

# ARDOR

October 2016

EDITORIAL:  
REFLECTIONS ON A YEAR

EXCERPT:  
THE RODEO KNIGHT

SHORT:  
WHEN LOSS  
IS SHARED

WORK IN PROGRESS:  
*American Pride*

# ARDOR

october 2016

## THE NEWSLETTER OF ASHAVAN DOYON

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From Dreamspinner Press

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Shorts  
The Colors of Romance

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Novellas  
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The Byte of Betrayal

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Series - Sam's Café Romances  
The King's Mate (2nd edition November 2016)  
A Wounded Promise  
The Rodeo Knight (November 2016)  
The Chess Master Chronicles - Books 1-3  
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Andrew's Prayer  
Becoming Rory

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# Editorial

## Reflections on a Year

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I launched *ARDOR* a year ago with the October 2015 issue. I'd deliberately selected the cover model I had in mind for *Becoming Rory* and previewed the arrival of Smits with the outline of the skater. The rose in the corner was a homage to my College Rose Romances. I wanted the covers to both speak to my writing and style, but also to my intent. This was not going to be just another author newsletter.

Writing takes time—so much time. That means for me, as an author with a day job, that I can release three, maybe four, titles a year if I'm at my peak game. My disability means that often I'm not anywhere near that peak. I aim for three. I'm happy with two. I hope for four. A newsletter was one of many things I worked on to help keep that connection during that sometimes long space between stories.

When I first started working on *ARDOR* in August 2015, *Andrew's Prayer* had just been released. For the first time in almost three years I had no stories pending, no edits pending, just a single work-in-progress—the start of *Becoming Rory*. The publishing process being what it is, that meant it was going to be about a year before my readers saw anything from me unless I decided to self-publish something. Even if I chose to go that route, if I

did it right it would still be months before readers saw the result, assuming I could finish anything.

Making that first issue taught me a lot. I had no idea how much work it was going to be! I thought I'd just put together a cover—professional covers were important to me, a way to make my newsletter distinct—a blog style entry and a quick short and it'd be easy.

So. Not. Easy.

In my younger days I wrote for gaming magazines. Our articles had to fit fairly precisely in a predefined space. Our word count requirements were ruthlessly precise. Now I understand exactly why.

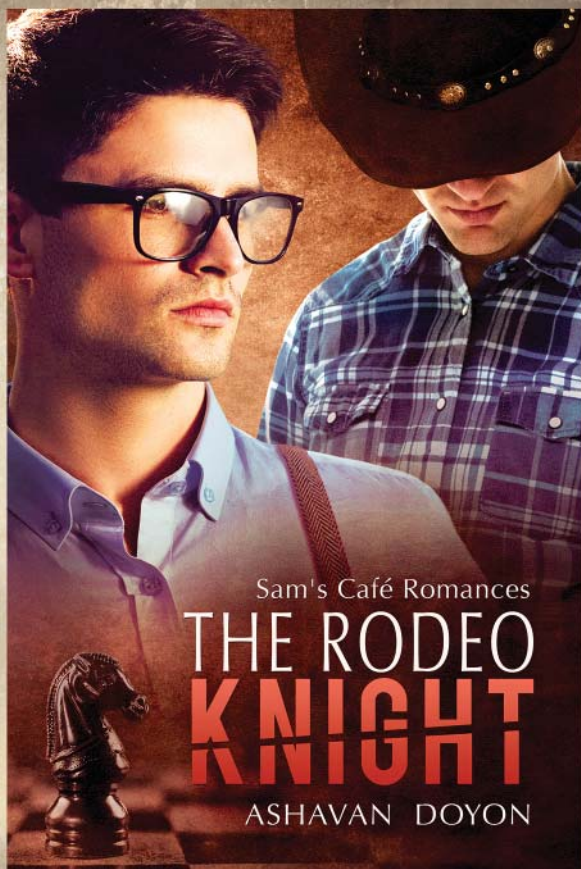
This experience has taught me so much about design and stock photography licensing and font licensing. I'm pleased to say it's also been successful. Newsletter releases are one of the times I actually can see notable traffic increases to my website.

That success means the experiment will continue. I hope this year brings more releases, more stories for me to share with readers, but you can be sure it will bring six more issues of *ARDOR*.

—Ashavan Deyon

*Sam's Café  
Romances  
Book 3*

*releases on  
November 30!*



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

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



# Excerpt

## From *The Rodeo Knight*

BRIAN DIDN'T TAKE long to realize that he had no idea where they were going, only that it was back toward them, and away from where he expected to find his answers. He kept finding words on the tip of his tongue, only to clench his teeth, hissing the breath away that he'd meant to use.

Dr. Nimitz focused on the road, her driving exact and precise in a way that was not comfort-

able to watch. Brian tried to focus on the passing trees and cliff faces instead. A few still had a growth of ice leftover from winter, cascading down like frozen waterfalls. But mostly it was ugly

in that way that spring is ugly in New England. Muddy, dirty, brown.

Brian's heart stuttered when they finally turned through the gates. It was a cemetery. His throat was dry and no amount of swallowing would lubricate it. *Did my partner die? Did I leave home for nothing?*

The arrangement of the plots seemed unusual, half in the mountains and half in the woods, with little clearings marked by stones. Most of them were old, thin and narrow with faded writing that might

be legible, maybe, if it was stared at for long enough. A few modern stones, thick and squat with writing etched deep, were scattered among the old. They kept going deeper. Finally, she pulled the car over, as exact as every other movement of the car had been. Brian could only be thankful that he did not get carsick.

"Come, Brian," the doctor said, primly exiting the sedan.

Brian, his limbs weak still from lack of sleep, pulled himself from the car and followed her. She moved up the hill to their left and slowed before a tombstone. Brian huffed his way up the gentle slope

and stopped dead in his tracks.

*Brian Stouten*

*Called before his time*

Brian's lips trembled. "Then who am I?" he whispered when he could manage to speak. Hope flared. *Flowers against the grave. Dying, but there. This was a man who was missed by someone.*

"We all thought it was you. A message from your parents. It was the only thing that stopped your partner. Such grief. They gave him your anniversary band—a

### BRIAN STOUTEN CALLED BEFORE HIS TIME

*Brian's lips trembled.  
"Then who am I?"*

thing he knew you would never give up. He called me, as you did this morning. I had to go to him. I do not make house calls, but he was in such agony.”

“Because of me.”

“No.” The word snapped, sharp. Then her voice softened. “I am going to say hard things now. Are you listening?”

Brian shut his eyes tight and fell to the ground, his energy gone. He nodded slowly.

Dr. Nimitz set a hand on his shoulder. It was comforting and vaguely familiar. She squeezed and then walked away and stopped. “I know

you better than you think. You are sitting there calculating every move you can make. Each new piece of information just adjusts your strategy.”

“So?”

“You do not even know the name of your partner, and yet you are planning to find the way back to him.”

“Wouldn’t you?” Brian had opened his eyes, but they were still downcast, staring at the dirt. He found himself staring at the doctor’s high heels instead.

“You must decide for yourself. Right now I think you are grieving over the idea of loss. You do not know who the man is, much less how he makes you feel now. You do not even feel what he made you feel then, do you?”

“No.” The admission caused a sinking in his gut that wasn’t remotely comfortable. “But I felt the loss. With Brandon at that joke of a party my parents were throwing. He told me I’d been married, and I knew—I *knew*. The grief I felt, I can’t describe. I felt it. I actually felt it, felt something.” His head was shaking as

though he still couldn’t believe it.

The doctor crouched next to him. It was a feat Brian envied; it was something he’d struggle to do, and she was doing it with perfect ease in a tight full-length skirt. “Maybe you need to find out who you are first. Who he is. Then you can decide what your strategy should be.”

Brian got to his feet and walked away from the stone. “How am I supposed to do that? Apparently I don’t even know my own name.” It came out bitter. It was bitter.

“Nothing about this is fair, Brian. You always want everything to be fair, but you know better than most that it is not.”

“That certain?”

The crunch of gravel betrayed the doctor’s steps, walking toward the car. “Brian Stouten was dead before

your accident, Brian. You laid him to rest yourself when you became Brian Pine.”

From the day his parents had told him his name it had felt off. “Pine?”

“It was your way of making sure your parents understood.”

“That I was choosing him.” It was almost a memory, and he said it with the reverence his mother would give a prayer.

“Come. We will find you a hotel. You will need clothes, and food—a shower.”

“I don’t smell that bad, Doct—”

“It’s Elaine, and yes, you do. Cigarette smoke only covers so much.” She sat in the car and glared at him until he got into the passenger seat.

“I want to know who I am!”

She slid her glasses down, looking at him over the frames. “And we will help you find out.”

*“Brian Stouten was dead  
before your accident,  
Brian. You laid him to  
rest yourself when you  
became Brian Pine.”*



*The unlikely friendship between a young man and a barista forms the basis for The King's Mate. This was a friendship that was nurtured over time, and eventually became a deep bond that only deepened with shared loss. This story is about that shared loss and provides a little background.*

# Short

## When Loss is Shared

---

RUSS WASN'T EXPECTING the phone call. Certainly not in the direct way it came in defiance of all the rules their lawyers had laid down. He arrived at the cemetery, following winding instructions that took him deep into the grounds.

Brian's father couldn't be missed. Perhaps it was the way his driver hovered nearby, too obviously a bodyguard. Perhaps it was the ostentatious limousine that Russ knew was not his usual choice of vehicle. Maybe it was the way that standing by what Russ could only presume to be Brian's grave, he barely managed to look sad.

No, that was definitely it. Certified ass.

Should he take it as the 'favor' it was intended? That at least Russ would know where the love of his life was buried? Was that somehow supposed to soothe the injured heart? Make better that he'd been locked from his husband's final hours in the hospital? Make better that they'd buried his husband's body never asking if that's what Brian had wanted? That they'd done it without him?

Russ swallowed against the lump in his throat. Of course Brian hadn't been his husband. Not legally. They'd had their ceremony the year before it became legal, and had never bothered with a new one. They had all the time in the world... until

there wasn't any left at all.

"Mr. Stouten." He barely moved his lips, practically growling the name. His whole body shook, the fury rising up to bubble along his skin, electric, waiting for him to lose control.

Mr. Stouten smirked. Russ knew that was intentional. Nothing Brian's parents did was accidental. When he stepped aside, Russ knew the reason. Rage sat in Russ's gut like a stone.

Brian Stouten. Stouten. His name was Pine. Fist-clenched, Russ sucked in air through clenched teeth and breathed out into the chill. *It's fine. He didn't want a headstone. He wouldn't care. Who cares what it says?*

Russ exhaled. *I care.* "His name was Pine." He kept the words level. Maybe that was wishful thinking.

"I doubt that you'll do what would be necessary to exhume his remains simply to change how the tombstone reads."

His smirk made Russ want to tear the bastard limb from limb. Hurt him the way he deserved. Dammit, he deserved to hurt. This was his son. It should *hurt*.

"What did you want?" Another growl.

Mr. Stouten frowned. "I never liked you."

"That I knew."

"Proud of it, are you? You stole my son."

“He walked away from you. I was heartbroken, you know. When you gave him your stupid ultimatum. I never expected him to choose me. He was giving up hundreds of thousands—”

“It was over two hundred million.”

Russ stumbled backwards. *Holy fuck! He chose me over that!* Tears welled and fell down Russ’s cheek.

“It could only be love. Only that could make him so stupid.” Mr. Stouten’s face flushed with an angry, brilliant red. He straightened and brushed the front of his long woolen coat to smooth it. His head tilted slightly and he glared down a strong aquiline nose. “Well, it’s done. And your infectious rot upon our name is also done.” He pulled something from his pocket and held it up. “They had to cut the other one off of him. This one they saved. I considered just throwing it out, or selling it”—a whimper escaped Russ’s throat—“but I wanted you to know that this little thing you had with my son is done. It will never mean what you wanted it to.” He dropped the ring into Russ’s hand. “At the end, you were out of his life.”

Mr. Stouten walked down the hill toward the limousine.

The memory of a jail cell was too fresh in Russ’s mind to attempt to beat the snot out of Brian’s father. He desperately wanted to. For years he’d watched Brian strive to be the best, waiting for the recognition his parents had always withheld. Always left to wonder if his parents even knew that he’d made it so far or done so well. But the rift between them had been too great. Russ crushed the platinum anniversary band in his fist. He watched as the driver held the door for Mr. Stouten, closed it behind him, and then got into the car. Slowly the behemoth maneuvered back onto the road and cruised out of sight.

The tears ran freely once the limousine was gone. He fell to his knees by the tombstone. *Called before his time.* Damn right. He squeezed the ring harder. His other hand touched the stone. Cold hard marble. How could it be more real now?

But Russ knew.

No one got that ring off Brian’s finger while he was alive.

“I love you,” Russ whispered. “Please. Let this all be a dream. I’m just having a nightmare because we had that fight, right?” He sobbed, choking. “I’m sorry I didn’t say it. I’m so sorry. I love you. I love you. Come back to me.” He pressed his hand flat against the stone. “Please say it’s a dream, baby.”

GETTING YANKED UPRIGHT with a hang-over ranked high on Russ’s list of ways not to get woken up. There was no resisting the casual strength that pushed him, now seated, against the headboard.

“Wake up sunshine.”

Russ blinked, groaning against the light, and shielded his eyes. “What’s this about?” This wasn’t the first time Sam had sent Lou to wake him up since Brian passed. Sam and his wife couldn’t always do it themselves.

Lou was a large man. Massive. Quiet. Usually he was a teddy bear. Now was not one of those times. “She’s sick. Get up.”

That had Russ up and alert. Sam had said something about her going in for a test. It was nothing, he’d said. “How sick?”

Lou turned. Dark circles marred the skin beneath his eyes. “Hospice.” She was his best friend.

Russ blanched and then his drinking the night before caught up with him all at once. He scrambled out of bed, and raced to the bathroom, choking on the deluge of bile and vileness.

“Shower,” said Lou, his voice cold and clear from the other room as Russ



retched. "And hurry your ass up. I got no time for your drunk ass antics."

THE HALLWAYS WERE sterile. Too familiar. A few months before police had been dragging him out of corridors like this, as he tried to force his way in to see Brian. He felt a sting. Sam would have what he hadn't. Sam would be at her side.

Russ stood outside the door while Sam spoke to the doctor. Across the hall, their son Justin sat. Blond with the same steel-blue eyes as his father. His hoodie was pulled up over his face. His face was blotchy from the tears and he hid it quickly when he noticed Russ looking. Lou pointed at the door and sat down in a chair next to Justin.

A quick punch in the arm, pat on the shoulder, and then Lou had Justin's hood down and was tousling Justin's hair. It took only moments for him to collapse against Lou and give in to crying again. Mentally Russ counted the years. Justin must be almost eighteen now. Huddled against his godfather, he didn't look it.

Hospice. That meant less than six months. Usually a lot less. Russ steeled himself and walked in. If he'd doubted it was the right thing, her smile erased that doubt completely. She held out both hands, heedless of the tubes hanging off of them and waited for Russ to take the invitation, which he did, leaning in to kiss her on the cheek as he grasped her hands gently.

She looked pointedly at Sam. His reluctance was obvious, but he kissed her forehead and left them alone.

"You will help him with Justin?"

Russ nodded. "Of course."

"This boy he's dating. I don't like him—"

"You're not supposed to like him."

She laughed, and then her entire demeanor changed as she began to choke,

and then struggled to regain control. She slammed her fist hard into the mattress. "Maybe that's it," she hissed between clenched teeth. "He's going to need you. You know how much you've leaned on us these weeks. It's not fair. But I need you to be better. I need to know you will be there."

"Always."

She leaned back into the pillows with relief. "Good."

Russ held her gaze. "How long?"

She shook her head. "Not long. I thought I was pregnant. The tumor is so large it has blood vessels. A pulse. But they can't even remove it. There's too much everywhere. Lungs. Liver. Kidneys. Breast. It's even in my lymph nodes."

She looked away. "With my problem, I just thought it was me thinking the worst, my stupid diseased brain making everything seem worse. When I started throwing up and they thought at first I might be pregnant I was terrified. Going off meds again, like I did with Justin? How would we survive that?" She squeezed his hand. "He'll need you. I meant that."

Russ looked up. "I'll be there. I promise."

"There will be medical bills. He'll have to close—"

"No. I'll take care of it."

"Russ, you ca—"

"I said I'd take care of it." Russ glanced through the long window where Sam stood, watching anxiously. "He'll need the café. I won't let it close."

She held his hand tight. "You weren't allowed to watch Brian die. I don't know, honestly, if that's better. He's going to have to watch."

"He'd never forgive himself if he didn't," Russ said flatly. He took a long deep breath. "Just trust me on that."

"Then that's what you need to do for me," she said. "Forgive yourself."

## *The King's Mate* by Ashavan Doyon



Russell Pine comes to Sam's Café every morning to enjoy the best coffee in town and to chat with Sam Tesh, the owner, a loyal friend for the past twenty years. When Sam offers him a challenge, Russ reluctantly takes it on, acting as the master opponent in a chess tournament. As the days pass and the hopefuls fall to the chess mastermind one by one, Russ discovers that the contest isn't the only game being played.

Russ finds himself the focus of a secret courtship through words and pictures left for him to discover each morning. Will a hint of cologne on the paper lead him to his admirer? In a café full of young and beautiful minds, who is looking at the graying chess master?

*Sam's Café Romances*  
*Book 1*

*Second edition*  
*newly expanded*

*releases on*  
*November 30!*





# Work in Progress

## American Pride

---

I don't know his last name. He hasn't told me that yet. It's not that he's secretive, my elusive protagonist. It's just that he's private, wrapped up in grief and pain and he doesn't want to share.

I sorta need him to share.

At the moment it's a source of frustration right up there with edits for books always managing to arrive all at the same time. Because just like that impossible gridlock of words, his failure to share puts on the breaks at a time when I need the story to press forward.

Dustin is in no mood to be helpful. He wouldn't even tell me his first name! Another character had to wheedle it out of him. So I am left deducing things about my hero. Normally they're chatty. I know way more about my characters than I ever wanted to. Dusty? Not so much.

I've had reticent characters before. I've had characters who hid things from me (yes, I'm looking at you, Steven Everett). But I've rarely had characters so preoccupied with the need to function, or with their need to avoid it, that I couldn't get a handle on who they were.

So when the story begins with the word "Monster," I'm not sure at first what the screaming child is referring to. I mean, I write stories about beautiful men. Don't I?

My spark of inspiration was a cover,

and the man on it is beautiful. That's my hero. Isn't it? I hope?

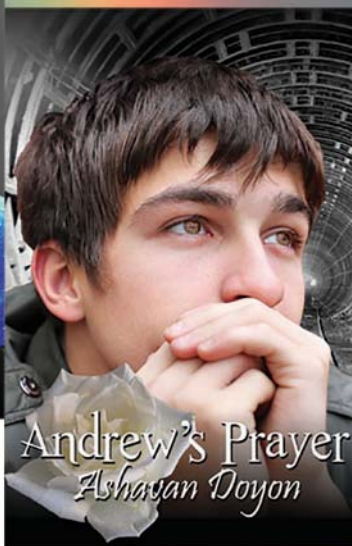
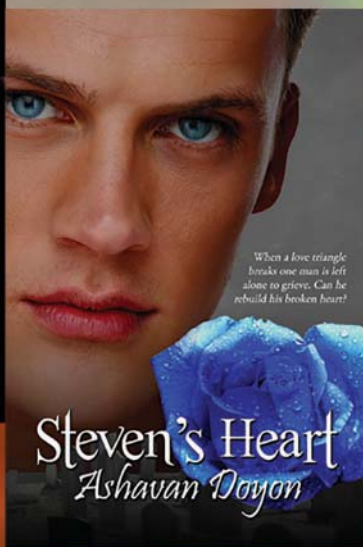
The first scene tore apart my expectations for the story. Everything I knew about Dustin, everything I'd started the story knowing, was true. And yet it wasn't. Because what I knew was concrete, and Dustin was full of nuance. I'd expected a soldier, a proud American.

Instead I was confronted by a young man already weary with the sight of atrocity, someone who'd hurt and seen horrible things. Someone who, now, was one of those horrible things, and resigned to it.

Dusty made me weep right from the start of the story, and he's not done yet.

He's making me work for it. I've been researching everything from rules for flying flags to life insurance for soldiers to disfiguring injuries. It's fascinating stuff, and the result will be worth it. I'm at that fun part of the story, where Dusty has decided there's something he wants, and that makes me really excited, because to get what he wants, Dusty is going to finally have to start talking to me. And really, the sooner Dusty talks to me, the sooner all of you will get to meet him.

The good news? For a limited time, subscribers of *ARDOR* will receive *American Pride* for free upon its release.



*discover the  
thrill of romance*

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