

# ARDOR

A young man with glowing yellow eyes is the central focus, looking directly at the viewer. He is surrounded by a forest scene with falling snow. The background is a mix of dark brown tree trunks and bright, glowing yellow and white light effects, suggesting a magical or ethereal atmosphere.

*April 2016*

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THOSE CHERISHED WORDS

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# ARDOR

april 2016

## THE NEWSLETTER OF ASHAVAN DOYON

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Ashavan Doyon

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From Dreamspinner Press

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The Kings Mate  
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The College Rose Romances

Preview from *Becoming Rory*  
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Loving Aidan  
Steven's Heart  
Andrew's Prayer  
Becoming Rory (Coming June 2016)

*When Love is Gone*  
Short based on characters from  
*The One That Feels*  
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# Editorial

## Those Cherished Words

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Writing is a special sort of creation. I nurse the words, I help them grow with rewrites and edits. I set them loose on the world as stories. And then they've flown and all I can do is read reviews and hope, pray that someone, anyone, will see some value in what I've written.

And then come the reviews. It's just about the only feedback authors ever get, and even though we know we shouldn't, mustn't look—we do. Almost all of us.

And we rage. That book is our baby, and the criticism we're getting isn't the quiet note of an editor that we've trained ourselves to respond to, or an email from a beta that tells us we totally messed up the story. That feedback is a review, and we must never ever respond to it.

A bad review hurts. Those words getting critiqued? They represent months of work, hours and hours of research, writing, rewriting, editing, and proofing. Blood, sweat and tears went into that story. If I respond when I'm hurt, I will respond in a way that is hurtful. And because I'm an author, I have a particular gift in being hurtful with words. How can I unleash that? This person read my story. They picked it out. They spent hours of their lives reading it and then cared enough to write a review. Saying nothing hurts too. But speaking out is worse.

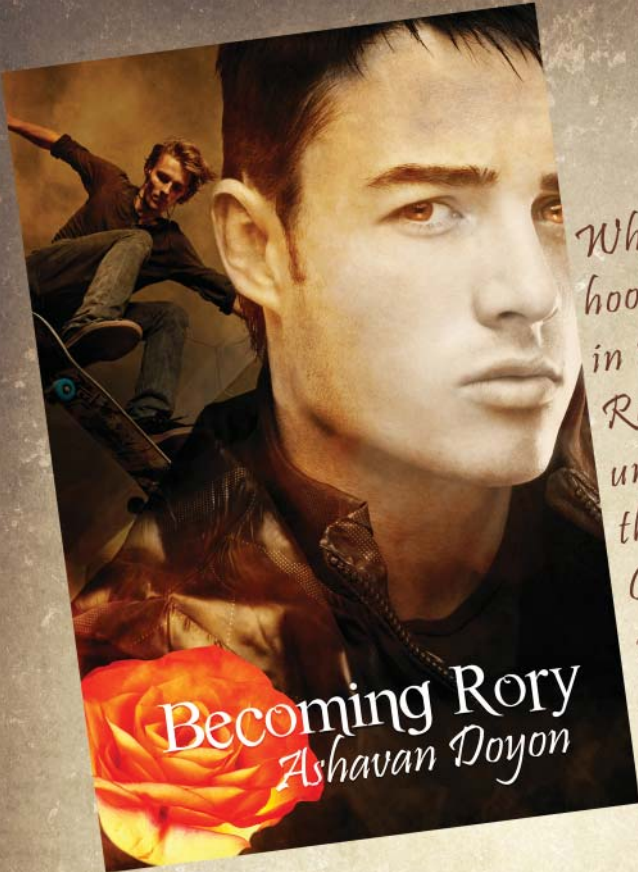
I do research. I write what I know. I have some idea of how things work and whether a scene makes sense, even when the reader doesn't think I do. This can get tricky. Sometimes the author isn't an expert and what we write really doesn't work. But oddly that doesn't seem to be when readers notice. Readers notice the things we know best, and call us out on being wrong.

Almost every author will tell you, do not engage a reviewer. Reviews are for readers.

Unfortunately, sometimes reviewers get mean. They get personal, they get self-righteous, they make accusations and personal attacks. And sometimes they review stories that it's clear they never read. I've seen reviews of stories complaining about characters who never appear, plot points in settings that aren't in the books.

Did I mention these are our cherished words? That I got ten beautiful reviews for that one bad one? Trust me, it still ruined my day. Reviews are for readers. Every experience is valid. But inside, those words are cherished, and what I most want to know is that you enjoyed them.

—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*



# Preview

## From *Becoming Rory*

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The party held by the student leadership was not like any party Rory had ever been to. Lit majors had parties, but they were small dinner parties, and the drinking was wine with cheese and maybe some brandy while music, classical or perhaps new age, played in the background.

This was unimaginably bigger and louder. They'd walked just across the courtyard to Baxter. Barry spent the brief walk explaining that Baxter was where the political science majors who made up the bulk of the student government leadership lived. Because only leaders and athletes had officially arrived, there was no sign in required at the security desk; it was simply a matter of getting let in the door, and then following the noise.

"Not crowded yet," noted Barry.

Rory wasn't at all sure how Barry could possibly think this wasn't crowded. Barry disappeared for a moment and then reappeared with two bottles.

"I don't drink."

"Can't, or don't?" asked Barry.

"Don't."

"Hard lemonade," said Barry, thrusting the bottle out to Rory. "If you don't have something, someone will give you something a lot stronger. You don't strike me as the beer type. Trust me, this is better."

"Do I have to drink it?" asked Rory,

taking the offered bottle.

"Drink, no. Hold, yes. But it's good, and there's more if you decide you like it." Barry patted him on the shoulder. "Hey, loosen up, it's a party."

Rory mumbled something vaguely affirmative and watched as Barry wandered over to talk to a cluster of people in the corner. He recognized several of them as people who had been helping people unpack their cars earlier. They must be residence life staff. Rory looked around and nervously took a quick drink from his bottle. He grimaced and smacked his lips. Well, they'd gotten the lemonade flavor right. He could tell there was alcohol in it, but only vaguely from the taste. The alcohol spoke more through what it felt like to drink. There was a vague tingle, a hint of an aftertaste, and a warmth that spread fast, too fast, through his cheeks.

The corners were taken already, but Rory searched out a spot along the wall. They'd lit the basement of Baxter with lamps, and not many, so there were a lot of shadowed spots. The best light was around the pool tables where several people played what appeared to be friendly games. People lounged on the couches, gathered around the low tables. An area on one side had been cleared, and the music was slowly but surely changing to

dance beats that Rory recognized from a few attempts to go out clubbing. How Andrew had convinced him to do that, he'd never know.

Rory was sure about one thing. Except for Barry, he didn't know a single person there. Rory fidgeted as he glanced around the room. No one was dancing yet. A few people on couches made out, but more were talking. Everyone was drinking. For a moment Rory wanted to run away.

"You need to lean against the wall." The voice was husky and came from a deeply shadowed area on Rory's left.

"Why?"

"Lean. And for heaven's sake pretend to take a swig of that stuff."

Rory swallowed and leaned. The bottle came to his lips and he tipped it back, taking a small sip of the hard lemonade, but letting most of it flow back into the bottle.

"Yeah. Like that."

Rory tried to see who it was, but quick glances yielded only the man's size and overlong brown bangs that swiped across the young man's face obscuring any hope of seeing more than high elfin cheeks and a glimmer of the sparkling inscrutable dark of eyes peering through the strands. Peering at him.

"Thanks," whispered Rory. If it wasn't for the baritone, Rory might have thought it was a kid. He was small enough. But the voice wasn't a kid's voice, it was deep but mixed with the throaty rasp of someone who smoked too much. He scooted closer to Rory along the edge of the room, leaning comfortably, arms crossed, one foot lifted and flat against the wall. His clothes screamed skater kid. Shirts layered one over another. Black, gray, a dull olive drab. Long sleeve and elbow length and then around the bicep. Cargo pants. Chains. Good clothes. Rory still couldn't see his eyes, but his head kept shifting.

"Don't look at me. Pick something on

the far side of the room and just always look in that general direction."

"What?"

"And take another freakin' swig of that bottle before someone realizes you don't belong."

Rory dutifully obeyed, but his eyes didn't go to the far side of the room, they went to his feet. "I thought I was doing okay."

"Outfit's good. But once that reslife guy left your side you floundered. You didn't know what to do, and it showed."

"And you do?" asked Rory.

Rory earned a brief chuckle in response. "I know enough." The kid paused and gave an approaching man a glare that made Rory wonder if the guy would spontaneously combust. The man slowly backed away and then turned around.

"What was—"

"Drug dealer. You don't do drugs do you?"

"You're asking me? Come on. Even I can smell the weed on you."

The kid shrugged. "Sometimes. Just that." The glimmer of the kid's eyes glanced through strands of hair. They were dark, almost black, though that could have been the light. The look seemed expectant somehow.

Rory glared at the bottle in his hand. "Alcohol. It was never an addiction, but it came close."

"Not hard lemonade then?" asked the kid.

They were right next to each other now, their arms touching. The kid was really short. The scent of marijuana on his clothes wasn't as heavy as Rory had first assumed—it was almost stale, like it hadn't quite come out in the wash.

"I'm—"

"Lawrence Graeble," replied the kid. "Am I wrong?"

Rory swallowed. "It's Rory now."

*It's easy when you lose a love to dwell on it, even for years. For Thommas, it has been five. The One That Feels starts with the meeting between the two men, but there was a discussion on the phone first, a plan to meet. Presented here is the phone call that acted as the catalyst for them to see each other face to face.*

# Short

## When Love is Gone

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I ALMOST DROPPED the phone when I saw the number. Caller ID hadn't identified the caller, but it didn't need to. I looked at the readout for the space of two rings, three, then I shot it to voicemail. I couldn't. Not right now. And yet for minutes, hours after the call, I wished that the caller had left me voicemail. That night the call came again, but I was long past the time in which I'd entertain calls in the middle of the night, and I had no one to bind me to that responsibility. No children. No family. No love.

Morning meant bearing witness. Not one call, not two. Fifteen.

I recognized the number. I knew who it was trying to reach me. I knew what I wanted the call to be, and I knew that it wasn't. Frankly I was surprised he remembered the number. I know it wasn't in his phone.

It'd been five years. Five horrible lonely years. Now Brian was calling. I could block the number. I should block the number. I sat for an hour at the edge of the bed, the phone sitting next to me, staring at a photo that had been taken when we were happy, when our love was alive. It was from before Brian had been seduced by the idea that I wasn't worthy of his love.

The call came again at lunch. I should

be flattered, I guess, that not only did he remember my number, but my habits. When we'd been together I'd never have left a call go unanswered. Would never refuse to answer a call in the dead of night. When I'd deleted my number from his phone, when I'd deleted it from mine, I'd told him never to call me again.

Anger. Pure and powerful, he didn't doubt my word. And he'd agreed. For five years he'd kept his promise. Even powered by the force of anger that oath hadn't binding, not on Brian. But he'd kept the promise and now he was calling—at lunch when he knew I'd answer.

Four rings. I could let voicemail pick up again. I could force him to leave a message.

I answered the phone. "Ashforthe." Was it too terse? No. It needed to convey something.

There was a pause, long enough to doubt, but not so long that I'd hang up. He knew me too well.

"Thommas," he whispered, so soft it barely came through the speaker.

Just hearing my name hurt. He said it with that enviable way of imbuing the sound with everything he was feeling. And Brian, my Brian, he was in agony. All my plans to hold him accountable, to remind him of how we'd ending things,

they melted in that moment. I could feel his pain and already it infected my veins, attacking my resolve.

“What is it?” I said. My anger burned in the words, too present to be muted by his pain. Or perhaps my pain just flared brighter in the moment.

This time the pause wasn’t so long. Maybe he thought I’d hang up. Maybe he just needed to get the words out. I couldn’t be sure.

“Can we meet?”

I was thinking about it. Why the fuck was I thinking about it? I knew better. Meeting never went well. This was Brian. All of my formidable control was useless around this man. This was going to be a disaster. Of course I was going to do it.

I could pretend I was curious. I could pretend it was something, anything else. But that wouldn’t be why. I would go to meet him because I could never deny Brian anything. I’d never been able to.

“Where?”

Numbly I listened to him tell me where. I didn’t write it down. I didn’t need to. It was a club. One we both knew well. Ages ago, before we’d been happy, we’d danced there. That was before he left me alone. Before he’d abandoned me for a seemingly endless stream of twink boys with whom I could never compete. It was before he’d met Jordan, and my name had become something forgotten in a moment—until he had need of it.

I knew better than to ask why. It wouldn’t matter. He’d asked and now I was going to at least go to the club. If only to see him. I might be brave enough to leave without talking to him. I might be able to resist if I could see him and really feel the anger over the years we’d lost. Over the years I’d spent investing my heart and soul into something that he abandoned because I’d been his first. Because he’d wanted to play the field.

I was never enough for Brian.

Just thinking the words made my intestines knot and my heart pound.

I should have been enough. I tried to be enough. Even after he left me and I was the safe place to go when a hot boy he was fucking turned violent. Even after he started using me as a personal bank account and a way to get out of trouble. Even after I was relegated to a safety net he could conquer with a kiss and some pity sex.

He muttered some platitudes. Thanks for being willing to meet him. Promises that it would be different this time. I didn’t listen. I knew better.

I would go anyway.

I whispered reassurances. I hated myself for meaning every word. I calmly maneuvered him into hanging up and set my phone aside. It was my Friday. Had he done that on purpose? Had he waited to call until he knew he could ruin an entire weekend?

No.

That would be too much like planning ahead. We’d never done that. Not when we were together. Planning meant thinking of the future. We didn’t talk about why. I’d never really told him why. But he knew in some vague sense without understanding that my future was uncertain. He was old enough to ask my status. Old enough not to trust just hearing the words. I didn’t blame him for the assumption. But I did, a little, for the fact that he never asked the other questions.

Not that I would have answered them. Not that I could in a way he would understand. But it would have felt good for him to be interested enough to ask.

The photo sat on the nightstand. A happier time. One where I might have actually hoped for a future. I had never looked young, but in the picture at least, I didn’t look old. Not the way I did now. Not the



way I felt now. I should be grateful that every year I'd lived was not etched upon my face. I'd lived so many years. More than Brian at his cruelest would have ever guessed.

My heart raced. Was I excited? Hopeful? I dashed those hopes in the depths of a despair that five years had yet to diminish. Privately I hoped it was money. I hated the idea of Brian trading sex for money, even with me. But money was easy. Write a check. Done. That was another one of those uncomfortable questions Brian never asked. Not that I would have told him. Not that he would have believed me if I did.

Brian had been quiet for too long. It wouldn't be money. It wouldn't be anything about Brian at all. He was devastated, which meant it wasn't about him or about family or about anything I might want it to be about.

It would be about Jordan.

In all the many realities, there were few creatures for whom I bore a true hatred. Of them all, none compared to the animus I held within the deepest dark reaches of my heart for Jordan Blackmun.

Until he walked into Brian's life, I had hope. When Brian first left, leaving me numb and broken in the place I had built for us to be together, I had thought only to wait it out. Years uncounted I had waited, and I naively thought myself strong. There was nothing therapeutic in watching as Brian moved from one hot young twink to the next, never staying with anyone for long. Each link in a chain that just got longer tied me tighter to despair I dared not feel. Strong. It would break me.

But I waited. I endured.

Brian tired of the twink boys. He tired of the drama. He tired of volatility. He asked me if I could ever forgive him, and I said yes. He asked if he could come back, and I said yes.

He never made it back.

Jordan Blackmun entered Brian's life, and my love was gone. While I might still entertain hopes, dreams, I knew the moment I saw Jordan that I had lost the love I had forever. I might never admit it. I might scream to whoever listened that Brian and I were meant to be. On the cusp of a true reconciliation, Jordan took my love from me.

I hate him.

It's not his fault. I would have hated anyone who stole something as precious as Brian from me.

For two years I endured watching them together. I nursed the embers of my shattered hope and I waited. I'd thought I was strong and I'd been humbled, so this time I waited with humility in my heart and when Brian needed money, I gave it. When Jordan got arrested, I posted bail. When my precious Brian called me because his love had overdosed, I followed his love into the Realm where he had wandered, and I brought him home.

Brian saw enough that time to ask questions. I love Brian. I answered.

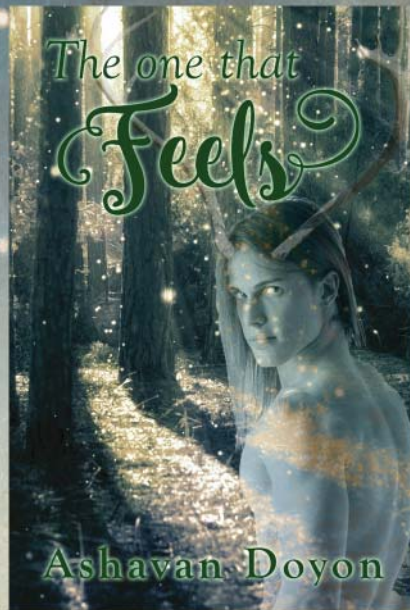
Tonight I will go to the club. I will dance and pretend I'm carefree. I will look into the eyes of my love, and I'll see that the love is gone from his eyes. And when he asks the world of me, because of his precious Jordan, I will put aside my hatred.

When love is gone, the world ends. I have waited and endured. But my love is gone. Will he understand the why when he asks the impossible of me? When he speaks that hated name and tells me I have to help? Will he understand why I still can't say no? Will he know that I still love him?

Tonight I will see Brian again.

For a moment—maybe a minute, maybe an hour, maybe an evening, I'll have hope.

# 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](http://www.ashavandoyon.com/blog)

# Work in Progress

## Writing the Realm

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*The One That Feels* started its life as a project for the July version of National Novel Writing Month. I wanted to write more, and participating had always helped me write consistently.

It is the only national novel writing event I ever failed. I got wrapped up in Thommas. I spent hours writing and rewriting the conversations he had with Brian. And as I wrote and then threw out words, getting further behind, I began to wonder if the argument between them meant something more than it seemed.

I had an ex in college who always used to come to me after we broke up whenever he needed something. I don't think he was even conscious of doing it. But I knew a lot of the anger Thommas was feeling came from that place, and because I wrote the story in first person, I very much felt it as I was writing.

Of course, when you're writing in the time crunch of a Nano, strange things happen. And when I finally worked my way past that first couple chapters, I ended up faced with something I wasn't expecting. This wasn't the college aged contemporary angst that I normally write. Certainly the angst was there, but there was also an element of magic and supernatural that crept in from out of nowhere.

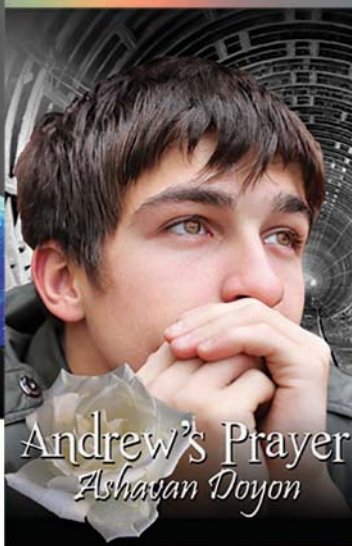
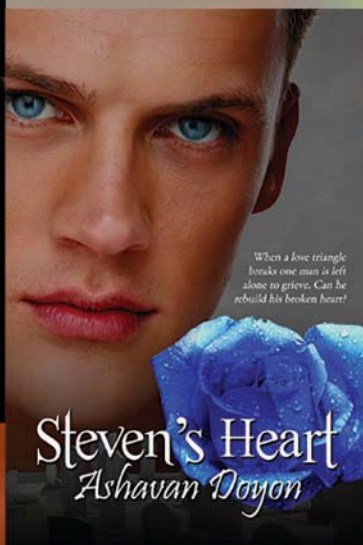
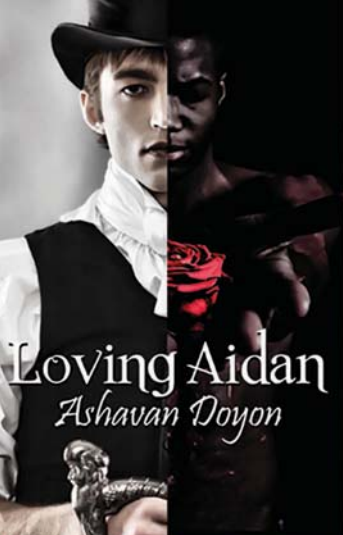
I grew up on fantasy. I know it well.

And I knew I was playing with fire, because it's really hard to be a pantsner and write fantasy. There are too many rules and too many places to flounder. I was having a hard enough time with the standard romance rules, which at that time I was only learning.

Worse, I had not one world but several. The real. The Realm. An ambiguous realm of the mind. Dreams that have effects on the character when they wake. Are those also worlds of their own?

I wrote this pantsing. That means I wrote it without an outline, character driven. It also means that the locations are nebulous, the distances a function of story and not a map. There are clues to how the real and the Realm tie together. There are strange and inconsistent rules (the Realm is always capitalized, the real is not). Was it consistent enough? That's something only readers can decide.

Thommas will soon speak his first promise. For someone who dwells in the Realm, that's a powerful magic, because an oath witnessed by the Realm cannot be broken. It's fitting that Thommas is bound that way by both Brian and by the wayward Prince of Zaharoth. Because the essence of the story is that in the end Thommas must choose. Join them every other week on my blog, the Passion Stroll!



*discover the  
thrill of romance*

**ASHAVAN DOYON**

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