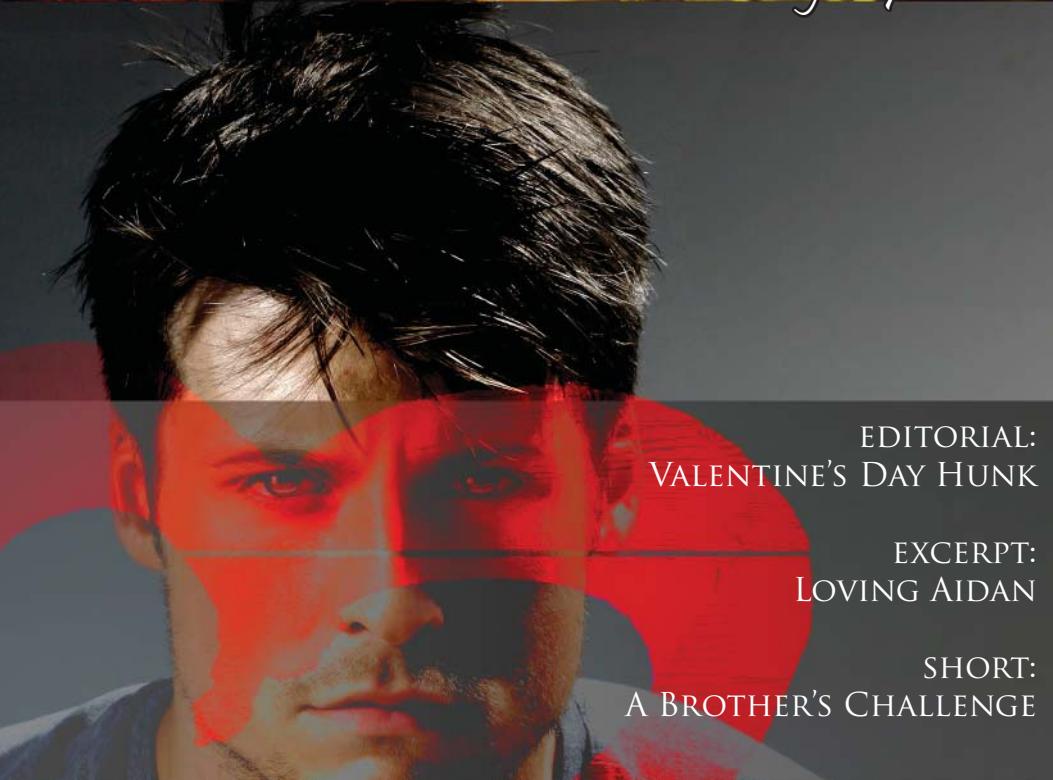


ARDOR

February 2017



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ARDOR

february 2017

THE NEWSLETTER OF ASHAVAN DOYON

Books by
Ashavan Doyon

Editor

Ashavan Doyon

FROM DREAMSPINNER PRESS

Short

The Colors of Romance

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I Almost Let You
The Byte of Betrayal

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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

PURPLE HORN PRESS

Short

American Pride

The College Rose Romances

Loving Aidan
Steven's Heart (anticipated April 2017)
Andrew's Prayer (summer 2017)
Becoming Rory (summer/fall 2017)

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A Brother's Challenge

Short based on characters from *The Rodeo Knight*

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Editorial

Valentine's Day Hunk

My life outside of writing crashed around me in the past month in some ways it hasn't in a long while. From unexpected struggles we knew would come up with Purple Horn Press and thought we had planned adequately for to the simple drudgeries of winter, February was just no fun.

About the only thing I did get done for this past month was the design for a Valentine's Day cover for *ARDOR*. I rather liked the artsy cover I did last year at this time, and I wanted to do something just as edgy. Also, the last two covers have been object based, and as a romance newsletter I wanted a hot guy.

Of course the problem with finding hot guys for covers is that hot is not so subjective when it comes to cover models. How can you tell? Take a look at covers. This isn't new. From notorious blond surfer dude on the cover of *Collision Course* by K.A. Mitchell to the blond bearded hunk we're seeing everywhere nowadays, to the cover model on the front of this very issue, favorite models are easy to spot. Cover artists love these guys, and so do authors. Sometimes it's the expression. Sometimes it's just that blond, blue-eyed models are hard to come by, but it isn't hard to find a half dozen covers with the same models.

Sure, you can make the image distinctive. A good cover artist will. But just like my Valentine's Day hunk, the cover may still end up diluted by the many other covers featuring the same model. Covers are so important for an author—the first, best chance to make an impression comes from the cover, followed by the title (which of course is wrapped up in the cover) and the blurb. And it's completely possible to take an overused model and create a cover that is distinctive by making the faces of the models less important features in the design.

Sometimes, the better part of valor is taking an already purchased image and putting it to alternative use. That's why you see the "gray shirt hunk" on the cover of *ARDOR* this month.

I love using distinctive models, but those are the hardest to find alternatives for. The Victorian gentleman I selected for *Loving Aidan* has been used recently on two other novels, which contributed to my decision for a new cover for the rerelease coming in March. Speaking of... *Loving Aidan!* Rerelease! March 22! Excited and nervous.

—Ashavan Doyon

ASHAVAN DOYON

Loving Aidan

A lonely Aidan,
a confused Steven,
and against
all hope, a very
jealous Sammy.
Torn between
romance and
an impossible
dream.

Loving Aidan
by Ashavan Doyon

College Rose Romances
Book 1

Published by
Purple Horn Press

Excerpt

From Loving Aidan

AIDAN SHOOK HIS head as he navigated through the press of bodies. College students and college-aged folks who weren't students, too many of them from the local high school and barely eighteen, much less legal drinking age, surrounded him, each holding tightly to a red plastic cup filled with beer. Aidan slid his way through the tightly congested house, praying that no one was drunk enough to set the place on fire.

Once through the throng nearest the keg, the crowd thinned out. Aidan found his way to the kitchen, which was even quieter, and grabbed a can of soda out of a cooler filled with ice. He cracked the pull tab and drained it quickly, tossing the empty can into a box where the recyclables were being collected. He sighed. Who had convinced him to come to this again?

"See, man, it's a great party!" said Sammy, who stood in the shadows in the corner, his eyes bright, his smile flashing. Like the rest of the crew team, he was wearing a deep blue jacket trimmed in gold with his name in delicate cursive letters across his shoulder blades in back. Underneath he was wearing a low cut t-shirt, the cross fully visible against the hard, smooth expanse of his chest. He was stunning, and tipsy, the alcohol heavy off his breath even at a distance.

Oh yeah, right. That was why. Aidan closed the distance between them and slipped the cup away from him artfully, setting it on the kitchen island. "Yeah, great party. Where's Caroline?" Aidan asked. It wasn't like Sammy to drink like this, not when he had a meet the next day.

"Around," said Sammy, shuffling toward him in an uncoordinated motion that made Aidan nervous about just how much Sammy might have had to drink. He'd seen Sammy drunk before, and the rorer was never less than graceful.

Aidan caught hold of Sammy and steadied him. "What happened?"

"Good beer," said Sammy, falling against Aidan. "So good." Aidan felt where Sammy's hand fell, and he couldn't help but wonder if it was really the beer that his friend was referring to. Dear God, Sammy was feeling him up, and it felt wonderful.

There was a crash as someone plowed through the kitchen door, sending it smacking against the wall hard enough to put a small dent alongside several similar ones. "Oh, good, Sammy's here," said Tim with a grin, dressed in the same deep blue jacket. He was tall, like Sammy, his skin deeply tanned even in the depths of winter. His eyes sparkled, a blue that was almost gray, and his hair was mousy, brown, short and disheveled.

"Yeah, and drunk. Where's Caroline?" asked Aidan, moving enough that Sammy's hand fell away. "You have a meet tomorrow, Tim. Wasn't someone keeping an eye on him?"

"He's just having a good time."

"Timothy," said Aidan, his voice hard-edged.

"Oh, fine. Caroline left with Sarah."

"And..." said Aidan, tapping his foot. There was more to this. He could tell.

"Steven was..." Tim looked around, clearly checking to make sure they were alone. "He was getting blown."

"This is Steven we're talking about," said Aidan, still tapping his foot. "I mean, fidelity isn't exactly in his vocabulary."

"I mean, Sarah was with Caroline and Sammy. They all saw."

"Come on, Tim. This is college. Tell me you've never walked in on someone."

Tim looked around again. "It was a guy, Aidan. One of your lit geeks from that poetry class he's in with you."

Aidan winced as he shifted to continue supporting Sammy's weight. He'd been wondering all night how Andrew had managed an invite to this party. "Okay."

"Wait," said Tim, looking Aidan over. "You're not really surprised, are you?"

"Not really, no."

Tim's eyes widened a bit. "Did you sleep with him?"

"Does it matter?" asked Aidan.

"He was dating Sarah!"

"Which should give you your answer. I'm not one to betray a friend," said Aidan, sliding an arm around Sammy and pulling Sammy's arm over his shoulder to help support the tall athlete a bit better. He keenly felt his own lack of height. At barely five foot four, he was not the best equipped to be supporting Sammy.

"But you had the opportunity?"

"If I'd wanted to," said Aidan. "Yeah."

"I'd have sworn you were interested."

"Attracted and interested are not exactly the same. And I don't betray friends," said Aidan flatly. His foot sought and caught the leg of a chair, dragging it close enough that he could lower Sammy into it.

"He was... Mouth on his cock... so hot," mumbled Sammy in a garbled whisper.

Aidan hesitated and glanced at Tim, who looked puzzled.

"What did he say?" asked Tim.

"Doesn't matter," said Aidan smoothly, obfuscating for his friend, though his own mind was racing. "Poor guy got a shock. I don't think Sammy ever much considered guys going at it."

"It's not going to make it uncomfortable for you, is it?" asked Tim, suddenly concerned.

"I'd probably react the same to walking in on one of you," said Aidan dismissively. "Get back to the party. I'll get him home."

Tim nodded. "All right," he said. Tim's eyes sought Aidan's sympathetically. "You know, if you and Steven..."

"Steven's hot. But I'm not in the market for closeted gay boys," said Aidan, just a bit more unsure of that fact than he had been moments ago. He glanced quickly at Sammy, who was still mumbling drunkenly, and thank God Sammy was whispering and mumbling 'cause if Tim could hear it... Aidan grunted and looked back at Tim. "What about Steven?"

"Doesn't know yet. Steven was sorta occupied. I mean, I got the impression the other guy knew what he was doing," said Tim quietly.

Aidan laughed at that. Andrew knew exactly what he was doing. He was quite talented.

"Did you want to... I mean," Tim stammered the words. "I don't know who should break the news about Sarah—"

"No one," said Aidan curtly. "He made his own bed. He'll have to suffer the consequences."

Previewing anticipated stories for Brandon and Brice, we get a peek at the two together after Brandon sends Brian off to search for his old life in The Rodeo Knight.

Short

A Brother's Challenge

BRANDON STOUTEN STOOD at the window. Silently he watched, waiting for the exhaust fumes spraying into the chill air. He pressed a hand to the window. Would Brian see or even think to look? Slowly, hesitantly, the truck lurched forward, then glided down the long driveway, past the stand of trees. A sudden exhalation concealed the view behind the fog of condensation. He'd been holding it. A slow swallow followed.

He'd done it now.

Brandon felt the presence at the door. A sixth sense, the kind brothers have.

"Where is he?"

"Gone."

"What do you mean, gone?"

Brandon trembled. Was it anger? Was he allowed to be angry? Yes.

"How could you, Brice?"

"Wasn't me."

Brandon curled his hand into a fist. "Of course it was."

"You think that little of me?"

"I think you didn't stop it." Brandon turned, the heat of his anger rising to his cheeks. "You could have stopped it!" Hissed anger, quiet and emphatic.

Brice Stouten stood at the door, a reflection. Imperfect and aged, but the same—they were the same. Brice stepped forward, pushing the door

closed behind him.

"Well?"

"We gave him a life, Bran. A beautiful wife. Money. A home."

"He had a home."

"But what about his personal life? You know what they're like. Different guy every week. Dad was saving him."

"Shut up! He had a husband! A life. A home. A fucking love, Iceman. Dad took that away and replaced it with a facade." Brandon turned back to the window, stepping right up against it until his breath fogged the glass. He spread his hand palm against it. The chill of winter was still there, clinging to the evening even if it fled during the day.

Brice was quiet for a long time. A full minute, maybe more.

"How did you know?"

Brandon half-turned, glaring over his shoulder. "Better question—why didn't you?"

"I followed my orders," Brice snapped.

Brandon sighed. "You're forty years old. Is that all there is? Following orders?"

"We weren't supposed to talk to him. At all, Bran."

"Maybe I needed to. Maybe I didn't want to end up like you." Brandon turned and walked up to Brice, toe-to-toe. "Maybe I didn't want my love to die at twenty."

"Careful, little brother. You're playing with fire."

A rush of footsteps concluded in a knock and a push and an open door that silenced anything further.

"Hey Dad, you promised." The boy was a softer shadow of his father. The harsh lines that defined both of them were muted, the cheeks more rounded even on the skinny sixteen-year-old body, the smile dimpled. And there was a smile—perpetual. From his mother.

"I'll be there in a minute." Brice's glare didn't stray from Brandon for a moment, though he managed to tousle the boy's hair without even a glance, and pulled the boy close enough for the touch to soften his expression around the fierce unrelenting stare. He tousled the boy's hair again. "Go find your mother."

The boy left and Brice closed the door, this time turning the lock.

"Mom and Dad will know soon." Brice spoke quietly, still facing the door. "What are you going to do?"

They'll know... but how much? How much will they guess? "I don't know. But what they did? To steal a man's love from him? They already did it once to you."

Brice stilled completely.

"They did that to Brian. They did that to our brother. And he'd already given up everything. Them. Us. Money and power. He gave up everything for it"—Brandon spread his arms, pointedly glaring at the clear luxury of their surroundings—"and they stole it from him anyway. Stole his husband, Brice. His love."

Brice grasped the door above him, claw-like.

"Can you stand there and pretend? Mom and Dad might not know the price you paid, but can you possibly think we didn't see it? That watching that wasn't part of what pushed Bri to make the decision he did—seeing you

become this, when you had a chance at something real."

"What I have is real." A whisper.

Brandon rested one hand on his brother's shoulder, ignoring Brice's attempt to shrug it away. "And you love him. And that love has helped you endure a long time, hasn't it? But what about something that touches your heart and makes you soar. I know you remember."

This time the shrug was more forceful. "I have to get back to the party."

Iceman. This is why they called him that. It wasn't just the happy circumstance of his name, or the fact that their names, all of them, were just too similar. It was this mask, like ice, dropped on all the emotion like some magic coolant to freeze their brother from feeling anything. One minute he was Brice, the next he was the Iceman, their father's perfect minion—obedient, resourceful, determined.

"And Brian?" The rest of the conversation was over. Brandon knew better than to try to appeal to Brice's humanity when he was busy not having any.

"Where did he go?"

"You can't seriously expect me to tell you."

"He has a wife."

"No. He had a husband. One he chose. One he cared about enough to do what neither of us would ever do." Brandon turned and returned to the window. The truck was long gone. *How the hell am I going to get home?*

"What happened to him?"

"You mean what did you do? Do you care?"

"Bran...."

"Bri's husband remarried. I didn't have the heart to tell him, not when I was already telling him his whole family betrayed him."

"Why didn't the husband fight?"

"You know why. You think it stopped at

million dollar payoffs to the hospital?"

Brice pounded the door lightly with a fist. "Dad convinced the guy Bri was dead, didn't he?"

Brandon stared desperately at the road. Had he done the right thing? Would knowing help, when there was nothing to be done? Brandon closed his eyes, setting his forehead against the chill of the glass. "Gold star."

"I didn't know."

Brandon grunted. "You chose not to."

"Well, where were you?" Steps came close, the sharp clack of expensive shoes on the hardwood floor.

"They didn't tell me." He kept his eyes closed. This was his guilt. His regret.

The soft clench of fingers betrayed Brice's reputation even as the words spoken reinforced it. "We can't be seen to support him, you know that."

"You mean you can't."

"They'll cut you off."

"He's my brother. He was there, Brice. When I needed him."

Brice's hand stiffened.

"I have my trust. They can't touch that."

"But the rest...."

"Does it matter. If he's happy, does it really matter? Did you really give up Tony for money?"

"Damn it!" Brice spun and crossed the space to the door so fast that Brandon was sure he would fall. "You don't know what you're talking about." After the rush to the door the stillness as he stood there, his fingers shaking on the lock, was profound.

Brandon had watched someone fall apart like this. Just recently, when he'd told Brian the truth, he'd watched his other brother collapse in just the same way. The realization hit him and it stung. "You were going to walk away."

Brice turned the lock and swung open the door. His face was flushed. The Ice-

man had fled. "I was young and foolish, and in the end it didn't matter. Think about what you're doing. I can't cover for you forever." He turned and strode down the hall, his voice booming as Brice called for his son.

Swallowing against a swell in his throat, Brandon sat on the bed. His. Would he be able to call it that much longer? Would his support for his brother really get him cut off as his brother suggested? It could. His parents hadn't joked when they ruthlessly cut off every avenue of support Brian had ever had.

What had Brian done? He kept going. He kept loving. He worked at a cafe and he shared kisses and a love and a life with a man he loved.

They'd stolen that from Brian. They'd stolen it from Brice. God knows the threat had always been there for him, too. Especially now.

But Brian needed him.

Would he, could he, live without love?

How could he expect anything different of Bri? How could anyone?

One last time, Brandon gazed down upon the long, winding drive into the woods. "Fly big brother," Brandon whispered. "Fly fast, and don't you dare look back."

Slowly, with confidence increasing every step, Brandon walked the halls of the estate. His confidence didn't mean his stomach wasn't curdling into a molten, leaden mass of doubt. But he could deal with that. He would make Brian proud, even if Bri would never know it. He squared his shoulders and walked into the den of Stouten guilt.

"There you are. Now, where is your brother?"

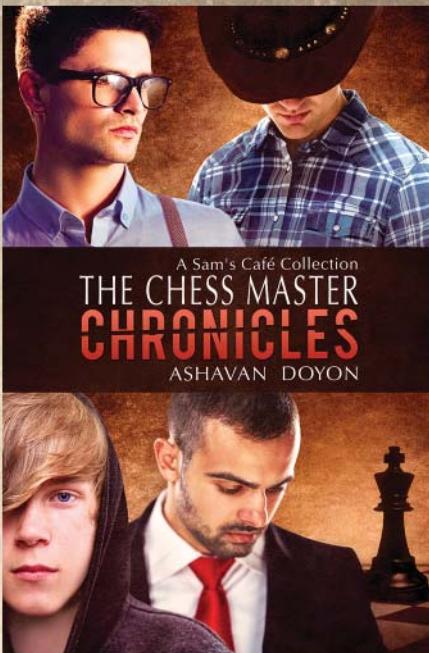
Brandon swallowed and shook his head.

"What did you do, boy?"

"What could I do? I set him free."

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.

Work in Progress

Coming Up Roses

I'd love to say I'm working on something new... and I should be. I need desperately to be. But right now I'm still in Torquere Press collapse Hell.

As some of you may know, my husband and I have started Purple Horn Press and it launched with *American Pride*. Subscribers to *ARDOR* got that story free. The next release, and in fact many of the initial releases, are rereleases of the series closest to my heart—the College Rose Romances.

First of all, and coming up very soon, is the rerelease of *Loving Aidan*. While I was heartbroken to lose the cover for this story to the collapse, several recent releases have featured that same Victorian gentleman. That meant a new cover design. I also had to go back to the final proofing files, and to my emails with the editor, and identify all the little changes made in that final proof, in the galley proof stage and get those into the manuscript.

Loving Aidan was my first published novel. I got a lot of criticism over Aidan, and of Sammy—not of Steven who was universally adored. I honestly never understood that, though it did influence me in my decision to write book two: *Steven's Heart*.

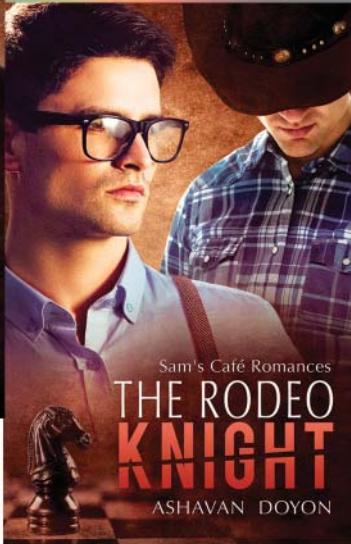
The cover for *Steven's Heart* will be familiar to readers when they see it. I used the same model for the cover and emphasized some of the things that disappeared.

Blond hair. Blue eyes. A cemetery. *Steven's Heart* will release in April and I am so happy to get the story back into print. Steven took me from surprise from the beginning. There was always more to him, and also less. He's a simple character with intense motivations that becomes more and more interesting mostly because he's reacting to others. I love him, and the surprise he guards so carefully, and I honestly believe readers react best to this book over all the others I've written. People love Steven to death.

After that we'll be releasing *Love Aggression*, a shifter story by the fantastic Cindy Sutherland. The cover keeps changing or I'd share it. Hopefully soon!

Then in May we'll see *Andrew's Prayer*. That will be a good moment, because I'll know that the books are going back out and I'll feel a more secure. *Andrew's Prayer* is special to me because of the setting. That ramshackle cinderblock house Andrew's mom calls home is the house I grew up in.

That takes us through May. Whether we see *Becoming Rory* in June or July depends to some degree on how submissions and editing are going for Purple Horn Press. What I can say is that you'll see the new story, *Forgiving James*, before the end of the year.



*discover the
thrill of romance*

ASHAVAN DOYON

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