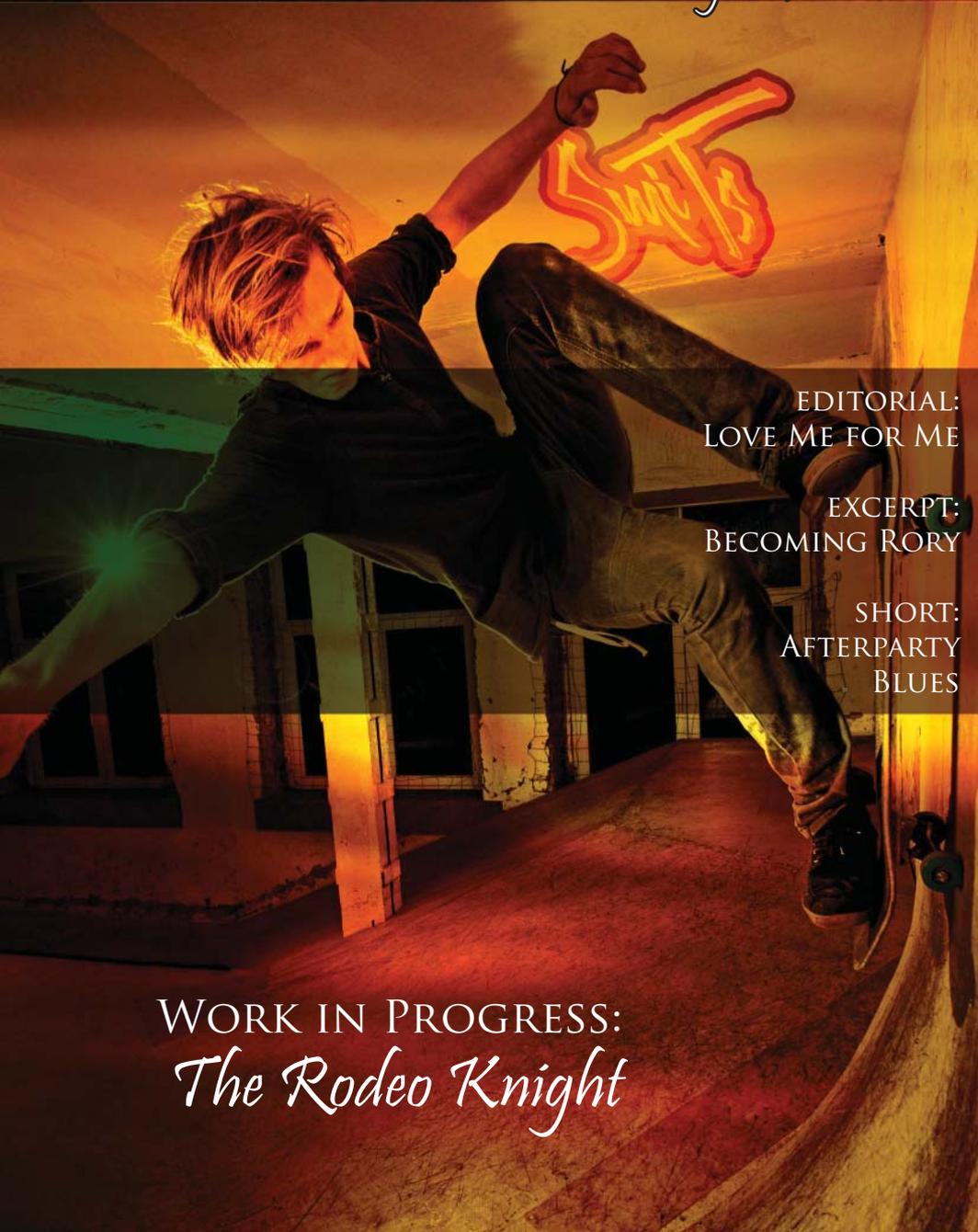


ARDOR

August 2016



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LOVE ME FOR ME

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BECOMING RORY

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ARDOR

august 2016

THE NEWSLETTER OF ASHAVAN DOYON

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From Torquere Press
The College Rose Romances

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Short based on characters from
Becoming Rory
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Editorial

Love Me for Me

When I first started *Becoming Rory*, it was a mistake. I was supposed to be working on a story about Drew—what eventually became *Andrew's Prayer*. But after a false start where Drew returned home to a rather well off middle class family, I realized that it wasn't Drew at all that I was writing.

I started over. I knew I wanted Drew's story to start during the summer break. Instead I took the character that had been so emphatically not Drew and I let him talk to me. Rory liked to talk. Insecure by nature, he was angry at a lot of things. But mostly he was preoccupied by the fact that he'd been who he was for so long just to make other people in his life happy.

I knew Rory's love interest the moment he appeared, whispering in my head to tell Rory to stop sticking out at the party. That party proved to be a pivotal moment for Rory and for "Jimmy" who became Danny during the editing process. Danny Smits was my favorite of Michael's crew. I knew a lot about Danny. I knew he'd gone to private school. I knew he struggled with his addiction more than the others. I knew that he was cocky and decisive.

More importantly, I knew Smits was a good match for Rory. He'd push in all the ways Rory needed pushing—and then he'd push more. He'd push in hard ways.

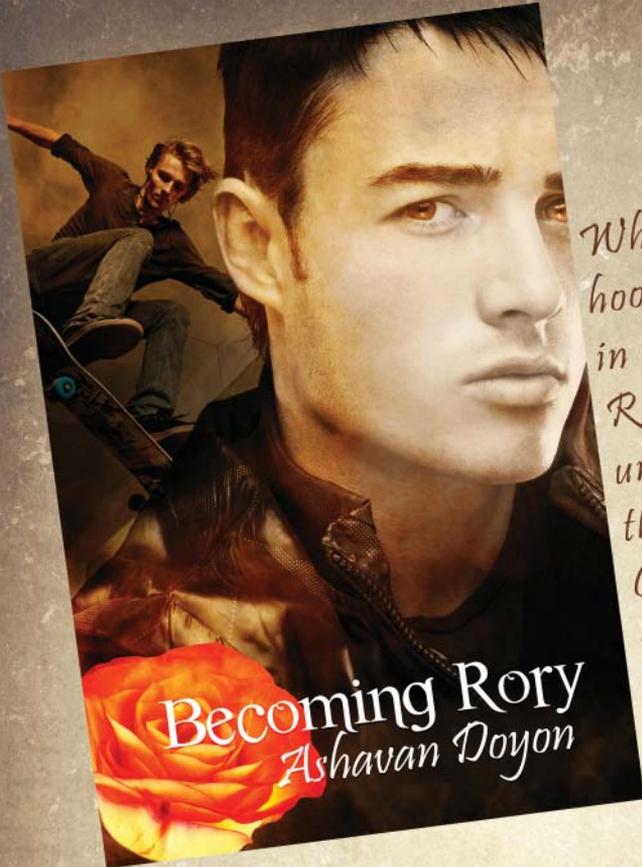
I'd been reluctant for a while to include Smits' sort of mental illness in a story. I knew what would come, inescapably. Accusations and critique quickly rolled in.

Smits had to be perfect. He wasn't. Smits had to be inhuman. He wasn't. Smits had to somehow defy everything I knew about his illness (which given I have the same illness is quite a lot) and somehow not seem broken. He didn't.

As a person with bipolar, I know how devastating it can be to wake up after mania and not even know necessarily what you did, or for it to all be a blur. I know how terrifying it can be to wonder if you did something out of character or dangerous. I know how what it means to feel broken and that no one will love you.

When you have an illness like Smits does, you often feel invisible. I know I felt that growing up, not knowing what was wrong, why my moods were always so far out of whack. I know I felt that way as a reader, never seeing a character like me in a story. So I hope someone reads this and sees themselves in Danny. I hope they know their Rory is out there, waiting to love them as they are.

—Ashavan Deyon



Becoming Rory
Ashavan Doyon

*When an anonymous
hookup leaves his card
in Rory's pocket,
Rory does the
unexpected and calls
the phone number.
Can a moment of
weakness become
something
special?*

Becoming Rory
by Ashavan Doyon

College Rose Romances
Book 4

Published by
Torque Press



Excerpt

From *Becoming Rory*

RORY RAN INTO his dorm room, slamming the door closed behind him. He tossed his keys on the desk, only to have them fall to the floor. His hands were shaking so hard that he had to try twice before he was able to pick the fallen keys up off the floor and place them firmly back by his leadership paperwork.

The cardigan he quickly discarded, tossing it on the bed. Looking down at his bare chest, Rory couldn't fail to see the signs of his shame. His torso was covered with marks, bruises that were fading slowly from red into a deep purple that would last days. Rory chanced a glance to the mirror.

"Damn," he whispered, his hand going to his neck. The kid hadn't been subtle. Rory's hand formed a tight fist, still shaking and he held it to his lips.

"What do I do?" Rory squeezed his eyes shut. "What the fuck do I do?" he screamed.

His breathing got heavy and he glanced from the lights of the campus on one side to the dark of the forest. Then he looked down. The fabric of the jeans was stained at the crotch with a dark and still wet blotch. He swallowed and cursed, kicking off the sandals and pulling off the jeans

and underwear. It was still too hot, but he shivered unconsciously in his nakedness. Rory fisted his hand again, clenching and unclenching it until it stopped trembling. "All right. I can do this. I can be Rory. I'm not Lawrence! I'm Rory."

But you just did something stupid, just like Lawrence would have.

Rory pounded the wall. "No! I'm Rory!" Rory or not, he regretted the move almost immediately. Wound up the way he was he'd used no caution in hitting the wall at all. The concrete did not yield one bit to

his fist, which he immediately cradled in his other hand with a cry and curse, this one screamed out in a furious roar. He let another round of tremors pass through him, trying to calm himself.

"Come on, Rory," he whispered. "You wanted sexy. You did it. You were sexy." His breathing was still coming out as gasps. He walked, very slowly and deliberately, to the alcove by the door where he grabbed his towel. He swallowed hard. "Clean first. I'm not dirty. I'm not. Just sticky. It's okay to not want to be sticky. It doesn't mean I feel..."

But he did. All that wonder and now he fucking felt dirty. He turned to the mirror again. God! His lips were full and swollen.

"All right. I can do this. I can be Rory. I'm not Lawrence! I'm Rory."

Kissed that way. He looked sensual and sexy and the time on the couch had only made the sexy bed head look more complete. "Not dirty. I'm not dirty. This isn't Lawrence going into those fucking tunnels to suck cock. It's Rory... Rory choosing to..." The panic was setting in. He could feel it in his breathing. "No! Not dirty. I chose to be me, damn it! I chose not to hide!"

He covered himself with the towel and peeked down the corridor. Empty. He tore down the hall and into the bathroom. He tossed his towel on the hook and let the hot water of the shower cover him. Soaked. "Not dirty. Just sticky. Just sticky." He closed his eyes and fought the sobs. He pressed the dispenser, covering his hands in body wash and rubbing it around his groin and stomach. It was like he could feel a phantom touch on his stomach. It was like the kid was still touching him. God! Those kisses. They weren't dirty. They were the most beautiful thing he'd ever felt.

Rory turned his face into the water and let the hot streams cleanse the tears. "Not dirty, it wasn't dirty." Under the water he was finally able to calm himself, his shak- ing reduced to a slight tremor. He wiped himself dry and tied the towel around his waist.

The hallways were still blissfully clear. Back in his room, Rory put the cardigan and the soiled underwear in his laundry bag. He glanced back at the jeans. Barry's jeans. He lifted them and touched the damp spots on the front with a bit of reverence. Another man had made him come. This wasn't him sucking off closet- ed jocks in the tunnels. This was someone making him feel good. Calling him hot. It wasn't dirty like that. It was beautiful.

Might have been if you'd gotten his name

first, Rory.

He sighed. "Yeah, there's that."

If he washed the jeans now, he might manage to get them clean before Barry came looking for them. Maybe. He made a perfunctory check of the pockets, stum- bling back into his desk chair as he pulled out a business card. *Hands on my chest. Oh my God! Hands in my back pocket.*

"He gave me his name," Rory said wip- ing frantically at his eyes. "He gave me his name!" Rory laughed hysterically. Rory dropped the jeans to the floor and rocked in his chair, staring at the card. *Daniel Smits, President. Young Entrepreneurs.* Rory kissed the card and set it on the desk. He let out a breath.

"What if it was just a hook-up?" He looked up at the ceiling. "Did I just give that away in a hook-up? What I felt?" Rory could feel the panic come on again and he looked at the card again.

"Fuck it!" He grabbed his phone and began punching in numbers. "Come on, come on..."

The ringing at the far end settled to a beep and then a message: "You've reached Skate Mate, your solution to find the most bitchin' board out there. This is Smits, leave me a message."

Lead pooled in Rory's stomach. "Um, hey. This is Rory... we met at the party. Umm. Well, we just fucked at the party. Maybe it was more than that? I hope it was."

A frantic knocking started at his door. Rory cursed. "Meet me for breakfast to- morrow? Please?" He hung up the phone, set it on the desk, and went to open it, not realizing until he was done that he was just in a towel.

Barry looked him up and down and whistled. "See, now, if you just did this, you'd have the boys falling all over you."

Becoming Rory is told from Rory's point of view. I made a conscious decision for the whole series to tell the stories that way, focused on that single character. In New Adult, with its focus on characters discovering themselves, that choice is important. Here is part of Danny's point of view from after the party where they hook up.

Short

Afterparty Blues

DANNY SMITS CLIMBED the stairs to Webster, cursing for the hundredth time, at least, the lack of an elevator. The hall was quiet. The resident assistant was the only other person on the floor, and he had been occupied at the party when Smits left. Occupied. Fucking on the pool table.

Color rose into Danny's cheeks. He felt the heat of it, like it pooled into a spot and then spread under his skin from there—sudden and rushed. He didn't really have room to judge. Not when he'd spent hours on a couch grinding with fucking Lawrence Graeble.

The smile was unbidden but welcome, broad and giddy. Okay, so it was Lawrence Graeble. But Lawrence—sorry, Rory—had never looked like that a day in his life. Danny shivered. So. Fucking. Hot.

He raked his fingers through his long, half-tangled hair—tangles from where Rory had held him. He'd been desperate, ecstatic. Danny frowned. Lawrence used to blow guys in the tunnels. Everyone knew that. Puffton had outed Lawrence with a picture of his mouth around someone's cock. The kind of picture taken while Lawrence was too engrossed to notice. Sure, it hadn't lasted long on social media; it'd been reported immediately. But the damage was done. There wasn't any dodging an image like that. Danny

smiled. Somehow that geeky lit kid had managed to salvage it all.

Danny leaned back until his back cracked and pulled off all three layered shirts in one pull. He balled them up and stopped himself before tossing them in the corner. Hesitantly he brought them to his face and sniffed.

God! They smelled like Rory. And sex. Danny grimaced. And pot. Rory was right. They still stank of it. Stale and gross. He sniffed again and shuddered. The pot smell he could mostly ignore, but the Rory smell? That was... shit.

He tossed the ball of clothes into the corner and hugged himself. He shook his head. He loved the single, but he had a love/hate relationship with being alone. He grabbed his cigarettes and sat by the window, opening it before setting up the fan. He tapped the pack against the desk a couple times and pulled out a cigarette.

He adored the first puff on a cigarette. The rush of heat, the burning in his lungs. The way he immediately relaxed as he let out that first stream of smoke. He shuddered, smiled, then took a long drag and held the air in. The fan dispersed the blown smoke quickly, sending most of it out the window, invisible in the dark of night.

He pulled his phone from a pocket and

scrolled through messages. The usual crap. Rob complaining that Danny had “spent the whole party with his tongue down some hot guy’s throat” when Rob had needed a wingman to score. Danny sent off a quick *Why couldn’t Dallas be your wingman?*

Rob replied quickly. *Just pulling your chain. Girl gave me her digits. Wouldn’t come home with me though. You bring that guy home?*

Danny growled. He puffed on his cigarette, sending smoke into the fan to be torn apart and dispersed.

He knew he’d delayed responding too long when his phone dinged. *You wanted to! Danny?*

Rob would get what his lack of a response meant. If it had been anyone else messaging, he’d blow it off. This was Rob—his best friend since forever.

Maybe.

The phone rang. The crew had rules. He had to answer.

“Go away!”

Rob’s chuckle came across as a crackle. “When this happens I have to call. It’s not for me. It’s for you.”

Danny squeezed his eyes closed. “Can’t you? Just this once?”

The speakers whistled as Rob sighed on the other end. “No.”

“Damn it, Robbie!”

“Now hold on. That’s your fault. You asked me before, last semester. You remember. Go away, you said. And I did. And what happened?”

Danny gulped. He took a long drag of his cigarette, tapped out the ash and set the cigarette there. “Please!” The crew had rules, stricter ones for Danny. Because of last semester. Rob blamed himself. Danny knew it.

“No.” Rob’s voice quavered. “Talk. Right now. Or do I need to get Dallas and come over there?”

Danny shook his head. “Don’t.”
“Then talk.”

He leaned against the dull ivory paint of the wall, so cool against his skin in the summer heat. “I’m allowed!”

Rob laughed. “You like him.”

“Stop it.”

“You like-like him.”

“I said stop!”

“Oh God, Danny! Really?”

“Shut up!”

“I mean he was hot. That smooth chest. His hair. I knew you were looking, but—”

“It’s Lawrence Graeble.”

“Shit.”

“I know.” Danny sighed. He slipped his cigarette back between his fingers.

“Best you didn’t take him home then.”

“Not helpful.”

Silence on the other end. Then a deep heavy sigh. “Lawrence?”

Danny took a quick drag and tapped the ash into the ashtray. “Rory.”

“What?”

“He’s going by Rory. I think... I think he’s been wearing a mask for so long even he bought it. The guy I met tonight.... Robbie, he was cool. He was trying so fucking hard to be someone. I think it was him. I think he was really being him. God. It was stunning.”

“Lawr—”

“Rory!”

Rob grumbled. “Fine. Rory Graeble. Stunning?”

Danny smiled. “Yeah.”

“Okay. I know that tone. I know it well. I remember it ending with me not getting laid for weeks because you were always in my room crying your eyes out—”

“Don’t you dare bring—”

“—over Toby.”

“—him up.” The words softened at the end to a whisper. Danny sniffed and extinguished his cigarette in the ashtray. He swallowed to try to clear the lump in his

throat and padded over to the nightstand. He pulled out a drawer and lifted out the single framed photo inside. He danced his fingers over the glass. It was the only photo he had of Toby. In a fit he'd let Rob destroy them all. They'd missed this one. Or maybe Rob had left it for him on purpose. He'd never been sure.

"I'm sorry." Rob's voice had been firm before. Now it was soft. Comforting.

"You know how hard it is? Watching you all date? Watching and never getting fucking close to anyone? Even Mike had Aidan. You and Dallas choose to sleep around. Either one of you could date if you wanted. Every one of you could—"

Rob's hesitance was palpable. Eventually he spoke, his words quiet and uncertain. "I know what you want. You've talked about it forever. But you just hooked up with this guy. Did you even get his phone number?"

"Left him mine."

"You shit. You fucking put your number in a stupid coat pocket or some shit. And for a month I'm going to have to talk you down and—"

Danny's phone chimed and he glanced quickly at the screen.

New voicemail from Lawrence Graeble.

Danny dropped his phone on the bed.

"—he's never going to call." Rob's voice sounded small and tinny from where the phone sat on the bed.

Jaw moving, Danny tried to make a sound but no words came out. He could feel the tears welling up. He balled his fist and clenched.

He rubbed at his forehead. Dimly he could hear Rob continuing to rant about how he always did this. How the guys never called.

But Rory called. Rory had fucking called. Danny's lip trembled. He set the photo back in its drawer and he closed it.

He lifted the phone back to his ear.

"—seriously, man. What was it this time? Fucking card in his back pocket?"

"Yeah."

"He's never going to know it's there. You're going to mope. You know how dangerous that is. Especially for you."

Danny walked slowly to the window and sat down. He set the phone down long enough to up his hands around a fresh cigarette and light it. He sucked in the lovely burn of the first puff.

"—just sayin' that you do this to yourself. I hate seeing you hurt—"

"He called." Silence. "He called, Robbie."

"Damn it."

"What?"

"And if it doesn't pan out? That's almost worse man."

"What if it does?"

"I know watching Mike with Steven has been hard, but not everybody gets that."

Danny closed his eyes. "What if he wants to meet me?"

"Fuckin'... fine. If he does. You meet him."

"You think so?"

"Yeah. Meet him. See if he'll kiss you hello. See if he'll hold your hand. All those little things Toby would never fucking do for you. You make damn sure those are there."

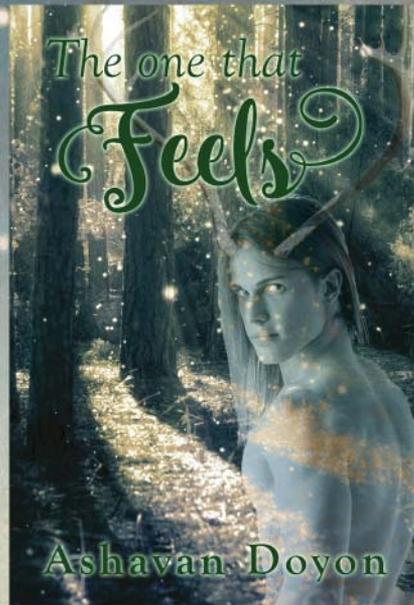
Banging his head lightly against the wall of his room, Danny closed his eyes. "I opened myself up. It was only a little, but, damn, what if he—"

"Stop. Hang up the phone and call him back. Arrange to meet. Right now all you've done is fuck around. Tell him the other part. You swore to me if you ever seriously dated again there would be honest-to-God fucking dating. So date."

"And if it's good?"

"Fuck his brains out." Rob said it like it should be the most obvious thing in the world.

Join the Adventure



Thommas Ashforthe should never have met his ex Brian at the club. Never able to refuse Brian's pleas, Thommas enters the Realm to seek out the lost spirit of Brian's dying boyfriend Jordan. The price of travel in that place of magic is steep and oaths spoken in the Realm cannot be broken. With time running out before Jordan's body dies in the world of the real, Thommas rushes through the Realm on a hopeless quest.

Nem is a prince of Zaharoth, and Thommas represents a hope of escape from the ruthless authority of his father. But when Nem binds Thommas with an oath as a price of passage through the forests of his homeland, can he dare to hope that the stranger from the real will be truly bound by it?

Read the serialized edition free at
www.ashavandoyon.com/blog

Work in Progress

The Rodeo Knight

Super secret work-in-progress news!

In March I went to the Dreamspinner Author's Workshop—a thrilling experience that I would recommend to any new Dreamspinner author. While I was there, one of the opportunities I had was pitching story ideas to the senior editors. I'd had an idea for a while for a sequel to *A Wounded Promise*. It was angst, depressing—deep in those soul stirring difficult ways I love to write. It put the heroes through quite a bit of hell.

I'd been mulling the idea for a while, then I sat through a workshop where it was suggested that once characters had their happy ending that putting those same characters through hell may not be your best idea.

Well, shit. There went my sequel.

I struggle to sleep when I'm in a strange space, so I sat at the hotel in the dark, looking out my balcony, and thought some more. My husband had made a suggestion for a story idea. I'd discarded it because it seemed out there in soap opera land. But then, I used to write soap opera fanfic. I toyed with the idea. A character with amnesia may be out there, but I had a friend in college who lost every bit of his memory in a car crash. He used to talk about it all the time, enough that I could do the idea justice.

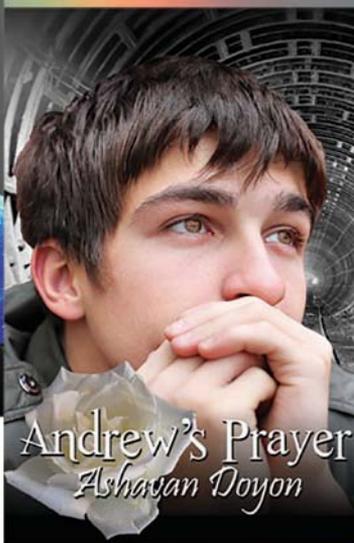
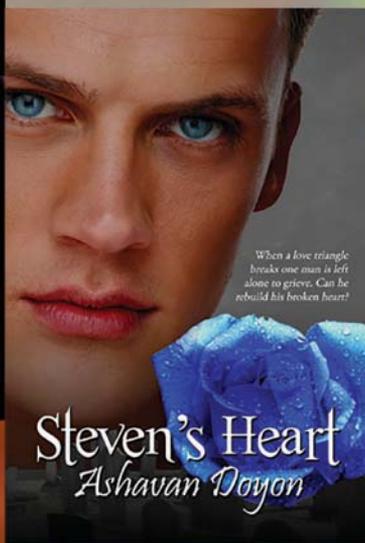
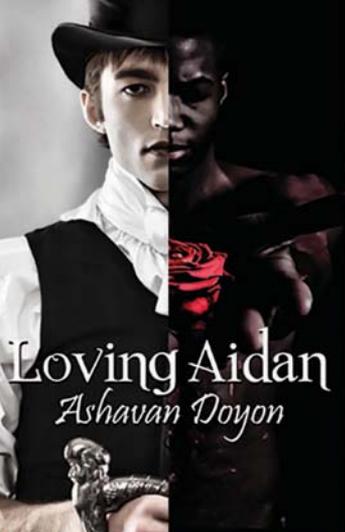
Slowly Brian began to speak.

As importantly, he wasn't the only one talking. Using my newly minted Tara Lain blurb writing techniques, I stayed up late crafting the blurb. Turns out they liked it. Enough that in addition to the story I pitched, the first story in the *Sam's Café Romances* is getting an update. Look for them this November/December!

THE RODEO KNIGHT

Struck by amnesia after a car crash, Brian Stouten has been living a life laid out by his family, a heterosexual life that just doesn't fit. When he learns it was all a lie, he returns to the small college town that's his only clue to his past. But the town is still unfamiliar, and the man he'd hoped would make all his memories return is on a honeymoon with another man. To add insult to injury, everyone thinks Brian died in the crash. It's only when an out-of-place cowboy asks to bum a smoke that Brian realizes this trip was meant to be.

Sylvester Thomas has always fought a secret desire, and done it successfully. But when geeky Brian offers him a smoke and a light, a simple brush of hands has Sylvester's hidden passions burning deep. Did he make a mistake letting Brian walk away?



*discover the
thrill of romance*

ASHAVAN DOYON

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