop of ice cream on a dessert plate and surround with the fried banana nuggets. Drizzle with caramel sauce. Top with a sprinkling of crushed pineapple. Serves 4.

Taken prisoner by a ruthless group of anarchists deep in the Cambodian jungle, anthropologist Jocelyn Hewitt is isolated in a dark prison cell. Without chance of rescue. Or hope. Until the man in the next cell reaches out to let her know she's not as alone as she thinks.

CIA agent Oliver Shaw has been held prisoner for over two years. Forced to witness the brutal torture and slow murder of his entire team, his spirit is not just broken, it's crushed. He no longer believes in hope. Until he hears Jocelyn through the wall, and suddenly feels like a glimpse of light is trying to reach in...

Jocelyn's heart aches for the tortured man whose presence and voice give her the courage to risk their escape. But first she'll have to remind Oliver who he once was, what he once loved, and bring him back to life. Only then will they have a chance for freedom—and the kind of love neither ever thought possible.



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EXCERPT from *Edge of Light*:

It was supposed to have been nothing more than a simple dinner. They both had to eat, it made sense they would do so together, especially on their last night in Cambodia. But, as Oliver sat across the table from Jocelyn, the night tied him into knots.

With its graceful arches, subtle touches of pale yellow and burgundy, and muted lanterns strategically scattered around the tables, the hotel's open-air restaurant invited intimacy. Not the desperate kind, where basic survival stripped inhibitions and forced connections based on mutual dependence. No, this was different. This was...subtle.

A look, a touch, soft conversation.

Ceiling fans stirred the warm breeze overhead, lightly, like a lover's caress. A small pond rippled beside their table. He tore his gaze from a bright purple flower spinning in the water and looked at Jocelyn.

Candlelight flickered across her solemn face in a glow that glinted off her shiny dark hair and sparked in her hazel eyes. She wore a traditional wrap dress that wound around her in a colorful floral print and left her shoulders bare. It was a far cry from the tattered, shapeless fabrics she'd worn in the jungle. But, then again, Siem Riep seemed like a different world, so full of traffic and tourists and laughter.

And a whole new, beautiful, unattainable Josie.

Oliver swallowed, meeting resistance in the form of a hard dry lump in his throat. He reached for his water. His fingers fumbled the small stem and knocked over the glass.

He jerked his napkin off his lap and tossed it on the growing puddle. "Shit."

"You look like a different person. Without the beard, the long hair." Jocelyn's hesitant voice immobilized his frantic attempts to sop up the mess.

He ran a hand over his cropped hair, scrubbed his palm over his crisp, new jeans. Three days ago when the helicopter had touched down in Siem Riep he hadn't wanted any reminders of the jungle and he'd went about shedding them as quickly as he could.

New clothes, new haircut.

He raised his eyes to Jocelyn's. "It's still me."

She slid her hand over his. "I know."

But even as he said it, he wasn't so sure.

Betts's Chocolate Chip Cookies

From *Place Your Betts* by Katie Graykowski
Genre: Contemporary Single Title

3/4 stick shortening
1 1/4 cups firmly packed light brown sugar
2 tablespoons milk
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
2 large egg
1 3/4 cups All Purpose Flour
1 teaspoon salt
3/4 teaspoon baking soda
12 oz. semi-sweet chocolate chips
1 cup coarsely chopped pecans (optional)

Heat oven to 375°F.

Combine shortening, brown sugar, milk and vanilla in large bowl. Beat at medium speed of electric mixer until well blended. Beat in eggs. Combine flour, salt and baking soda. Mix into shortening mixture until just blended. Stir in chocolate chips and nuts.

Drop by rounded measuring tablespoonfuls 3 inches apart onto ungreased baking sheet.

Bake 12 minutes and cool 2 minutes on baking sheet. Remove cookies to rack to cool completely.

EXCERPT from *Place Your Betts*:

“You cut down my trees.” Gabe glared up at her.

Betts didn’t step down to greet him. Instead she used the two-step height advantage to look down her nose at him.

“And?” Gabe propped one brown booted foot on the first stair. He looked more resigned than mad. His jeans and blue tee shirt were coated in a layer of dirt and sweat making the shirt cling to interesting peaks and valleys of pecs and abs. Were they as hard as they looked?

“And what?” Betts hunched her shoulders. “Was there a question in there?”

“You defaced my property. Your land,” he choked out the words, “doesn’t include my driveway.”

“It wasn’t me. It was Mama.” Betts plastered on her most charming media smile. “I don’t suppose you’d chop that wood and stack it neatly by my door?”

Gabe blinked and then shook his head. “I don’t suppose it would start raining cold milk and warm chocolate chip cookies.”

The oven timer dinged.

“As a matter of fact.” Betts went to the oven and pulled out the cookies. They were gooey and golden-brown. Perfect. “I’d be happy to dump cold milk on you and complete the dream.”

Jilian’s “Best of Earth” Cookies

From *The Source of Magic* by Cate Rowan
Genre: Fantasy Romance

4 oz. butter
1½ cups quick-cooking plain oatmeal
½ cup sugar (¼ if leaving unbaked)
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. cinnamon
1 egg
1 Tbsp. flour
¼ cup mini chocolate chips or mini M&Ms

Preheat oven to 350°. Spray cookie sheet with a cooking spray.

Melt butter.

Mix oatmeal, sugar, baking powder and cinnamon together and mix with the melted butter.

Break egg and beat it, then add flour and mix well. Add to oatmeal mix. Stir in chocolate chips or M&Ms.

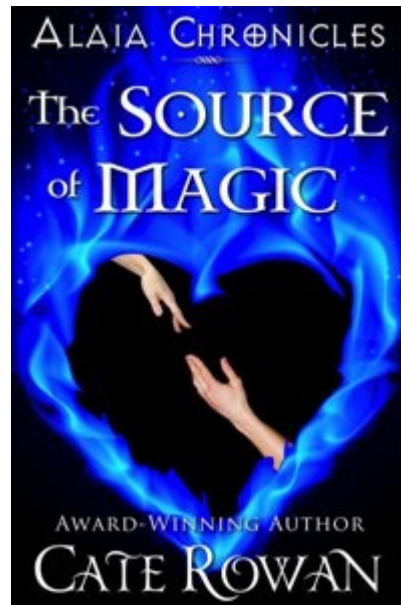
Drop batter onto cookie sheet in 2-tsp. chunks (not too close, because they will spread). Bake for 10-12 minutes at 350°. Remove immediately from cookie sheet. Cool completely and store in airtight container.

Hat tip to Ursula’s Cookbook (out of print) for the original recipe, modified and much enjoyed over the years.

Alvarr and Jilian, the hero and heroine of *The Source of Magic*, enjoy these delicious cookies toward the end of their story after journeying back to Earth. Author Cate can’t bake a batch herself these days because her mountaintop residence has no stove(!), so she might occasionally, maybe, possibly, make the batter and leave it in the fridge for unbaked snacking.

When a gorgeous man clasps Jilian Stewart to his chest and yanks her from Scotland into a magical battle, she thinks it must be another of her bizarre dreams. Plagued by unnerving visions of this man, she's sure they're brought on by the stress of her mother's deadly paralysis. Instead, Jilian finds herself ensnared in a world of fantasy, treachery, and family secrets, opposing the one man who can make everything right.

Prince Alvarr, her sexy abductor, offers a cure for her dying mother, but won't send Jilian home with it until she helps him destroy the evil mage threatening his people – with mystical powers she never knew she had.



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EXCERPT from *The Source of Magic*:

Lying in the infirmary bed and fully awake at last, Jilian glanced down at the bandages around her upper torso and left shoulder. The movement brought a twinge of discomfort, but not the searing pain of before. “What happened to me?”

“One of Bhruic’s men shot you. Gurdan, I think it was.” Varene reached for Jilian’s mulberry blanket and tucked it in. “But my healing trance worked. Thankfully, there was no curse on that arrow.”

Jilian stared at the woman. It was like knowing the words of a new language, but the sentences were gobbledygook.

“That was Gurdan’s final error.” Prince Alvarr’s voice, unmistakable and ominously quiet, came from the arched doorway. He watched Jilian, his jaws tight with anger.

She stared at his angular, masculine face, and the way the light seemed drawn to his dark silver eyes. God, he’s...gorgeous, she thought. And pissed off. Dangerous! Aware of her near-nakedness, she tugged the blankets higher.

He stalked toward her. “Varene, would you excuse us?”

Jilian swallowed. Please don’t leave me alone with him.

An ambivalent expression crossed the Healer’s face. “She’s my patient, and she’s not fully recovered yet, so just behave yourself.” She headed toward the door and tossed him a warning look. “I’ll be back shortly to check on her.” Then she left.

He slowed his pace as he approached the bed but his fierce expression didn’t waver. He pinned Jilian with a glare. “Rokad, Findar and Nenth—their magery is gone now.”

She straightened, hauling the blanket up with her. Anger roughened her throat. “Look, tell me who you are. And where I am.”

His nostrils flared. “I told you I’m Alvarr, and that I need your help. You don’t remember your own FriendSon?” A bitter note edged his baritone. “I may have been unborn, but you did stand for me before you left.”

“FriendSon? What’s that? And I repeat—” the words shot out of her mouth like BBs— “who are you?”

Exhaling, he planted his hands ominously on the mattress, one on either side of her feet. The top of his green leather tunic splayed, revealing the cords of his neck. “My parents would be grieved to hear how quickly you forgot your homeworld, Sara.”

“Homeworld?” she shouted. “What are you talking about? And I’m not...Sara...” Her voice trailed off as the name echoed in her head.

No.

Sara. My mother?

What does my mother have to do with this?

BREAKFAST

T-Bone Carter’s Biscuits

From *Welcome to Last Chance* by Hope Ramsay
Genre: Contemporary Romance

2 cups self-rising flour. (If you're using all-purpose flour, then you'll need to add a tablespoon of baking powder and 1 teaspoon of salt)

¼ cup Crisco vegetable shortening

¾ cup milk

Preheat oven to 500 degrees. Coat a baking sheet with no-stick cooking spray

Carefully measure the flour into a large mixing bowl, then cut in the shortening with either a pastry blender or a couple of knives until it forms a crumbly mixture. Add enough milk, mixing with a fork, until the dough is firm and leaves the sides of the bowl. You don't want the dough to be sticky.

Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead it a couple of times, then roll out to about ½ inch thick and cut with biscuit cutters. Place biscuits on the baking sheet.

Bake 8 to 10 minutes until golden brown.

Dear Reader,

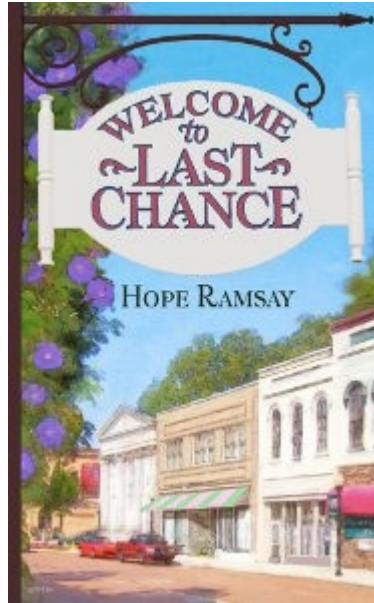
Yes, our town is way off the beaten path, but strange, wonderful miracles happen a lot around here.

I've owned the Cut 'n' Curl beauty shop for years, and I've seen folks come for a visit, then stay for a lifetime. Take Jane-that pretty firecracker of a girl who just arrived in town. I would swear she's running from something. She came with only five dollars in her pocket but she's worked real hard to make a fresh start. She's turned my son Clay's life upside down without even realizing it.

And thank goodness for that! Ever since Clay left his country western band, he's played everything too safe. He needs to take a chance on Jane. Besides, the more he tries to keep his distance, the more he'll realize that he and Jane are singing the same tune.

But I should quit ramblin' and go check on Millie's permanent wave. Next time you're in Last Chance, be sure to swing by. We've got hot rollers, free coffee, and the best gossip in town.

See you real soon,
Ruby Rhodes



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EXCERPT from *Welcome to Last Chance*:

Stony nodded as he stood. He turned to look down at his brother. "I was out to the golf course a little while ago. I'm a little worried about Jesus."

"Daddy and I tied him down yesterday. He should be okay."

Jane almost choked on her bacon. "You tied down Jesus?" she asked looking from one to the other of them. "Pardon me, but what, pray tell, was He doing on a golf course? And please do not tell me some old joke about how He was golfing with God."

Stony chuckled, and something changed in his eyes. For a fleeting instant, she could have sworn the chief of police was made of flesh and blood.

He turned toward Clayton P., who was not laughing. "This one's got a sense of humor, doesn't she?" he said as if she weren't sitting there.

Clayton looked up from his biscuits. "It's a statue of Jesus -- twenty feet tall."

"On a golf course?"

Clayton P. squeezed his eyes shut and started to massage his temples with his index fingers, like this entire conversation had given him an Excedrin headache.

"It's a mini-golf course," Stony said.

Clay dropped his hands to the table top. "You know what?" he said in a hoarse voice that conveyed pain, anger, and something else Jane couldn't quite figure out. "I hope it rains so

hard today that the Ark floats away, Moses drowns, and the Whale and Jonah find their way back to the sea."

Jane picked up another slice of bacon and crunched. "There's an Ark too?" she said around the food.

Easy Cinnamon Rolls

From *Sugar Springs* by Kim Law
(Coming December 2012)
Genre: Contemporary Romance

Make one biscuit recipe (See T-Bone Carter's Biscuits)
2 T butter, melted

Mix Together:

1/2 c sugar
2 t cinnamon

Glaze:

1 c sifted powdered sugar
water

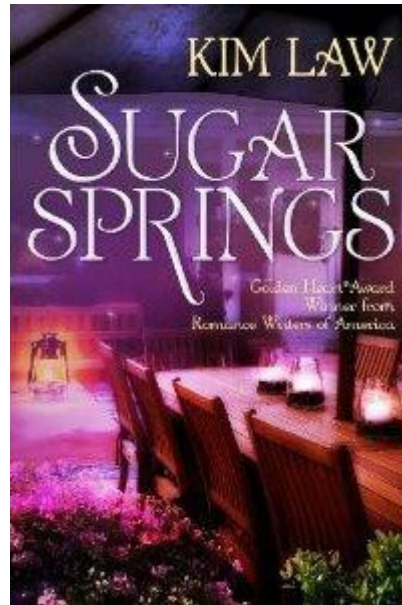
Roll biscuit dough on lightly floured board in a rectangular shape to about ¼" thick. Brush dough with melted butter, sprinkle with sugar mixture. Roll dough up like a jellyroll and seal edge. With string, cut ½" thick slices and place side down on cookie sheet.

Bake for 12-15 minutes at 450 degrees.

For glaze, add water by the tablespoonful to the powdered sugar until it mixes to become of pouring consistency. Pour over warm rolls.

Lee Ann London once had big plans...scholarship, college, love. Then she found herself raising her deceased sister's twin girls when their father disappeared. Now, with her beautiful girls, a community that depends on her, and her photography studio finally taking off, Lee Ann may not have the life she'd imagined, but it's definitely where she wants it. Until Cody, her bad-boy ex, returns to Sugar Springs...

Cody's childhood put a chip on his shoulder the size of Texas. Bouncing around the foster care system, he was always the one to leave before anyone left him first. Then he found a place he wanted to stick. Lee Ann was the best thing that ever happened to him. Only, he hurt her. Bad. He's back now, and determined to earn her forgiveness...and maybe win back her love while he's at it.



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EXCERPT from *Sugar Springs*:

Worn brown boots came into her line of sight and caused every muscle in her shoulders to tense. Surely he hadn't shown up here.

Lifting her head hesitantly, she scanned over the same hard body she'd checked out only the morning before, continuing to go up until she finally came face to face with Cody. Yep, he'd shown up here. And just like yesterday, taking in those penetrating eyes and square jaw made her heart skip a beat.

It surprised her, honestly. No matter how much she'd once hated him—or how much she still loathed him—her body apparently didn't remember. Instead, it remembered how she'd also wanted him. The bad boy and the good girl. It had been a fantasy from the first moment she'd laid eyes on him.

She had to get this ridiculous reaction under control. And she had to get him the heck out of there.

"You can't escape me so easily this time." His deep voice vibrated over her, reminding her how she and her best friend had once made up excuses simply to get near enough to hear his low timbre.

She took a deep breath to calm her nerves before glancing toward the gym doors where the girls would soon be coming through. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

He stared into her eyes for several seconds and then hitched up the corners of his mouth. It didn't feel like a friendly smile.

“You never were a good liar, Lee Ann.” He picked up a cinnamon roll and began peeling the plastic away. “I’ve heard rumors about you this week.”

The roll disappeared between his teeth as he bit off a large chunk. When she caught on to the fact that she was standing there like a teenager, gawking while the man chewed her pastry, she flushed and dropped her gaze. Sweet, Jesus, why had he come back now? She did not need this distraction in her life.

Sausage Gravy & Biscuits – Redneck Style

From *Jimmie Joe Johnson: Manwhore* by Lindsey Brookes
Genre: Humorous Romance

1 lb Pork Sausage
¼ Cup All-Purpose Flour
2 Cups Milk
Salt & Pepper to Taste
8 Prepared Biscuits

Crumble and brown sausage in large skillet (medium heat).

Stir in flour until it dissolves in the cooked sausage. Stir in milk slowly. Cook until mixture thickens and bubbles. Add salt and pepper to taste.

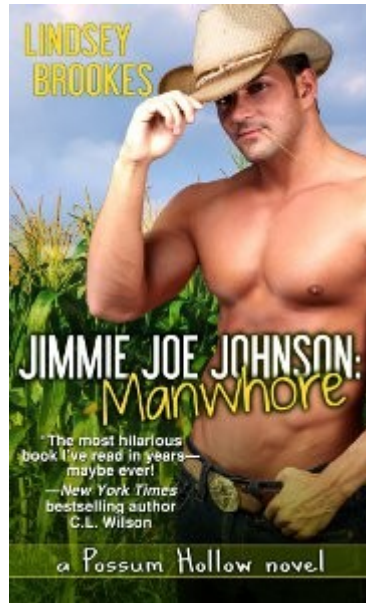
Serve over steamin’ hot biscuits.

(For added taste, accordin’ to Jimmie Joe, wash your meal down with a cold beer!)

"There are some things a man can't change. My bein' a babe magnet for one..." --Jimmie Joe Johnson

Fact is, just about every single female in Possum Hollow, Alabama--along with most of the attached ones--has enjoyed my services. And not just as an auto mechanic, if you know what I mean. With me, women know exactly what to expect. A sweet ride, and no promises.

But even a manwhore has rules. Like stayin' away from Baylee Jean Brown. As teenagers, Baylee Jean and I were hot and heavy. Then her Aunt Callie Rae warned me off, sayin' I'd never be good enough. Seeing as the women in Baylee Jean's family all have witch blood, and I figured Callie Rae was fixin' to do something unmentionable to my man parts, I agreed. But now suddenly, Baylee Jean--smart, sexy, wild--is all over me. She wants me bad--hell, who doesn't? But, if there's one woman who could bring a hound dog to heel, it might be her. . .



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EXCERPT from *Jimmie Joe Johnson: Manwhore*:

“Whaddyasay we go grab us some eats and then we can talk,” I suggested, hopin’ that might ease some of the tension that had wedged its way between us.

“Fine,” Levi muttered.

“We’re here,” Case said with a frown. “Might as well eat.” He turned to our daddy. “You ain’t gonna start singin’ when we get up there are you?”

A hint of our daddy’s smile returned as he stood. “I’ll try not to.”

We followed him over to the buffet line and grabbed a plate. I’d never seen so much food in my life.

“How’s that little gal of yours?” our daddy asked me as we moved along the endless row of choices.

“Little gal?”

“That sweet little thing you used to chase after,” he said as he loaded his plate with sausage links and bacon strips. “You know, the one that was always covered in dirt and carryin’ wild critters around.”

“Baylee Jean?”

“That’s her,” he said with a nod as he stuck three biscuits on his plate and smothered them in sausage gravy.

“You tryin’ to become fat Elvis?” Levi muttered as he eyed the plate in our daddy’s hand.

He laughed. “I’d probably make more money that way. A lotta females prefer that big ol’ smooshy-as-a-teddy-bear look. But no matter how much I eat, I never put any fat on. Reckon I was just born to spend my life a sexy man.

We all nodded in agreement. That seemed to be our lot in life, too. Only the sexy part wasn’t doin’ me any damn good. Not anymore thanks to a certain witch.

Lucy’s Rum Cake “Stud” Muffins

From *The Ghost Shrink, the Accidental Gigolo & the Poltergeist Accountant* by Vivi Andrews

Genre: Light Paranormal Romance



Muffins:

- 1 box (18 1/2 oz.) yellow cake mix
- 1 box (1 3/4 oz.) instant vanilla pudding
- 4 eggs
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1/2 cup milk
- 3/4 cup rum

Preheat oven to 325F and line cupcake pans with muffin liners (makes approx 18). Combine all muffin ingredients in a large bowl. With an electric mixer, beat on high for about 2 minutes. Pour mix into prepared cupcake pans, filling 3/4 of the way.

Bake 25 minutes, until a toothpick inserted into center comes out clean.

Butter Rum Glaze:

½ stick butter
1/8 cup water
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup rum

In a small saucepan, melt the butter. Add sugar and water, and bring to a boil. Boil for 4-5 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and stir in rum. (Carefully! It'll steam.) Heat the new mixture for 30 seconds, resulting glaze will be thin and syrupy.

Move the muffins to a plate (to catch the dripping glaze). With a toothpick, attack the muffins and poke a bunch of holes in them. Drizzle the glaze over the muffins and repeat until all of the glaze is absorbed. Enjoy!

It's not smart to piss off a poltergeist...

It's bad enough to be sexually frustrated. But as a medium, it means until Lucy Cartwright gets some, she's doomed. Oh no, not to death. Worse. To nightly visitations by recently deceased, wanna-be Cassanovas without the bodies to back it up. Then a living, breathing fantasy arrives on her doorstep, and Lucy thinks her dry spell is at an end.

Much as he would like to be Lucy's personal gigolo, PI Jake Cox has a job to do. He's been sent to prevent her from getting laid until a particular horny phantom—and key witness in his mob investigation—pays her a visit. The real challenge? Keeping his own hands off Lucy long enough to get the job done.

Or the lonely, geeky ghost of a murdered mob accountant could rip a hole in the fabric of the universe...



EXCERPT from *The Ghost Shrink, The Accidental Gigolo & The Poltergeist Accountant*:

She extended the glass of ice water toward him and he took it, letting their fingers brush just to see her reaction. A little crackle of energy passed between them—not quite static electricity, but definitely electric. Lucy scurried back a few steps until the width of the kitchen separated them. She quickly began rifling through cupboards, pulling out mixing bowls and ingredients with a subconscious grace that spoke of serious repetition.

“So, you really talk to ghosts, huh?” he asked casually, leaning back against the counter to watch her hands fly through the familiar motions. “I still can’t quite wrap my head around it. I guess you know the meaning of life, then.”

Lucy shrugged without pausing in her mixing and measuring. “Not in the cosmic sense, no. I’m just about helping people accept their lives for what they are, release the baggage they are afraid to leave behind and move on. Sort of post-life therapy.”

“So, you’re a ghost shrink.”

Lucy grinned impishly. “Yeah. They talk to me and their presence in our slice of reality shrinks.” She giggled a little at the pun and Jake bit back a smile. She was too cute—especially with the little dab of flour clinging to the tip of her nose.

He nodded toward the mixing bowl in her hands. “What are you making?”

Lucy looked down at her hands as if surprised to find them baking without her permission. “Rum Cake Muffins?”

“Are you asking me?”

Jake thought she made a face, but she was turned half away from him and it was hard to tell.

“You still haven’t answered my question,” she said as she preheated the oven.

“About what I’m going to do to Mellman?”

She glanced at him over her shoulder, her eyes even bluer in contrast to the flour on her nose. “Is that his name? Mellman?”

“Eliot Mellman. Thirty-seven-year-old accountant and murder victim.”

Lucy sighed. “I get a lot of accountants.”

Jake thought about what Karma had said about the love-hungry ones coming to Lucy for satisfaction. “Yeah, I imagine you would see quite a few repressed number crunchers,” he said, unable to keep the suggestive undertones out of his voice.

Lucy froze. “Oh God, she told you.”

Sam's Keep-Dani-Healthy Greek Omelet

From *The Great Bedroom War* by Laurie Kellogg
Contemporary Romance



Serves two

4 eggs
2 tsp. olive oil
3 Tbsp. scallions, chopped
2 cups fresh spinach, chopped
1 Tbsp. chopped fresh dill
1/8 tsp. garlic powder
1/8 tsp. black pepper
1/8 tsp. salt
2 tsp butter
2 oz. feta cheese, crumbled
2-3 slices provolone cheese (depending on how cheesy you like it)

Beat eggs to a froth in a bowl. In a 10-inch nonstick skillet, sauté scallions for one minute then add spinach, chopped dill, garlic powder, salt, and pepper and sauté quickly just until the spinach starts to wilt. Combine the spinach mixture in the eggs and stir in crumbled feta cheese. Rinse the skillet. Melt 2 t butter in the pan over a medium heat. When the butter sizzles, add beaten egg mixture to the pan. Gradually move the cooked edges to the center with a spatula while alternately tipping the pan in a rotating motion to allow uncooked mixture to move to the clear edges of the pan. When the eggs are nearly set, flip the omelet and lay slices of provolone cheese over ½ of the hot, cooked side of the omelet and fold.

Cook for another ½ minute, flipping it halfway through to melt the cheese inside. Cut in half and garnish with a sprig of dill.

*She's trying to forget the pleasure in her ex's arms
He's doing his damndest to remind her*

Fledgling entrepreneur Samantha Riverà is in charge of her own life for the first time and determined to keep it that way. She's attempting to banish her call-all-the-shots ex-husband from her dreams, but it's kind of tough forgetting the Zorro look-alike who's willing to do anything for her, except give her the only two things she wants—another baby and his love. When their 14-year-old daughter Dani—who's maintaining a shaky remission from leukemia—rebels, Sam foolishly seeks advice from her Don Juan ex, who, incidentally, could charm the knickers off a nun.

When Nicolàs Riverà returns to Redemption, PA, to help control his defiant daughter, he discovers he not only has serious competition for Sam's affection, but Dani has a crush on a boy who is the last kid Nick wants her interested in. The boy is a horn-dog rebel who reminds Nick way too much of his teen-aged self.

Sam never understood that, to a Latino man, familial responsibility is número uno—regardless of whether he was born and raised in America. She also has no concept of how terrified this reformed bad-boy and businessman is of losing her to another high-risk pregnancy. The death of their premature son devastated Nick, and his refusal to sire another child incited The Great Bedroom War that ultimately destroyed his marriage. Now, he'll stop at nothing to get his family back—even if it means blackmailing his way back into his ex-wife's home to become a greater presence in his sick child's life—and, with any luck, Samantha's bed and heart.



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Huevos Rancheros

From *Second Grave on the Left* by Darynda Jones
Genre: Paranormal Mystery



2 tbsp. cooking oil
1 cup red chile sauce
4 flour (or corn) tortillas
1 cup refried beans
4 eggs
1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
1/2 cup salsa (optional)

Heat oil in a small skillet over medium-high heat. (If using corn tortillas, fry them individually until each are slightly firm but not crisp.) Fry eggs, adding oil if necessary, to preferred hardness.

Place the refried beans in a microwave-safe dish. Cover and cook in the microwave until heated through.

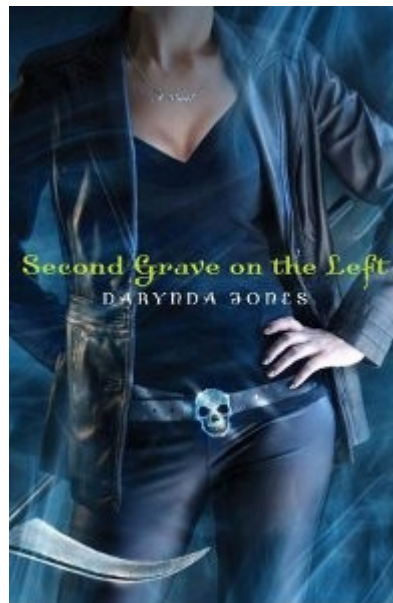
Heat red chile sauce in small saucepan on low to medium heat. Add salt to taste.

Wipe out skillet and heat tortillas (if using flour) individually on medium heat, turning them over and being careful not to burn. No oil is necessary.

Place tortillas on plates and spread a layer of beans over them. Top with cheese, a fried egg, then smother with warm red chile sauce and, if desired, salsa. You can also sprinkle crumbled bacon on top or a dash of Devil's Dust. Enjoy!

Charley is rudely awakened in the middle of the night by her receptionist who tells her that a friend of hers named Mimi disappeared five days earlier and that she just got a text from the missing woman setting up a meet at a coffee shop downtown. But when they show up, Mimi is nowhere to be found. A message on the bathroom wall, a woman's name, was clearly left by Mimi. Her distraught husband explains that his wife had been acting strange since she found out an old friend of hers from high school had been found murdered a couple weeks prior. The same woman Mimi had named in her message.

Meanwhile, Reyes Alexander Farrow (otherwise known as the Son of Satan. Yes. Literally) has left his corporeal body and is haunting Charley. He's left his body because he's being tortured by demons who want to lure Charley closer. But Reyes can't let that happen. Because if the demons get to Charley, they'll have a portal to heaven. And if they have a portal to heaven...well, let's just say it wouldn't be pretty. Can Charley handle hot nights with Reyes and even hotter days tracking down a missing woman? Will Cookie ever get a true fashion sense? And is there enough coffee and chocolate in the world to fuel them as they do?



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EXCERPT from *Second Grave on the Left* by Darynda Jones:

The emotion radiating off my dad took me by surprise. It was wrong somehow, like when a server once brought me iced tea after I'd ordered a diet soda. The normally mundane task of taking that first sip sent a shock to my system, the flavor unexpected. While Dad had his

occasional off days, his flavor was different. Unexpected. A deep sorrow mixed with the overwhelming weight of hopelessness barreled toward me to steal the breath from my lungs.

I straightened in alarm. “Dad, what’s wrong?”

He forced a weathered smile across his face. “Nothing, hon, just getting some paperwork done,” he lied, the deception like a sour note in my ear. But I’d play along. If he didn’t want to talk about what was bothering him, I’d let it slide. For now.

With a weary sigh, he shrugged into his jacket. “I need a shower before the lunch crowd descends. Sammy should be here soon if you want some breakfast.”

Sammy, Dad’s cook, made huevos rancheros to die for. “I may get something later.”

Lucky’s Lucky Charms

From ***Getting Lucky*** by Katie Graykowski
Genre: Contemporary Single Title

1 large bowl
1 box Lucky Charms cereal
1 cup whole milk

Open cereal, pour into bowl, and add milk. Eat.

EXCERPT from *Getting Lucky*:

“My shameful secret has been revealed. I can’t cook. All I eat is cereal.” Lucky stood close behind him.

Will turned around. She’d changed into a light green dress that tied at the back of her neck and left her shoulders bare. It was the first time he’d seen her in anything close to feminine. “I hate to knock your choice of poisons but shouldn’t you eat something with some nutritional value? Adulthood is waiting... take the plunge.”

“Never. First it’s the cereal, then it’s going to bed at a reasonable hour. Pretty soon I’m working in a dead-end job, counting the days to retirement, and driving a ten-year-old Ford Taurus. I’m going to be young forever. Life’s simple when you only eat food that comes with a toy. Want to see my collection of super spy decoder rings?” Her stomach rumbled. She invaded his personal space by reaching around him to the cereal cabinet. “If you don’t want to watch, I suggest you go in the other room.” She grabbed the Lucky Charms.

He took it from her. “As a friend, I can’t stand by and watch you do this. You’re killing yourself one marshmallow at a time.”

Her eyes narrowed. “You’re not planning an intervention are you? It’s just cereal. Crack cocaine isn’t what makes the marshmallows magically delicious.” She took the box back. “They’re always after me lucky charms.”

BEVERAGES

Dani’s Mango Madness Smoothie with Raspberry Swirl

From *Pointe of No Return* by Amanda Brice
Genre: Young Adult Mystery



Smoothie:

½ cup orange juice

½ cup peeled, pitted, and sliced frozen mango

Honey to taste

Place the juice, fruit, and honey in a blender. Blend on high speed until smooth. Yields one 12-oz smoothie.

Raspberry Swirl:

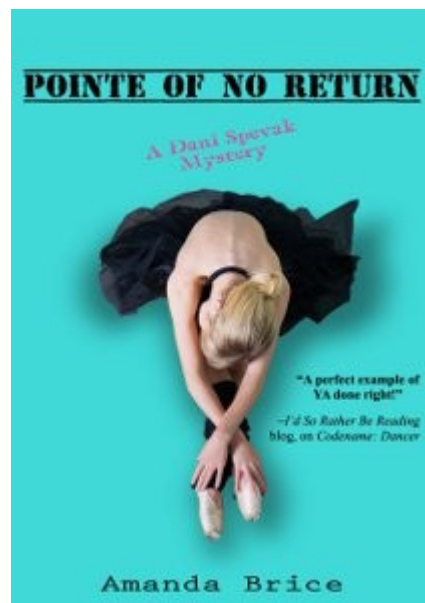
1 cup unsweetened, frozen raspberries, thawed
2 tsp Splenda
2 tsp cornstarch
½ tsp vanilla extract

Combine Splenda, cornstarch, and vanilla extract in a saucepan. Stir until there are no lumps. Add in raspberries until broken down, about 4 minutes. Strain to separate liquid from seeds. Chill at least 1 hour. Yields enough for four drizzles.

Pour the smoothie and ¼ of drizzle together into serving cup to create swirled effect. Enjoy!

Aspiring ballerina Dani Spevak's visions of sugar plums are dashed when she's assigned to understudy her nemesis, Hadley Taylor, in the Nutcracker. Pretty, popular, and rich, that girl has all the luck. Or so she thought.

When Hadley mysteriously disappears with opening night just around the corner, Dani can't sit idly by, even if it means losing the part. Now she's running all over Phoenix in a race against the clock. From reality TV trophy wives to sleazy real estate developers to a possible drug ring, the cast of suspects begins to add up. Will she find Hadley before the curtain rises?



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EXCERPT from *Pointe of No Return*:

"Wanna go grab a smoothie while we wait?" Analisa asked.

I flinched, both from the question and from the pain of my bleeding toes as I peeled back the lambswool I'd shoved inside my dance shoes. (I always laughed when people said that dancers probably had the nicest feet. Did they actually know any dancers?)

Did I really need the extra calories and sugar from a smoothie? I had costumes to fit into – well, I would if I got a role, that is.

Maya must have seen my hesitation because she answered for me. “Yes, she does. Let's get out of here.”

We left campus and walked the two blocks to Groovie Smoothie. I thought about ordering a bottle of water and calling it a day, but I knew Ana and Maya weren't going to hear of it. I knew they were worried about me, but they were wrong. I didn't have a problem.

Really.

Sure, I'd agreed last month to see a body image counselor. And I'd been going, but it wasn't the least bit necessary. Interesting – I was learning a lot – but not for me.

The dance department was full of hypocrites. They encouraged us to do whatever it took to be slim and trim so we would look good up on stage, but they didn't want the liability of their dancers ending up hospitalized. So my counseling was just a formality, and everyone knew it.

Besides, I didn't have a problem. Really.

“I'll have an extra-large Mango Madness with a raspberry swirl.” I could just have a fruit smoothie, no need for yogurt. Lo-cal, no fat. Perfect. “Oh, and a soft pretzel,” I added with pointed look at Maya.

See, I didn't have a problem. Really.

Homemade Skinny Latte

From *Death, Taxes, and a Skinny No-Whip Latte* by Diane Kelly
Genre: Humorous Romantic Mystery

This is a vegan recipe – it's healthier and makes the cows happier, too!

1/2 cup brewed coffee (try flavored coffees for fun!)
1/4 cup chocolate soymilk
1/2 cup lite soymilk

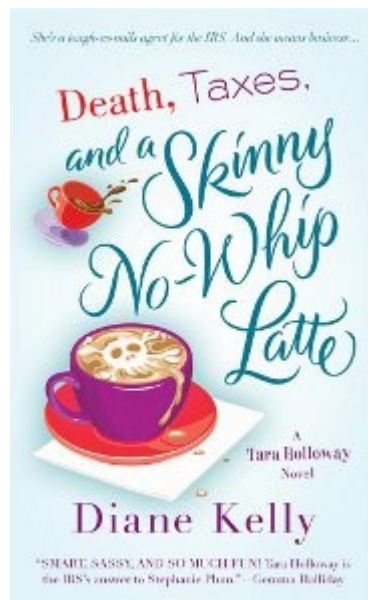
Pour together into a mug and enjoy! It doesn't get any easier than that, huh?

Hitting the books. Solving murders. Counting calories.

It's all in a day's work for Tara Holloway, the U.S. Treasury's latest, greatest, soon-to-be-skinniest weapon against the biggest, richest tax cheats in the nation...

When she joined the Criminal Investigations Division, Tara knew she'd be investigating some very real crooks. Forget about waitresses hiding tips from the IRS or babysitters not declaring income! Tara and her partner, Eddie, are going after one of country's richest, dirtiest felons. Being on a diet doesn't help Tara's mood much. Hopefully, by the time the investigation is over, she'll be sitting somewhere in a string bikini, far, far away...

But first: Reality. Marcos Mendoza is a suspected loan shark with connections across the Mexican border. He's never been accused of any crimes, yet his business associates have a history of disappearing...and resurfacing...in body bags. Will Tara risk life, limb, and the pursuit of filing a joint tax return with her maybe-serious boyfriend Brett? Fighting crime, like drinking a cup of coffee with low-fat milk and artificial sweetener, is often bittersweet...



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EXCERPT from *Death, Taxes, and a Skinny No-Whip Latte*:

"I'm scared shitless, Eddie."

I looked over at my partner as he pulled his maroon minivan into the parking lot of the downtown Dallas post office. Eddie Bardin was tall and lean, sporting a gray suit and starched white dress shirt with a mint-green silk tie. Though Eddie was African-American, he was more J. Crew than 2 Live Crew, like a dark-chocolate version of President Obama. Not that Eddie'd ever condescend to vote for a democrat.

Despite the fact that my partner was a conservative married suburban dad and I was a free-thinking single city girl, the two of us got along great and made a kick-ass team. Problem was, the current ass we were aiming to kick was a very frightening one.

A row of cars stretched out in front of us, a solid red line of brake lights illuminating the early-evening drizzle. Apparently I wasn't the only slacker who waited until April fifteenth to file their tax return.

Eddie pulled to a stop behind one of those newer odd-looking rectangular cars. Cube, was it? Quad? Shoebox? He glanced my way. "Scared? You? C'mon, Holloway. You've been slashed with a box cutter and shot at and lived to brag about it." His scoffing tone might have been more believable if I hadn't noticed his grip tighten on the steering wheel. "We're invincible, you and me. Like Superman. Or toxic waste."

I scrunched my nose. "Ew. Couldn't you have come up with a better metaphor?"

"I'm exhausted, Tara. And besides, it was a simile." He muttered something under his breath about me being the child the education system left behind.

I might have been offended if I thought he truly meant it. You didn't become a member of the Treasury Department's Criminal Investigations team without a stellar academic record, impressive career credentials, and a razor-sharp intellect, not to mention a quick hand on both a calculator and a gun. Not that I'm bragging. But it's true.

I toyed with the edge of the manila envelope in my lap. "Battaglia and Gryder were chump change compared to Marcos Mendoza, and you know it."

Eddie and I had recently put two tax cheats--Jack Battaglia and Michael Gryder--behind bars, but not before Battaglia had sliced my forearm with a box cutter and Gryder had taken pot shots at me with a handgun and pierced Eddie's earlobe with a bullet. Not exactly polite behavior. What's more, neither of those men had a history of violence prior to attacking us. The focus of our current investigation, Marcos Mendoza, was an entirely different matter.

Due to a lack of evidence, Mendoza had never been officially accused of any crimes. Yet his business associates had a suspicious history of disappearing.

And resurfacing.

In dumpsters.

In pieces.

Parish Cocoa

From *Ghosts of Boyfriends Past* by Vivi Andrews

Genre: Light Paranormal Romance



7 fl oz cocoa
1 ½ fl oz peppermint schnapps
¾ fl oz vodka (optional)
Whipped cream
Peppermint stick (optional)

Prepare cocoa mix as usual. (I prefer Land O’ Lakes Dark Chocolate). Stir in peppermint schnapps & vodka (optional). Garnish with whipped cream and peppermint stick. Enjoy!

Letting him in could mean losing him forever.

Elizabeth “Biz” Marks has the magic touch when it comes to matters of the heart—except her own. In a slightly tipsy fit of loneliness, she once tried to harness a little love mojo to work in her favor. Instead the spell mutated into a nightmarish curse that kills off her boyfriends on her favorite holiday: Valentine’s Day.

With three permanently ex-boyfriends on her conscience and another hearts-and-flowers holiday approaching, the last thing she needs is a too-gorgeous-to-be-true reporter snooping around.

Biz just has extraordinarily bad luck, or she’s a bona-fide Black Widow who bumps off her boyfriends for a chunk of the inheritance money. Either way, Mark Ellison is sure there’s a story here. Especially when his attempts to charm her send her into a panic.

The harder Biz tries to keep Mark and his beguiling dimples as far away as possible, the harder he digs to get at the truth. Now she’s beginning to wonder if his is the love that will finally break the curse...or if she’ll be burying her heart along with him.

Warning: This book contains curses, meddling ghosts, nosy neighbors and enough peppermint Schnapps to drown the inhibitions of even the most cautious witch.



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EXCERPT from *Ghosts of Boyfriends Past*:

“Don’t look now, but that hot reporter’s been watching you from the schnapps tent for the last half hour.”

Ignoring Gillian’s attempt at stealth, Biz immediately swung around to meet Mark’s stare. “What’s he still doing here? I gave him his interview.” She’d confessed to being a nutter who believed in ghosts, and he was still hanging around. Damn the curse. And damn her stupid hormones for being glad he was so damned persistent.

“Maybe he likes schnapps,” Dave commented.

“That man isn’t here for the schnapps,” Gillian said.

Biz was inclined to agree with Gillian. Especially when Mark grabbed two Styrofoam cups of fifty-proof Parish Cocoa and began walking straight toward her.

“And I think that’s our cue.” Dave grabbed his wife’s arm and started hauling her away. “Have a fun festival, Biz.”

“Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do,” Gillian called over her shoulder with a lecherous wink.

Biz’s eyes were locked on the Reporter of Doom stalking toward her with two cups of temptation, but she heard Dave snort as he dragged Gilly away. “At least that leaves her some room to maneuver.”

A chill shot down Biz’s spine that had nothing to do with the January breeze. She didn’t need room to maneuver. She needed a quick escape route. Unfortunately, her booth was smack-dab in the middle of the square, a hangover from when *Charmed*, *I’m Sure* was the heart of the town and her booth was the bright red love Mecca that everyone was drawn to throughout the festival.

Mark saw her wary expression, and his dimples flashed out in response. “I come in peace.” He raised the Styrofoam cups. “No questions, just spiked cocoa.”

Biz ignored the Styrofoam peace offering. “Why are you still in town?”

His confident smile didn’t waver for a second, the arrogant punk. “Mrs. Kent told me the Winter Festival wasn’t to be missed.”

Biz looked around, taking in the half dozen folding tables, the overcrowded schnapps tent and the enthusiastic, if slightly off key, local Bluegrass band stomping away in the gazebo. The Winter Festival had always been more of an excuse to take the day off work than a tourist attraction. Even the vendors who set up booths didn’t take themselves seriously, spending more time soaking up peppermint schnapps than hawking their wares.

Biz herself would be mingling with the dancers on the other side of the square, drinking until the music started to sound good, if she didn’t have a curse to break.

“I hear the weather is lovely this time of the year in Raleigh.” She had no idea what the weather was like on the mainland in January and she didn’t care.

“Are you trying to get rid of me, Biz?”

Yes, but I don’t actually want you to leave.

Captain Drake’s Rum Drinks

From *The Siren’s Song* by Jennifer Bray-Weber
Genre: Historical Pirate Romance

Dark ’N Stormy

2 oz. dark rum
3-4 oz. ginger beer
½ oz. fresh squeezed lime juice

Fill high-ball glass ¾ full with ice. Combine all ingredients. Garnish with candied ginger.

Papa Doble

2 oz. white rum
1 oz. fresh lime juice
1/2 oz. fresh grapefruit juice
1/4 oz. maraschino liqueur
1 1/2 to 2 cups shaved ice

Shake all ingredients. Serve in cocktail or martini glass. Garnish with lime.

Captain's Punch

½ oz. spiced rum

½ oz. amaretto almond liqueur

½ oz. peach liqueur

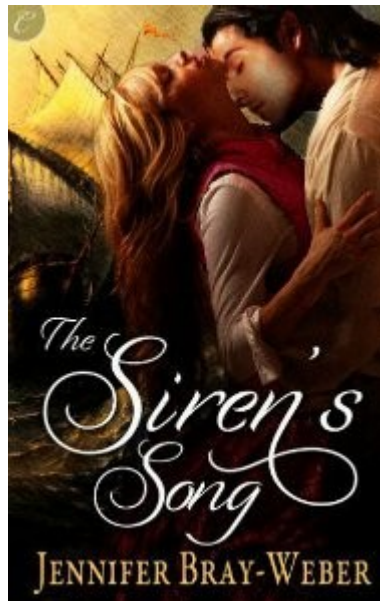
2 ½ oz. orange juice

Pour all ingredients over ice in an old-fashioned glass.

Pirate captain Thayer Drake lures ships onto reefs for plunder, and business is lucrative. Yet, saving a lass from drowning after her ship wrecks becomes more than he bargained for when the crazy wench dives back into the raging sea for her blasted purse.

Tavern songstress Gilly McCoy, penniless and fleeing from the man who murdered her lover, stowed away on the doomed ship. Now at Drake's mercy, Gilly must earn her passage by performing for the captain. And that is not all: she must also kiss the captain at every ring of the ship's bell. But she discovers kissing the handsome rogue is not entirely a bad bargain...

Drake is intrigued by the beauty, but there is no room in his black heart for a woman. He has demons that he drinks nightly to forget. Meanwhile, Gilly has her own secrets to keep—including why her purse is more valuable to her than her life...



www.jbrayweber.com

EXCERPT from *The Siren's Song*:

His demons called now that he sat alone and he greeted them as he always had. He swallowed half the bottle of rum, wiped his wet lips with his sleeve, and slouched down in his chair. He waited, waited for the dizziness to abate and the liquor to dilute his body. His heartbeat slowed as the rum replaced his blood. Distant sounds crept out of the shadowy realms of his mind. Horse hooves stamped the dry ground. Dust swirled around its legs. A

sword scraped across its metal scabbard. Drake could still make out the distinguishable cries from the dying. He swallowed the remaining rum to dull the memories he wished to forget.

One more drink should do.

He rose, unsteady on his feet. Making his way around the room, he extinguished all the lanterns with the exception of one. He removed it from its hook and plucked another bottle from his treasure of spirits. Rounding the desk, he set the items on top, removed his shirt, and opened a window. Burnt drafts fanned over his face. The murmur of the sea whispered becalming lullabies. With ballads, booze and a fair maiden to dream of, he may get sleep this night.

Cookie's Mucho Magnifico Margaritas

From *Fourth Grave Beneath my Feet* by Darynda Jones
(Coming October 2012)
Genre: Paranormal Mystery



Sea salt (for rimming glass)
1 (6 ounce) can frozen limeade concentrate
6 fluid ounces tequila
2 fluid ounces triple sec

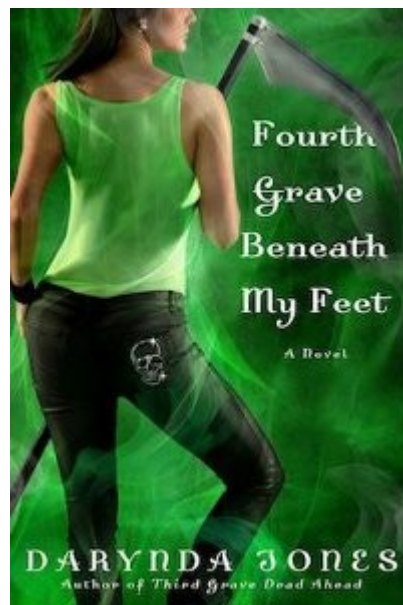
Fill blender with crushed ice (optional: for frozen margaritas). Pour in limeade concentrate, tequila and triple sec. Blend until smooth.

Dip rim of glass in ¼ inch of water then ¼ inch of salt. Pour mixture into glasses (if frozen) or over ice.

Enjoy!

Sometimes being the grim reaper really is that. Grim. And since Charley's last case went so awry, she has taken a couple months off to wallow in the wonders of self-pity. But when a woman shows up on her doorstep convinced someone is trying to kill her, Charley has to force herself to rise above. Or at least get dressed. She quickly realizes something is amiss when everyone the woman knows swears she's insane. The more they refute the woman's story, the more Charley believes it.

In the meantime, the sexy, sultry son of Satan, Reyes Farrow, has been cleared of all charges. He is out of prison and out of Charley's life, as per her wishes and several perfectly timed death threats. But his absence has put a serious crimp in her sex life. While there are other things to consider, like the fact that the city of Albuquerque has been taken hostage by an arsonist, Charley is having a difficult time staying away. Especially when it looks like Reyes may be involved. Just when life was returning to normal, Charley is thrust back into the world of crime, punishment, and the devil in blue jeans.



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EXCERPT from *Fourth Grave Beneath My Feet*:

Gemma was determined to help me sleep if she had to get me plastered to do it. So she and Cookie were trying out a frozen margarita mixer I'd ordered during a low point in my downfall. For one week, all I could think about was drinking margaritas—well, that and running my tongue along Reyes's teeth—but I didn't have salt—or Reyes's teeth. I'd also lacked the energy to leave my apartment to get some—or the desire to stoop low enough to beg Reyes to let me lick his teeth after what he did—so I could only wish for a margarita. And dream of Reyes's teeth.

I'd secretly hoped a margarita would magically appear in my hand, but that would mean I would have to put down the remote and God knew that was not going to happen.

It was a vicious circle.

But Gemma rarely drank. Maybe a glass of wine with dinner. And I drank only on special occasions. Like Fridays and Saturdays. Cookie on the other hand . . .

“Woouooooohooooooo!” Cookie raised her arms in triumph. No idea why. “I haven’t had thith much fun thince . . . thince . . .” She seemed at a loss for coherent words, but she recovered quickly and pointed toward the door. “Thince Reyeth Farlow walked through that door!” She turned back to me, her expression full of awe. “And, my god, doeth that boy know how to walk.”

Bonnie Pratt’s Easy-Peasy Peach Sangria

From Death, Taxes, and Peach Sangria by Diane Kelly

(Coming January 2013)

Genre: Humorous Romantic Mystery

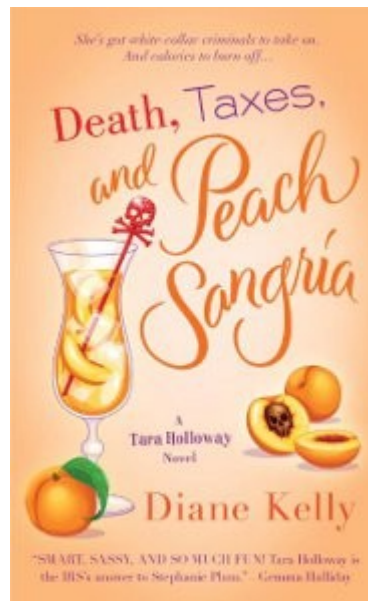
1 bottle of your favorite white zinfandel wine
1 ½ cups peach schnapps
½ cup frozen pink lemonade concentrate
One peach, sliced
½ cup raspberries
1 small orange, sliced
1 ½ cups lemon-lime soda

Place fruit in a pitcher. Add wine, schnapps, and lemonade concentrate. Stir well. Refrigerate at least one hour. Add soda just before serving and stir again. Serve over ice, enjoy with friends, and forget your troubles!

When it comes to exposing tax fraud, Tara Holloway and her partner Eddie Bardin are really cleaning up. From their brilliant takedown of the disappearing “Tax Wizard” to their perfectly planned downfall of the “Deduction Diva,” they’ve earned the respect of their peers at Criminal Investigations. Now Tara’s ready to celebrate with an ice-cold pitcher of peach sangria—even if her next case is totally the pits...

Tara’s looking forward to a challenge but, back at the office, everyone’s looking for love. Her boss Lu “The Lobo” Loboinski and office virgin Josh Schmidt are signing up for an online dating service, and—to Tara’s dismay—so is her crush, Special Agent Nick Pratt.

Tara's trying to act chill. But when she learns that her next case involves cash-funneling to terrorists, it's not just her love life that's on the rocks. It's her life, period.



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EXCERPT from *Death, Taxes and Peach Sangria*:

On a Monday morning in late September, Eddie Bardin and I donned our ballistic vests, slid our Glocks into our ankle holsters, and headed out of downtown Dallas in a plain white government-issue sedan that smelled faintly of French fries.

Eddie leaned toward the door and checked himself in the side mirror. “How do I look?”

What my response lacked in decorum it made up for in sincerity. “Like an idiot.”

“Then it’s the perfect disguise.”

With the shiny gold chains, sagging jeans that exposed polka-dot boxers, and untied hi-top tennis shoes, he looked like a hip-hop singer or a wannabe gangster. The disguise was a far cry from Eddie’s usual attire of classic business suits and silk ties. I, too, wore a disguise, though mine was far more subtle. In blue jeans, sneakers, and a Dallas Mavericks T-shirt, I was undercover as a retail sales associate from a sporting goods store at a nearby mall. As a final touch, I’d pulled my chestnut brown hair into a pony tail and topped it with a Texas Rangers baseball cap. Go team!

We were two IRS special agents on a mission. Today’s mission would be taking down a tax preparer who called herself the “Deduction Diva.” According to her glittery red advertising flyer, she provided clients with massage chairs and a complimentary glass of champagne while their returns were prepared. Hoity toity, huh?

With tax law growing increasingly complex, more people were turning to professional preparers. Entrepreneurs looking for a niche figured they'd cash in on the trend. Unfortunately, too many had jumped on the bandwagon. Tax preparation services had become a crowded market and preparers had resorted to gimmicks to grab the attention of potential clients. But where these people came up with the gimmicks God only knows.

After merging onto the freeway, I glanced over at my partner. "Don't you dare touch that stereo."

I slapped his hand away as he attempted to eject my Tim McGraw CD and slip in some soft jazz. Eddie might be African-American, but he was much more Kenny G than P. Diddy. I, on the other hand, was much more Lady Antebellum than Lady Gaga.

Yep, in many ways Eddie and I were polar opposites. He was tall and dark, a father of two who'd grown up and was now raising his family in the affluent north Dallas suburbs. I was a petite white woman, a recovering tomboy who'd grown up climbing trees, shooting BB guns, and swimming in the muddy creeks of the east Texas piney woods.

Dig a little deeper, though, and you'd find Eddie and I shared quite a few similarities. We'd both kicked academic ass in college, graduating at the top of our classes. We'd both taken jobs as special agents in IRS Criminal Investigations when we'd discovered that sitting at a desk all day didn't suit us. And we both wanted to see tax cheats get their due. Especially the Deduction Diva. She'd been cheating the government for years. The Diva's due was long overdue.

HISTORICAL

Lady Westover's Dinner Party

From *The Vanishing Thief* by Kate Parker
(Coming December 2013)
Genre: Historical Cozy Mystery

In the 1890s, wealth was judged in part by how bountiful a spread one laid at a dinner party. The upper and upper-middle classes tried to meet the expectations of their guests or surpass them. Imagine if you will sitting down to a dinner similar to the one my heroine, Georgia Fenchurch, faces as she plays the impoverished country relative of Lady Westover. For Georgia, ordinary middle-class bookshop owner to her London customers and master-of-disguises investigator to her fellow Archivist Society members, is on the trail of a kidnapper.

Artichoke Soup
Fillets of Salmon
Pigeons with asparagus
Leg of Lamb, new potatoes, salad, stewed celery
Goose pieces in tomato sauce, garlic & parsley, green peas
Aldershot pudding, plum pudding
Anchovies, cheeses, biscuits
Cherry water ices, pineapple cream ices
Fruit of the season

Wine, frequently champagne, was served with every course. Before you wonder why their corsets didn't burst, remember it was unnecessary to try every dish, and cleaning your plate was unheard of in that time and place.

EXCERPT from *The Vanishing Thief*:

When the fish course was set before us, Blackford turned to me with a cold smile. The clatter of silver and the rumble of voices faded in my ears. Apprehension must have shown in my eyes because my heart was pounding and I'd lost my appetite.

In a very low voice he said, "I didn't realize you were Lady Westover's country cousin, Miss — Peabody. Or should I say Miss Fenchurch? Does the presence of a Scotland Yard inspector have anything to do with why we're enjoying this meal together?"

"No." The duke deserved a better answer. He'd not given me away yet. I kept my voice low to match his. "The inspector's here to even the numbers and make it appear more of a family dinner. And he's curious about Drake's disappearance, although it's not his case."

"Scotland Yard inspectors don't attend dinner parties to even the number of men and women, even for as persuasive a hostess as his grandmother, and they don't get curious."

"I think they must. Curiosity is the most important characteristic an investigator can possess."

He took a bite of his fish and considered. "You're probably right," he said when he'd swallowed. "So what is this dinner in aid of?"

"Drake was introduced to Victoria Dutton-Cox by Lord Naylard. Lord Hancock was a victim of Drake's. I want to question them without either realizing what I'm doing."

He'd jerked in his seat when I mentioned Victoria's name, but by the time I finished speaking, he had himself under control again. "That'll be easy with Naylard. The man lacks both suspicion and brains." He took a sip of his wine. "Do you want to question me again?"

"Yes."

"Then it will only be fair if I question you, too."

"All right." What does he want? "Did Drake try to blackmail you?"

“Yes. How long have you been looking for missing people?”

I glanced around. No one at the dinner was paying any attention to us. “Ten years. What did Drake possess that would make him think he could blackmail you? You’re a formidable man. He’s very ordinary.”

A smile flickered over his lips. “Letters written by my sister. I control her money, therefore, he came to me to sell his silence. Are you a virgin?”

I felt my eyes widen and my cheeks burn. That was hardly a question one could ask in polite society, but then, neither were questions about blackmail. I thought I had the upper hand until he’d turned the tables on me. The man had the instincts of a hunter hidden inside impeccable tailoring. This was a man I could understand.

He raised his dark brows. “Surely you didn’t think you could ask my deepest secrets without revealing your own?”

16th Century Herbs used in Modern Herbal Remedies

From ***Captured Heart*** by Heather McCollum
Genre: Historical Romance with Paranormal Elements

Feverfew Insect Repellent



Combine about 4 ounces of the fresh (or 2 ounces of dried) feverfew leaves with 1 pint of olive, safflower, or other pure vegetable oil. Heat gently, uncovered, for about one hour. For oil, strain, bottle, and cap tightly when cooled. For a thicker ointment, add 1 to 1-1/2 ounces of beeswax to the mixture as it heats. Let cool and bottle appropriately.

Ointment applied to skin can protect one from biting and stinging insects as they hate the scent. Fresh feverfew leaves can also be rubbed on the skin to keep bugs away. The ointment can also improve acne and insect stings when applied to clean, dry skin.

Chamomile Tea



Chamomile, not to be confused with Feverfew, is calming to the nervous system as well as a digestive aid. Use dried chamomile flowers, steeped in a tea/infusion and sweetened to taste, to help one relax and fight insomnia.

Heather Tea

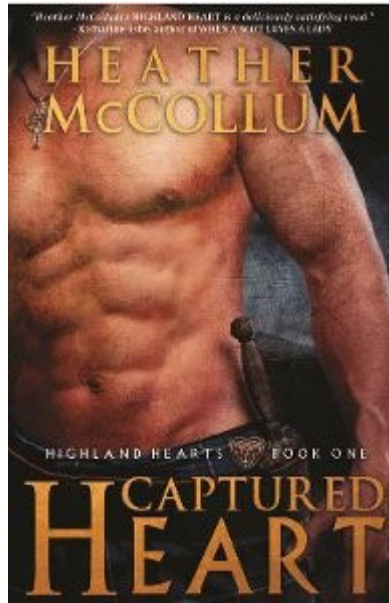


“No’ a flow’r that man can gather...can beat the bonnie, bloomin’ heather” is one of many verses celebrating one of Scotland’s most notable flowers. It has been used in roof thatching, brooms, wool dying, honey, ale, and bridal bouquets (for luck).

Make a tea with heather blossoms to suppress coughing fits and to aid sleep.

Fleeing with only her bow, horse, enormous pet wolf, and the cryptic clues hidden in her mother’s medicine journal, healer Meg Boswell gallops north towards freedom, running from the man who falsely accused her mother of witchcraft. Cursed with magical healing abilities, Meg knows that if she’s captured, she will die like her mother—atop a blazing witch’s pyre.

Winter winds rip across the Highlands, pressing Chief Caden Macbain forward in his desperate plan to save his clan. He’s not above using an innocent woman to bargain for peace if it keeps his clan from starving. But Meg isn’t who Caden thinks she is, and when she kills a man to save the clan, he must choose between duty and her life. For although he captured her to force a peace, Meg's strength and courage have captured Caden's heart.



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EXCERPT from *Captured Heart*:

“I understand having a woman along may seem odd, but I promise not to interfere with your mission—”

“Our mission is complete,” Caden said abruptly, his fists clenched.

“Well, then, I couldn’t possibly interfere. I will just take care of your injured and will follow you back to the Highlands. A mutual gain.”

A gust of wind scattered wood smoke this way and that. Several of the lass’s curls tugged free of the blanket and floated out around her face. She looked like she’d been tugged, her hair in beautiful disarray. He could imagine it fanned out across the soft fur on his bed. One side of the blanket slipped, exposing the creamy milk-white skin of her shoulder. Caden’s jaw ached.

“Have we set a bargain, then?” She chewed a bit on that luscious bottom lip.

Caden nearly groaned watching those lips, so soft, so perfectly formed.

“Aye.” His gaze moved from her lips back to her lash-framed eyes. “We have set a bargain. Donald, make certain a tent is set up for Lady Boswell so that she may dress and sleep.”

Donald hurtled away from them.

“And Donald, not a word to the men yet. I will tell them about our guest.”

“You may call me Meg,” she said. “I don’t hold tightly to formalities and we have a long way to go.”

Caden watched her pull the blanket up to cover the bare shoulder and frowned. “Get some sleep. We leave England at dawn.” He turned on his heel, dismissing her. The wave of lust, however, was harder to ignore.

Was she frowning at his rude departure, her lovely eyes glaring at his back? Meg Boswell was certainly no fainting flower. She had spirit and courage. She was most definitely glaring.

Caden let out a long breath. They’d be back on Scottish soil on the morrow. Why then did he welcome an excuse to slice someone through?

Ewan jogged to keep up with Caden’s long strides across the camp.

Caden stopped and turned to him. “Alert the men that we leave at dawn for home. Make sure they understand that Meg,” he said, stressing the name she bade him use, “is our guest.”

“Are you going to tell her—?”

“Not until I have to.” Caden walked purposely toward the cold stream. Perhaps another icy swim would remind his body about his goal. He slapped a low branch out of the way as he strode into the darkness of the trees, tearing the green limb from the trunk of a slender birch. He should be celebrating, not scowling. After all, he had completed his mission on his very first day in England. He had captured Meg Boswell, and she didn’t even know it.

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