



Kevin Klehr

WRITING
SAMPLER

Dear Reader,

Thanks for downloading my free Writer's Sampler. Like any author out there, we're out to reach our readers, and this is my way to introduce myself to you.

In this package are several short stories, a few blogs from my website, and several excerpts from my novels for you to enjoy as you find your favorite reading chair, settle in, and get to know me.

Many of you have already downloaded my tale of two gay angels on a date, which I've also included again in this package for those who haven't seen it. Skip past it if it sounds familiar.

Also note that I'm an Australian writer with an American/Australian publisher, so at times the type of English used in this download will change. Sometimes the spelling and grammar will be American, at other times it will be Australian/British/Canadian. Please don't get too rattled.

So thanks again for allowing me into your reading device and I hope to get to know you through the magic of cyberspace.

Kind regards,

Kevin Klehr

SHORT STORIES:

HER CAT WAS YESTERDAY'S NEWS FEED

By Kevin Klehr

She sat near her window, no longer waiting for her life to begin. She had a huge circle of friends and she liked them all. She liked the pictures of David's housewarming party. She liked keeping abreast of Laura's wedding plans. But most of all, she liked Leah's tales of Paris, after meeting a man there.

She felt secure with her new niche of friends. The old ones stopped ringing months ago as she never picked up the phone. Unlike her new friends, they always told her what they thought about her clothes, her job and her taste in men. With her new companions she never had to justify her decisions.

Her circle was always there when needed, just by pressing a button. No need to venture out into the cruel world where webs of people intermingled; drawing her closer to the ones she depended on when her emotions were low, but sometimes ripping her apart when they no longer depended on her.

Now she had safer paths to travel. No danger in her way. They were narrower tunnels that took her directly to the people that liked her, although they didn't comment as much as they did before.

Lately she was drawing pictures. Pictures of herself as Laura's bridesmaid or as David's girlfriend. Laura and David liked these images, but they no longer commented the way they used to when she would share tales of her cat, Mitzi. She didn't mind. Without their voices there was no danger of critique.

In her sink was the sticky tin that was used to bake her own birthday cake. Mitzi had licked the mixing bowl clean during the morning, as this was the feline's only meal for several days. Now the forgotten pet laid on the floor, too weak to move, watching the birds through the glass while listening to her stomach rumble.

Our girl had a grin like a child sitting on Santa's lap, as comments came flooding in once more. The words 'Happy Birthday' were being wished over and over again, even from Laura and David. The pictures she had shared of herself eating cake had sparked interest. She had countless friends all over the world. Who wouldn't be happier?

GUY'S ROMANTIC LIFE
By Kevin Klehr

I stared at myself in the mirror for about five minutes. I didn't like my hair. It took me four outfit changes to be happy with my shirt, but my hair looked like a pot plant on steroids. I had gelled the life out of it and my date was going to be at my front door at any minute.

Okay, I need to explain. I was about to see my teenage sweetheart. The one I hadn't seen since he tried to teach me to fly when we were a lot younger. In those days I was the perfect Prozac candidate; too negative and way too serious.

As I waited for my man to sweep me off my feet, my adolescent insecurities flooded back like a tidal wave. I shut my eyes and took a deep breath. He knocked.

"Is that a hairstyle or a cry for help?" Joshua looked me up and down. "Sorry, Guy, I meant it as a joke. I like it. It has that 'rock star just got out of bed' look." My wings drooped. "Why don't you close the door, I'll knock, and we'll start again?"

"No, no. Come in," I said. "I'm sorry about my mood. I've been battling with my appearance, wanting to make a good impression."

Joshua smiled while shaking his head. His flaming red spikey hair and classic leather jacket made him look like the rock star. I swooned like a hapless groupie.

"Let's try a second time," my handsome date said. He reached for the door knob and gently pulled it shut. Again, he knocked. It was now me who smiled and shook my head before letting him in.

"Hello, Joshua," I said. "I really..."

He lifted his finger to his mouth before planting his lips on mine. My ill-fated hair issues melted away as I floated on a cloud of pure bliss. I breathed in his aura of two day stubble and vodka on the rocks. His love spun around me, securing my irrational self in its whirlwind.

He pulled away.

"Don't stop," I said.

"More of that later, if you're good." Joshua swanned past me with the confidence of a self-made millionaire. I closed the door and followed like a petite geisha girl. "Are you really that worried about your hair, Guy?"

"Look at me. It's got so many bits jutting out, I could slash the neck of someone taller than me."

"Guy, hardly anyone is taller than you."

"What if I fall? I could stab someone through the heart."

"And do what? Here in the Afterlife it's hardly going to kill them. They'll just think you're cupid without the arrows. Striking love with split ends!"

"Very funny." I gestured to the lounge. "Would you like a drink before we go out?"

"No. Let me be in charge tonight." He lifted one wing and pointed back toward the front entrance. "I'm happy to go if you are, unless you want to tame that jagged bush growing out of your head."

"Nah. Between your red mane and my 'cry for help' as you put it, we'll definitely turn heads."

"Yeah, the other way."

We arrived at The Pedestal for a drink before dinner. It was a subdued night as Nellie, the sultry songstress, looked like she had a hit of valium before walking on stage. Her raspy voice meandered its

way through the theatrical crowd like a faint trail of smoke, seeking out patrons and rendering them under her spell.

Next to the singer, a young man in a sparkling long tail jacket sat elegantly in front of a baby grand. His fingers danced on the keys as the vocalist clutched her microphone like a long lost relative.

I was open to her music. It had taken me years to listen with a jazz ear, yet her voice seemed to hide some sort of pain she was holding onto. I could relate.

Joshua whisked ahead of me, aiming for one of the rare available booths. As I caught up, he reached for my hand and led me to the waiting seat.

“What would you like to drink?” he asked.

“Cranberry and vodka.”

“A fancy choice.”

I looked at him oddly, but he missed my expression as he had already turned to walk to the bar. His swagger had that bad-boy quality. An essence I wanted to melt into like grated cheese on Italian cooking.

Just before Joshua stepped to the bar, his dreamy black wings extended themselves like the arms of someone yawning. He didn't even check if anyone was within his personal space before they stretched. Fortunately there wasn't. He then casually retracted them.

It was odd how we met up again. He just came back into my life, out of the blue. No warning that I'd be spellbound at the sight his sculptured jaw or his wistful eyes. He was simply walking up the path to my house when I coincidentally opened the door. He wanted to see me and hinted at a night out, making it clear that he desired to do more than just 'catch up with an old friend'.

If I was guiding a mortal who was going through this exact situation, I'd tell him to tread carefully. But I hadn't had sex in a while, so the idea of getting laid was clouding my judgement.

“Cranberry and vodka for my little angel, and vodka straight for moi.” He sat opposite me after sliding into position like a landing glider. “As you loosen up, I'm going to make you drink shots.”

“You are on a mission, aren't you?”

“No rest for the wicked.”

“Joshua, back off a bit. This is our first real night out to catch up after years. Wouldn't you like to know what I've been up to since puberty?”

“Minor details.” He stared at the pianist as he swallowed half his drink. “That guy is good with his fingers.” He looked back to me. “Threesome?”

“Now I know I've made the wrong decision.” I got up to leave, but my date shuffled across to the edge of his seat and stood before me. “What are you doing?”

“Just trying to be funny, but it's not working.”

“Where is that charismatic angel who visited me the other day?”

“I'm still here, somewhere.”

“Well find him, Joshua, because this loser is cramping my style!”

“When did you get so feisty?”

“When I met someone who showed me my true worth.”

My egotistical friend slowly sat down.

“That used to be me.”

“Aren’t we a bit too sober for deep and meaningful conversation?”

He stared at his drink.

“Um, I guess it’s too late to start this date again.”

“Joshua, what pisses me off the most is being made to feel like an easy conquest! Why did you think...?” I stood. “No! You know what? Even sitting alone at home by myself is better than being here with you right now.”

As I made my first step toward the exit, he jumped up and grabbed me by the wrist.

“I truly am sorry, Guy. I know I’m better than this, and you definitely deserve my better self.” He gently pulled me to my seat as he lowered himself back to his. “Let’s not treat this as a date. Let’s just be two old friends catching up.”

“Yeah, that’s a better suggestion.” I was replying through clenched teeth. “Besides, I want to know what you’ve done since our teenage years.”

“A lot. Wow, where do I start?” He took a small swig of vodka. “I tried a relationship. Maybe that’s why I’m here? I’m trying again.” I looked at him, puzzled. “Guy, there was someone who finally left *me* and I really don’t know why?”

“So you came to me as a rebound?”

“I think I was just trying to prove that there’s nothing wrong with me.”

“Now I’m even more confused. If that was your intention, why did you act like a jerk?”

“I don’t know. Sometimes I don’t understand my own actions.”

“This guy you were in love with, who was he?”

“Dalton. The most sublime man this side of mortality.”

“You were fooling around with a mortal? What about his soul? You were stopping him from being reborn!”

“Yeah, I know. So sue me. But what could I do. We angels have our desires too.” He held up his glass, looking into it as if it held all the answers. “He was as tall as you, Guy. He had more charisma than most pop star divas. All he had to do was enter the room and I’d forget who I was talking to the moment before.”

“Wow. My hero had his heart stolen.” Joshua gazed at me, sullenly. “How long were you together?”

“Almost two years. He became picky at the end. I was never enough.”

“He cheated?”

“No. It was just me. I wasn’t enough. Our relationship wasn’t enough. He wanted more than just a relationship. He wanted to be on the move.”

“Why didn’t you go with him?”

“He didn’t want me around anymore.”

My fallen idol gave me a goofy smile. I reached over and rubbed his shoulder. It seemed I was his rebound and I wasn’t sure if I felt honoured, or if I should have felt like a cheap substitute.

Nellie leaned against the piano singing a love song directly to her accompanist. He was trying to keep a straight face as she teased with her lyrics. Gentle murmurs and laughter filled the club.

At a booth not far away, an older regular held her toy-boy close to her chest, as they both looked on. At the back of the bar, Wilma, the theatre critic, was too caught up in conversation with her A-List friends to notice what was happening on stage. They chatted away oblivious to the mirth around them.

“She’s in her own world,” said a voice above us.

“Carpenter!” cried Joshua. He leaped like a coiled spring. “Guy, this is Carpenter. Carpenter, this is someone from my past, and if I play my cards right, part of my future as well.”

The man shook my hand like a surgeon calmly greeting a new patient.

“It’s nice to meet another angel. You and Joshua are the only two I’ve met, yet this is supposed to be the Afterlife.”

“Someone likes to work in mysterious ways,” I replied.

Carpenter retracted his arm and stood in quiet grace. Somehow he evoked Rodin’s sculpture ‘The Thinker’; wise beyond his years by summing everything up in detail. His crisp white shirt, thick black belt and slim-fit blue pants added to the allure of his thin framed glasses. A class act, even at first glance.

“Am I intruding?” he asked.

Joshua shared a glance with me, but before I could react, he invited Carpenter to sit with us.

“Would you like a drink,” asked my fellow angel.

“No. I was thinking of leaving anyway. It’s still early and I need to hear something more upbeat.”

“Where were you thinking of going?” I asked.

“There’s a new bar that’s taking off just a few blocks away. A friend was supposed to meet me here before we checked it out, but she hasn’t turned up.”

“Maybe she’s fashionably late?” said Joshua.

“There’s ‘fashionably late’ and just plain rude. She’s tipped into the latter category.” He scanned the bar quickly before turning back to us. “Why don’t you join me? I could do with the company.”

Joshua briefly read my face, but I was in two minds, so I had no idea what he believed I was thinking.

“Yeah, why not?” he replied.

I nodded.

“Thank-you. Tonight I want to get wicked, and who better to help me than two angels!”

While Carpenter studied the club like a window shopper looking for an affordable purchase, his playful grin kept fuelling my wayward fantasies. But at this stage we’d had more to drink than a misled teenager.

Joshua had disappointed me with his stinky attitude, and even though this gay discothèque had more spirited contenders than a dating website, I was curious about the man who wasn’t interested in me, yet.

“So, Carpenter, do you see anyone you like?” I asked.

I had a smile wider than a sumo wrestler, which I couldn’t control. Joshua turned the other way.

“I like that older dude with the full head of hair. He has that ‘wise intellectual’ look.” He fluttered his eyebrows. My grin disappeared. “Good sex and great conversation before more good sex.”

“I like the funky nerd on the dance floor,” said Joshua.

“Why don’t you go and talk to him?” I asked.

He opened his mouth as if he was about to reply, but not a sound came out. I felt odd.

“Yeah, Joshua, go and dance with him,” said Carpenter. “Mine looks like he doesn’t want to be disturbed. That girl chatting with him must be a friend.”

“Can I change the subject?” asked my fellow angel.

“We’re talking about men. What other subject is there?”

“Oh, my topic is also about men. But it’s about lost causes.”

“Sounds serious,” I said.

“I’m not trying to be morbid, but there’s something…” His eyes darted to the dance floor. “Carpenter, your future conquest is busting a move.”

“It can wait, Joshua. You’ve got something on your mind.”

The one night contender had an angular way of dancing. Every beat was matched with a hieroglyphic stance. His female companion glided around him like a seasoned matador, adding grace to her partner’s awkward steps.

“Go on, he’s on the floor,” Joshua said.

“He looks like the Tin Man on Ecstasy. No, you need to get something off your chest. What is it?”

“Dalton.”

“Who’s Dalton?”

“His last boyfriend,” I replied. “It sounds like the time has come for deep and meaningful conversation. Shoot.”

“I, um, don’t get what went wrong.”

“What did he do?” asked Carpenter.

“He said I’m too self-centred.”

I bit my tongue.

“You? Never!”

“Joshua, what did you give of yourself?” I asked.

“I lived up to his expectations.”

“But what did you give of yourself?”

“I did everything he asked.”

“But what did you give of yourself?”

There was no answer.

“This Dalton guy never smashed your fortress,” said Carpenter. He gazed into space. “Wow! That almost sounds sexual.”

“So what were you afraid of?” I asked.

Again, no answer.

“Guy, it sounds like our friend feels he needs to hide, even with those he loves.”

“Yeah, now why is that?” I replied.

“Doesn’t feel worthy, maybe?”

“Worried he might put his foot in his mouth?”

“Joshua, this wasn’t just an obsession, was it?”

“No, of course not. He was the spark of every social occasion we were at. His charisma walked three steps ahead of him.”

“Yeah, I get it,” Carpenter answered. “His eyes shone so bright he could lead ships into port. Sounds like an obsession to me.”

“Why do you think I was obsessed?”

“Listen to yourself,” I replied. “We’ve heard nothing about this man except for his physical attributes. Was he kind hearted? Did he have a sense of humour? What was his favourite colour? Did you really know anything about him?”

“I knew I loved him.”

“Ahem, loved him or needed him?”

A shiver ran up my spine on my last word, causing my wings to flutter three times.

“You’re getting straight to the point, Guy,” said Carpenter.

“I’m too drunk to weave around the issue.”

“To weave around Joshua’s issues or yours?”

I looked at him like he was refrigerated food that had passed its use by date.

“I don’t talk,” announced the jilted one.

“Oh you talk,” I replied. “You just don’t communicate. And it sounds like Dalton felt lonely.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Well if you knew, man, why didn’t you...?” I held up my hand to stop Carpenter speaking.

“Because I needed to hear from someone else what I already knew.”

“But Joshua,” I said, “they’re the conversations you have with your partner.” I looked into the crowd.

“Or they’re the conversations you have with your friends while you’re still with your partner.”

That older man seemed to loosen up. His gal pal writhed up and down him like a snake, while he played as straight as he humanly could.

“I’m starting to think I might be in with a chance,” noted Carpenter.

“You’re going to leave this discussion?” I asked.

“Guy, I think this is the discussion where I’m the forgettable co-star.” Joshua and I exchanged glances.

“Oh don’t look so weird. There’s chemistry between you, and from what you told me about your history, you both have a lot of catching up to do.” He regarded the gent as if regarding Lois Lane in need of saving. “Now, I can entertain myself, and you two, well you two should entertain each other.”

He winked. My jaw dropped. I didn’t look at Joshua. Carpenter headed for the dance floor.

“Well there’s an unexpected twist,” my fellow angel said.

I watched our friend make his way toward his prize as my damned wings fluttered again.

“Carpenter’s right,” said Joshua.

“Hmm.” Now I wished I returned home earlier.

“Hey, my long lost friend, haven’t you got anything better to say?”

“I’m still dealing with his home truth.”

Carpenter sidled up to the man, twisting his body in improvised sixties’ dance steps. His potential lover did some odd shoe shuffle before making his own groovy arm moves. Sadly he still lacked finesse. His female friend left them alone.

“Guy, you pinned me in one. I don’t communicate well. Please listen. I’ve got a lot to say, so can you at least stop gazing at the dance floor.”

I sipped my cocktail before meeting his eyes.

“Josh, maybe this night is more confronting for both of us than we’d like to admit to? Let’s call it a night.”

He slammed his hand on the table.

“That has to be a reason to stay.” My head tilted back. “Come on, we were good friends once.”

“Once, but that was a long time ago. You disappeared and left me longing.”

“Really? You were longing?” I stood, but Joshua grabbed my arm. “If it helps, Guy, let me do the talking. Let me pour my heart out while you just listen. You don’t need to say a word.”

The scene was joyous around us, but all I could see were shadows. The music just thumped, without melody or reason. The lyrics blurred into some uncontained mess. The patrons, distant, even as they swung close.

I sat for serenity. Walking through the crowd would only make me feel alone, so I sat, staring at my drink.

“I get that you don’t want to look at me, Guy, but thanks for hearing me out.” He guzzled his cocktail. “I couldn’t face my teenage crush when we were young, so I left. I’m sorry it was soon after trying to teach you to fly, but your lack of self-belief was the perfect cue for my exit.” I gulped. “But you showed promise. If I stayed I would have ended up teaching you to soar. And we would have soared, together. But I didn’t think I was good enough for you.”

My superhero was unmasked. I looked up.

“Josh, you of all people? I, er, I...”

“I can’t remember you ever being speechless.”

“Maybe it’s because you said something I needed to hear. I thought you thought I was a loser back then.”

“Then why would I ask you on this date?”

“Oh my...”

“Guy, you really are speechless.”

I nodded briskly.

“Joshua, imagine you’re the kid who never knew his parents, and finally you work it out. You realise that the woman raising you couldn’t be related because she wasn’t an angel. Then you hate yourself. You hate yourself because from day one, someone left you behind.” My wings fluttered violently but I firmed my muscles to keep them still. “Then you left me behind at a time I really felt like I was worth something to someone.”

My fellow angel peered at Carpenter.

“Look at us, Guy. We’re a couple of losers.”

I, too, looked to the dancing crowd. Carpenter was jiving close to his lover for the night.

“No, Josh, we were just young and stupid.”

My date lifted his glass, even though its contents were melted ice.

“Here’s to being young and stupid.”

I clinked my glass with his.

“No, here’s to being older and wiser.”

We both swigged, Joshua swallowing the icy remains.

“So what do we do now?”

I studied our former companion writhing with his one-nighter in drunken bliss. Their groins pressed together like pages in a book. The gay first step, complete.

“Let’s dance.”

JUST BEING ADAM
By Kevin Klehr

Glancing down at the turquoise sock which engulfed my foot, I was reminded how carefree and camp I'd become. Only a year ago the idea of clothes that screamed at you, rather than lull you into a sense of security, would have sent me rushing to the closet. But there it was, one pastel garment waiting to be peeled off.

"Adam, there's no time for dramatic pauses today," reprimanded my buddy Merrick, "Just pop it in the locker so we can begin your liberation!" My friend and his partner Marco were already draped in their non-designer itchy white towels. One with a key elasticised to where his watch rested a moment ago, the other sporting his as an anklet.

"Yes Adam," continued Marco, "A random act of sex is the perfect antidote for your broken heart." His directness was delivered in soft tones, like a nurse coercing you to use a chamber pot. I ripped off the sock and hurled it into my locker, slammed the door shut, and locked away my concerns.

I'd spent the last year playing husband in a relationship that needed life support for the last few months. It wasn't that I was in denial. It wasn't that I even wanted it to carry on. It was just that it was as familiar as my designer range of multi-coloured socks. Snug, if not too cosy. My ex had done me a grand favour by leaving me.

Guiding me by both hands, my bold friends led me down a fragrant musty hallway where a full length mirror greeted us. I'd never realised my hips swung before, but there was the evidence as we sauntered past our reflections. If one thing my past relationship had taught me, it was to accept who I was, metronome hips or not. Now I just had to uncover the tools to move on.

We were at a crossroad where my mentors decided to skip down one path, leaving me to seek out my own rewards. There was melody in the groans that provided the soundtrack to this experience. Short sharp notes accompanied by lower moans, all in surround sound. Tempting nymphs of all shapes considered facial expressions and body hair, caressing, embracing, tasting. Before I had realised, I was part of this lair, thrill seeking while concealing my caution.

A finger sailed around my Adam's apple, then tracked its way up to my lower lip. His chocolate eyes and latte skin were enough to convince me I had made the right choice. Recalling his expertise in the art of kissing, has forced me to grin during several lonely moments in recent times. For the record his name was Terry-Lee, or perhaps that was his cruising name.

Infatuation may have coaxed me out of the closet twelve months ago, finding acceptance as a supportive member of a loving couple in the eyes of the wider world. That night though, I relished in the encounter of just being. Just being me. Just being Adam.

CONVERSATIONS WITH AN ANGEL

By Kevin Klehr

“He said your heart wants to protect the other person while your head tries to protect yourself.” Farnham stared at me as if I farted. “What’s the matter?”

“He said the same thing to me.”

“I guess it’s his token advice.”

Even with this curious look, he still was the man I wanted to share my life with. For six months I found sanctuary each time I visited his one bedroom apartment. It was always messy every time I showed up, and like a dutiful husband I’d whip out the rag and the cleaning products which I bought for him, and get to work.

But it went with the territory. It was him, and he truly had me under his spell. And even though at first his weekend sleep-ins, his habit of buying gadgets he didn’t need, and his unbreakable pattern of always showing up an hour late to anything we’d planned irked me, in time they were just the little things that made him who he was.

And let’s face it, when you wake next to someone who is clutching your naked body with their hand on your chest, while you cushion their waist with your ass, you know there’s no use sweating the small stuff.

My phone rang. Farnham groaned, but not in a good way.

“It’s her, isn’t it?” he asked.

I checked the screen. I nodded.

“You know I have to answer.”

“No, Jamal, you don’t have to answer. Can’t you put that thing on silent?”

“It doesn’t matter. It stopped now.”

“But we both know it will ring again. Just wait five minutes. She’ll ring again!”

“Babe, do we have to?”

His eyes stared through me as if I wasn’t there. Great start to the morning I thought. Two people I love are going to be cross with me. I wiggled my ass against him.

“That’s not going to work, Jamal.”

“Isn’t it? It feels like it’s working.”

He grinned. “Smoke and mirrors. That’s your weapon, smoke and mirrors.”

I pushed back harder while I held my phone near his face, then with a master stroke of my thumb, switched it to silent mode. I placed it on the bedside table, turned to him, and planted the sloppiest kiss I could muster on his willing lips. He was mine, but more importantly, I had to show him I was his.

“I dare you not to look at that phone,” he said. His tone was half pleading, half demanding.

“Hun, I have to see what she wants.”

He gritted his teeth. With only one shoe on, I checked my phone. She’d left three messages in the last half hour. One saying I had chores to do around the house. One saying she needed to tell me something private. The last informing me that my brother hadn’t been home all night.

“I can already guess what your mother has texted,” Farnham claimed. His expression resembled that of a soldier who was losing the battle.

“At least she’s not claiming it’s a medical emergency.”

“She knows better than to try that trick again.”

He was right. My mom even got my dad to ring an ambulance the last time. They medics weren’t impressed when they were told to go back to their base because she suddenly felt better.

Farnham gazed at me, knowing I would soon leave. But I had to. Family was calling and it was my job as the oldest son to take responsibility for my siblings. Yes, I’d have a word to my brother when he got home. Yes, I’d turn the vacuum cleaner on or wash the bathtub or do whatever she expected me to do. And then I’d brew coffee so she could bitch about dad like she always did.

“So what is it this time, Jamal? What excuse has she come up with to rip you from my arms?”

“I’ll come back this afternoon. Now don’t look at me like that. This afternoon, I promise!”

He sighed. “Is this a Jamal promise or a real promise?”

“Now don’t be like that, babe.”

“I’m serious. She’ll keep you there. She’s done it before. And I’ll sit here waiting for you to come back, only to get a text message or a very quick phone call saying you won’t be back and you don’t know when we’ll see each other again. Come on, Jamal, it’s been six months! I know the drill.”

“Babe, it’s my brother. He hasn’t been home all night.”

“That’s because he’s out doing what you’re doing. But she’s not texting him –” My phone chimed. “Like I said, she’s not texting him ten times an hour because he’s out sleeping with a woman.” I glanced at my phone. He sighed again. “What does she say this time?”

“Same old same old. Don’t worry about it, babe. She wants attention.”

“No, she wants your attention off me.”

“I have to go.”

“You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do. You just feel obliged to go.”

I wandered over, reached around and caressed his back. I kissed his cheek several times as he kept his lips shut tight. So I nestled my nose into his earlobe. His body loosened. He half grinned. My lips brushed against his. He kissed me, so I encouraged a longer embrace. Soon he was rustling my hair and pressing his mouth to mine, and I was in a place where the world seemed normal.

Again I was dressing myself. The phone had chimed several more times while Farnham and I made love, but I told myself not to look until I was outside of his apartment.

“Darl, I won’t be waiting for your return. I have things to do. Ring me if you’re definitely on your way back and I’ll let you know where I am. And I mean ring me, don’t text.”

“I will be back, babe.”

“Only ring me if you are on your way back. If you’re not coming back, don’t contact me.”

“You’re serious.”

“Deadly serious. I’m learning not to wait for you.”

“Ouch.”

“Sorry, Jamal, that’s just the way it is.”

We still kissed good-bye, but his severity haunted me as I made the journey home. And with his cutting words repeating like a broken record on my mind came the punch. That feeling in my gut that came with no physical contact, but boy, was it twisting me in knots.

I parked to the side of the road. I had to think. In the past there were only two other men who came close to how I felt about Farnham. One was a two month thing because we both realized I was more in love with his city views than with him. It still didn't stop us seeing each other from time to time. We had more fun after the breakup than before. The other broke my heart. He said I was a rebound. I said I loved him. He said he was sorry for believing he loved me.

And mom had a field day with that one. She said you can never trust men and listed off dad's faults for the umpteenth time. I replied that I thought we were talking about me. She answered that we were because she knew best.

With Farnham I never expected more than just a bit of fun. But all he had to do is smile at me and I'd slip into daydream. Hearing his name by chance was better than a serenade from a thousand minstrels. And nights without him by my side hurt as if someone had cut off my Siamese twin in a botched operation.

A tear ran down my cheek. I didn't know why. I turned the key and started the engine. Soon I was back home with my accuser. She was washing plates and handing them to my brother who was busy with a dishcloth.

"Mama, you said my brother wasn't home!"

"He's home now," she replied. She gestured toward him like a prize on a quiz show. "He came home."

"I came home from where?" my brother asked.

"Apparently I had to come home because she was worried about where you were."

"You did? Sorry bro. Were you with Farnham again?"

"Obviously. That's why I have fifteen messages from mama."

"Don't mention that boy's name," she said. "That goes for both of you, don't mention his name."

"Who's name? Farnham's name? My boyfriend's name?"

"No. No. No. I told you not to use the devil's name."

"Oh, he's the devil now. What happened to the dirty temptress? At least that one was original."

"I liked 'the man who'll sell your soul'," my brother added. "That one was poetic, Ma."

"What would your father say if he knew, Jamal? Think about that."

"I'll have to tell him at one stage," I replied.

"And bring shame on this family! Who do you think you are?"

"He's a homosexual in love," my brother answered.

"Go to your room!"

My brother folded his arms.

"It's okay," I said. "I can handle this." He shared a cheeky smile, handed me the tea towel and ran off.

"Jamal," she continued in a lighter tone, "what is wrong with you? Don't you want children? Think about these things. How can you go out to a party with a man on your arm? What is he going to do, wear a dress?"

"Mama, his name is Farnham, and he's not that kind of gay man. Besides, he'd look like Aunt Rihanna in a dress." I shook my head. "Not a good look."

“Jamal!”

Our doorbell rang. My mom grinned as if her cheeks would burst. My brother answered the door and instantly I heard a woman’s voice asking for me. He paraded her in. Her dark brown eyes stared at me like a sorceress with a spell to cast.

“Sweetheart, I’m taken,” I declared. I stormed out, only to hear my brother inform my failed blind date that he was single.

Our neighbor, Guy, was on his driveway washing his car. He took one look at me and told me to come inside.

“Do I look that frazzled?” I asked.

“Oh yeah,” he replied, turning off the tap.

“This is what she wants,” I began. I sat in what he called the counselling seat, the plushiest armchair in his living room. “She wants me to be a good family member, marry some girl, any girl, and have kids while I screw men on the side. It’s the honorable thing to do. Everyone will know what’s going on, but they won’t talk about it. That way there is no shame on the family.”

“A medieval mentality in a twenty-first century world,” Guy replied. He filled my wine glass. “And somehow I can’t see Farnham putting up with being the mistress.”

“Some woman just showed up at our place that mom invited. She’s stunning, but my body doesn’t work that way!”

“Calm down, Jamal. Trust me, this doesn’t have to be complicated.”

“But it is. It is complicated. That family next door raised me. They were proud of me when I came second in my third grade spelling bee. They told everyone about it. Then when I was a teenager they kept bragging about how many female friends I had. I can see my dad’s sly grin just thinking about it. And mom’s right. What will he say when he finds out.”

“Surely he already knows.”

“I don’t know.”

“What would be the worst thing that could happen if he finds out?”

I thought, but the answer in my head rose like a toxic beast from a radioactive swamp.

“I need more wine, Guy.”

He took the glass from my hand. “I don’t think you do. I think what you need now is to see Farnham.”

“I need a sounding board.”

“But your sounding board shouldn’t be me.”

I brushed my hair back with the palm of my hand, then stared in the direction of my parent’s venomous house.

“Mama thinks I’m screwing you as well as Farnham. It’s the way her mind works.”

“Well, she has seen both of you visit me. How does she feel having a gay neighbor?”

“She puts up with it. Somehow my dad doesn’t seem to care.”

He sat back down, still with my empty wine glass in his hand.

“You know, Jamal, the heart wants to protect those we love, while our head tries to protect ourselves.”

“I know. You’ve said that before.”

“Now think about those words as you drive to see the man that loves you.”

There’s something about blue eyes. You gaze into them as that person talks to you, but you’re really diving into their soul as their words float by. I caught him by surprise as for some reason he was home. He had no errands to run as he had claimed before I left him that morning. It was his way of protecting himself from my absence.

And even in his confident stance, I could see the small boy wanting more from his play friend. While here was I, the child who let everyone down. It’s a lonely place inside my skin. Elders judge my every move, unless I seek forgiveness and play the role I was born to play.

But while I keep the peace, a huge grate skims my heart, taking off slivers as if it were cheese. It whittles away the love that was once there to share with the world. And somewhere inside my body I want to scream, but those screams get muffled. But what does it matter? I’m not sure I’m ready for anyone to hear my screams.

Here in his arms, though, I’m the chameleon whose fears slowly melt away to find clarity. His blue eyes struggle to hide their distrust. And I want those eyes to care again. I want those eyes not to dismiss me. I need to follow through this time and not let him down.

“Let’s dance,” I said.

“But there’s no music,” he replied.

“There’s a tune waiting to be written. It’s titled ‘Farnham and Jamal’ and if we touch and sway a little, it will write itself.”

“Are you on drugs?”

I didn’t answer. My right shoe shuffled forward, followed by my left. I was a do-wop girl making my way to my lover. And he smiled a smile I hadn’t seen in god knows how long.

I blew a puff of air on his face which made him giggle, as my arm reached around his waist. We waltzed like amateurs. No one judged. No one minded. No one cared.

“Imagine both of us living in this apartment,” said Farnham.

“I can imagine that.”

We laid on his bed naked, my back against his chest. Outside a breeze had begun, sounding more like a gentle ocean than a gust of wind. Trees rustled as if they were waking from their stillness, and a few stars gathered in the night sky to peek into our world.

“I’m serious, Jamal. You’re twenty-five and you still live with your family. Imagine coming home to your own pad. We’d cook dinner together, fight over the bathroom sink and complain about each other’s snoring. It would be bliss.”

“As long as you were near I wouldn’t care if cockroaches set up house in the kitchen.”

“I could trim your beard hairs. With your beard and my nose hairs, we’d clog the sink like confirmed bachelors.”

“Yeah, and we’d change the sheets only when visitors complain about the stench.”

“Like I said, it would be bliss.”

“Hmm, it would be.”

“Then move in, darling. Move in with me.”

“Babe, I might just do that.”

On cue, my phone chimed. I ignored it. Thirty seconds later, it chimed again.

“I know you want to look, Jamal. I can sense it in your body.”

“How?”

“You’re tense now.”

“Farnham, consider this. Your mom is so cool. She’s had us over for dinner often, while your dad and your sister fuss over me. You have the life. Mine’s more difficult. I could lose my family, you know that.”

He coughed, more to clear his throat than as an involuntary action. “Can you stay here tonight?”

“You know I can’t. It’s a workday tomorrow. I promised my mom I’d be home on school nights.”

“It’s nice to know you keep some promises.”

“Don’t be like that, babe. That’s our arrangement, and trust me I had to negotiate long and hard so I could spend Saturday nights with you. That’s our night.”

“Hmm.”

“What? That’s all you have to say?”

“Hmm.”

I wished we had a storm. We had only calm, but no storm. And there’s always something eerie about the calm. Farnham and I would normally have argued so passionately, our protests would shake the neighborhood. But tonight he was lobotomized. His kind heart, misplaced.

Although I parked in front of my parent’s, I couldn’t go in. I wanted to know if Guy was still awake, so I snuck into his front yard like a spy and peered into his living room. His back was to me while candlelight accentuated his lanky outline. But that’s not all that was accentuated. I looked closer.

He had wings. They towered above him a third the length of his body. I stepped back not meaning to, then huddled closer to the glass. There was no mistaking what I was seeing. An angel was praying with a candle in his hands.

I ran to his front door, but as I was about to knock, I stopped myself. What would I say? What would I do? I turned toward my parent’s place, but as I took the first step, his door opened.

“Why didn’t you knock?” he asked. His wings were no longer there.

“It’s late. I shouldn’t have come to see you at this time of night.”

“Nonsense. I want to know how your talk with Farnham went. Come in.”

He opened the fly screen and I stepped inside. The candle was still burning on a side table next to his counselling armchair.

“Guy, I think we broke up.”

“I find that hard to believe.”

“No, I’m serious.”

“That explains why you’re acting shell shocked, Jamal.”

“It’s been a strange night for lots of reasons.”

“Have you been home yet?”

“No, I needed a friend.”

“So, tell me what happened.”

I sat in the armchair as the angel crouched at my feet. A tear ran down my cheek so I wiped it with the back of my hand. I heard fluttering, as if a bird had been startled. At the same time, the flame on the candle flickered.

“Guy, I think I fucked it up. He wanted me to move in but I acted cool and –” I wiped another tear.
“Oh, my stupid bravado.”

“Go on, talk.”

“Why am I scared to live my life? Why am I so scared of losing my family when all it’s doing is making me unhappy? Why am I tearing myself and those I love apart?”

“Farnham must be worth it if you’re putting yourself through this.”

With blurred eyes I saw his wings again. I swallowed hard.

“But what if it doesn’t work out and I lose both him and my family?”

He stood, jutting his wings out as a shield to protect me.

“Jamal, let’s look into the future.”

As his wings folded back into place, his living room and any hint of his house was gone. But there I was, still seated in the most comfortable armchair he owned. Behind him was the night sky as if we were floating in space, yet I still felt the proper force of gravity.

As I peered into the darkness two figures materialized. One was me without my beard while the other was Farnham who’d grown a beard.

“What the –”

“Shh. Just sit and listen.”

“Hey darl,” said my boyfriend, “she’ll come around. At least your dad knows about us now.” In the vision a kitchen appeared, and I realized the other me was peering into a pot on the stove. “Come on, stop moping. You’re where the love is.”

This image faded and in its place was a slightly older version of us. Heritage buildings appeared in the background.

“If it wasn’t for you, Farnham, I would have never made it to Europe.”

“Oh come on, darling. It wasn’t all my idea. The moment I mentioned it you were listing off the cities you wanted to see.”

“I didn’t mean it like that.”

“Well, what did you mean?”

“Never mind.”

I knew the smile on my doppelgänger. It was a smile that said I was at peace. The vision changed again, but this time in more detail. Funky furniture littered this enchanted stage, and there we were on a grand lounge suite. My head rested in his lap as I held a book. He had his attention focused on the screen of a tablet. We were plumper. Both with no beards. And my peaceful smile still reigned.

Guy fluttered his wings causing ripples which washed this scene away. A party appeared in its place. Old fashioned streamers were tossed around someone’s garden and about fifty people in various states of drunkenness were waiting. I knew some of them. Farnham’s best friend, Pete, stood with a girl I

didn't recognize. My brother drifted with his eyes half shut, until something caused him to clap. The rest of the party applauded instantly.

And out we came, a little thinner and definitely older. We kissed before Farnham stepped forward. He raised a glass of champagne.

"Thank-you for all being here to celebrate our twentieth anniversary." The crowd cheered. "It means a lot to me and Jamal." He paused and breathed in. "You know, love doesn't always pop into our lives the way we expect it to. We have the ideal man in our mind, but the ideal man is never what we expect.

"The ideal man is always better than we could ever expect. We know his neuroses, and he knows ours. We know that if the outside world gets too dark, we just steal a glimpse at our man and light will fill the room. And we know that whatever age he gets, he will still be the most beautiful man in the world, hands down.

"Okay, I know that sounds corny, but it's the way I feel about this man. My man, Jamal."

More applause sounded as I lowered my head.

"Are you crying," the angel asked.

"No," I replied. "Damn it. Yes, Guy, I'm crying, just a little."

"Talk about it."

"We used to say things like that, Farnham and me. He used to call me the most beautiful man in the world, and –"

"And?"

"He was my ideal man. And when my family haunted my thoughts, I'd look at him and it didn't matter anymore, until –" Guy's moved closer. "Until mama's concerns got louder."

Soon the starry sky returned, and under it was Farnham and I again. Tangled facial hair replaced the strands missing from our heads, and somehow between this image and the last, we'd lost more weight.

"Let's dance," said Farnham.

"But there's no music," the older me replied.

"There's a tune that's been written. It's titled 'Jamal and Farnham', and I bet if we sway a little, we'll hear it loud and clear."

So these men danced in synch, like a pair who'd spent a lifetime together. And I heard the music.

"Your heart wants to protect those you love," said Guy. "But who are you really protecting?"

"I've been protecting my family, to the detriment of the man I'm in love with."

My neighbor's living room reappeared as his wings faded away.

"So who should you be protecting?"

"I know, Guy. I know. But what will my family –" I stared at his far wall.

"You have a right to your own happiness, Jamal."

"Can you show me how my family will react in the future?"

"I can, but I won't. For nothing is written in stone. That is your challenge. You have to make amends as time moves on. But next door is your mother. A mother who believes she's doing what's best for her son."

"You know, Guy, I can't go home."

"Why?"

I stood. "Because it's not my home."

He gestured to his front door. I strode confidently, stopped, and then turned to thank him. When my body swiveled back toward the exit I noticed my suitcase waiting for me at my feet. I shook my head, lifted the luggage, and continued my journey.

I turned my key in the lock to Farnham's apartment. There he was, deep in slumber. I undressed and carefully slipped under his sheets. He stirred.

"Jamal, darling, it's a school night. What are you doing here?"

"Falling deeper in love with the man of my dreams."

"Are you on drugs?"

"I may as well be. My head is light. I'm deliriously happy. And I know at last, what's best for me and those I love."

BLOGS:

HAVE YOU LEFT THE PLAYGROUND YET?

It was a comment that went straight to the heart of the conversation, and a comment that has resonated ever since. And yet, I don't remember who we were talking about at the time.

So what does it mean? We all have been in a playground early in our lives. We reasoned with life the best way we could, hitting out at those who hurt us, or curling into our shells. And we were either popular, or avoided.

I'm not sure if everyone thinks this at some stage, but as I grew older I watched the games people played in the office, and wondered why maturity had never stepped right up and introduced itself to these individuals.

Managers went on power trips. Some stood up to their bullying. Some crumbled. Others looked at the boss as a childish idiot, and treated them accordingly.

There were ambitious workers who felt the need to spread rumours about those who threatened their rise to the top. Soon others had to watch what they said around these poor excuses of adulthood. It's not a situation many of us had time for.

I think I kicked the habit early. I went to a school in Queensland, a state that is considered one of Australia's most conservative. Our school, however, was very progressive. We even had meditation classes around exam time. But it's what we did at the beginning of our final year that really made the difference. We went on a school camp.

We shared cooking duties, played games, did team building exercises, and spent the evenings talking or singing around a camp fire. In one week we changed.

The year before we were teenagers. Now we were adults. The old social groups had worn away. The popular, the nerds, the born-again Christians (it was the 80's), and whatever other categorised kid's movement that ever was, was no longer. We had our own special room where we all hung out between classes. We all went to each other's birthday parties. No matter who we were, we were all friends.

And recently it all returned. Yep, we were the subject of gossip. And the weirdest part about what was said, was that it was successfully dismissed as garbage by those who heard it. As my partner often says "Some people try to transfer their unhappiness onto others."

And at those times you really look in amazement at how some people continue to act as if they're still in the playground.

THE 'LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT' MYTH

Let me start by saying I actually believe in 'love at first sight'. I just think it's named wrong. 'At first sight' implies it's a visual thing. And writers and film-makers keep perpetuating this myth by having our romantic heroes fall for the physical attributes of their intended lover.

Too often it's all about the eyes. Someone is always lost in them, whether they're blue, brown, green, or have that faraway look. Somewhere in some text the eyes are casting a spell on an unsuspecting soul.

Or is it the tall dark stranger? One look and our main character is taken by the way they wear their hair, or the way they style themselves for interested parties. Perhaps they are tall, masculine, feminine or attractive in other ways.

And this is where we have it wrong. Those in love knew they connected with the person on first meeting, but not physically. They hit it off the way we sometimes do with friends. We don't understand why it feels like we've known them for a while, but there's a sense of comfort there. So the feeling is similar whether the person shares our lives as a buddy or a life partner.

But here's the difference. Others around us see what's happening. They understand we're falling for something other than a mere friendship. You say 'they're not my type'. That's because they're not, physically. We think the way they look constitutes whether they will be a love interest. To us, it wasn't 'love at first sight'. No. It was 'love at first meeting'.

As the dust settles we realise this person is more than just a friend. Wayward romantic thoughts haunt us until eventually we say it to ourselves – "I'm in love".

MY FIVE TIPS FOR STAYING IN LOVE

This year my partner and I will clock up twenty-five years together. And although the anniversary of when we met will arrive six months before the date we became a couple, it highlights the fact that love should never be rushed.

Take time to fall in love. Don't go shopping for it. For it will tap you on the shoulder, pointing you toward someone you least expect at a time you're not searching. And once you fall, take note of the advice below.

Tip 1: Share your dreams together.

This is my number one tip. My partner always says tip 2 is the most important, but to me, this one is. I really recommend that you share your dreams together, and once one dream or treat is realised, move onto the next.

For example, set out to buy that house or apartment. Research the next world trip, and put money aside for it. Look at ideas for renovations and put them into action. Meanwhile, share a hobby. Always have something brewing that you are working on together.

For eleven years, Warren and I produced and presented a community radio show called The Rhythm Divine. Every week we'd spend hours researching, interviewing guests and mixing our music. Before and during that time we redid our kitchen and bathroom, and enjoyed several vacations. I can't stress how important it is to share your dreams and realise them.

Tip 2: Communicate

People who don't know us think we argue a lot. My mum even accused us of it when we were in our early years. We both turned around and in unison and replied 'Mum, we're not arguing'. In later years, she realised that this is the way we communicate. We debate, openly and honestly.

So don't feel you can never say something for fear of being challenged. Be challenged and make sure both of you stress your point. And never go to sleep with an issue unsolved. Resolve it before you retire for the day. In years to come, those early issues will be insignificant.

Tip 3: Your sex life is your barometer.

Let's get personal. Many decades ago a woman I used to baby sit for pointed out that a couple she knew no longer slept in the same bed. Then she followed it up by saying that in anyone's relationship, sex is the barometer of how successful, or unsuccessful, that relationship is.

If you're happy, it will all come naturally. I'll leave you with that thought.

Tip 4: Ask the grey haired ones.

As yet, we haven't had to do this, but it was advice from a priest at a wedding we attended many years ago. He told the bride and groom that if they had problems in their marriage, don't talk to a Catholic priest. They're not married. What would they know?

He gestured to the old couples in the church and said to go to the ones with grey hair, for they've felt it, done it and learned from it!

Tip 5: I love you.

For some it's hard to say, yet with practice it can roll off the tongue so easily. And if I told you how many times a day Warren and I say (or text, or email) it to each other, you'd probably throw up.

But my partner has taken it one step further. He noted how my family members say it to each other before one of us leaves, or finishes a phone call. He instigated the same practice with our friends. Some were taken aback at first, but most of them now end our conversations with 'I love you'.

If you can say it to your friends, you can definitely say it to your loved one.

After all, the trick is not to find ways to stay together, but ways of building on what you have.

MY FIVE TIPS FOR WRITING A NOVEL

Although I'm not a newbie in the world of novels, I'm far from being a bestselling author with a plethora of titles under my belt. But that doesn't mean I haven't learned from my own experience.

A while ago I hosted other writers sharing short stories about the Afterlife on this blog. I had about six contributors, but to my surprise one of them handed in his writing with spelling errors, and another sent her story in the body of an email. And although I have nothing against self-published authors, there is no excuse to not take a professional approach to writing.

So here is how my creative juices usually splash onto the page.

Tip 1 – Let your ideas incubate:

I have several ideas for different novels. From time to time when I least expect it, a plot twist or an interesting line of dialogue comes into my head. Or someone comes up with a one liner or a life philosophy that's worth repeating in one of these books.

I'll record the thought or the proposed dialogue on the recorder of my smart phone, and later transcribe it to my notebook under the title of the book I think its best suited for.

Tip 2 – Find your characters on Google:

I've only done this recently. Use Google to find images of the types of people you see as your main characters. When you find the right image, look at each person and give them a catchphrase.

Now work out Head, Heart and Below. (This was a tip an HBO writer shared in a TV documentary).

Head = Their education and what they believe.

Heart = Who they loved.

Below = The type of person they like to sleep with.

Then add various other characteristics under the title TRAITS.

Tip 3 – Always read aloud the last thing you wrote:

I'm not big enough in the world of novelists to pump out a few drafts and send it to my publisher so an editor can fix all my mistakes. So the first thing I do before I continue writing, is to read aloud my last day's work as if I'm addressing an audience of potential readers.

You'll be amazed at the grammar and spelling mistakes, or simply the strange turn of phrase you have written previously. Other times you'll find you can express a sentence better, or you'll find more compelling ways to explore your imagery. And you'll also see redundant words.

Tip 4 – Do your laundry when you write:

As soon as I leave my laptop to go outside to hang washing, my brain rewrites what I have just written, and in every case, both better and with more imagination. Seriously!

This is also true if I get up to prepare lunch or go for a pee.

Secret Tip – An antidote for writer’s block:

A talented editor told me that when I suffer writer’s block, close my eyes and imagine walking into a dark room with just a chair and a film projector. Now let the film play the movie version of the scene you are writing. It will all unfold naturally. Write down what you watched. (This was a tip used by one of the writers of the original series of Star Trek)

Tip 5 – A first draft is never a novel:

All of us at one stage were first time writers, and we all thought when we typed the last full stop, we had a masterpiece. I hate to break it to you but that is never true.

Don’t touch your manuscript for three months. In the meantime start another novel or rediscover the outdoors.

When the time has passed, print out your proposed masterpiece in a font you’ve never seen it in. Now take it to the beach or a park or somewhere away from your writing desk, and have your red pen ready.

For the first time you’re experiencing your writing as the reader, and you will see where the pace slows, where the plot doesn’t work, what scenes need to be added or dumped, what chapters need to be rearranged, and various other story faux pas you thought worked on first draft. Now, work on your next draft.

Then repeat this exercise two months later. (Or get a friend you trust will be brutally honest with their feedback to read it).

Now go and write that best seller that will be on everyone’s lips!

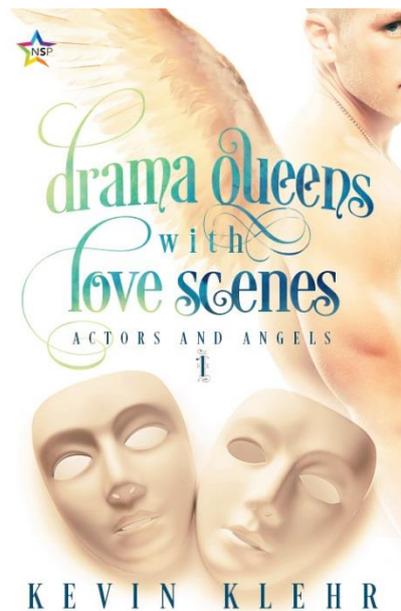
BOOK EXCERPTS:

Drama Queens with Love Scenes (Blurb for Book One):

Close friends Allan and Warwick are dead. They're not crazy about the idea so to help them deal with this dilemma are Samantha, a blond bombshell from the 1950s, and Guy, an insecure angel.

Allan also has a secret. He has a romantic crush on his friend, Warwick, but shortly after confiding in his new angel pal, his love interest falls for the cock-sure playwright, Pedro.

Not only does Allan have to win the heart of his companion, he also has to grapple with the faded memory of how he actually died.

**Excerpt from *Drama Queens with Love Scenes (Book One):***

Guy was still dragging me along the streets of the Limelight Quarter. The crisp night air was reviving my spirits, albeit through my drunken stupor. Many colorful folk whisked past, some briefly staring at us as they made their way.

"You realize Pedro will be there," I said.

"That's why we're going to call Warwick to come downstairs. You need to talk privately."

We arrived outside of their balcony. I rubbed my arms to keep warm as Guy placed his hand on my shoulder.

"Warwick!" I yelled. "Are you there?"

There was no answer. A couple adorned in bohemian black, stopped in their tracks the moment I shouted to my ex-lover.

"Broken heart," whispered Guy to the interested onlookers.

"I understand," replied the woman. She looked up to her man. "Poor thing."

"Go on, Allan, call out again."

"Warwick! Warwick! I love you." My voice echoed from the building as I looked to my angel friend. He nodded and caressed my shoulder. The couple nodded as well. "Warwick, are you home? I need to talk to you. Will you come down, please?"

"Keep going, Allan."

"I really need to talk to you. I have so much more to say to you. I should never have let you walk out of my door the other night. I've wanted to talk to you so many times during the last few days, but there's nowhere private at the theater. Plus I'd probably break down, which is not a good look when you're wearing white grease paint."

A few onlookers came out from their balconies. I glanced at Guy who was joined by a small audience. Some parents had let their kids stay up well after bedtime, and their freckled little girl was giggling at me. Her mother shushed her so she sat on the ground, sulking.

"Don't worry about it, Allan. Just go on."

"Yes, we're right behind you," said an elderly lady with bad teeth. "You make him listen."

"Warwick, I love you, and I know you love me. You told me so. You said you've been waiting all year for me to make a move, and as you know, I've been waiting for you to make that move too."

"You tell him, love!" interrupted the old woman.

My support team began to chant Warwick's name. I was empowered. I encouraged them to clap their hands in time. They did. There was about ten of them now, and their support gave me a warm glow in that frosty breeze. However, Guy looked worried.

"Allan, shouldn't you wait until he comes downstairs?"

"My dear friend, Warwick is a coward. I know he's up there, but he's too scared to come down because he doesn't want to hurt that imbecile's feelings. The very imbecile who tried to hurt me physically during his dumb-arsed play!"

"Allan..."

"No one should ever break your heart," alleged a handsome older gent behind me.

"Thank you." I turned back to address my ex-lover. "Now listen here, Warwick! You told me that you'd been waiting for me to make a move. I did. We made love over and over under that so-called playwright's nose. And what happens when the going gets good? You freak out. What the hell for? Was the sex that bad that you preferred old teensy-dick instead? Was it all getting too intense for you? Is that the reason?" The crowd became quiet as I felt the bitter cold again. "Were you too scared of being in love? Too much intimacy for your murky heart to deal with? Too much real emotion for your juvenile soul to cope with? Too much effort to be in love with someone who's madly, deeply in love with you? Too much..." I shuddered. "Too much..."

Guy grabbed me from behind as I felt my legs give way. He eased me to the footpath and shielded me with his wings. I howled, before tears streamed down my face.

"It's okay, Allan," said the angel. "This is a big step for you."

"He doesn't love me, Guy. He doesn't love me the way I love him."

"I don't think that's true."

I began whimpering like a child being punished.

Blurb for *Drama Queens and Adult Themes* (Blurb for Book Two):

Adam's about to discover how much drama a mid-life crisis can be. He's obsessed with Mannix, the nude model in his art class. But Adam has been married to Wade for nearly two decades, and they don't have an open relationship.

Little do they know that Fabien, a warlock from the Afterlife, has secretly cast a spell of lust on Adam and his potential toy-boy.

As things begin to heat up, Adam's guardian angel, Guy, steps in. But what's the best way to save the relationship? Should Guy subdue Adam's wandering passions or instigate a steamy threesome?

Excerpt One from *Drama Queens and Adult Themes* (Book Two):

He had the perfect vee-shaped torso. The kind that would turn on a dozen potential lovers if he wandered into a gay bar. And while his faultless crew cut was artificially red, his other natural features were as intense as James Dean's. I could go riding in his sports car, feeling the breeze as we headed to Lover's Lane. He'd admire me with his penetrating eyes before undressing me for a lovemaking session so powerful, not even a night with a handpicked selection of porn stars would compare.

But unlike anyone I'd ever met, he was blessed with soft charcoal-colored wings. This was Guy's boyfriend, Joshua. I was back at that thespian drinking haven, the Pedestal, at some stage between going to bed and waking up the next morning.

I tried not to drool at this bad boy, while picturing myself taking off his well-fitted leather jacket, slowly. I wanted to let out an orgasmic moan, before any foreplay had begun.

"I think you need to sleep with Mannix," he said.

He sipped on a Bloody Mary.

"Joshua!" his loving partner reprimanded.

"Joshua, we tried," I said.

"And what happened, sweetheart?"

"He freaked out. He gives us all the signals and then runs off in terror."

"Tsk, ts. Now why would he do that? You're not exactly on the ugly scale."

"Thanks," I replied. "I think."

"Joshua, that's not the issue here," Guy said. "I've been watching over them, and they're getting obsessed with Mannix. And just as odd, Mannix is obsessed with them. It doesn't make sense."

"What's there to make sense of, Petal? They're grown men looking for a bit of spice. This Mannix dude is the spice. Supply and demand. No problem."

"But Guy has a point," I said. "This is doing my head in. One minute, Wade and I are respectable grown men, the next we're one step away from toupees and face-lifts."

"And is this causing you two to argue? Fight? Split up?"

"Strangely, no."

I picked up my cocktail, resting the top of the glass on my lower lip before sipping slowly.

"Joshua, it's still causing drama," continued Guy. "Adam and Wade have their heads in no-man's land, and Mannix is just as bemused."

"Oh my darlings, they're men. Adult men. Every one of them. That which doesn't kill them, will make them stronger. Or separated but I can't see any hint of that. Can you, Adam?" I nodded tensely. "There, you see, Guy? It might be causing a bit of grief, but in the end, they're men. Once they stop questioning it with their emotions, they'll solve it physically and wonder why they didn't get down and dirty sooner."

I sat with the two angels, none-the-wiser. That dark-skinned woman was back on stage. Sultry jazz was her genre of choice today, and her small ensemble cruised into mellow tones that could set you adrift on a small boat. As she crooned the first lines of "Someone To Watch Over Me", Guy sang the words with her under his breath.

Around me, the mismatched furniture complemented the mismatched cast. A lone African woman, wearing more colors than a peacock's tail, stood transfixed as if the singer was secretly robbing her soul. Her fingers tapped on an imaginary piano, and her wide-eyed stare gave me goose bumps.

An old lady, dressed in clothes her own granddaughter would wear, clutched her wine glass like it was a precious jewel. At the same time, she gazed into the eyes of a mature athletic man who looked like he once had a passion for ballet dancing. Their loving gaze reminded me of the way Wade sometimes looked at me.

"So, Joshua, you think we're making too much of a big deal about this?"

He rubbed the tip of his sculptured jawline as Guy casually leaned toward him.

"Adam, darling, there are men who put themselves through hell and back trying to do the right thing. They won't act until they work out all the final consequences. And let's face it, as much pontificating as humanly possible is not ever going to let you know the final outcome, really! And there are men who are a lot more spirited and take life as a challenge. Go forth and take the risk and see where it leads you."

"Joshua, Adam understands that," Guy said. "But there's Wade to consider. What if their marriage falls apart?"

"Darling, seriously. From what you've told me, they're not going to fall apart. It's all just a bit of fun. Mannix is a new appliance, like a fridge or a vibrator. Something that has a use. And think, Adam. Think of the uses you can come up with, with your new appliance."

Excerpt Two from *Drama Queens and Adult Themes (Book Two)*:

"My darlings, listen to yourselves. You are one of the most 'together' couples I know, gay or straight. But all it takes is this little play-bunny to enter your lives and you both act like *Pepé Le Pew* pining after what you can't have!"

This was the most stern she had ever been with us. She loved us to death so I guess we were the last people on earth she wanted to see hoodwinked by some wholesome-acting vixen.

Our friendship with Maude was based on openness from day one. She cast us in a play she was work-shopping at the theater group, and we were instantly drawn to her unapologetic spinster status. She took one day at a time, appreciating her posse, never wanting to complicate her life with just one companion. Wade seemed to study her like a poker player weighing up his next move.

"I love you, Maude, but trust us, you've got the situation wrong."

"Have I, Wade? You still know little about him."

"We've met up with him a couple times."

"And tell me, boys, has there been any flirting?" We didn't answer. "I rest my case." She opened the pantry door where she'd stashed more bottles of red. "I think it will take another few glasses for me to talk sense into you."

Before any debate could be entered into, she unscrewed the top and poured. Although Wade expressed concern about driving home inebriated, I welcomed the top-up, even if it was close to midnight with a work day ahead. The crisp raspberry-like scent enticed our palettes.

"Right, my sweethearts, a little perspective. After you met him, Adam, when did you next catch up?"

"We went for a drink that night."

"All three of you?"

"No," replied Wade. "I was at dance class."

"Uh-huh. You chat. You like each other. Then who contacts who?"

"We invite him around for dinner," I answered.

"Quiet night?"

"Pretty quiet," said Wade. "We had dinner, chilled out, then he had to go home to his flatmate as something was wrong."

"Uh-huh. What happened?" Again, we didn't answer. "You actually don't know, do you? You never thought to ask. Are you actually sure this guy has a flatmate, or is it a boyfriend?"

I searched my wine glass for an answer. No mystic visions appeared. Now I knew I was tipsy. Thankfully, Wade was my designated driver.

"And do you get the feeling he might be interested in one of you, more than the other?"

"Oh definitely not," Wade said. Like me, he also studied his glass for an answer. "He's taken an interest in both of us, and yes, now that I hear myself say it, it is a bit bizarre, but trust me, Maude, there is no ulterior motive."

"Maude," I added, "I appreciate your concern, but trust us, there's nothing sinister going on here. Just a bit of mutual infatuation, nothing more, nothing less. We're grown men. We're not about to do anything foolish."

"Adam, we've all witnessed too many couples split up when a touch of spice was added, as you know. I'm determined not to see the same thing happen to my closest buddies. Besides, the politics of who to invite to what occasion is something I don't want to go through again."

"Yeah, I know what you mean," I added, "but... "

"Remember when I told you about the time I accompanied Jean and Simon to the circus and witnessed the trapeze artist flirt with Simon. They ended up running away together to live on a farm, while Jean took on the arduous hobby of stalking. First the letters, then the phone calls, followed by those crazy ticking gifts. I don't want to be meat in the sandwich again, and I'm determined not to see *my boys* split up."

Excerpt from Nate and the New Yorker

Taken from the 60s themed party scene

Both Cameron and I had Hawaiian shirts to wear, while Rowena sported a tie-dyed sarong and an afro wig. And around us, interesting guests wore chic little skirts, James Dean-style jackets, hippie gear, and mod wear.

“You haven’t introduced me yet,” said a middle-aged woman to Cameron. Her rust-colored coat had a masculine cut. Yet she elegantly held a long-stemmed cigarette holder with something that smelled very much like a joint burning on the end.

“Sorry,” said my charming American. “This is my friend, Nathan. And this well-dressed lady is my Aunt Beverley.”

“Nice to meet you,” I said.

She took my hand and kissed it. “I hope you don’t think me too forward, it’s just that you’ve got such fascinating features.”

“My aunt likes to flirt.”

“It runs in the family,” she replied. She gave me a measured wink. “Now, nephew, where have you been hiding this handsome Englishman?”

“I’m Australian.”

“It’s your accent. I never can tell the difference.”

“I need you!” yelled a girl in a flower necklace. She was the drummer of the band and was addressing our host.

“It’s time,” Cameron said.

“Time for what?” I asked.

He kissed me on the cheek and then headed for the microphone stand.

“You’re in for a treat,” whispered Aunt Beverley, her voice raspy from years of smoking.

“He sings?” I asked.

“He sings,” she replied.

A laid-back strum of the bass guitar started the song, followed by a drum beat. Then the vocal. And before I knew it, I was being serenaded in front of a room full of acquaintances. But, wow! What a unique experience.

“I’ve never seen him go out on a limb for someone like this before,” said his aunt.

I smiled politely, then closed my eyes. He was crooning. His honey voice made my soul rise out of my body and search for a dream. And in the hip nightclub that appeared in my mind, he wore a gray suit with a crimson tie, standing tall in front of the trumpet section who were waiting for their cue. And I was the only one in the club.

“Where are you?” asked Aunt Beverley in a low tone.

I wanted to say I was in love but stopped myself. I realized it was rude to have my eyes closed during Cam’s song. I opened them. He had me in his sights. I wanted to jump into the waves on his Hawaiian shirt and end up on a deserted island with just him and me.

“Would you like a toke of my cigarette, Nathan?”

“No, thank you. I think the fumes have already hit me.”

Drama Queens with Love Scenes, Drama Queens and Adult Themes, Drama Queens and Devilish Schemes and *Nate and the New Yorker* will be released through NineStar Press during 2017

For more information on Kevin’s writing and his novels, go to www.kevinklehr.com

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