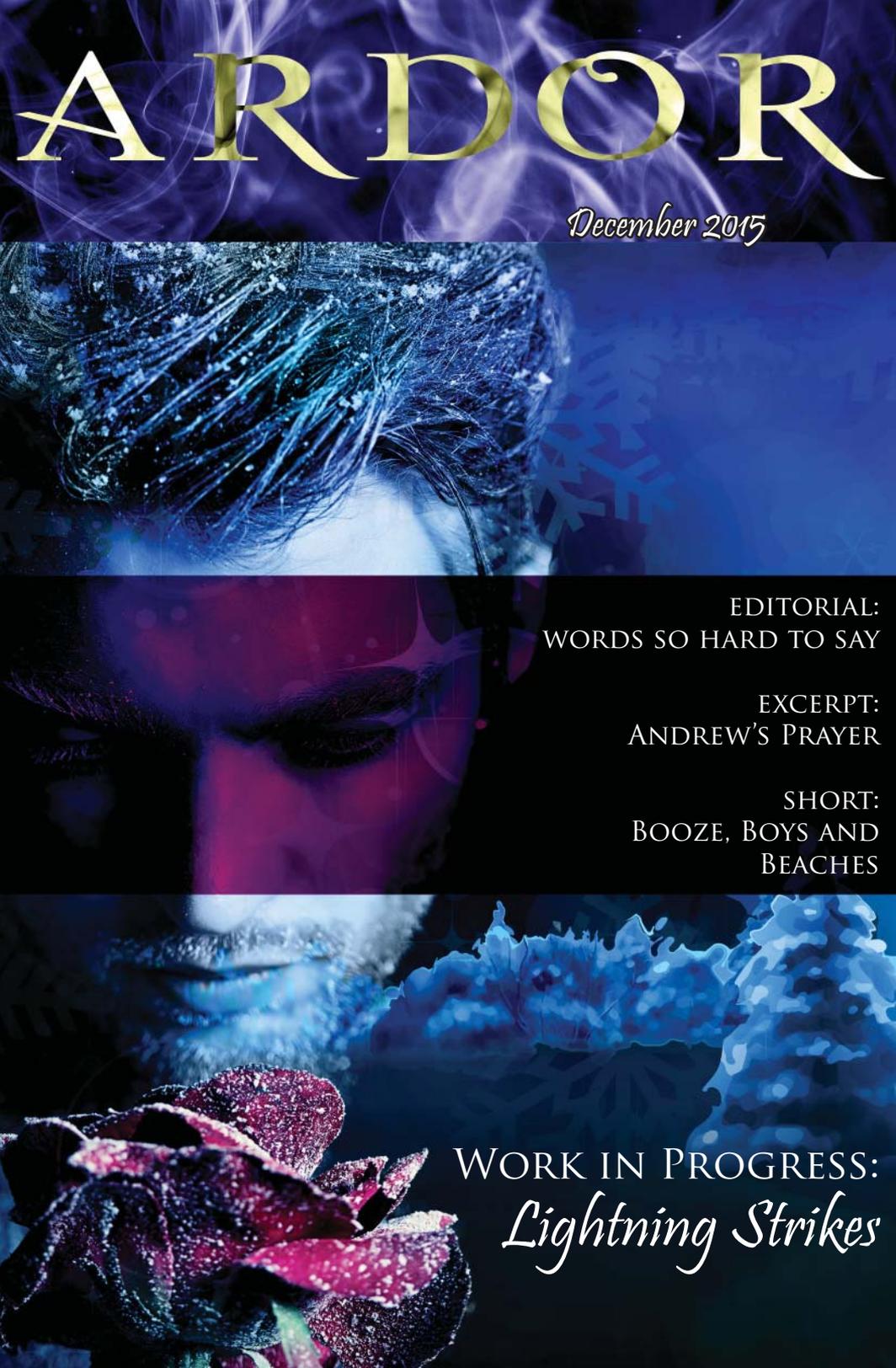


# ARDOR



*December 2015*

EDITORIAL:  
WORDS SO HARD TO SAY

EXCERPT:  
ANDREW'S PRAYER

SHORT:  
BOOZE, BOYS AND  
BEACHES

WORK IN PROGRESS:  
*Lightning Strikes*

# ARDOR

december 2015

## THE NEWSLETTER OF ASHAVAN DOYON

Books by  
Ashavan Doyon

Editor  
Ashavan Doyon

From Dreamspinner Press

Cover Design by Ashavan Doyon  
Photography and images by

Shorts  
The Kings Mate  
The Colors of Romance

Andrey Kiselev  
Leung Cho Pan  
kostins  
tisti

Novellas  
I Almost Let You  
The Byte of Betrayal  
A Wounded Promise

Additional photography and images by  
Tamara Kulikova  
Algirdas Urbonavicius

Novels  
Gerry's Lion

Stock photography licensed from  
123rf.com

From Torquere Press  
The College Rose Romances

Editorial Content  
Copyright 2015 by Ashavan Doyon

Loving Aidan  
Steven's Heart  
Andrew's Prayer

Excerpt from *Andrew's Prayer*  
Copyright 2015 by Ashavan Doyon

*Booze, Boys and Beaches*  
Short based on characters from *Gerry's Lion*  
Copyright 2015 by Ashavan Doyon

All rights reserved.

# Editorial

## Words So Hard to Say

---

Romance is hard, because it deals with our deepest emotions. When I write a love story, I want the reader to feel something, to dig deep and drag the emotions to the surface, with joy and with tears and sometimes with heart-wrenching sadness.

It's my job to be invested in the idea of three words. Because almost every romance is about those three words, whether meant sincerely or just stringing a fling along to a "happy for now" ending. The words, of course, are "I love you."

What makes it harder is the expectations.

*Love shouldn't come too soon. No one would say I love you that quickly. I hate instalove. I feel like the feelings developed too quickly.*

I strive to tell a good story. I want the emotions to be realistic, because it is only when I'm realistic that the reader is in tears, living and experiencing the story with the characters. Unfortunately, humdrum love is not what readers want. They want a good story, a special story, and so often the characters are thrust together in a crucible. They spend a weekend or a holiday or even just the perfect moments together. They share of themselves.

This is exactly what's required for people fall in love quickly. The science behind it has to do with the release of certain chemicals in the brain that are the same in a new and intense situation as they are when you're falling in love... resulting in a very fast bond.

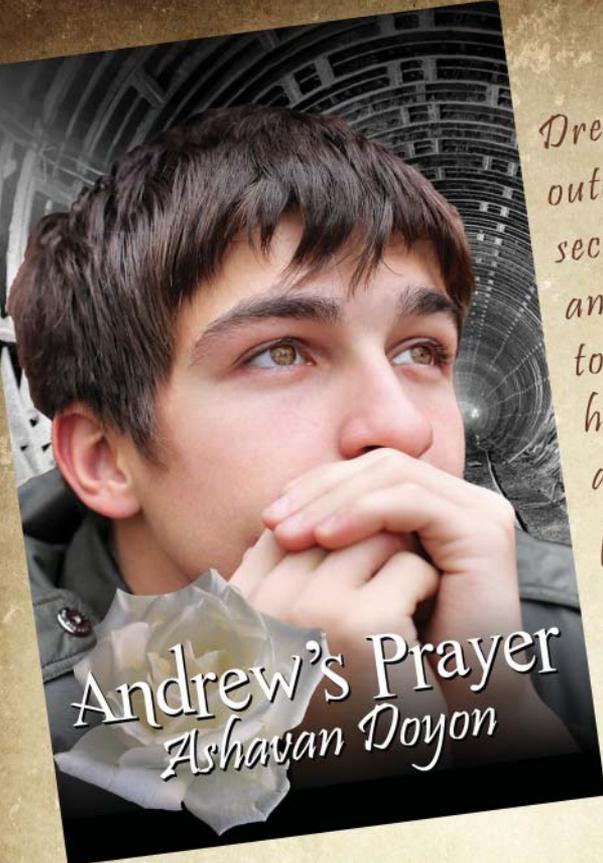
Contrary to popular belief, I love you is scarily easy to say. Typically men say it within three months (for women it's longer) and 40% of men say those three words within the first month. That's almost half.

Complicating the issue is the heterosexual idea that it's a big ocean and there are always more fish in the sea. While this may be true in a big city, outside the urban context this is far from the truth. In small and even moderately sized towns it can be remarkably difficult to find someone.

There's a lot of baggage behind those three words for gay men. Often, we spend our childhood and teen years fearing that the people that every person has a reasonable expectation will say those words and mean it—our families—will turn their backs on us. This can make gay men alternately anxious and terrified to say "I love you" to someone. Desperate, because we want so desperately to hear it and feel it, and terrified, because what if that feeling isn't returned? What if it becomes pain—again?

So yes, my characters often say "I love you" quickly. Part of that is youth, and part that they're men, and part that they're in intense situations. But it's also hope that those words won't be so hard to say.

—Ashavan Doyon



*Andrew's Prayer*  
Ashavan Doyon

*Drew returns from being  
outed at college to his  
secret life of shame  
and poverty. Tricking  
to pay the bills,  
he meets Grant,  
a client, a lover,  
possibly a future*

*Andrew's Prayer*  
by Ashavan Doyon

*College Rose Romances*  
Book 3

*Published by*  
*Torquere Press*



# Excerpt

## From Andrew's Prayer

---

"We gonna talk about it?" His mom's voice was soft. Sad. He could tell that.

"So I'm a sissy. Not like you didn't always know that."

"Your dad woul—"

"Dad's dead," Drew said flatly. He set his hand against the metal of the heating unit. The metal was still a little cold from the morning, and with the sweat coating his palm the sensation was as cool as he'd known it would be. "And he wouldn't have cared." Drew shut his eyes and pretended the last hadn't been a lie.

Of course Drew's dad would care, he had hated having a sissy boy—hated it enough that he'd teased and cajoled Drew about it mercilessly, right up till the day he'd died. Too much whiskey on medications that he wasn't meant to drink with. All their lives turned upside down. Drew still hated him for that.

His mom set a hand against his shoulder. "He wanted you to be a strong, good man."

"So it makes me bad? Is that what you mean?" He shook her hand off his shoulder. Drew didn't really cry anymore. He'd done that enough as a kid, but he still felt the

urge, that feeling that had to be stomped into dust as his eyes tried to well. His dad had taught him that.

"Andrew Tuttleman! Don't you say shit

like that. You know that ain't even close to what I mean."

Drew tilted his head back, staring at the ceiling. "You said you got sick again. Bagging. You still have the job at the grocer?"

She snorted. "Manager's mother is sick too. She's sympathetic, though she wouldn't be if she had any idea what it is. I got talked to about keeping minutes on my phone, but the job's still there." She looked around. "If we'd owned the house, it might be different. I've looked for another place, but Jed owns those too."

"You could get a rent controlled place."

"That's all I need, government in my business. I do just fine."

Drew's shoulders sagged. *Yeah sure, as long as I'm paying the rent.*

His mom returned to the kitchen, and Drew heard the chair scrape against the floor as she sat down. It took her a few moments to say anything more. Her breathing was heavier than he remembered and that tugged some places he didn't normally let

himself feel—the same ones that brought him all the miles home.

"You gonna talk about it or not?"

"Yeah, sure," Drew said, opening his eyes. The ceiling was still sorta white. At least it didn't have water stains anymore. "Daddy was right. I'm just a sissy boy. That what you wanted to hear?"

"You got a boy? Someone special?"

"No. It's just as lonely and miserable as you always told me it would be. All right? Happy now?"

Drew didn't want to hear the choked sob. He didn't want to think about what that might mean, because those tugs in his gut, those just got stronger. He swallowed against the dryness in his throat. "There's no one, Mom. Nobody special."

"And what about those girls? You wrote me about girls."

"That was just something I did to keep things quiet about me."

"You telling me you was fucking girls just to keep this quiet?"

Drew turned and scowled at her. "Look at how you reacted. Told me you shoulda gotten rid of me. How you think that feels? What did you expect? I did everything I could to hide it!"

His mom got quiet. "You were fucking those girls. I thought you'd... I thought just maybe you..." She turned to the table and got quiet, letting her thoughts trail off.

Drew walked to the table and pulled out the other chair, sitting across from her and taking hold of one hand that rested on the table.

"You know when that story broke. All those queers up at your school getting beaten. You knew all of 'em. That's why they had you on the TV. You knew them all."

Drew nodded, but didn't say anything.

"You fucking them too?"

Drew didn't look his mom in the face, he couldn't. "Some of them."

"Which ones?"

"Doesn't matter. There was nothing serious with any of them. Nothing serious with anyone."

His mother clasped a hand over the one he had over hers, trapping it there. "Why not?"

Drew let out a long sigh. "Not many people are out at my school, Mom. You may think liberals and queers have overwhelmed up north, but it's not as true as you think. There's plenty of people that think just like those bastards across the street. There's not so many people who are brave enough to be out." Drew swallowed. "I could dress nice and just be seen as a shy lit geek. So I did. Look what happened to the people who didn't... Michael was almost killed. Sammy came out and someone tried to burn him alive. Nobody thinks of Aidan as scary, but I've seen Aidan fight people off. They got to him, Mom. Beat him up and put him in the hospital." Drew still couldn't look at his mom's face. "I was the one talking to the press. They wanted to shut me up, so they made my life hell. Outed a few others, so it wouldn't look like they were targeting me, but I knew. I got quiet. Stacy broke up with me, but I found another girl."

"Did it work? Do they know you're a sissy boy?"

Drew pushed away from the table, stood up, and turned away. "I don't know."

"This girl?"

"She thinks they're nuts. I was good at making the girls think that." Drew looked

at the cabinet where his mom kept her liquor.

Was it too early to start? He sighed again.

"Doesn't matter."

"Am I gonna meet this girl?"

Drew shook his head. "No. I'll break up with her over the summer. I'll call it distance, but it won't be. I'll be apologetic and sweet about it. I'll make her feel sorry she didn't try harder. Make her feel guilty." Drew sighed. *I'm not good person.* "She'll tell everyone it was her fault, and I'll get back to campus to girls swooning and falling over themselves to be next in line." Drew stepped away from the table. "I'm not a good strong man, Mom. That's why it hurt. You're right. Dad was right. I'm just a shit."

*"I'm not a good strong man,  
Mom. That's why it hurt.  
You're right. Dad was right.  
I'm just a shit."*

*In Gerry's Lion we are greeted with an emotional palette that defies the cheer of the season, because we're meeting a man who is driven by grief and a concurrent need to both feel it and flee from it. When we meet Leo, we don't get to see the same emotional depth immediately. Presented here is the start of Gerry's Lion from Leo's point of view.*

# Short

## Booze, Boys and Beaches

---

"That's enough," Leo said in a soft voice that nevertheless carried the length of the empty club.

"What?" The pretty boy on stage practically snarled the words.

Leo hopped onto the stage and glared at the young man through sunglasses he wore to hide his eyes.

"I'm in jeans. What do you expect you fucking cow!"

Leo flinched.

"Not cool." Danny stepped forward. He rivaled the young man, with sharp cheekbones and that bit of scruff that was currently in. His hair was dark, curly and wild. He set a hand on Leo's shoulder. "He's your potential employer, kid."

"Well, I'd like to see him do better!"

Leo shook his head quickly, but Danny's lips turned slightly upward. "Fine."

"Danny," growled Leo.

Danny pulled Leo's glasses off. The kid hissed and stumbled back. "Come on, man," Danny said. "Take off that shirt and show the boy how it's done."

"I can't!"

Danny grabbed Leo by the shoulder. "You can."

Leo shivered as he pulled his shirt off. He looked at the kid, whose eyes were wide, whispering a name Leo hadn't used in years. Certainly the kid had never expected ripped abs under the shapeless over-sized shirt. That was the point. Blue eyes met

blue eyes. "It's not enough to be pretty," Leo said, voice cracking. It was a talk he hadn't given in a long time. "It's not enough to be built. That'll get you laid. To get paid you need more. You're just doing this a lot." Leo thrust his hips suggestively.

"It looks good," Danny said. "I don't need to be gay to know the boys will eat you up. But it has to be a show too."

Gripping the pole lightly, Leo swung to give himself the momentum he needed and then executed a split, circling twice before one leg curled up and around the pole and Leo's hands let go stretching arms toward the floor as he circled. His abs popped into definition as he swung.

"See that? Gyrating on stage? That'll get boys taking you home for the night, if that's what you want. Doing that?" Danny pointed to Leo as he continued swinging in jeans just as restrictive as the twink boy's. "That gets you tips and a paycheck"

"They just want this anyways." The kid grasped his package.

Leo swung elegantly to his feet. "Trust me, you'll find that isn't enough. Even with those scenes on the internet. Even with that pretty ass that will have them wanting you in the crowd. It's not enough."

"Work on it," Danny said. "We have more shows coming up. Everyone likes a show that gets them hot in the winter. Maybe we can use you then."

The kid jumped off the stage and grabbed

his coat. "Assholes," he grumbled, flicking them off.

Danny stepped forward to say something but stopped when Leo grabbed his shoulder. When the kid was gone, Danny glared. "You let him get away with that?"

"He's young, struggling. He needed this job. He's going out for clients tonight, Danny, because we didn't give him a job."

"You don't know that."

"Yes. I do."

"Leo, this is a business. We have to be discriminating. Unless you want to get on stage again?"

"Can't."

"Won't more like." Danny shook his head. "It's been a fucking year, Leo. How did you let that guy mess you up like this?"

Leo sat at the edge of the stage. "He made me feel like that," Leo said quietly. "Like that kid who thinks that all that matters is his body and his dick. And then John made me feel like this body wasn't enough, and nothing else about me mattered."

Sighing, Danny sat down next to Leo. "John fucked you up, man. But your confidence can't be shot forever. You have to get out there, even if you can't do it on stage."

Leo fell backward against the stage. "Last date just left me at the table."

"Because you do this. It's a date, Leo. It's supposed to be about having fun and establishing attraction, desire, common interests. It's about making someone want more, and when you do this shit, you're proving John right."

It stung.

"Look, I get it," Danny said. "But you've let your whole world be about that. It's affecting you."

Leo clutched his head. "What do you want me to do?"

"Take a break. That cruise, the one you took with John. It's coming up, isn't it? Go. Get on that damned ship. Get laid. Get tan. Go dancing. Swim on the beach. Get yourself good and drunk and when you come back, for fuck's sake, leave the shade of your

fucking ex on the damn boat!"

Grunting, Leo sat up. "That's your prescription? Booze, boys and beaches?"

"Yes."

Leo looked at his dangling feet. "You'll hire the kid? With the brunet we saw earlier? If they do the routine together..."

"I'll have to talk to Jen."

Leo swung his feet back up onto the stage. He grabbed his shirt, pulled it back on, then hopped off the stage. Halfway to the door his step was interrupted.

"Make sure you bring real clothes."

"These are real."

"Leo, you're fucking gorgeous and you dress like you need to hide your body."

"I don't want them to see it. I don't want anyone to fucking see it!"

Danny's boots clapped against the floor of the club as he launched himself off the stage and then clacked against the floor with every step. "You don't have to show it off. But wear something that fits. Hell, wear those damned tropical shirts you love so much if you have to. At least they aren't hiding you."

"Not worth being seen, Danny."

"Fuck that. Pissed as that boy was, he would have gotten into bed with you in a second if you'd been offering."

"No, he wouldn't."

Danny grabbed Leo, turning him so they were face to face, eye to eye. "Yes, Leo. You are a gorgeous man. You used to know it. John was a stupid cheating schmuck. He spent months trying to get back with you. You think he did that because you're ugly? No. Even he knew you were worth it and that he'd messed up."

"He cheated on me!"

Danny patted Leo on the cheek. "Yeah. But that reflects on him, not you. Are you going to book that ticket? Or do I have to do it?"

THE LINE WAS AS LONG as he'd remembered it. Leo's suitcases had already been taken by the porters, he just had a small bag of

essentials. He watched the crowd, numbly. It was cheerful. That was to be expected, at Christmas. Young couples treating themselves to a vacation. Older couples avoiding the bustle of the holidays. College students avoiding home. As he moved from one line to the next, through security, establishing onboard credit, he watched the crowd.

He'd spent a week trying to blow it off before he'd come home to his apartment to Danny and Jen in the living room. They hadn't yelled. But they had packed for him, clothes he hadn't worn in a long time. Skimpy clothes. Sexy clothes. Tropical shirts. Boxes of condoms and lube—he swore there was enough for him to fuck a different boy every hour and still have some left over!

There were hot college boys in the line with him. Some of them had tells. Enough for him to know he could spend the whole trip in his cabin fucking if that's what he really wanted.

To one side, frequent cruisers slipped through a shorter line in a fraction of the time. Quietly escorted and shepherded through, the line drew Leo's notice only for the handsome African-American man who seemed to go through it all with a numb, vacant expression. He made Leo doubt every tell, too perfect to trust instinct not to be wishful thinking.

Leo watched the man slip through the lines and let himself smile at the what if.

"Passport, please," asked the person behind the counter, distracting him.

Leo quickly searched his pockets for his paperwork and handed it across the counter.

There were more lines, a dismally long wait at an elevator, and then he was in his room. He stepped out onto the balcony. The view right now was lousy, facing the city, but later he'd be able to look across the water. It was a splurge he hadn't made last trip. Danny had known that.

The knock on the door was insistent and came with instructions for the required

mustering drill. That reminded him too much of the last cruise, and he was so flustered the only man he noticed was from the activities staff. With what happened last time, it wouldn't have mattered if the guy had been perfect, all Leo could see was rage.

Cruises were meant to be pleasant and fun, and it wasn't long before every crew member was quietly prodding him to go to deck twelve for a party as the boat slowly pulled away from the dock. That was good. Leo needed a drink, and he got one as soon as he arrived, sitting at the bar and ordering something strong rather than tropical.

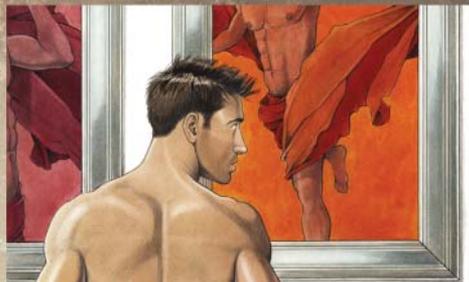
The dancers were already on the floor, trying to get a passenger to join them. The crew shimmied, shook and twerked away. Leo's breath caught. The African-American man he'd noticed in the regular cruisers' line was on the floor.

A red polo contrasted against the shade of his skin, and the man's shaved scalp was beaded with sweat. But what most attracted Leo was the expression on the man's face as he danced. While before he'd had a vacant, distant expression, as he danced it became joyful, ecstatic. The song slowly ended, and after he'd endured the embarrassment of being called out for his fantastic dancing, the man moved to the edge of the deck, eyes on the horizon.

Doubts filled Leo. This man was gorgeous, and while the dancing was a tell of its own, Leo still felt the awful twist of his stomach at the thought. *What if John was right? What if I'm just a whore?*

Leo pushed his drink away and licked his lips. "If I'm going to put this behind me, I have to start somewhere," he whispered. A smile formed slowly. *Besides, that's the cream of the crop. If he says yes, I could be in heaven for the whole cruise!*

Step by step Leo forced himself forward. All he had to do was say hello. Surely he could at least do that. In sexy, husky tones he'd had no cause to use in a year, Leo forced the words out. Fuck John. He was going to try. He had to.



## *Gerry's Lion*

by Ashavan Doyon

Gerald Tanner lost the piece of his life he loved most, his husband Adam. When faced with the prospect of another Christmas with a family who thinks he's better off now that Adam is gone, Gerry decides instead to revisit the memory of when they met, and boards a Christmas cruise on the Sunrise. He's not expecting to meet Leo Ystrabov. He certainly never imagined the courageous young man would challenge him into feelings of desire and the possibility of a love that isn't his precious Adam.

Leo Ystrabov doesn't quite know how to handle the shattered heart Gerry presents so hesitantly. But the offer is precious, and Leo can't resist. However, with two families none too eager to accept them and a lot of baggage on both sides, their relationship faces an uphill battle. Leo will have to find his courage to be the lion Gerry sees in him.

Published by Dreamspinner Press

# Work in Progress

## Lightning Strikes

---

When I first made my plan for this issue of the newsletter, I was really expecting to be talking about my next College Rose Romance. The fourth, *Becoming Rory*, was just submitted to my publisher, and for the past three years, I've written the draft of one of these stories during National Novel Writing Month.

*Becoming Rory* was different. I wrote it over the course of a full year. When it came time for Nano, I was ready and expecting to start the next story, even though I don't know yet whether my publisher is going to take *Becoming Rory*.

I have ideas. The next two College Rose Romances are planned. I have titles, book cover ideas, and even characters in mind for both of them. In a lull during writing, I created a graphic for the next one: a handsome man over a stormy purple background with a lightning strike. Superimposed was the rose that told me what it was supposed to be about. Purple. A single word—beloved. My critics were just going to love me, as a purple rose is symbolic of love at first sight.

That's not the draft I wrote during November. It's a worthy story and the small graphic inspired a cover concept that I'll pitch, assuming my publisher takes *Becoming Rory*. But I needed a break, and so I wrote something very different. Inspired by the cover design for this issue, I wrote a story about a man touched by winter.

It's a modern fantasy story, rather than

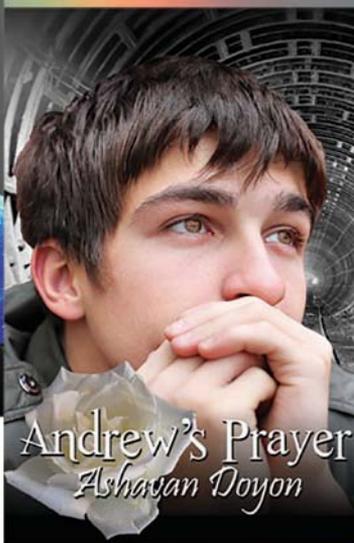
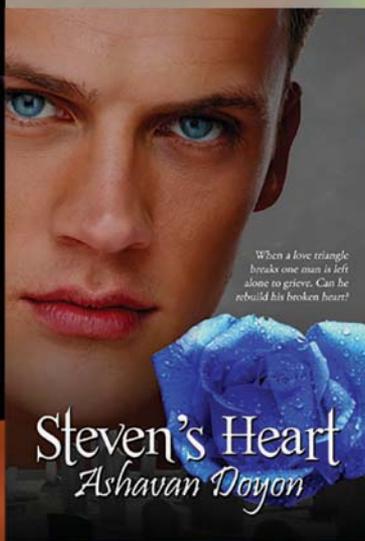
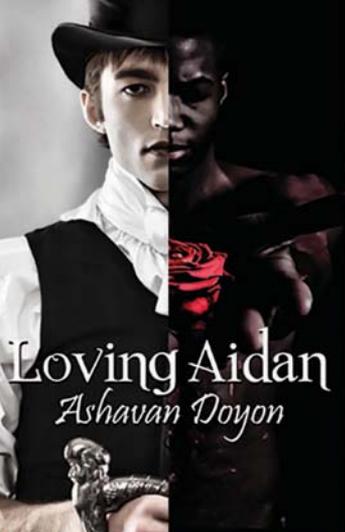
a strict contemporary. I liked the seasonal aspect, playing on perceptions of spring and summer as positives, opposite autumn and winter as seasons touched by death. What if those of the folk touched by autumn and winter were really rare, their births touched by sadness? And so I had two brothers. One is exiled into the realm of mortals, for autumn meant death to the folk. The other, winter, is tolerated only because winter is the renewal that allows spring to come.

The child of autumn is left ignorant of his heritage, making his way as a changeling child, fostered by parents who understand nothing of why he is different. This feeling of being alien and unknown by everyone is something he shares with a friend, and in secret they celebrate their shared difference in a forbidden relationship.

The relationship begins to awaken the power of autumn, and the folk, cloistered in their realm, consider the young man a threat to their own mortality. The king of the folk sends his warriors of the spring into the mortal realm to destroy the threat forever.

But the king had not counted on the possibility that a mother might love her exiled son, or that a brother might try to intervene, even into the mortal realm.

Lost is a story about self-reflection, about discovery, about the power of memories and of love, about loss and transformation. I look forward to sharing it with you.



*discover the  
thrill of romance*

**ASHAVAN DOYON**

[facebook.com/ashavandoyon.writer](https://www.facebook.com/ashavandoyon.writer)

[www.ashavandoyon.com](http://www.ashavandoyon.com)



@ashavandoyon