

# ARDOR

*December 2016*



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SOARING HOPES  
& SHATTERED DREAMS

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*An Unexpected Hero*

# ARDOR

## december 2016

### THE NEWSLETTER OF ASHAVAN DOYON

Books by  
Ashavan Doyon

FROM DREAMSPINNER PRESS

Short  
The Colors of Romance

Novellas  
I Almost Let You  
The Byte of Betrayal

Novels  
Gerry's Lion

Series - Sam's Cafe Romances  
The King's Mate (2nd edition)  
A Wounded Promise  
The Rodeo Knight  
Print only collection (Books 1-3):  
The Chess Master Chronicles

Other Publications

The College Rose Romances  
New editions coming next year!

Loving Aidan  
Steven's Heart  
Andrew's Prayer  
Becoming Rory

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Short based on characters from *I Almost Let You*  
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# Editorial

## Soaring Hopes & Shattered Dreams

I can't describe the feeling of holding your book in your hands for the first time. There's an elation to it, a giddiness, that defies my facility with words. You feel it in your stomach, bubbling in a rush that comes upward and tingles—honest to God, it tingles.

The publisher that gave me that feeling for the first time was Torquere Press. I'd had a short story in an anthology before, but it was in Dreamspinner Press's Daily Dose, which isn't available in print, so I never got that feeling. I'd had articles in gaming magazines, so I'd experienced a shadow of it, but never the full on force.

That first experience was marred. Just my luck, to have it marred. The spine of that first release had a misspelling. *Loving Aidan* was spelled *Loving Adian*. My husband probably thought I was a madman. Torquere handled it quickly. I'd been so excited I wasn't willing to wait for contributor copies, I ordered two so I could hold the book in my hands. Torquere replaced those too. Even though no other authors reviewed the spines of their books, I was given the opportunity to review the full wrap cover of every subsequent book.

This month has been a hard one. I've had elation, yes. *The Rodeo Knight* is out, and with it a second edition of *The King's*

*Mate*, and a print anthology of all three of my Sam's Cafe Romances: *The Chess Master Chronicles*. I'm so proud of that. I love that series. Having that Daily Dose story finally in print is a vindication for me.

November was hard in part because of that release. Eleven original exclusive blog posts meant 12,000 words of new content. It was an intense schedule. But all the time that I was writing those blog posts, I had a cloud hanging over me.

Torquere Press hadn't paid its authors in months. Shortly after the final blog post for *The Rodeo Knight* release was written, authors received notice. Torquere Press would close.

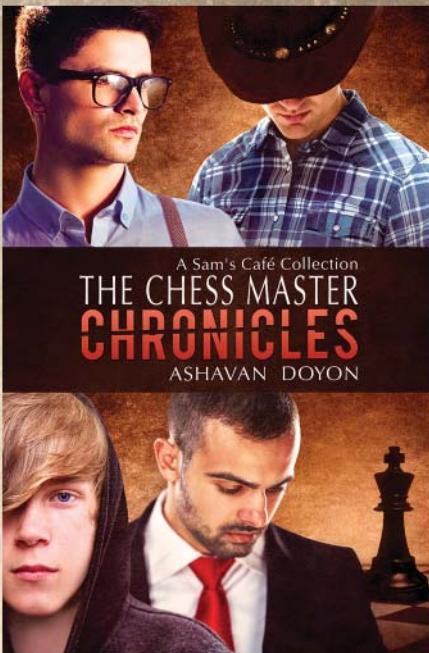
All my hopes built up and embodied by my Dreamspinner release were being shattered by my Torquere Press releases. Close to my heart, my novels for Torquere were new adult romances, stories that drew on a decade of life as a student struggling at times to figure out what being gay was. I put so much of myself into those stories.

I have my rights back. I'm lucky. Now I just have to figure out how to put my books back into the hands of readers.

—Ashavan Doyon

# *A Sam's Café Collection Books 1-3*

Welcome to Sam's Café, where men from all walks of life gather for the best coffee in town and to try their hands at the King's Game. Through challenges on and off the board, they move toward an endgame that might involve romance and a happily ever after—if they make the right moves.



## **The King's Mate**

Sam convinces Russell Pine to act as grandmaster in a chess tournament, but he soon learns the game isn't the real challenge. A secret admirer is courting Russ through words and pictures. But in a café full of beautiful young minds, who could be interested in the aging chessmaster?

## **A Wounded Promise**

With his abusive ex behind bars, Justin is eager to pursue his relationship with Russ. But when an alcohol-induced rage rekindles Justin's trauma, Russ will have to find a way to make amends for his mistake and heal the wounds on his lover's heart.

## **The Rodeo Knight**

Amnesiac Brian Stouten doesn't fit into the heterosexual life laid out by his family, so he returns to a small college town in search of clues to his past. The man he hopes to contact won't be of any help—but an out-of-place cowboy just might.

# Excerpt

## From A Wounded Promise

RUSS HELD JUSTIN's sleeping body close. It was hardly necessary; Justin had slept all night with his arms wrapped tightly around Russ's chest. Russ kissed Justin's hair. It was a spiky mess, as it always was in the morning. Russ swallowed. *I can't lose this.*

It took him almost half an hour to extricate himself without waking Justin. He watched for a few minutes to make sure Justin would fall back asleep. That was no hardship. He'd happily watch Justin all day, especially like this. Awake, Justin was a complicated puzzle. The scars that were invisible as his lover slept lingered when Justin was awake, in every comment, every shy glance away. But there were also flinches, winces, frightened panicked looks. Russ screwed his eyes shut. He'd made Justin frightened again. How could he have been so stupid? Russ managed a long slow breath, slower than he'd wanted, but he also didn't want to wake his sleeping lover.

Justin trembled in the bed, clutching at the blankets until he'd gathered enough folds to hug tightly. He always wanted to be holding something, needed to be close. Afraid to trust but desperately needing to? Russ couldn't be sure. They spent so much time avoiding those questions.

"I love you," whispered Russ, leaning down to lightly kiss Justin's forehead. Justin stirred momentarily, and then he grumbled

and pulled the pile of blankets closer.

Russ went into the bathroom and closed the door so the noise of the shower wouldn't wake the sleeping beauty in his bed. He washed quickly and towed himself dry. The temptation to rejoin Justin in the bed was immense, but Russ retrieved a pair of jeans, a T-shirt, underwear, and socks from the dresser as quietly as he could and dressed in the living room. On the table he left a simple note in case Justin woke up, the words "I love you" on a slip of paper.

The drive to the café was silent. Too quiet. They normally drove together, Justin's reflections on life filling the space. Russ walked in nervously to find Sam sitting at the counter.

"I wondered if you would come," Sam said.

Russ walked wordlessly to the counter and sat down next to Sam.

"You need coffee?"

Russ nodded. "Black."

Sam stood and went behind the counter. This early there were never many customers. Russ was almost always the first. The café had changed in the last few months. The large dominating square of the bar was accompanied by a row of tables where local college kids, and a few regulars, played chess. It was a result of a tournament and the boost in customers that the tournament had brought. Business had stacked toward the afternoons and evenings, when the

students were out of class.

Normally Russ would walk the line of tables to check out how the games were going. Sometimes he'd play one of the regulars. But not today.

"You weren't here yesterday," Russ said. The words were hard to manage.

Sam glared at Russ. "No," he said, setting down a porcelain saucer with a clang that made Russ worry it would crack. "I wasn't."

Russ looked down at the empty cup as Sam filled it.

"We've been friends for—"

"Don't," Sam said. He set the coffee pitcher back on its warmer. "What happened?"

"It's not important," Russ said softly. "Something set me off. I started drinking. It was a mistake, Sam."

Sam's nostrils flared. "You scared him."

"I know." Russ shifted uncomfortably on the stool.

"You know, it scared me from the start. Justin interested in my best customer—for years now, my best friend. He hid it from me, and Justin hiding anything scares me. I know he still hasn't told you why, but trust me, I have reason to get scared. When he came home, so upset that he was pounding on the door rather than just opening it, I knew something was wrong."

"I didn't hurt him."

"You were drunk, Russ."

"It was the day he died!"

"And Justin didn't know! So whose fault is that?"

Russ swallowed, his throat feeling dry despite the coffee. "Mine."

"You know, when I saw you two after the tournament, I thought, maybe they're ready. Justin let you touch him. Just casual touches, but he spent years flinching from everything. And you... you were playing chess. After Brian died, I never thought I'd see you even look at a chessboard again."

"Talking about fault, that was yours."

Sam smiled. "I was pushing. I'm your

friend. I'm supposed to push." Sam let out a sigh and pulled a cloth from the sanitizer bucket to wipe at some drops of spilled coffee. "I thought you were ready."

Russ sighed. "I didn't mean to scare him."

"He set you off?"

Russ nodded. "Knocked the photo of Brian off the mantle. The frame shattered, and the photo tore. I just saw red. I screamed at him, and he hid in the bedroom." Russ shook his head. "I was so angry, I couldn't talk to him. I went into the kitchen and started drinking." Russ clenched his fist. "I didn't stop."

"Instead of talking to him. Don't you have any idea what it means when you scream at him?"

Russ sipped his coffee, then swallowed hard. His throat still felt dry. Damned nerves. "What happened to him, it wasn't just one time, was it?"

Sam turned away. "No." It was hushed. But Russ still heard it.

"Will he be all right?"

Sam was still turned away, his hands at his face. "Maybe. But he was ready to run."

"I'm sorry."

"You should be saying that to him. You should be comforting him."

Russ nodded. "I did. But you need to hear it too."

"He's a good boy. He's my boy. Don't ever make the mistake of thinking you have even a chance of winning if you force me to choose."

"I love him, Sam."

"The ones who love us can scare us most of all." Sam turned to look at Russ. "I understand that better than anyone."

Russ looked at his coffee. "I know. I'm sorry." "He'll be up soon."

Russ nodded. Justin had worked at the café for too long to sleep much past dawn. "Can you... I know you need him here, but..."

"You'll owe me big."

"I have to fix this the right way, please."

*A brief look at Chris and Aaron from I Almost Let You as Aaron struggles with the shadow cast by the election at Christmas time. There may be hope yet. I trust that our boys will find it.*

*Short*

## Hope for Christmas

CHRIS GROANED. Two small hands grasped his, dragging him out of bed. He didn't resist. He was just thankful that he'd changed into something a little less risque than what he'd worn when he first got in the bed.

A quick glance back at the bed revealed a still sleeping young man. *Beautiful*. He reached forward in a rush to grasp Isabella by the waist and lift her onto his shoulder. He leaned his head into her side. "Morning my pretty."

"Come on, Daddy. Santa came!" She said it with the awe of a true believer.

"We have to wait for your papa."

"Awww!"

"You know the rules." He set her down. "But Daddy...."

He gave her a stern look, to which her only response was a pouty extended lower lip that crushed Chris's soul to mush. But Aaron, he'd never forgive Chris if she did more than open the stocking without him. Chris crouched to look at Bella, brushing hair out of her face. "Papa is very tired. But he wants to see everything Santa brought you."

"He's always tired." She glowered, stamping a foot.

Bella wasn't wrong. Since Trump had won the election, Aaron had been in a state of perpetual terror, staying up every night glaring at a screen as though watching the

bad news the moment it was announced somehow helped. Chris tipped Bella's chin up. "Watching you open presents will cheer him up. So you wait, okay?"

"Okay." She scuffed a foot against the floor.

Chris tousled her hair, prompting a shriek, then a groan from the other room. Bella brushed at her hair and fled down the hall toward the twinkling of the Christmas tree. Chris watched her go and stood, arching his back and twisting until he felt a satisfying crack. He returned to the bedroom.

*Beautiful.*

Naked from the waist up, Aaron's lower half was covered by sleeping pants he'd only started wearing since Bella was old enough to escape the nursery on her own. He'd tossed aside the blankets, revealing the empty, much skimpier underwear Chris had worn to bed. Aaron clutched his head in his hands. "I feel like I've been run over."

"Of course you do." Chris glanced down the hall to be sure Bella wasn't listening. "You were up at four doing all the arranging."

Bella shrieked. "Daddy! Santa came!"

Aaron winced, but there was a smile on his face. "It was worth it."

Chris waggled his eyebrows. "I certainly hope so." They'd done more than arrange presents. At four a.m. they could be sure of not getting interrupted.

"Go," Aaron said. "She won't wait long."

The fast patter of feet ended with a thump as Bella crashed into Chris's leg.  
“Daddy! Daddy! Santa!”

Chris smiled and lifted her. “Your papa needs coffee, pretty girl. Then your stocking.”

“But Daddy....”

He set a finger over her lip. “Shh.”  
He rubbed their noses together. “Santa brought lots of presents?”

Wide-eyed and grinning, Bella nodded.

“You must have been good! Were there any for me?”

“No, Daddy.”

“The blue ones,” Aaron supplied. “With the snowflakes.” He stood up and stretched and then folded both of them into a hug. “Love you Belly.” He turned to Chris and kissed him. “Love you Boo.”

“He’s ‘wake! Presents!”

“Coffee,” Chris corrected, smirking as he kissed Aaron back. He wished he’d taken a picture of Aaron in bed for the scrapbooks. He’d taken some of the tree and the presents, arranged and perfect. Soon hurricane Bella would descend and they might regret getting presents at all.

Aaron pulled on a loose shirt and went with them to the kitchen. Chris started with coffee. Aaron was in his usual chair, scrolling through messages on his phone.

“Put that away.”

“He’s going to—”

“Probably. We can’t let him take this away.”

“That’s why—”

“He’s not even in office yet, baby. And you’re letting him consume this. She doesn’t even really remember last year. This is Christmas. The first one she’ll probably remember. You, me, her. Our family. Together. He can’t take that away.”

Aaron gulped. “He’s going to try.”

“Then we’ll fight it. But we can’t let him win before he even does anything. That’s what you’re doing. You’re letting him steal moments from us.”

“Daddy!”

“Help her with her stocking?”

Aaron nodded, setting his phone aside. He turned to go to the living room but turned back, embracing Chris fiercely. “I’m not letting you go, not ever.”

Chris kissed Aaron’s wavy black hair. “I know. Your daughter is about to explode.”

“Daddy!” That one was almost tears.

Both of them could hear it.

“Coming, Belly girl.”

“Stop calling her that!”

Aaron chuckled and rushed from the room. Giggling and a happy squeal followed.

Once the coffee was percolating, Chris allowed himself a long sigh. Poor Aaron. He’d always been too plugged in to political crap. Too concerned with what everyone else thought. Too ready to keep how the rest of the world made laws from letting the two of them from being happy. Now it was three of them. Chris understood a little better the fear Aaron felt so keenly.

ISABELLA SLEPT, surrounded by unwrapped presents, her head against Chris’s knee. Aaron had long since crushed the massive amounts of wrapping paper into a bag in the corner.

Chris sipped his coffee. “You’re quiet.”

Aaron held up the keys he’d had cradled in his hand. “It’s too much.”

Chris shook his head. “It’s not. I had a good year. We both did.”

“Not the money,” Aaron said, waving dismissively. “A minivan? Us?”

“She’s not going to fit in a car seat in the back of the Jag. Besides, mine is almost like the old station wagon.”

“I want my car with the big bow on top.”

Chris smirked. “It wouldn’t fit in the garage that way.”

The doorbell rang, it’s dull, too-soft tones loud enough only because Bella was snoozing.

“I’ll get it,” Aaron said, setting the keys on the table next to him and heading down the hall. The tones sounded again. Chris

heard the door open. Aaron's voice, shaken, calling out. "Chris...."

Aaron didn't shake easily. Chris bolted from the couch, careful of Bella, but rushing to the door. Framed in the threshold of the front door was a woman he hadn't seen in over ten years. He swallowed hard. The brush of Bella's small arms grasping at his legs felt somehow magnified as she peeked to see who it was. Chris leaned down and lifted his little girl up.

"Who is that, Daddy?"

Chris looked at Aaron and then at the stunned woman. Her mouth was open, as though trying to speak, but nothing was coming out.

Bella twisted in Chris's arms and turned to Aaron. "Papa?"

Aaron raised a questioning eyebrow at Chris who nodded slowly.

"This is your grandma."

Bella's eyes got huge, wide with wonder. "I have another grandma?"

"Mom," Chris said slowly. "This is Isabella."

"She's—"

"My daughter. Our daughter." Chris gestured to Aaron. He didn't give her a chance to say anything. Instead he captured his daughter's attention, made a bit of a funny face so she giggled, and spoke directly to her. "Say hello to your grandma, okay?"

Bella hid her face quickly against Chris's chest.

"What are you doing here?" Aaron asked quietly, in that soft and deadly way that made Chris certain that there was a whole lot more Aaron wanted to say but wouldn't—not with Chris there, not with Bella there.

"Can't I visit my son?"

"You made clear last time we spoke that it could never happen. What changed?" Chris held Isabella tight. Could she sense it? That he was scared? Worried?

"He passed a few months ago." She closed her eyes and steadied herself against

the door. "Tried to find you. Couldn't. By the time I tracked you down everything was over. Thought maybe it was kinder to let it be. Then the holidays... I'd given up everything to be with him. You'd given us up to be with him." She nodded at Aaron. "Ain't nobody left to care. It's a good love. Gotta be. You're still here, together. Look at you." Her eyes teared up. "And with a daughter!"

Chris glanced at Aaron. Slowly Aaron nodded.

"It's cold outside, Mom. You should come inside."

Aaron's phone rang. Not its usual ring. Aaron gazed wide-eyed at Chris and beamed. "Boo...."

"Go answer it!"

Aaron ran for the kitchen, where his phone was still sitting on the table.

"What's going on?"

Chris gestured for his mom to come in. "It's probably nothing. Just another false—"

"Boo!"

A tingle filled him, from the tips of his toes all the way to the crown of his head. "Oh, God."

Aaron stuck his head into the hallway, nodding vigorously, the phone still crushed to his ear.

Chris squeezed Isabella close to him. "Bella, baby."

"He's here?"

"Is this a bad time?"

Chris's mom looked sad, out of place. He was going to fix that. He was going to fix everything. 2016 wasn't going to be such a bad year at all. It was going to be about the best year ever. All his hopes, all his dreams. A family. A husband. A little girl. He swallowed hard.

He turned to look at his mom. "Want to come with us to meet your grandson?"

"He's really here?" asked Bella.

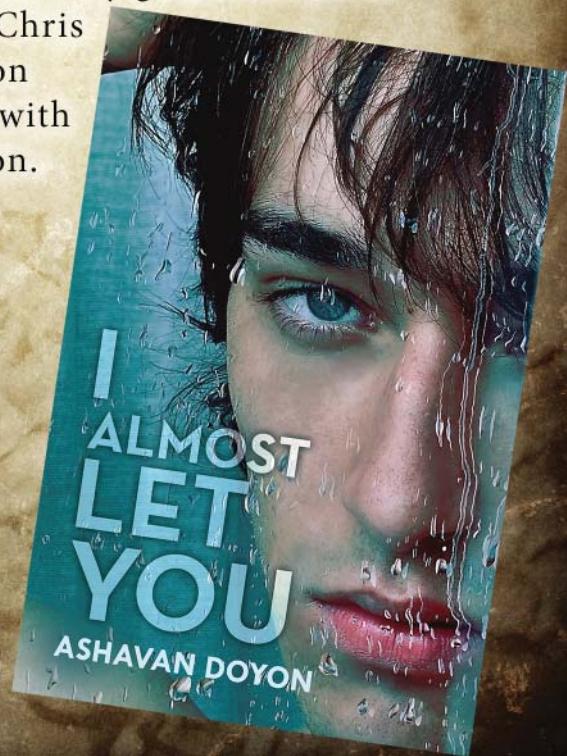
Chris's mom looked at him and smiled. "I'd love to."

## *I Almost Let You*

by Ashavan Doyon

When Aaron refused to discuss getting married, he didn't expect Chris to take it so poorly. They've been together twelve years. Aaron thought they'd at least talk about his very valid reasons. Gay marriage isn't even legal in their state, and what do they need a piece of paper for, anyway? When Chris leaves after the fight, Aaron tracks Chris down just in time to see him about to lock lips with a stranger in a club, which drives home the situation's urgency. Aaron must make things right with Chris. He's willing to do anything, but their friends' advice only goes so far, and when he learns what Chris has been hiding, Aaron has to decide if a life with Chris is even an option.

Published by  
Dreamspinner Press



# Work in Progress

## An Unexpected Hero

A year ago, I knew exactly how the College Rose Romances were going to go. Book five was going to center on an as yet unknown character, who was going to fall for Cian, frequently referred to in the early books as boy-in-a-dress. I don't feel this gives anything away, since the title for book five was already set: *Cian, Beloved*.

The book focused on the purple rose; it was meant to focus on an unexpected and instant attraction and a young man's struggle coming to terms with a burgeoning bisexual identity. For me that's an important story to tell, since so many of my characters are emphatically gay, and so many of them have used young women to keep that secret. Discovering a larger sexuality, one that expanded rather than being based on a lie, represented a new story.

Also bisexual characters get ignored. Not fair. I don't apologize for my gay characters being gay, but I seriously want the bi characters to get the focus at least some of the time. Book five was going to be one of those times.

Instead, in the midst of my publisher's collapse, I wrote a very different story. It was one that I knew had been waiting in the wings for a little while—it got foreshadowed in *Andrew's Prayer* quite unexpectedly at the end. I hadn't expected the character to emerge so forcefully, or

for him to push all the other stories aside.

I should have. The character, for all that he's turned out rather more complex than I expected, has been expressed everywhere we've seen him as a bully. The bully. The very one who assaults Aidan in book one. Jim Puffton.

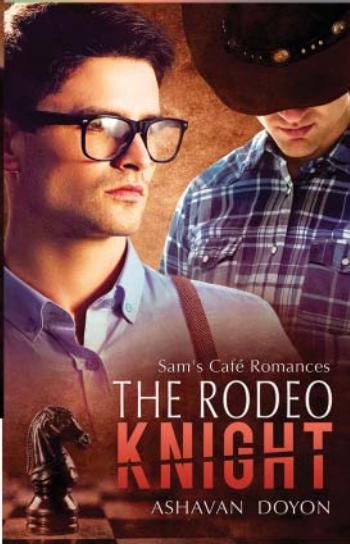
I knew from the start that I was going to make Jim Puffton gay. From his comeuppance in *Loving Aidan* to the important clash in *Steven's Heart*, Jim is not a lovable character. Then in *Andrew's Prayer* he does something unthinkable.

I knew the character was gay. But Jim, he'd neglected to mention to me that he'd been falling for Drew all those times they met in the tunnels. But there it was. Why does Jim miss the sex in the tunnels? "I don't," he tells Drew. "I miss you."

They were fun words to write because I hadn't expected them when Jim whispered them from the recesses of my brain. I knew what they meant. Jim was telling me he had a story too, one he expected me to tell.

I didn't know he was going to cut in line. Bastard.

So *Cian, Beloved* will be delayed so that I can bring you the now very near complete *Forgiving James*. He's a very conflicted character, as you might expect, but I think you'll root for him in the end.



*discover the  
thrill of romance*

**ASHAVAN DOYON**

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