



# Khimairal Ink

Volume 5, Number 1

January 2009



Bryn Greenwood  
Cheri Crystal

Stories by  
Amelia Beamer  
Geonn Cannon

S.V. Green  
Brigitte Green



# Khimairal Ink



Volume 5, Number 1

January 2009



## Contents

**Publisher**  
Claudia Wilde

**Managing Editor**  
Carrie Tierney

**Assistant Editor**  
C.A. Casey

**Layout/Story Art**  
T.J. Mindancer

	3	
In This Issue	☞☞	Claudia Wilde
	4	
Variety	☞☞	Carrie Tierney
	6	
The Worst of It	☞☞	Bryn Greenwood
	10	
In the Morning	☞☞	Amelia Beamer
	12	
Blackbirds and Blossoms	☞☞	S.V. Green
	16	
Does the Butch Come With the Recipe?	☞☞	Cheri Crystal
	20	
In Every Port	☞☞	Geonn Cannon
	25	
Life of Anais	☞☞	Brigitte Green
	30	
Contributors		

ISSN 1939-3393  
Khimairal Ink Magazine  
is published January,  
April, July, and  
October.

# In This Issue



**A**lready, 2009 is shaping up to be an exciting and progressive new year. We hope you like our improved look and format. Although I still prefer real paper to turn, I love the idea of turning a page while being online. The various buttons turn, enlarge the print or show reduced pages for the reader. This format blends the ease of our web version with the added color, ads, and layout of the PDF file. We hope you enjoy it!

In keeping with new trends for this issue, I've selected excerpts from each story offering the reader a brief glimpse of the potpourri of story themes and styles this month. Take a peek!

"Does the Butch Come With the Recipe?"

by Cheri Crystal

"Meaty chicken breasts baked to perfection."

"Served with an order of hot, spicy tongue on top."

"The Worst of It"

by Bryn Greenwood

Cam is a sun with an entire system of planets revolving around her-legal pads, dry erase boards, note cards, and a little chalkboard. Each with their own satellites: chalk, pens, ever-sharps, markers.

"In the Morning"

by Amelia Beamer

Gina reaches for her toothbrush, and Amy's hand goes for Gina's, of its own will. Their fingers entwine, so familiar they've lost their intimacy.

"In Every Port"

by Geonn Cannon

She was wrapped in dirty laundry and was trying with all her might not to acknowledge that thing she had been smelling since the airport was, indeed, coming from her. Good thing I told Dana I would arrive too late for her to pick me up, she thought.

"Blackbirds and Blossoms"

by S.V. Green

tears for you

darken my sleeves

one by one

the blackbirds take off

from cherry branches

Heat from the forge seemed to catch in my hair like salt from a sea-wind. I piled more coals over the blade of Chinatsu's sword, watching the dark steel redden and go soft.

"Life of Anais"

by Brigitte Green

Flavia delights in telling me about the exploits of the goddesses in mythology and of those of elegists such as Sappho and Sulpicia and their insistent rebukes of the constraints of modern-day marriage. She has long since ceased to shock me and now her tales awake my fiery Oscan blood and her kisses send flames through my belly that rival those of the volcano.

Intriguing, aren't they?

Enjoy!

Claudia

# Variety



**S**ometimes our issues have unifying themes—sometimes the only thing the stories have in common are the fact they have nothing in common.

This issue offers a variety of stories and writing styles. It also exemplifies what *Khimairal Ink* is all about—celebrating the individual voice of the author and showing the limitless possibilities for stories that happen to have lesbian protagonists.

When we first launched *Khimairal Ink*, I had a discussion with an author who couldn't understand that we were complaining about getting too many "first time" stories and wanted other kinds of stories featuring lesbian protagonists. This

author insisted that it was important to show how the protagonist and a love interest met and fell in love before telling stories about them as a couple. My response? "Who said anything about romance or couples? What about a story about a woman who happens to be a lesbian who goes through some story-worthy event in her life?" The author didn't think anyone would be interested in stories about lesbians without some kind of romance.

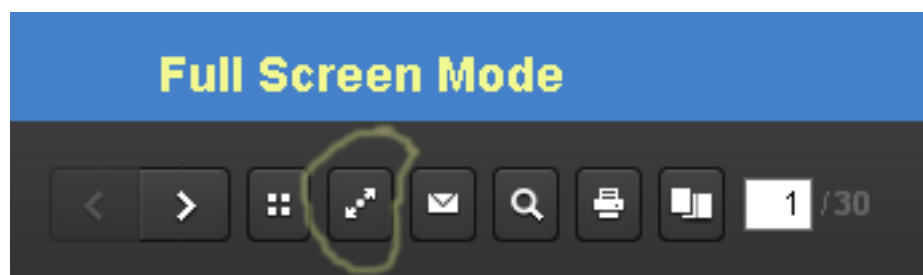
I just want to thank all you authors and readers for proving that lesbians in fiction can live as varied and interesting of lives as real lesbians.

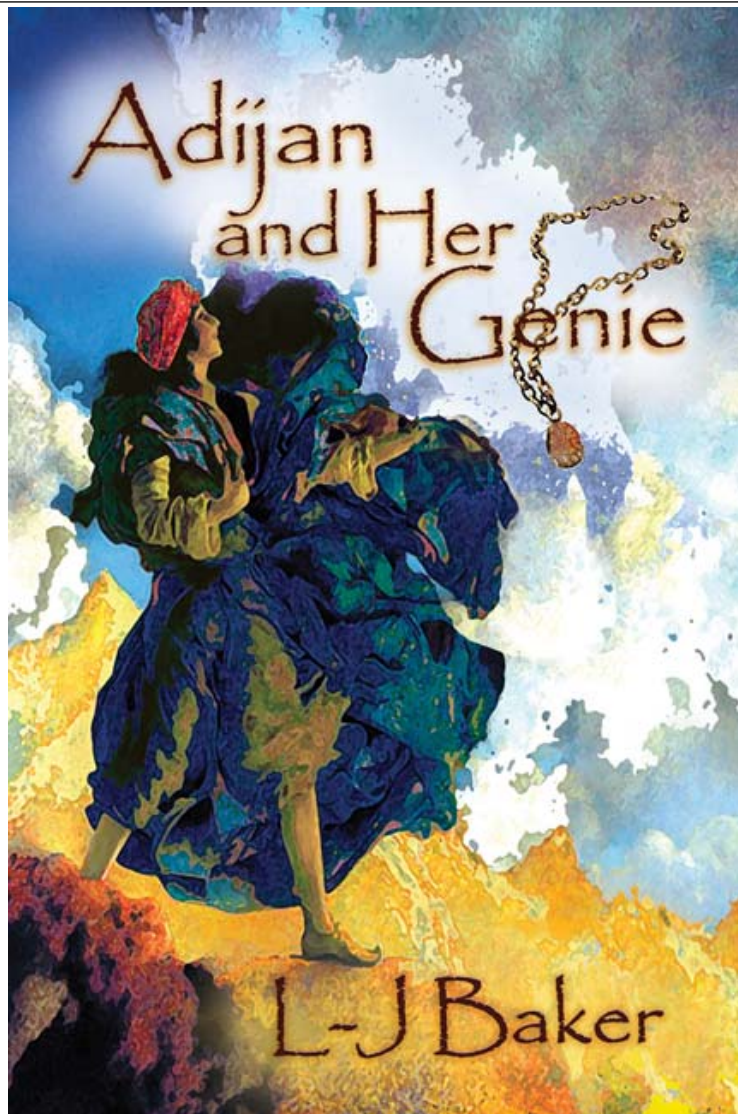
Carrie

Notice our new look?

Don't forget to play around with the buttons for different ways of moving around the zine.

Try the Full Screen Mode for optimum reading.





**A**dijan, a poor messenger girl in an Arabian Nights fantasy world, wishes she could build a world-spanning business empire . . . Shalimar, her wife, wishes Adijan could spend more time at home . . . Their landlord wishes Adijan would pay the rent . . . Adijan's brother-in-law wishes she would get trampled by a herd of camels so that he could marry his sister Shalimar to someone affluent and influential . . . And of all the wishes in the world, Adijan wishes the genie she's saddled with would fix her problems instead of treating her with disdain.

Be careful what you wish for in a world of genies, sorcerers, and flying carpet



Mindancer Press

<http://mindancerpress.wordpress.com/books/adijan-and-her-genie/>

# The Worst of It

Bryn Greenwood



**C**am's mother says, "I wish you'd known Cammie before the car wreck." They've only been at dinner for half an hour, and the topic has already come up half a dozen times. Cam peels off a sticky note and slaps it down in front of Shawna. Blue magic marker: "Like being at my own funeral."

Dinner isn't going the way Shawna expected. She thought they'd be eyeing her, giving disapproving looks. Cam's dad says, "I do miss that sweet voice. She used to sing in the choir."

"I was trying to learn sign language," says Cam's sister. "You know, so we could talk that way. Only Cam won't even try. I bet you haven't even opened that book." She's right. The sign language book is being used as a hot pad for the tea kettle, so it won't leave a mark on the dining room table.

Another sticky note, this one written so furiously that the marker has soaked through the paper. Cam slaps it down in the middle of the table, and for several seconds no one reaches for it. Finally, Cam's sister picks it up, reads, passes it around until it reaches Shawna. "I'm not deaf and all it does is encourage people to think of me that way." Shawna tucks it into her pocket with the rest of Cam's notes.

Cam is a sun with an entire system of planets revolving around her—legal pads, dry erase boards, note cards, and a little chalkboard. Each with their own satellites: chalk, pens, ever-sharps, markers.

**S**hawna and Cam met in the laundromat. Cam was wearing a blue shirt with a plunging v-neck and a darker blue ribbon around her

throat. Where other women might have displayed jewelry or just their breasts, she had a fountain pen tucked in the center of her cleavage. The first thing that captivated Shawna was how black the pen was against that very white sternum. The second thing was the way she leaned over Shawna's shoulder and fetched the pen out of its resting place. Confused, surprised, Shawna had watched, then read. Glossy black ink in the margin of her newspaper: "Will you watch my clothes for a sec? I'll bring you a Coke."

"Make it a beer," Shawna said.

Cam smiled, nodded, slipped a hand into her back pocket. She leaned down again, her long blond hair sweeping across Shawna's neck, bare and prickly from her fresh crew cut. In front of Shawna, she placed a small white card. Engraved, green ink on linen weave: Hi, my name is Cameron Lords. Call me Cam. Below that were an e-mail address and a phone number.

That sparked Shawna's interest, but after less than five minutes in the Downy steam of the Suds-N-Duds, she found it was not focused on Cam's lack of voice or that seared-looking scar on her throat that peeped around the edges of the blue ribbon, but on her long fingers working on the next sentence.

**C**am's family is still focused on the voice. Her mother wears reading glasses around her neck, and when the next sticky note is presented, she fumbles for them for the hundredth time, squints uncertainly, forming words with her mouth. "Oh," she says. "I thought you and Terry

were getting along.” Terry is Cam’s soon-to-be ex-roommate.

“We are. But she’s moving in with David, and Shawna’s going to move in with me.” Shawna watches the letters form under Cam’s pen, and then Cam pulls the sticky note from the pad and passes it to her mother. While Mom, Dad and Sis are reading, Cam leans over and kisses Shawna, strokes the back of her neck. No one says anything.

**T**wo months after that, Shawna falls in love with a real desperation. Coming back from studying at the library, she reaches into her pocket for her car keys, and dislodges a cache of notes--the relics of Cam’s conversation. When she bends over to pick them up, one falls open. Pencil on a ragged scrap torn from a sheet of legal paper. “Milk, cereal, tomatoes, strawberries, whipped cream, champagne, flowers hint hint. Did you forget it was our six-month anniversary?” Shawna feels a rush of admiration and longing. The way Cam’s words come together and the line of her arm, shoulder to elbow on the table. The way she pivots her legal pad with just her pinky, from writer to reader. In that instant, Shawna thinks that’s the worst of it: the deep shuddering wonder and the flash of fear that goes with it.

**W**ritten in a hurry as Cam is heading out. Grape-scented gel pen on a to-do list decorated with puppies: “Drop off Salvation Army donations. Thanx, sweetie. Dinner at 6:30.”

Shawna loads them into the trunk of her car, in a haze of innocence. She doesn’t see what’s coming until too late. In the last load, Cam’s old answering machine—like new from the store, in the box with the receipt taped to it. She keeps the boxes and receipts for everything. For as long as Shawna has known her, Cam has used a machine with TDD. This machine must be from before the accident.

The mistake is rushing toward her, like a train coming around a hill, but Shawna opens the box, presses the release button. The door on the front of the machine pops open, revealing the

little message tape. Before Cam comes home, the donations have been dropped off and the answering machine tape is hiding in Shawna’s backpack with the recorder she uses to tape lectures.

She means to listen to it once—just once, for the sake of knowing—but when Cam’s voice comes sprawling out, Shawna understands at last why her family and friends are so obsessed. It’s pure Hoosier, and still it hurts to hear what she lost, what Shawna is missing. “You’ve reached five-three-seven, six-zero-four-five. I’m not promising I’ll call you back, but you’d be increasing your chances if you left an intelligible message after the beep.”

Shawna is aroused by the way Cam’s mouth wraps around the garble of “intelligible,” how she lingers over the laterals, and how “beep” is two small explosions bracketing a vowel. Without a lot of success, Shawna tries to picture the lines of Cam’s lips and teeth and tongue forming those sounds. Rarely does Cam mouth words, except when she flings silent obscenities at other drivers.

Uncomfortable, but compelled, Shawna saves the little tape.

**A** month later Cam’s family begins to nag at her about the possibility of an electronic voice box. Wobbly with emotion, running off the edge of one sheet of notebook paper to another: “It’s like that’s the only part of me they notice. I came out right after the accident, but Mom’s never said anything about that.”

For Shawna, whose mother prays every day for her to go straight, it seems like a blessing that Cam’s family doesn’t argue about that. At dinner, they treat Shawna like family, not like Cam’s roommate. Shawna likes what she thinks of as her suburban in-laws. Against her will, she gets dragged into the arguments.

“But, sweetie, what kind of job are you going to get? You’re just creating all these unnecessary complications for yourself,” Cam’s mother says. She is worrying the chain of her reading glasses. Looking at her, Shawna tries to imagine that Cam will look like that someday: too thin, flat-chested, with her hair frozen in time. She can’t see it.

“Your mother’s right,” says Cam’s dad. Shawna’s father has never said these words. “I thought you wanted to work in non-profit marketing. You were going to apply for the PR internship at the museum. How are you going to be able to do a job like that, when you . . . ?” He looks apologetically at Cam, with pen and paper in hand.

“With the voicebox, you could do a job like that,” says her mother.

Controlled anger: “Are you even reading what I’m writing? Would you please just put your glasses on?”

“God, Cammie, why are you so stubborn?” Sis says.

To Shawna, paper-mangling spikes of fury, cheap hotel pen tearing through the notepad stolen from the same hotel: “What she doesn’t tell you is that she had an uncle with one of them. He had throat cancer. It was scary. None of us kids would get within a hundred yards of him. I don’t want to be like that!!!”

Shawna wants some fierceness, but she is sleek like a seal and cool. The conversations with Cam’s family make her queasy. They go around the table, interrupting each other, half-shouting, even when they aren’t angry. Cam pitches notes at them, sometimes slamming them down in front of the recipient.

Shawna is learning that she doesn’t need to shout or interrupt Cam to be fierce.

“You could just look into the technology. I mean, what if things have gotten better since your uncle? Then you’d know,” Shawna says later, when they’re alone.

Cam listens while Shawna talks, but her pen is already moving. Her rebuttal: “I don’t want to sound like a machine.”

“If you lost your arm and you had to get a prosthetic, I would still love you. It would still be you, even if you had a robot arm. I like robots,” Shawna says.

Cam smiles grudgingly.

Shawna is learning to like hearing herself speak, not to be disturbed by the sound of their conversations—the vocal counterpoint to the quiet scratch of pen on paper. She doesn’t win the argument that night, but Cam nods at what she says. Accepts the points she makes.

It is all a neat balance of Cam’s slowly gentled

defensiveness and Shawna’s budding fierceness until Cam comes home one night and catches Shawna listening to the tape of her voice.

She doesn’t do it obsessively, but that night it strikes her as something pleasant to do while Cam is out enrolling in some parks and recreation class.

Coming home, Cam hears her own voice, approaches, and slams open the bedroom door. There is a long silence as the rest of the tape drags out empty. Cam doesn’t look angry. She looks stricken.

She stomps down the hall, and in the kitchen she fusses with making a snack, strange sparks shooting off her. Shawna goes to her abjectly and says, “So, what did you enroll in?”

Loose pink letters on the dry board on the fridge: “belly dancing.” With a look of dissatisfaction, she draws an editorial half-moon to join the two words.

Shawna tries not to take it personally, because she can see why Cam might be upset, but she doesn’t know what to do about it. She makes a joke of it. “Yeah, she’s giving me the silent treatment,” she tells her co-workers at the greenhouse. Except it isn’t funny; it’s true. Cam’s notes dwindle to stark grade-school letters on the dry board. Her soliloquies of black on yellow stop. There are no more curving, looping, luscious seductions—the heel of her hand caressing the paper as her sharp fingertips palpate a fountain pen.

**T**he worst of it is the invitation that she thrusts into Shawna’s hand as she leaves for class one night. Cheap copy of a copy of a copy, graphics washed out, and type running crooked across the page: You are cordially invited to the Sheik Ali Baba’s for a performance of the Harem.

The recital is at the dance teacher’s house. Shawna feels out of place in her suit and tie, and is forced to introduce herself at the door. Cam is already there, somewhere out of sight. The hostess hugs Shawna against her jiggling brown belly and makes her sit on a pillow and drink wine. After a while all the floor space around the edges of the room is full and someone dims the lights.



When the dancers enter, Shawna identifies Cam from her plump, white hips and her ankles, with their rings of chigger scars. Like all the other dancers, she is made up sootily around the eyes and below that, veiled down to the collarbones. It makes Shawna uneasy, the way Cam's eyes float above the veil, no nose, no mouth. Her belly Shawna knows, but it's strange to see it bared like that, shaken. The house is too warm, and sweat trickles under Shawna's breasts. A little angry now, she squirms on the pillow, takes off her jacket, and mechanically applauds when everyone else does. She spends most of her time trying to make eye-contact with Cam, who refuses to notice.

At intermission, Shawna corners her at the snack table in the side hall. Cam is firing off notes with a golf pencil on a miniature spiral bound notebook that is unfamiliar. A short red-haired woman receives the notes, nodding. The redhead's date stands behind her, picking through a bowl of vegetables. There's no room to maneuver in the hall; it's too narrow and the redhead's date grunts when Shawna pushes past him to get to Cam. The redhead is in the act of taking the notebook when Shawna bumps

into her. "Hi, I'm Shawna," she says too loudly and Cam narrows her eyes, a warning.

"Could you excuse us for a minute?" Shawna asks the redhead and pushes past her until she is chest-to-chest with Cam in the tiny hall. Shawna guides her past the table and through the nearest bedroom door, shuts the door behind them and fumbles for the light switch.

Cam looks at her coolly, waiting. Out of desperation Shawna goes for the veil. She pulls it off, sending bobby pins loose on the floor. Before Cam can set her lips any harder than they are, Shawna kisses her. For lack of any better ideas, she presses Cam down on the disheveled bed, and gets her hand past half a dozen layers of fabric, to Cam's breast. Her legs are tangled up in the ballooning skirt, and her belt buckle scrapes on Cam's bare belly.

Belatedly, Shawna thinks of the redhead in the hall, still holding the notebook.

Cam lies back, her clothes deranged, holding the stub of pencil in one hand. Her lips are blurry with smudged lipstick. She doesn't resist when Shawna takes the pencil and tosses it on the floor.

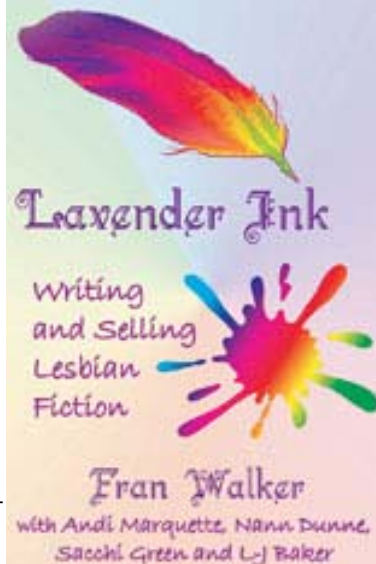


Want to write lesbian fiction for publication?

Everything you need to know is now in one entertaining book by Fran Walker, with chapters by Andi Marquette, Nann Dunne, Sacchi Green, and L-J Baker

Coming soon from  
Nuance Books

<http://nuancebooks.wordpress.com/books/lavender-ink-writing-and-selling-lesbian-fiction/>



## In the Morning

Amelia Beamer



In the morning, Gina will leave. If it snows, Amy will throw snowballs at Gina's car as Gina drives away. The snowballs are Amy's way of saying she loves Gina and she doesn't want her to go. They will hit the car, thump, thump, and then they will melt, leaving white mineral tracks. But the love will be there, Gina thinks, and she will feel guilty. She closes her email, just as Amy pokes her head in.

"You're just staring at the computer," Amy says. "Are you finished packing?"

"Yes," Gina lies. She takes a sip of wine that tastes like wood; like it might splinter her tongue.

"Did you remember your bathing suit, for the hotel?" Amy holds onto the doorway, one hand on her hip, and one foot on the opposite knee. The kettle's brr comes then from the kitchen, and Amy turns away, her pajamas swishing as she walks. Tea. Amy always drinks tea.

Gina thinks of the woman she will see, the woman she's been emailing with nearly every day. Gina wagers to herself: if it's green tea, I won't go through with it. If it's black, I won't feel guilty. Gina follows Amy to the kitchen, but she can't see the label on the teabag, and she smells only Amy's lemon shampoo.

"I don't think I'll have time to go swimming," Gina says. "It'll just be attending meetings and doing workshops, and then going out to dinner with work people." Gina has to know. "What kind of tea is that?"

Amy tells her through the steam. "Chamomile." It is of no help.

In the morning, Amy will get up to see Gina off. Then she'll come back inside and try to fall asleep while the bed is still warm. It's hard to sleep alone; the bed gets larger, more accusatory.

Her tea warm in her belly, Amy brushes her teeth, looking at her reflection in the mirror. She and Gina have been living together for over six years. Amy's teeth are still white and shiny, but there are more lines around her eyes.

Gina comes into the bathroom then, through the open door, and puts her hands on Amy's hips. She kisses Amy's neck, watching their reflections through the steamy mirror.

Amy leans forward, spits and rinses. "You ready for tomorrow?" she says, stepping aside.

"I'll finish packing in the morning." Gina is better about mornings. The bed doesn't hold her as closely as it holds Amy. Even when Amy is holding Gina also, the two of them, Amy and the bed, are not enough to keep Gina once she's awake.

Gina reaches for her toothbrush, and Amy's hand goes for Gina's, of its own will. Their fingers entwine, so familiar they've lost their intimacy.

Amy won't say anything, she decides. Nothing about how much time Gina spends on the computer, laughing to herself. Nothing about how Amy has never once looked at Gina's email. Amy is silent, holding Gina's hand as if they could communicate just by touch.

"Let's do it before you go," Amy says. "Okay?" Amy kisses Gina without waiting for an answer. Their tongues explore; Gina tastes like she always does, only bitter from the wine. Gina's

fingers are on Amy's face and in her hair, and her touch is intense. It's as if Gina is already thinking about what might please someone else. It is too much for Amy.

"You're going to come home, right?" Amy asks. She doesn't mean to say it, but now it's said and she can't undo it.

"Honey." Gina presses her forehead against Amy's. "Of course I'm coming home. I don't have to go."

"No, you should go," Amy says, not wanting to have this conversation. There is something at the back of her throat. It has to come out. "You enjoy yourself with whoever you're seeing, and you bring your energy back here when you're done." She is angry but mostly sad, and also shocked that she said anything.

From the way Gina's eyes go wide, Amy realizes her guess was right, and now she's given Gina permission. She wishes she hadn't. Amy kisses Gina before either of them can say anything, and pushes her against the wall damp with shower steam. The kiss is deep, and rough, and it moves between them like language.

Amy leads Gina to the bedroom, on the way glancing around as if she could memorize their life together. That pile of laundry there, a photograph from Cancun over there. Their sex is hot, desperate; wet skin and pressure, and Amy can feel the world ready to break apart.

In the morning, Gina will leave.



## Year's Best Lesbian Fiction, 2008 Edition

Nominations and submissions are being accepted for the first Year's Best Lesbian Fiction anthology. Anyone can nominate their favorite lesbian short story published in 2008.

Editor: Fran Walker

Judges: Lynn Pierce, moderator of *lesfic\_unbound* and Joan Opyr, author of *Idaho Code*  
Submission period: December 11, 2008 to January 31, 2009

Eligibility: Short stories with a lesbian character or theme, first published in an edited market in 2008, including stories from e-presses, print presses, journals, and zines.

Restrictions: No fan-fic. No unpublished, self-published, or vanity-published fiction. No stories that are strictly romance or erotica. Stories with erotic or romantic components are acceptable, but this collection is intended to complement rather than overlap with the Year's Best Lesbian Erotica and Year's Best Lesbian Romance anthologies.

Payment: \$25 + one contributor's copy.

Purchasing: reprint rights (trade paperback) for 18 months.

Scheduled publication date: June 2009

Visit <http://www.bedazzledink.com/nuance/yblf2008.html> to nominate your favorite story.

# Blackbirds and Blossoms

S. V. Green



*red dawn  
in my dreams  
I have walked with you  
now, the sound of  
footsteps in the dark*

**O**n the day I was to be sword-sworn, the Emperor Daisuke ordered a burning.

Mistress Kaede came to me in the antechamber of Seiobo's temple, where I had spent the night in preparation for the swearing ceremony. She carried a tray of sticky rice and cold black tea, but the look in her eyes was enough to silence my hunger.

"What is it, Mistress?" I asked, inwardly shaking. Had she uncovered those thoughts I spent all night trying to silence? Was she ready, even now, to call off my binding to Akane and hand me over to the Emperor?

But no, it was someone else's ill-luck to be the center of Daisuke's wrath that day.

"His Majesty has sentenced Lady Chinatsu Hashimoto to be burned," Kaede said simply, setting the tray down on the floor in front of me. Her trailing purple sleeves were dampened around her wrists, the only sign that she had been crying. I didn't blame her; most of the Court knew that Chinatsu had been Kaede's most faithful student.

"Oh, Mistress." I sighed, longing to place a comforting hand on her shoulder, though physical contact was denied to the sword-sworn before their ceremony. "For what crime?"

"There is only one." She straightened and gestured sharply for me to eat. "She loved her sword-brother."

I called on years of training to keep my body

under control, to keep my eyes from betraying me. The bonds that held sword-sworn brothers or sisters together were the strongest known to mankind; to replace them with something so low as the bond between lovers was grave heresy indeed. For this reason, Mistress Kaede tried to arrange it so that sword-sisters would only bond with other sisters.

She couldn't know that, in my case, such precautions were worse than useless.

I shoved a massive spoonful of rice into my mouth and chewed slowly, hoping the obvious effort would excuse my silence.

"Daisuke has ordered that Chinatsu's sword be melted and scattered before her death," Kaede said. "And I've appointed you to the task. You can finish it before the swearing ceremony begins."

"And Akane?"

Something like a smile twitched the corners of Kaede's lips. "She is in the temple of Bishamon, probably composing poems to the sun. Don't worry; I wouldn't dream of dragging such a delicate creature into this nightmare." In the heat of battle, Akane could hardly be called "delicate," but I understood what Kaede was saying. My future sword-sister, who looked as if she were made of ink and white cherry blossoms, had never been apt at dealing with the grimy world of politics.

As I swallowed the last of the rice, Mistress Kaede lifted the tray and turned to leave the antechamber. "Wait!" I called. The reference to Akane's writing had reminded me of something.

She raised both straight black eyebrows.

"I know it is Akane's place to write the

binding-poem, but could I perhaps write a farewell for Chinatsu?"

Kaede stiffened; while sword-sworn were trained in the art of poetry, it was rare for farewell poems to be written for condemned traitors. At best, it would be Chinatsu's place, as the younger of her sworn pair, to compose one for herself and her lover on her own.

But surely Chinatsu would not be expected to recite while breathing in the flames of her own pyre?

My Mistress sighed a little, casting a glance at the rising sun. "Do what you think is best, my child."

I sat down on the steps and began to compose.

*tears for you  
darken my sleeves  
one by one  
the blackbirds take off  
from cherry branches*

**H**eat from the forge seemed to catch in my hair like salt from a sea-wind. I piled more coals over the blade of Chinatsu's sword, watching the dark steel redden and go soft. Whatever my poem may have said, any tears for her were burned away by the fire's merciless breath.

*Poor Chinatsu*, I thought, for what must have been the hundredth time that morning. While there is sense in ensuring no lovers' quarrels between a pair of sword-sworn, it is foolish to assume all love will end in pettiness. Why can a sword-sworn not love her sword-brother?

*Or her sword-sister?*

I pictured Akane's face, her high cheekbones touched with a trace of petal-pinkness, her wide black eyes with their long, elegant lashes. I pictured her hands, with their long white fingers and web of scars across the backs, and imagined what they would feel like in a lover's caress . . .

"No!" I snapped the word aloud, fighting to control my mind as well as I could control my body. The steel of Chinatsu's sword began to run through the coals, and I imagined my feelings for Akane running through the veins in just the same way. A red-hot poison, waiting to destroy me.

And worse, to destroy Akane.

I pulled the sword from the fire, shaking drops of molten metal from the tip. It would not do to melt and scatter it, to break forever the bond Chinatsu shared with her sword-brother.

And so, because I would have wanted someone to do it for Akane and me, I buried Chinatsu's sword beneath the branches of a cherry tree.

*at dawn this morning  
two birds rose together  
as I take your hand  
let us become as those birds  
held together by light*

**A**kane's voice floated through the air of the temple, soft and musical as birdsong. Only the sight and sound of such beauty could keep my eyes from wandering toward the temple windows, which opened out onto a cloud of thick black smoke.

Through the bond of our joined hands, Akane felt me shudder.

"What is it, Sister?" she whispered. Beneath the chanting taken up by Mistress Kaede and the assembled crowd, no one could hear us speak.

"Nothing, Sister," I replied with a tight smile. Oh, how I longed to call her by a different name!

We came at last to the binding-by-blood, the most sacred part of the ceremony. Kaede pulled a long ivory dagger from her sleeve and handed it to me; as the elder of the sworn-pair, it was my place to do the cutting.

I rolled my own sleeve back from my right hand, took the dagger up in my left, and drew a shallow crescent-shaped gouge in my palm. Then I reached for Akane and made the same mark on hers. When we clasped hands again, I felt the hot blood mingling between our palms.

For a brief moment, her fingers tightened around mine, the possessive squeeze of a pearl diver's hand around a particularly valuable gem. I caught her gaze, almost frightened of what I might see; but the petal-soft flush of pleasure in her skin was not, could not be for me. It was excitement that had strengthened her grasp, not desire.

"You are now sword-sisters," Kaede announced. A cheer went up from the crowd, followed by loud chanting. Kaede joined in, her deep voice running through the air like a river's current.

I looked away, wishing the music was loud enough to shield me from the sound of my own heartbeat.

"Something is bothering you," Akane hissed. "What is it, Sister? You can tell me."

"No, I can't."

I risked glancing back at her and saw the color drain from her skin. Anger sharpened the lines of her beautiful face. "Then tell me this. Why did we become sword-sworn to each other if you cannot even share your thoughts with me?"

"You would be angry to hear them." Through our joined hands, I felt something sure through her, a shot of eagerness beneath the anger. What did she expect me to say? Worse, what did she expect to tell me? "My thoughts are . . . sinful."

"Nothing you think could ever be a sin to me."

Fearful, I raised my eyes to her face and saw something take shape there, something I had never dared visualize, not even in my dreams. I saw terror there, drawing lines around her mouth like the cracks starting in a vase before it shatters. I saw the first lifting of the mask we had both been trained to hide our feelings behind, the mask I had worn so well—the mask she had worn so well. As though she were brushing the wing of an injured bird, she gently raised our joined hands and pressed her lips against them.

"I love you," she whispered.

"Oh, Akane!" Despite the wet blood still on my palm, despite the hundreds of eyes fixed on us, I cupped my hands around her face and pulled her into an embrace.

The chanting had stopped, like an attacking sword blocked in mid-swing. I looked up to see Mistress Kaede's eyes fixed on me, her lips bared in a snarl. Perhaps it was only my imagination, but her black eyes seemed clouded as if with smoke. For one fleeting moment, terror hardened in my chest.

"What is the meaning of this?"

"Mistress," I said, stepping away from Akane

just long enough to bow. "I beg your pardon . . ."

"*What*," she hissed again, spittle flying from her lips, "is the meaning of this?"

Akane took a step forward, but kept one hand on my waist. Even through the layers of my robes, her warmth was comforting. "It means, Mistress Kaede, that we have discovered a bond more powerful than that of sword-sisters."

Kaede moved down from the temple stairs until she was on level with us. "I watched a student burn today," she said, softly enough that only we two could hear. "Don't ask me to do it again!"

"We won't," I said. Akane, fearless as always, gave my hand another light squeeze. Thankful for her strength, I turned to Kaede and prepared to sever myself from all I held dear—once. "Forgive us, Mistress, but we must leave. I am very grateful for your training. But it is clear that we will not fit in with your ranks of sword-sworn."

"You would give it up? For *this*?" She raised her fist, and for a moment, I thought she meant to strike me. But she lowered it quickly with a sigh. It broke my heart to see that there was true affection beneath the anger, and true fear. "Love doesn't last, little one."

"Some love doesn't," Akane said. "But not ours. I swear it." She turned to address the assembled crowd, all of whom had already risen to their feet. Some had already left the temple; others paused in their departure at the sound of her steel-strong voice, turning to hear what she had to say. "Our love was friendship before it was attraction. Our love is like the bond between sword-sisters, built upon cooperation and shared needs—but stronger."

"Like a blackbird and a cherry tree," I said. Though not as lovely as hers, my voice matched Akane's for strength. "Natural. Beautiful."

And though cherry blossoms wilted, and blackbirds flew away in the winter, the bond they shared could not be broken.

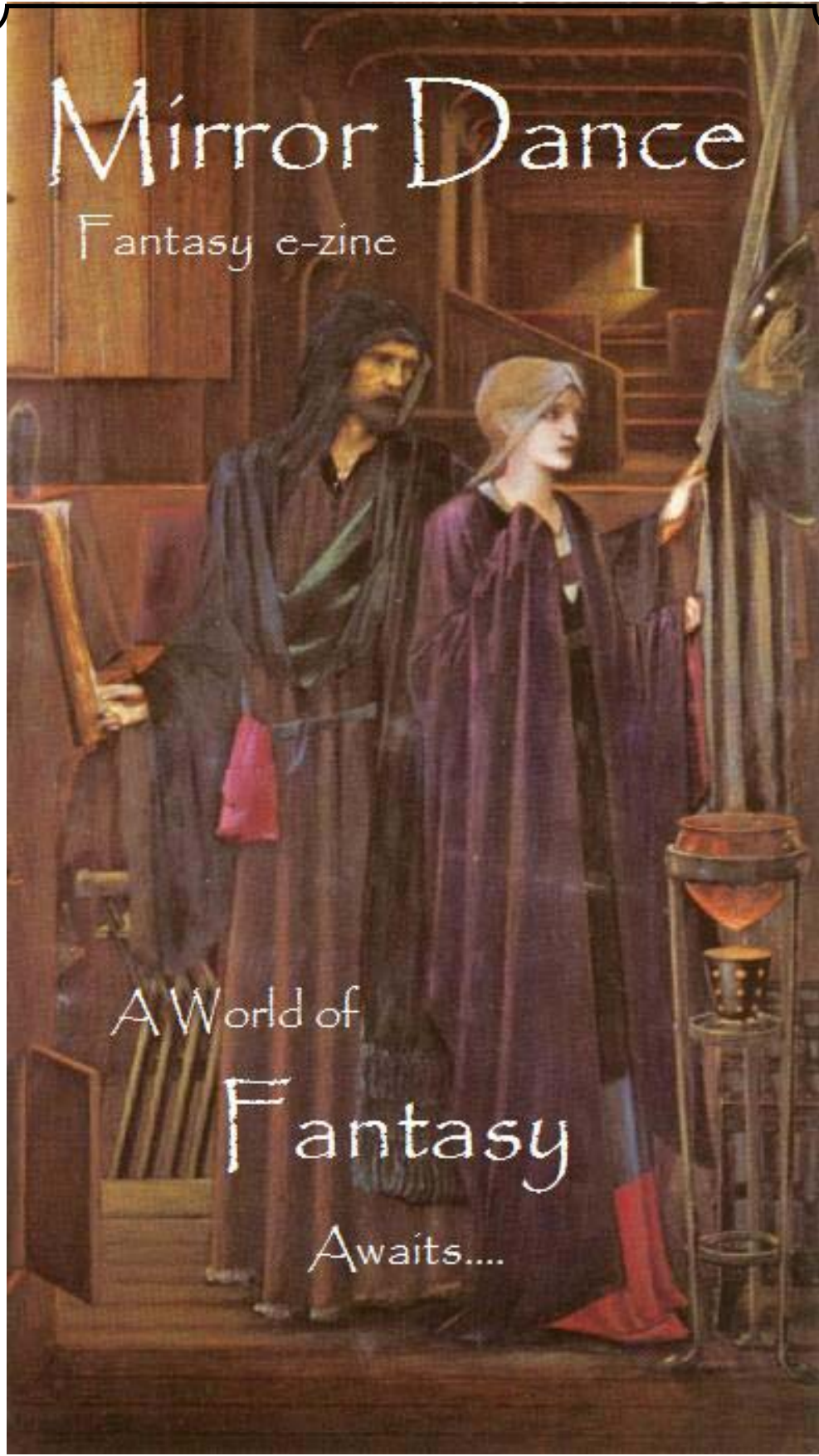
With Akane's hand in mine, I left the temple of the sword-sworn.

*red dawn  
darkens my sleeve  
as I take your hand in mine  
nothing in this world  
but blackbirds and blossoms*



# Mirror Dance

Fantasy e-zine



A World of

# Fantasy

Awaits....

[mirrordancefantasy.blogspot.com](http://mirrordancefantasy.blogspot.com)

# Does the Butch Come With the Recipe?

Cheri Crystal



**S**ummer league softball. Tristan Rizzo in hot pants up to her *pupik*, carrying three pizzas in the crook of her arm and supporting a large oil-slicked bag under her chin. Garlic and Parmesan wafted past Cyndy's nose. Loads of beer, pizza, and only one game left before the play-offs; once upon a time, that's all Cyndy Kaplan wanted. But something changed, and she'd be damned if she knew what it was.

Cyndy stood on the mound and was all psyched to pitch a rising fast ball. She wanted to beat her 60 mph record. Just as she cocked her arm, Lucky breezed past her from second base and offered Tristan a hand.

"Here, let me help you with that, little lady." Lucky was smooth with a razor sharp reputation. Cyndy had little respect for her type, and Tristan could do with some protecting.

"Practice isn't over. What's with the food?" Cyndy scolded. She caught Lucky hanging on Tristan and was about to get nasty, but her gaze fell upon Tristan's cleavage.

"It'll get cold," Tristan said, flashing Cyndy a dazzling smile to beat all tooth whitening ads.

"All right. Time out." It was impossible to resist the pleased look on Tristan's face. "Fifteen minutes," Cyndy shouted.

The sky suddenly darkened as Tristan laid out paper plates and napkins on a nearby picnic bench. They had no time to seek shelter in their cars. It would be hot and stuffy in the dugout, but at least they'd be off the windy field. In no time, an electric storm raged around the women huddled over their lunch. Cyndy never missed an opportunity to brainstorm. She stood expectantly with her hands on her hips.

"We'll need some serious funds if we're

going to take the whole team to Fort Lauderdale for the play-offs. Any ideas, ladies?" Cyndy could command a room the size of Giants Stadium. She was one kick-ass, take-charge Aries and nothing was beyond her reach.

Tristan Rizzo waved her cap in the air. Her long brunette curls bounced around the hollow of her neck, just above her ample breasts and looped around the back beyond her shoulder blades. Her cleavage was tough enough to miss, but the faint outline of dark nipples through white on lace made Cyndy sweat. Tristan looked fragile but she played a tough game. Her tits bobbed nicely when she went for the ball. It was hard for anyone not to get distracted. She wouldn't have minded a piece of that, but it was out of the question.

Since when was Cyndy one to stand on ceremony where a gorgeous femme with a generous mouth, ample tits, and the most fabulous ass was concerned? There was something different about Tristan. And it was more than her sexy body, quick wit, and charm. Tristan was a lot of fun and easy to be around. The last time Cyndy fell for a team member; it had landed her physically, emotionally and financially drained. She had vowed never to think with her clit again. Cyndy peered up the legs of Tristan's short shorts. She saw not even a glimpse of underwear and cleared her throat.

"I know. How about we sell candy bars?"

"We're a softball team. Not a bunch of cheerleaders." Cyndy hadn't meant to sound gruff, but next to pitching softballs, teasing Tristan was her favorite sport. "Any other ideas?"

"Car wash?" said the outfielder.

"Charge admission?" Lucky's deep voice re-



verberated in the dugout. She was born Lucy Travers but dubbed Lucky because of her bedroom hopping antics.

"Against the rules," Cyndy said.

Tristan hunched a bit but stood when Cyndy was about to call on someone else, as if these grown women were still in school. The team was made up of professionals, some in high-powered positions, but they didn't want the responsibility and administrative duties that Cyndy took on. "Tristan, you look about to burst."

"I say we put together a cookbook." Her green eyes shimmered when a flash of lightning illuminated her face. The others laughed aloud. Somehow, this irritated Cyndy. She patted the air with her palms until everyone settled down.

"Who is going to buy our cookbooks? The PTA?" More guffaws.

"There are five hundred women in our division alone. At say, twenty dollars a pop, that's a nice chunk of change right there." Tristan gathered her curls in a makeshift ponytail and then let it fall. If she tossed her head to and fro, she could pose for a Pantene Shampoo commercial. Cyndy tried to stifle a smile. She had to give Tris credit for not letting anyone intimidate her.

"We make it a butch cookbook," Tristan said. "With recipes for hungry women in a hurry." A unanimous vote decided the next fundraiser. The storm lifted and steam rose off wet grass in the bright sunshine.

**C**yndy set up the committee but let Tris run it. They met weekly over beers, chips and dip. ESPN provided background entertainment. Their titles ranged from, *Bitchin' in the Kitchen* to *Breakfast with Butch*. Cyndy looked forward to their meetings almost as much as to practice and to winning games.

Cyndy had never been inside Tristan's apartment before. It was a bit too country and frilly, but it suited Tristan, whose legs were bare and shapely beneath her sundress. The sandals she wore made her a mere three inches taller than Cyndy's five-foot-two inch frame.

"Make yourself comfortable in the living room. Lucky and Sylvia are in there already. I have to take the cheese puffs out of the oven." When she came out of the kitchen holding a tray of

munchies, Cyndy's mouth watered from more than the delicious aroma.

"Cyn," Tristan said casually, "mind taking out two cases of beer from the fridge?"

Cyndy tightened her grip on the beverages when she caught the sway of Tristan's ass as she sauntered into the living room. Lucky and the others pounced on her like a pack of wolves that hadn't eaten in days. When Tristan bent down to put the tray on the coffee table, her breasts threatened to fall out.

Lucky stuffed a handful of nachos into her mouth and then chased it with a hefty slug of beer. With her mouth still full, she managed, "I say we start with Clit-Teasers for appetizers." Lucky chewed through her self-satisfied grin.

"You would," added Cyndy dryly after Tristan laughed at Lucky's wise-crack.

"What'll be the main course," Sylvia, the catcher, offered helpfully, "Pussy Pot Roast?"

"Be serious, you guys," Tristan chided but grinned.

"Meaty chicken breasts baked to perfection."

"Served with an order of hot, spicy tongue on top."

"Does the butch come with the recipe?"

Tristan asked innocently. And they all howled, especially Cyndy.

Between jokes and munchies, they'd managed to outline the table of contents. Cyndy checked her watch, stood, and smoothed out her jeans. "Well, it's getting late and tomorrow's work." Standing offered only a slight relief from the pressure her pants placed on her crotch after one too many beers and whatever Tristan called those cheese things that she couldn't stop eating. They melted in her mouth, and Cyndy's mouth hadn't had anything tasty in quite the while.

Cyndy watched while Tristan let the others out. Lucky lingered, chewing on her lip. Short but quick on her feet; Cyndy practically pushed Lucky out the door.

"Okay, that went well." Tristan clapped her hands together. Her manicured nails were painted a neutral shade. Cyndy's hands were stubby in comparison, but once upon a time, she made up for it with technique. Once upon a time, she enjoyed playing the field. But those days were long gone.

Tristan started to clear the table.

"Here, let me help you with that." Cyndy took a stack of plates from Tristan's hands.

"That's okay. I can do it in the morning."

"I insist. Besides, I owe you an apology for scoffing at your idea."

"Thanks," Tristan said, picking up the empties. "We'll get a break publishing because my dad owns a small press. I bet we sell out." She brushed past Cyndy and into the small kitchen.

Cyndy frowned when the task was done. She wiped her palms on her jeans and stuffed her fists into her pockets. "I guess I'll be going then. See you at practice."

"It's only half past eleven. Stay a few more minutes. I could make us some coffee."

"I can't. It'll keep me up all night."

"Is that so bad?" Tristan smiled suggestively. Her swollen breasts were too close to Cyndy's face. Tristan's floral sweet scent mingled with her own musk in the tiny kitchen. It seemed as if Tristan was about to offer a four course meal with five star quality food but Cyndy forgot her wallet. Abruptly she moved away and knocked the tray of nachos off the counter. It crashed to the floor. Guacamole and salsa went flying, creating a colorful display on the stark white cabinets and linoleum floor. Even the oven door was covered in goo.

"Oh God, I'm sorry." They both went to get it and bumped heads on the way down. "My fault. Allow me." Cyndy tried to gather the sauce in her hands and only made more of a mess. It dripped through her fingers. She held up her hands trying to avoid getting any on her shirt and licked the outside of her palm. "Mmm, de-lish. You have to put this in the book."

"Good thing I washed the floor today." Tristan's good-natured laugh ended abruptly. She grabbed Cyndy's hand. "Oh no, your shirt!" Tristan reached behind her for a dish towel, which was stuck to a spatula tangled in an oven mitt. In her haste, Tristan knocked a pitcher half-filled with iced tea off the counter.

Cyndy caught it before the glass met the floor.

"Good save," Tristan said. "Oh, but look what you did."

Cyndy surveyed the damage.

"No, not the kitchen. I can clean it easily

enough. Look at your shirt and pants. It'll stain if we don't try to get it out right away."

Cyndy pulled the tea, salsa, and guacamole soaked shirt away from her body. Her light blue button-down resembled an art project gone wrong. She let go of the soiled fabric and shrugged. A smattering of green and red glided down towards her belt. Tristan caught it before it landed. She licked her fingers and laughed.

Cyndy watched Tristan eat the food off her clothes and put some in her mouth too. "I have lots of other shirts."

"I'm sure you do. But I like the way this one hugs your—" Tristan flushed at having been caught eyeing Cyndy's breasts.

That gnawing in Cyndy's gut started again. She couldn't stop the want any more than she could stop the rain. She moved closer and realized too late. "I'll ruin your dress."

Tristan held her arms. "I don't care."

Cyndy leaned in and ran her tongue over Tristan's swollen lips; the very ones she dreamed about. Tristan's mouth welcomed her. Soft moans amidst spicy salsa and smooth avocado was tasty, but Tristan was delectable. Cyndy pressed her mouth more urgently. With their breasts squashed between wet clothes, Cyndy's nipples became as hard as Tristan's.

"Let me take this off." Tristan's words a faint breeze as Cyndy allowed Tristan to unbutton her shirt revealing her naked flesh. Tristan licked up the mess and bit on Cyndy's nipples.

"Oh Tris." Cyndy cradled Tristan's head and as hard as it was to make her stop, she had to.

Tristan's eyes went wild. Her green irises were reduced to a tiny ring around huge black orbs that Cyndy could get lost in. Cyndy stilled Tristan's quivering lower lip with her teeth. She sucked on Tristan's sweet moistness there for a while.

"Wait," Cyndy started. When she noticed her palms firm upon Tristan's chest, she pulled away and banged her hip on a cabinet. She buttoned her shirt and haphazardly stuffed the ends into her pants.

"I've waited . . . patiently, I might add, and now it's time to take what I've wanted since the moment I joined your team." Tristan's pout accentuated the most willing mouth Cyndy had ever seen.

Cyndy ignored the lack of space between them and stood taller. “That was like two years ago.”

Tristan gathered her hair the way she always did. Raising her arms had the added benefit of lifting her breasts until Cyndy could not ignore the moisture pooling in her pants.

“That,” Tristan said, “is precisely why ‘wait’ is not the right answer.”

“We can’t do this.” Cyndy regretted the words the second they passed her lips.

Tristan moved closer until their noses were a hair apart. “And why not?”

“Because I said so.”

Tristan snickered.

“There’s also the matter of who is in charge here.” Cyndy puffed out her chest.

“I’d say I’m the boss seeing as how you’re standing on my turf.”

“I hadn’t figured you for that type.”

“Looks can be deceiving then. You’d be surprised by what I’m capable of when I want something. And I just might have to teach you a lesson for being so darn smug. And so incredibly sexy.”

“Are you challenging me?”

“Perhaps.” Tristan slinked her hand along Cyndy’s collar. She turned toward the sink, ran the tap, and made a show of washing the front of her dress but splashing the back while she was at it.

Every pressure point in Cyndy’s body sent distress signals. Been there, done that, reverberated in her brain, but her painful nipples and pulsating clit drowned out the sounds of reason.

Too late. Tristan Rizzo, Cyndy’s naughty nightly fantasy, moved in for the kill. “Your shirt’s buttoned all wrong. Let me fix it.” Tristan pinched Cyndy’s nipples between her fingers, sending powerful waves of pleasure. “Better yet, take it off. Now.”

“Is that an order?”

“Yes.” Tristan took Cyndy’s shirt and dumped it in the sink. “Now the pants. I can be quite the boss when I set my mind to it. And I plan to cook you until I’ve perfected the recipe and you’re done to perfection.”



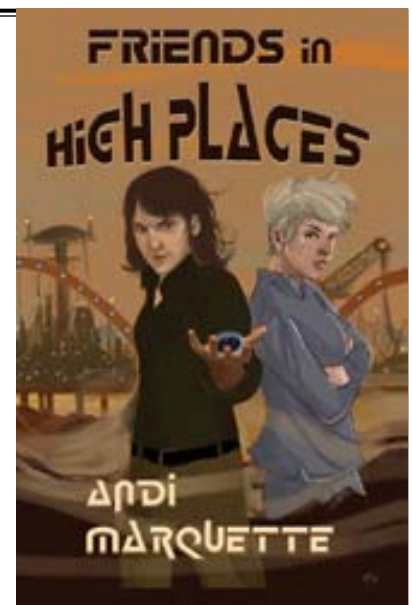
Read about the adventures of Torri and Kai.

**Friends in High Place**  
the first book of the  
**Far Seek Chronicles**



Mindancer Press

<http://mindancerpress.wordpress.com/books/friends-in-high-places/>



# In Every Port

Geonn Cannon



**T**he flight from Cairo to Chicago had seemed endless. She had spent four days in the middle of the desert, in a hotel with a broken shower and an iffy air conditioner, on what had to be the hottest days of the year. When her assignment finally ended, she found herself stuffed into a sardine can with two hundred other stinky, sweaty fellow humans for the thirteen-hour flight home. But finally, Nicole Bronwyn was back where she belonged.

The yellow blouse that had been crisp and fresh in Egypt was a wrinkled, sweaty mess by the time she finally entered the lobby of her apartment building. It was unbuttoned over a white T-shirt that had also seen better days. She was wrapped in dirty laundry and was trying with all her might not to acknowledge that thing she had been smelling since the airport was, indeed, coming from her. Good thing I told Dana I would arrive too late for her to pick me up, she thought. It was bad enough that the cabbie had to smell her; being trapped in a car with that smell might have sent Dana running for the hills.

She dragged two monstrous suitcases behind her, their wheels drumming loudly on the lobby's tile floor. Her dark hair was limp and lifeless, hung in a sloppy noose of elastic to keep it out of her face. The bags under her eyes were hidden by a pair of sunglasses, making her feel like a celebrity trying to slip past the paparazzi.

Egypt had been hell. Literally minutes after landing, Nick had been spotted by Sheri, an old business and personal acquaintance of Nick's. Sheri had been born in England to Egyptian parents, moved to Cairo and then returned to England to start climbing the corporate ladder. They had met when Nick sold some photos to

the newspaper where Sheri was editor. That first meeting had consisted of few cocktails, a shared cab back to the hotel and nature had taken its course. After that, they had continued to meet now and again. Whether Nick had photos to sell, or if they happened to be in the same town itching for a quick and dirty reunion, they didn't let one world affect the other.

Of course, Nick wasn't exactly on the market anymore. Sheri had latched onto her and suggested they get to the hotel as soon as possible. Nick had politely declined. Sheri had asked if that night would be better. Nick had been forced to reveal the awful truth: "I'm sorry. I'm in a relationship."

Sheri hadn't exactly turned into an iceberg, but her shoulder could have been a little warmer on their shared cab ride. Nick apologized, and Sheri accepted it, but their conversation had been stunted. They had parted with an agreement to share a dinner sometime during their stay in Egypt, a date neither of them kept, and Nick had been stuck under a dark cloud ever since.

The elevator was an ancient model, with a pull-down grate instead of a door. She stepped inside, stretched up to grab the door handle and bent low to pull it down to the ground. She latched it and pressed the button for the third floor. The depression didn't come from her confrontation with Sheri. It came from the realization, heretofore ignored, that she would have similar situations waiting for her all over the world.

Before meeting Dana, she had been quite the player. She had gone all over the world for various photo shoots, gathering pictures for her coffee table books and for various news

services. She had never felt the need to settle down. All she wanted was satisfaction, and if she could get that from a series of different women around the world, then why not? Wasn't variety the spice of life? She had Simone in France, Brigit in England, Zoe in Australia and Kimberly in Japan. Then, of course, there were Kate and Amy in Washington. The island was Nick's home away from home, the one time a three-way relationship had actually worked out. It would be hard to say goodbye to that, but for Dana, she was willing. The downside was that all of her relationships, all around the world, would have to be dealt with.

She sighed at the thought and raised the elevator door again. She pulled her luggage into the apartment, but left the bags immediately inside the door. No need to drag them all the way to the bedroom at the moment. Besides, the wheels rolling across the hardwood floor would wake Dana. She stood at the threshold of her home for a moment, her base of operations, and was surprised by how a lot of tiny changes had completely changed the look of the place.

A knitted afghan, worn and ancient, was balled up in the corner of the couch where it could easily be drawn over two exhausted bodies for the last half hour of a movie. The table behind the couch had always had the little brown lamp, but it had never been on when she came home before. Nick had never needed or wanted a light left on for her, but standing in the dimly-lit apartment, she suddenly saw the appeal. There were other things—a handful of framed photographs on the mantle, an extra pair of shoes next to the elevator, a magazine that Nick would never read on the coffee table—that revealed that Nick was no longer the sole owner of the space, not the ruler of her roost.

In the past, a woman bringing a toothbrush over was enough to make Nick claustrophobic. She had once broken up with a long-time booty call because the woman had the audacity to bring in the morning paper and read the comics before Nick got out of the shower. The rule had always been "My apartment, my stuff." But as she walked into the kitchen, she spotted a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame souvenir oven mitt hanging from the cupboard handle. She had never even been to Ohio.

Nick sighed and undid the bottom button of her blouse, untucked her T-shirt, and stripped both of them off. She draped the sweaty clothes over her shoulder and opened the refrigerator to see if there was anything to eat. Tupperware containers held leftovers of meals that had taken place in her apartment without her present. She didn't have time to think about it too hard, since the cool air suddenly washed over her. She sighed, opened the freezer door and sagged forward with her eyes closed.

She finally opened her eyes, took one of the Tupperware containers of Chinese food out of the fridge and dropped it onto the counter. She kicked off her shoes and perched on the stool, unwrapping a pair of chopsticks from the drawer. She picked lazily at the chicken and rice, interested only in silencing the growl in her stomach before she went to bed. Ah, bed. That huge queen-sized monster that she had once had all to herself. Funny how eager she suddenly was to give up fifty percent of the real estate to another person. She had always sworn that her bed, on her turf, was sacrosanct. She might have fifty lovers out there in the world somewhere, but home was home. Even when she hooked up with someone in Chicago, she insisted on using their apartment, their bed.

Until Dana. They had met at a restaurant, both dining alone. Nick was fine with the idea of eating alone at a table for two, but Dana had meekly asked if she could join her. Fine, whatever, she was attractive enough. They talked, hit it off, and Nick suggested they share a cab back to "your apartment," leaving it up to Dana whether they went home together. She didn't have to wait long for an answer. Groping in the backseat, a fierce first kiss, and a race upstairs to Dana's fourth-floor walk-up. By the time they got undressed, they were both right on the edge. Their first time had been on the floor of Dana's apartment, followed by a quick breather and then an encore in Dana's bed. It was business as usual for Nick.

But that was where "the usual" stopped. The following night, Nick had gone out to a bar and found herself wondering where Dana was. If she was on the prowl again, if someone else might have picked her up. It took Nick two hours and three drinks to realize that she was jealous. So

she had gone back to Dana's apartment building and buzzed to see if she was home. She was, and invited Nick up for a drink.

After their second night together, when Nick woke to realize she had spent the entire night, Dana had suggested an actual date. Dinner, drinks, and a movie. It went against Nick's religion, but there was a movie she wanted to see. And she hated going to the theater alone. "Ticket for one" just sounded so depressing. So she had agreed.

That first date ended with a chaste kiss and a promise to call. Nick imagined all the calls she would have to ignore and wondered how long it would be before Dana got the point and faded into the background. The day after their date, Nick was shocked to find herself dialing Dana's number and setting up a second date.

More movies followed. Their restaurant dates soon grew into quiet dinners together at one apartment or another. It was during a DVD marathon that Nick, realizing it was too late for Dana to head home, first offered her bed to another woman. Three months later, Dana was practically moved in and all Nick worried about was whether she had enough closet space.

What happened to 'I need my freedom'? What happened to 'my space is my space'? She didn't regret Dana moving in. She was just dumbfounded by her acceptance of it. When did I become Miss Domestic? When did I become the kind of woman who has a girlfriend waiting at home? And when did I decide I liked being that kind of woman?

"When you met Dana," she said quietly. She stuck the chopsticks into the rice, rubbed her palms against her thighs, and stood up. She returned the Chinese food to the fridge, unzipped her jeans and pushed them down her legs. She dumped them and her shirts into the hamper next to the bedroom door and walked in her socks toward the bathroom.

"Mm, Nick?"

"Shh, baby. Go back to sleep."

Dana was a silhouette in the darkness, lit from behind by the streetlight outside. Her auburn hair was mussed from sleep, and Nick could picture her eyes half-open and struggling to focus without her glasses. "Hi. Welcome home."

"Thanks. I have to take a shower . . ."

"Come here first."

"Dayne, I stink."

"I don't care." She held out her hand, and Nick couldn't resist. She walked across the room, very aware that she was only in her underwear, and knelt down next to the bed. She took Dana's hand, kissed the knuckles and then kissed her lips. Dana jerked her head back after the kiss. "Goddamn it, baby . . ."

"I told you." Nick chuckled. She climbed into bed on top of Dana and smothered her. "You asked for it." Dana squealed, and Nick squirmed under the covers.

Dana slapped at Nick's shoulders. "We're going to have to wash these sheets now."

"Or burn them," Nick said. Her leg slipped between Dana's and she realized her lover was sleeping naked. "I missed you."

"You, too," Dana said. She kissed Nick's chin and coughed quietly. "Although . . . seriously. Honey, get the hell out of this bed."

Nick laughed and rolled off the mattress. She stripped out of her panties and bra, tossed them aside and said, "Just to get the stink off and the sand out of some crevasses. I'll be right back."

"Okay. Wake me."

"Okay." Nick padded into the bathroom, took off her socks, and turned the cold water on. A cold shower might defuse the chemical reactions that Dana's naked body had started, but she was willing to take the risk just to be cold for a change. She got into the stall, rinsed out her thick hair--utterly alarmed at just how much of Egypt ended up swirling around the drain by her feet, and scrubbed herself until she could no longer smell the landfill that had been following her around all day.

She squirted a liberal amount of body wash onto a loofah and used it to erase at least one layer of skin from her body. Finally, she shut off the faucet, her skin once again pink and fragrant, and dried her hair with a towel. She dried her skin and brushed her teeth, then scanned the sink. Two toothbrushes. Some hand lotion. She picked it up, flipped the cap, and smelled it. Definitely Dana's smell. She returned the lotion to its spot and looked at the other things Dana had left in the room. Nail polish, a hair dryer, a box of floss, a bottle of her own mouthwash because she didn't like the taste of Nick's . . .

Nick shook her head and turned out the light. She padded quietly into the bedroom. The lamp on Nick's side of the bed had been turned on, but Dana was curled facing the other direction, her hand over her eyes, her lips parted with sleep.

Nick slipped under the blankets and spooned Dana from behind. Dana murmured, put her hand on Nick's arm and inhaled. She rolled over and smiled without opening her eyes. "Much better."

"Yeah?" Nick said. She bent down and kissed Dana's lips.

"Mmm. Good enough to eat."

A shiver ran down Nick's spine and she scooted closer. "Promises, promises."

Dana moved her lips to Nick's throat and lightly nibbled the soft flesh there. "You want me to go down on you?"

Nick laughed. The question was so casual that Nick couldn't help herself. "God, baby, you turn me on." She pulled back and kissed Dana's closed eyelids. "Sleep. You can welcome me back tomorrow morning."

"Okay."

Nick pushed the hair out of Dana's eyes and said, "I ran into someone in Cairo."

Dana put her head on Nick's shoulder. "Oh?"

Nick ran her hand over Dana's bare back. "Yeah. A, uh . . . we were kind of an item for a while. In a manner of speaking."

"You fucked her now and then," Dana said. Her voice was slurred with sleep. She was well aware of Nick's past, and she didn't care. Everyone had pasts, why bother getting upset or dwelling on them? "Did anything happen?"

"No," Nick said. "No, of course not. But it got me thinking. She's not the only one. You know, out there."

"Girl in every port." Dana was now basically talking in her sleep. She sniffed and settled her head against Nick's chest.

Nick nodded. "Yeah. So I was thinking about that. All those women out there."

Dana sounded a little more awake when she asked, "What did you decide?"

"I want you to move in with me."

Dana sat up. "What?"

"I don't want the girls in every port. When I was thinking about them, all I was thinking about was how I could tell them it was over. I don't want any of them anymore. I want you."

Dana leaned in and kissed Nick's lips. "I want you, too. It's just . . . you know, your apartment has always been your apartment."

Nick shook her head. "You spent the night here every night I was gone. Your food is in the fridge, your stuff in the bathroom, your afghan draped over the back of the couch—"

"You said I could bring that stuff—"

"I know, I know," Nick said. She put her hand on Dana's chest and felt her heartbeat. "I'm just saying that it's hard for me to call this my apartment. It has been for a while now." She leaned in and kissed the corner of Dana's mouth. "Move in with me. Say yes. Say it."

Dana laughed. "Fine, okay. I'll bring some more of my stuff over tomorrow."

"Okay," Nick said. She kissed Dana's lips and said, "Now, we can sleep."

"How was Egypt?" Dana asked. Dana rolled in Nick's arms and settled closer to her, their bodies spooned with Nick behind.

Nick crossed her arms over Dana's chest and kissed the back of Dana's neck. "Exhausting. Hot. I'll tell you all about it in the morning."

Dana lifted Nick's hand to her lips and kissed it softly. "Night. Roomy."

Nick laughed and buried her face in her lover's hair. Her live-in lover. She closed her eyes and decided that the idea of Dana living with her felt right. She had spent too long with a girl in every port. She was looking forward to the thrill of having someone waiting for her back home.



**"Nadine Butler thought she was losing everything, but she wasn't going to give it up without a fight."**

Also look for Geonn's other books, Gemini and World on Fire, due in 2008 and 2009 respectively.

More details at his website,  
[www.geonncannon.com](http://www.geonncannon.com)



Ad created by Elfcat255



# Life of Anaís

Brigitte Green



## Opening 63 AD

For a fifteen year old from a prominent family, especially considering that neither my parents nor I are Roman citizens, I've always had an independent streak. My girlfriends always say, "Anaís, if it wasn't for your disposition, you'd have the whole of Pompeii wrapped around your little finger." I think some of this comes from the fact that my family is not of Roman ancestry. We are Oscans, who were the original founders of Pompeii, before the Etruscans conquered it, known for their obstinacy. Rome conquered the Samites and a Roman fleet landed in 309 BC. Our city was besieged by Sulla in a social war from 91 to 89 BC. Pompeii was one of the last cities reduced by Roman arms and were Romanized in 80 BC. This is all information that has been passed down in my family for over three hundred years. The women in my family are known for their oral histories, so I know all kinds of interesting things about Pompeii, even those I would prefer I didn't. For instance, in 59 AD there was a civilian riot in the amphitheater, many were killed and wounded and as a result, the city cannot use the theater for ten years. By the time it reopens I'll be an old maid of twenty-five!

I live in a house about six miles away from Mount Vesuvius. Pompeii is an average-sized town near the seacoast, of about twenty thousand people. We have a marketplace and forum and the amphitheater is located in a corner of the city within the walls. Pompeii is open to the sea with a wall surrounding two-thirds of it. The southwest

corner is the old part of town. The houses are one and two stories with balconies and the lower portions of the façade painted. The streets have fountains along them and sewage runs along the curb. People cross the streets by stepping on stones jutting out of the streets, wagons traverse between the stones, causing ruts in the pavement. The houses come up to the sidewalk in front with a garden in the back and a walkway going around it.

My home is a fairly large villa with my bedroom off of the atrium next to the entrance. The atrium is in the center of the house and surrounded by rooms. A pool is the center of the atrium with a black and white mosaic pattern covering the floor and marble and bronze statues around the perimeter. Above the pool is an opening in the roof where light streams in. The walls are painted with frescoes of goats and satyrs, gods and goddesses, battle scenes and portraits. The tables consist of marble slabs with the legs carved and decorated in the form of griffins. Other tables or tripods, because they have three legs, are metal with legs in the shape of satyrs. The climate is mild and we obtain heat from cast iron stoves.

Our house is one story high, located on a side street that connects adjacent to the Marine gate and the Sarno gate.

The public baths or *thermae* are heated through the hollow floors and walls. All of the houses have porticos with statues surrounding them. At the North end of the forum is a temple to Jupiter, Juno and Minerva on a podium ten feet high with six Corinthian columns. On the east side are four public edifices, including the *mecullium*. At the south side are shops and

a chapel for worshipping the gods and powerful goddesses such as Athena, Aphrodite, and Diana, determiners of the fate of humankind.

Flavia delights in telling me about the exploits of the goddesses in mythology and of those of elegists such as Sappho and Sulpicia and their insistent rebukes of the constraints of modern-day marriage. She has long since ceased to shock me and now her tales awake my fiery Oscan blood and her kisses send flames through my belly that rival those of the volcano.

### 63 AD

The crowded streets of Pompeii and Herculaneum might seem ill-suited to walking for a visitor. Pedestrians are hampered by the outspread stalls of audacious hucksters, jostled by passers-by, and splattered by riders on horseback, but to me, it's home. However, if I wanted to escape the raucousness of the streets, I need only seek the quiet regions of the promenades of the city: the fora and the basilicas, where once the judicial hearings are over are left open to the public.

Many Romans, such as Therecus, my neighbor, indulge their gambling passions quite frequently and after banquets and celebrations in honor of Dionysius often come home drunk, waking everyone in their neighborhoods. Therecus is thirty-seven years old. He was married once but his wife died in a plague. He has three missing teeth and an abnormal lump on his leg that resulted from a wound he received in battle when a sword penetrated the bone in his upper left leg. As a soldier, he spends much of his time away from Pompeii, off somewhere horseback riding, shimmying up trees or in battle.

As I write this I glance out from the terrace to see fishermen pulling boats near a row of chambers used for storage. In the Sacred Area a ceremony is in progress, while patrons of the Suburban Baths relax in several indoors pools and sea breezes wash through the elegant garden of the House of Stags where hunting dogs attack deer in a pair of marble statues and a statue of Diana looks on.

It is true, I think, that that which you want most is what is forbidden to you, such as with Flavia. I think it must be like the many Romans who are attracted to the idea of love and unity in a

religion, and turn to Christianity. Of course, they don't tell anyone. They are intent on avoiding the spread of gossip and pretend to worship the gods and the emperor. I have no wish to hide what I want. Flavia and I declare our love brazenly throughout the town.

### 63 AD

In eight days my parents have decreed that I am to be betrothed to Plinus. It will be in front of my parents, some relatives and some friends while the rest of the guests content themselves with food, drink and dance at the banquet, the conclusion of the festivities. Plinus shall slip onto my finger a ring consisting of a circle of iron set in gold. This finger is used because, as the Egyptians discovered, a delicate nerve connects this finger to the heart. I will wear a crimson net in my hair and a tunic woven and secured around my waist by a knotted girdle of wool. Over this I'll wear a cloak of saffron color; on my feet sandals of the same shade; around my neck a metal collar. My coiffure will be protected by six pads of artificial hair, separated by narrow bands, such as the Vestals wear; over that a veil of flaming orange called the flammeum which shall cover the upper part of my face. On top of the veil is placed a wreath, woven simply of verbena and sweet marjoram. After I welcome my groom, his family and friends, everyone will adjourn to the atrium of the house to offer a sacrifice to the gods. After the sacrifice has been consummated, the auspex and witnesses will play their parts. The ten witnesses play a silent role and simply affix their seal to the marriage contract. The auspex, however, is indispensable. After examining the entrails of the sacrifice, he will give his guarantee that the auspices are favorable. Without this, the gods will disapprove and the marriage will be made invalid. As soon as he makes his pronouncement amid respectful silence, we'll exchange our mutual vows in his presence, Ubi tu Gaius, ego Gaia. This concludes the marriage rite and the guests shall burst into congratulations and good wishes: Felicites! May happiness wait upon you!

The subsequent festivities will last until nightfall when Plinus will wrest me from my mother's embrace and escort me to his home.

Flute-players lead the procession followed by five torch-bearers. As they march, the cortege will indulge in cheerful and licentious singing. As we approach the house, nuts are thrown at the children who have flocked about. These nuts will have been the playthings of the groom in his childhood and their rattle on the pavement is a merry prophecy of the happiness and fertility that the future promises him. Three boys, whose parents must still be alive, shall accompany me. One will brandish the nuptial torch composed of tightly twisted hawthorn twigs. The other two will lead me by the hand. On reaching my new home, I'll be lifted across the threshold, which is spread with white cloth and strewn with luxuriant greenery. Three bridesmaids enter the house behind the *nova nupta*: one of them carries my distaff and the second my spindle, emblems of my virtue and domestic diligence. After my husband has offered me water and fire, the third and most honored bridesmaid, the *pronuba*, will lead me to the nuptial couch where my husband shall invite me to recline. Then, the bridal party shall hasten out with the speed and discretion which propriety and custom demands.

### 63 AD

My wedding started as I expected it to until we exchanged vows. Tempestuous tremors rocked the temple and chunks of white marble and stone fell from the ceiling. Someone screamed "Earthquake!" and a mad rush started for the doors. I was scared that some of the guests would be trampled as well as fearing for my own safety. Mosaics and exquisite frescoes fell destroyed from the ceilings and the walls, crashing down on the pedestaled statues of the gods.

Everyone at the ceremony escaped with their lives, although the earthquake destroyed many of their homes and many of the public edifices. Many of the buildings have already started to be rebuilt or restored, but will take at least ten years to finish. My wedding has been rescheduled and we have many friends and relatives staying with us who have lost their homes to the sizable tremors and Juno knows, we have an ample amount of space to engage their needs. Needless to say, this event has unnerved and inconvenienced many. The loss of lives was few, but try to tell that to the relatives of

the deceased. Even though we have generous amounts of room, our guests and their accompanying requests are slowly driving me insane.

### 70 AD

I haven't written any entries in this journal since I was fifteen and a lot has changed since then. Alongside the heroines of the imperial aristocracy, the irreproachable wives and excellent mothers found within its ranks, some find easy to cite as "emancipated," or rather "unbridled" wives, who are the various products of the new conditions of Roman marriage. Some evade the duties of maternity for fear of losing their good looks; some take pride in being behind their husbands in no sphere of activity, and vie with them in tests of strength; some were not content to live their lives by their husband's side, but carry on another life without him at the price of betrayals and surrenders for which they do not even trouble to blush.

If the Roman women have ever shown any reluctance to perform their maternal functions, they devote themselves on the other hand, with a zeal that smacks of defiance, to all sorts of pursuits that men have previously reserved for themselves. There are some women who plunge passionately into the study of legal suits or current politics, et cetera while their husbands silently look on. I myself refuse to be suppressed by my husband or deemed incapable by him.

### 70 AD

Today, the amphitheater reopened, a belated opening that had been stalled by the earthquake of 63 AD. In the amphitheater most colossal efforts are made, and exciting spectacles, fairy-like splendor, a rapid succession of surprises and the charm of the infinite, the bizarre, and the monstrous are always being offered, in order to surpass, or at least to meet, the expectations of the populace.

In second century BC, gladiators were foreign combatants who brought their own weapons and styles of fighting. Gladiators would appear in most diverse accoutrement, singly or in troops; regular battles were waged with thousands fighting, and the arena left covered with bodies. Yet soon bloodthirsty combats and magnificent scenery failed to excite the dulled nerves of the

mob and only things absolutely exotic tickled their jaded senses. Now, at the spectacles given by Nero, he sets dwarfs and women fighting, even noble women. Among the spectacles are those of animal-baiting, which consists of animals being exhibited, hunted and killed by men or other animals and naval fights in the flooded arenas. The combatants consist of prisoners of war, Christians and slaves.

The theater is a more frequent and less appreciated form of entertainment consisting of comedy, drama, and mimes mimicking a detached character sketch of Roman life.

My marriage vacillates between an ongoing verbal battle and the detachment of the theater, I can glean no more pleasure from the offered forms of mass entertainment. Rather, I seek the embraces and attentions of my sweet Flavia. Plinius knows all about it and some of our fights stem from this, but truthfully I think we would be fighting constantly regardless.

#### 79 AD

Divorces are not uncommon. I see now that Plinius would have divorced me long ago if not for Augustus' age old law about dowries. Augustus conceded that the wish of a married couple to divorce should suffice to dissolve marriage, and insisted only that this wish be publicly expressed in the presence of seven witnesses and announced by a message. Later, he permitted a divorced wife to reclaim her dowry, even when from negligence or overtrustfulness she and her kin had omitted precaution of stipulating for such restitution. This was undisputed unless the judge allowed the husband to retain it for maintenance of children in his care, or for compensation for damages caused by the wife by her extravagance or misconduct. While progressively lowering dignity of marriage, this legislation succeeded its cohesion only up to a point where a husband weary of his wife, felt sure of capturing, without undue delay, another more handsomely endowed, which is the reason that Plinius divorced me, and I him.

#### 79 AD

It's late in the evening and a fearful black cloud, rent by forked and quivering bursts of flame moves across the bay. As it pulls closer,

descending, I imagine that many of us twelve shivering in a deep corner as the eruption draws closer beseech the aid of the gods, but still more imagine that there are no gods left, and that the universe is being plunged into eternal darkness for evermore.

Later, I see a huge fiery surge of flame and lava fall on the neighboring city of Herculaneum, just northwest of Pompeii and I wonder if the same fate will befall us. Flavia is here with me, she had come over to help me to arrange for the divorce when Vesuvius roared like a monstrous lion and exploded in fiery and smoke-filled surges. She was now comforting me, and I her. Writing this journal helps me to not think as much of the impending wrath of the erupting volcano nearby. A chained dog howls wildly nearby, then falls silent with a curtailed yelp. I think that as I await my death that I really do love Flavia. As that black cloud of death looms closer I am thankful for her being near me. I grasp her hand firmly in mine and together we head for the gates.

#### Bibliography

Carcopino, Jerome, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn. c. 1940.

Friedlander, Ludwig, *Roman Life and Manners Vol. I and IV*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London c. 1907, reissued 1965.

Gore, Rick, *National Geographic*. "The Dead Do Tell Tales At Vesuvius" Vol. 165, No. 5 May 1984.

Grant, Michael, *Cities of Vesuvius: Pompeii and Herculaneum*, Macmillan, N.Y., N.Y. c. 1971.

Lytelton, Margaret and Forman, Werner, *Echoes of the Ancient World—The Romans: Their Gods and Their Beliefs*, Golden Press, Western Publishing company, Inc. c. 1984.



# Contributors



## **Bryn Greenwood**

Bryn Greenwood lives in Kansas, which is as flat as advertised. Her stories and essays have appeared in *Menda City Review*, *Karamu*, *The Battered Suitcase*, *American Drivel Review*, and *Chiron Review*. When not performing menial clerical work at a large university, she blogs at [www.bryngreenwood.com](http://www.bryngreenwood.com). Also, she cannot believe Microsoft Word doesn't recognize the word "blog."

## **Amelia Beamer**

Amelia Beamer's fiction has appeared in *Red Cedar Review* (winning the 2007 Flash Fiction Contest), *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, *Mythic Delirium*, and other publications, and has been shortlisted for the 2008 Raymond Carver Editor's Choice Award at *Carve Magazine*. She works as an editor and book reviewer at Locus.

## **S.V. Green**

S. V. Green is a poet and editor from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She has experimented with everything from sonnets to free verse to haiku and tanka. She looks to mythology and history for ideas, and dedicates her poems to all who unwittingly inspire them.

## **Cheri Crystal**

Since Debut first appeared in *Erotic Interludes 3: Lessons in Love*, Cheri Crystal has published more than a dozen short stories with Bold Strokes Books, Cleis Press and Alyson Books. Her stories can also be found at [www.loveyoudivine.com](http://www.loveyoudivine.com). She has written two novels and has plenty more stories to tell. Cheri loves her food and delights in the oral gratification she gets from a delectable meal. *The Butch Cookbook* by Lee Lynch, Nel Ward and Sue Hardesty, inspired "Does the Butch Come With the Recipe." Cheri is currently working on contributing her best recipes to the follow up volume.

## **Geonn Cannon**

Geonn Cannon discovered the real life Squire's Isle in 2004 and has taken advantage of its fictional counterpart ever since. He lives in Oklahoma with two cats, but dreams of living in the Pacific Northwest (Like they say in Spokane: Near Nature, Near Perfect). His first novel, *On the Air*, was published in 2007 and two other novels—*Gemini* and *World on Fire*—are both due to be released in early 2009. For more information, visit his website at [www.geonncannon.com](http://www.geonncannon.com)

## **Brigitte Green**

Brigitte Green lives and writes in New York City with her partner and two cats. She was born in the wilds of Northside Chicago. When she is not writing, she is often mesmerized by the unreality of reality television.