



*"Where Imaginations Soar and Dreams Take Flight"*

*Author Sampler – Volume Three*

*December 2005*

*"A Gift for Our Readers"*

## *A Note to Our Readers –*

We want to extend a “thank you” to each reader. Each of the authors at Wings Press love what we do, but without the reader, we wouldn’t be here.

Most writers also like to read and we look forward to the opportunity to share our love of books with you. We will be available on the Wings Readers message board and invite you and your friends to join us.

This is a chance for us to get to know each other better. Did you ever wonder why we write? Or maybe you are curious about how we develop our stories and those delightful characters? What about our villains? Where would your favorite story be without a villain?

Please visit the Wings Reader Message Board and tell us what’s on your mind. We want to hear from you and will strive to answer your questions.

Join us at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/wingsreaders>

Once you get to know us, feel free to visit the Wings Press site and see which books catch your eye.

[www.wingsepress.com](http://www.wingsepress.com)

On the pages that follow, you will get to know our authors a little better. You will find a short summary of their story. This will be followed by an excerpt from the book they are featuring. An author bio and their website address is also included. Feel free to visit our websites and send us an email to say hello. We love to hear from our readers.

Compiled by Nikki Leigh – [www.nikkileigh.com](http://www.nikkileigh.com)

Designed by S & C Consulting – [www.sandcconsulting.com](http://www.sandcconsulting.com)

## *Featured Authors – Volume Three*

*December 2005*

*Nancy Brandt*

*Inspirational*

*Nancy Damato*

*General Fiction*

*Carol McPhee*

*Contemporary Romance*

*Cathy Miller*

*Young Adult Time Travel*

*J D Webb*

*Mystery*

*Nancy Brandt*  
*Inspirational*

*Blurb*

Mary Grace Caster knows what it's like to lose control of your life. Her faith in Jesus helped her overcome her former sinful lifestyle. Now she wants to help Ashley, a young girl heading down the same road. However, Ashley's father, Chance Meyers, refuses to see the trouble his little girl could get into.

Mary Grace gets involved with the family, but her growing relationship with Chance causes Ashley to rebel even more until she finds herself in a predicament that threatens to destroy the family. Can Mary Grace and Chance's love survive even this?

*Fabric of Faith*

*Chapter One*

He took a deep breath as he stood outside the door to the sewing room. He hadn't been in this room in over a year, and he wasn't sure what he would find. Not that he expected ghosts or anything strange like that, but the memories were certain to overwhelm him and he had to prepare himself for that.

Memories of Alice. This had been her room, her sanctuary from two teenagers and a husband who often demanded more of her than was right or reasonable. She'd never complained, however. He remembered her smile. She always seemed to be smiling, even when he'd dragged her away from her sewing machine to help him find a pair of socks.

A tear ran down his cheek, and he hastily brushed it away. Crying wouldn't do any good now. Besides, he had spent too much time crying for her in the past year. Alice would

have hated to see him wallowing in his grief.

He could admit it now -- he had done a lot of wallowing. For the first few weeks after Alice's death, he'd allowed other people to worry about the children. He spent his time in his study, crying and cursing God for taking his beloved Alice away.

Of course, that couldn't last. Reality and life had to eventually come back. The other people had their own lives to lead and after a few days, he was left alone with his children.

That's when he came out of the study to discover that his son and daughter needed him and his strength to deal with their own grief. He'd completely ignored them for several days, and now, he needed to think about someone other than himself.

He went to a counselor from his church. Four sessions later, he stopped feeling guilty about immersing himself in his own grief to the exclusion of his children. Those sessions didn't completely take away the pain of Alice's death, but they helped him realize that he had to get on with his life so the children could get on with theirs. When he got to heaven and was reunited with Alice, he wanted to be able to assure her that Ashley and Daniel had done all right.

*Okay, he told himself. No more stalling. You've waited long enough to do this. There's no point in waiting any longer.*

He opened the door to the sewing room, not realizing he held his breath until he released it. He looked around. Everything was just the way Alice always left it when she finished sewing or quilting for the evening. He could almost fool himself into thinking that she would be coming any minute to pick up one of the several projects she always had going.

"Chance Meyers, get a hold of yourself," he whispered, as though he were in a holy place. "Alice is gone, and she's not going to be needing this fabric or the sewing equipment anymore. This room could easily be made into an office for the kids to do their school work in." He rubbed his hands together and looked around the room, wondering where to begin.

The task he had set for himself was much larger than he'd first believed. Alice had collected enough fabric to fill three bookcases and two dressers. Everything was neatly folded and organized by color, but Chance had never even sewn on a button, so he had no idea what to do with it all.

He sat down in the rolling, swivel chair that stood in the elbow of the L-shaped work area. Homemade covers were on both sewing machines and the serger, so only the cutting

table was dusty. Chance ran his finger over the smooth wooden surface of the table. Alice would never have let this dust accumulate. Of course, she worked in here every day. Dust never had a chance.

He sighed. It would be so much easier if Alice were still here. He wouldn't have to try to figure out what to do with all this stuff. And Alice would know what to do about Ashley.

He'd asked his daughter if she wanted the fabric or the sewing room left the way it was, but she'd only shrugged said he could do whatever he wanted with it. Then she walked away, muttering that he'd do what he wanted anyway.

He shook his head. Maybe it had to do with her being a teenager, but lately he'd felt that he and Ashley spoke completely different languages. She spent the time she wasn't in school locked in her room, and even skipped dinner a couple of times a week.

He sighed and looked toward Heaven. "Alice, do you see what is happening? I wish you were here. Ashley looks so much like you, but she's more like me in temperament, and I don't know what to do with her. You were so much better with the kids than I am. I really need some help."

Chance lowered his head and prayed. "Dear Lord, help. I have to be both mother and father to Ashley and Daniel, but I just don't know how. Ashley needs her mother. Show me what to do."

Almost as though he had heard the words out loud, Chance got a strong feeling that the answer to his prayer had something to do with the fabric and that he should leave it alone for the time being. *I will show you the way*, a voice in his mind said.

Chance looked around the sewing room, wondering what God had in mind for him.

Mary Grace Caster sat in the office of The Quilting Hoop, the small quilting store she owned.

The Quilting Hoop was more than just her store. It was the fulfillment of her childhood dream and the answer to a few years of prayer. While she wasn't completely out of debt yet, she was on her way to owning the store outright, and she thanked God for her blessings.

This morning, however, prayers of thanksgiving were not in her heart. She muttered prayers of petition as she stalked through the aisles of the store.

Last night someone had broken into the store and destroyed over three dozen bolts of expensive cotton fabric. Nothing had been stolen, as far as she could tell, but the shreds of fabric scattered all over the floor were symbols of loss just the same.

The police had already come and taken her statement, along with that of Ginger Young, her assistant.

Ginger was now in the office of the store, looking at the invoice from the last shipment that they'd gotten. She tried to determine how much of a loss the store was going to take from this damage.

Mary Grace knelt between counters of fabric, trying to clean up the aisles as much as possible. The store would be opening in half an hour, and she didn't want the customers to have to wade through rags.

She stopped cleaning up and leaned her head against a nearby pile of bolts. That's what she picked up. Rags. She couldn't even think of them as scraps.

Scraps were small pieces of fabric, less than a yard length, that were used to make quilts. What she had in her hands were just rags. Whoever had broken into the store had made sure that the fabric was truly ruined. Not only had they slashed and torn the yardage, but they had tossed garbage everywhere.

Tears started down her cheeks. It would take days for the store to get back to normal, and even longer than that for her to feel secure.

She had no idea why anyone would do this. The police had said there might not be a reason. It could have been just a bunch of teenagers just out for a spree.

Mary Grace brushed the tears away. "Crying won't do me any good," she said, determined not to let this defeat her. She had worked too hard to get this store, and one act of vandalism was not about to make her quit.

She continued cleaning up, but as she did, she prayed for strength. She wanted to pray God would strike down whoever did this, but knew that wasn't what He would want. He would want her to forgive the vandals. However, she wasn't ready to forgive, so she just left the vandals in His hands, and kept her attention focussed on what she had to do to get the store ready for opening.

Mary Grace had worked in fabric stores for several years after college, and she'd learned the business from the ground up. When she'd saved enough money to be able to support herself for six months, she quit her job and worked up a business plan for the

Quilting Hoop. It took her some time, but soon she'd convinced a bank to help her finance the business and she rented the space she was now in.

It was Monday morning. A new truckload of fabric was expected later today, and she was grateful that the vandals had decided not to wait until tonight. If that had been the case, she would have been in even greater financial trouble than she was now.

"I guess that's something to be thankful for, isn't it, Lord?" she asked as she stood up and carried the armload of ruined material to the big garbage can she'd dragged out of the store room to make clean up easier.

An hour later, the store opened and several regular customers wandered around, searching for the perfect fabric for their latest projects. A few of them stood around the checkout/cutting table, chatting with Mary Grace about what had happened.

"You know," one of the ladies, a minister's wife, Mrs. Lambert, said, "you read about these things happening in big cities, but I never would have expected this kind of thing to happen here in North Hadleysburg."

Mary Grace didn't know how to reply to this. She didn't feel up to discussing the vandalism problem in town, but she didn't want to offend her customers. Fortunately, one of the other ladies -- Mary Grace couldn't remember her name -- spoke up and they continued talking.

Ginger brought a cart out of the storeroom. She'd been out in the back inventorying the new shipment. Normally, Mary Grace did this, but this morning she'd delegated the job to Ginger. She wanted to stay in the front of the store in case the police came back with information.

Ginger wheeled the cart, which was loaded down with bolts of fabric, up to the cutting table.

"Are these the ones you wanted me to bring out?" she asked Mary Grace.

Mary Grace glanced at them then nodded. "Looks like it. Why don't you start putting them away on the shelves?"

Ginger nodded, but before she could start, Mary Grace stopped her.

"Wait. Leave that bolt of red up here," she said. Ginger laid the bolt on the table.

Mary Grace fingered the bolt of red calico. She'd known exactly what she wanted to do with this fabric from the moment she'd seen it in the wholesalers' catalog.

She'd seen the perfect pattern in one of the half dozen quilting magazines the store carried. The designer had done the Drunkard's Path in blue and white, but Mary thought it would look striking in red and black. She had bought a beautiful black fabric a few months ago, and this red would complement it.

Mrs. Lambert must have noticed her smiling, because the older lady said, "Well, that's good to see. I missed seeing your smile when I walked in this morning."

Mary Grace looked up from the fabric. "I guess I haven't been myself this morning," she said, sighing. "It's just that..."

Mrs. Lambert interrupted her with a wave of her hand. "Don't even worry about it. I understand completely. I'm just glad to see that beautiful fabric still makes you smile. Now, what are you planning?"

Mrs. Lambert wasn't much of a quilter, but she loved to sew and she loved coming into the store and seeing what everyone else made. Mary Grace explained her plan while Mrs. Lambert nodded.

"It sounds beautiful. You will bring it into the store so we can see it, won't you?"

"Of course," Mary Grace replied.

At that moment, Ginger came back to the table to get a few more bolts of fabric to put away.

"Here, Ginger, let me do that," Mary Grace said. "Will you cut me three yards of this and put it in my bin under the table?"

"Sure, Mary Grace," Ginger said. "Is this for the Drunkard's Path you told me about?"

Mary Grace nodded, and Ginger smiled. "This will go great with that black you bought." She shook her head. "I wish I had time to make as many quilts as you do."

Mary Grace patted her hand. "You need to concentrate on school right now. Trust me, you'll have time later, if you want it. I only have time to make quilts because it's important to me and I make time for it. Now, I'd better put some of this fabric away."

When Mary Grace returned to the front counter, one of her regular customers, Mrs. Whitney, stood talking to Ginger over a half dozen or so bolts of colorful fabric.

"Hello, Mrs. Whitney," Mary Grace greeted the older woman. "What are you making now?" She reached across the cutting table to touch the rich, jewel-tone solids and the cream fabric Ginger had already cut.

Mary Grace tried, as often as she could, to engage the customers in conversation. She knew that the large fabric store chains in the area had lower prices, so she depended on her vast selection of quilting fabrics and supplies to draw customers. She wanted them to feel as though they were among friends when they were in her store.

"My grandson is getting married next year," Mrs. Whitney said.

"She's making a Baltimore Album quilt as a wedding present," Ginger interjected.

"Oh, that will be beautiful," Mary Grace said, truthfully. "Are you designing it?"

"Some of it," Mrs. Whitney replied. "To tell you the truth, I haven't thought it all out. I'm hoping it'll develop as I work on it."

"You'll do fine," Ginger said. "You're one of the most talented quilters I've ever seen."

Mary Grace smiled. Mrs. Whitney often came into the store with projects she'd just finished or still worked on. Almost invariably, all the customers in the store would gather around the cutting table to admire the beautiful hand quilting and the color choices.

The door to the store opened just as Ginger put Mrs. Whitney's purchases in a bag. The little bell above the door tinkled happily, but the man who stood in the doorway looked more confused than happy.

He stood still as the door closed behind him. Mary Grace watched him as his eyes flickered around the store as though he feared that someone would demand that he leave.

Mary Grace suppressed a giggle. Few men came into The Quilting Hoop unless they were with a wife or a girlfriend.

To Mary Grace's knowledge, there were only three male quilters in the area, and this man was not one of them.

That could mean that he waited for someone. There were about six women wandering around the small store, so Mary Grace decided to leave him alone until he asked for help. She worked on organizing one of the boxes that sat on the side of the cutting table. These boxes held patterns for dolls, quilts, vests and a myriad of other cloth creations.

The Quilting Hoop carried almost every pattern from every small company that catered to crafters and quilters. The boxes that held these patterns never seemed to stay organized, and that was one of the things that Mary Grace worked on when she wasn't needed to wait on customers.

She knew she could go back into the office and do some more paperwork, but she'd

rather stay out in the store, especially when there were several customers. It was too easy for Ginger to become quickly overwhelmed without an extra hand to help out.

Also, going back into the office would only remind her of the mess that had greeted her this morning, and right now, she didn't want to think about that. She just wanted to enjoy being surrounded by fabric and quilters.

When she finished cleaning up the first box, Mary Grace turned around and saw that the man still stood beside the door. He looked just as lost as he had when he walked in. She decided to take pity on him. Ginger had left the cutting area to show a customer where they kept the solid fabrics.

"May I help you?" Mary Grace said to the man. She again wanted to giggle when she saw how relieved he was. He stepped over to the cutting table.

"I don't know. I'm not exactly sure why I'm here." He looked around the store again, then he turned back to her.

"I was driving home from work today when..." He looked past her. His anxious expression turned into one of relief and he smiled.

Mary Grace looked over her shoulder to see what had caught his attention. On one of the shelves behind her sat a small plaque that said, "She makes covering for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple -- Proverbs 31:22." Mary Grace turned back to him.

"An appropriate verse for a quilter, don't you think?" she asked, smiling.

He looked at her and smiled more brightly. "My wife has -- had that same plaque in her sewing room. Maybe there is a reason I saw your store tonight."

## *Bio*

Nancy S. Brandt lives in Louisiana. She is a member of the Faith, Hope and Love Chapter, NJRW and HeartLA Chapters of Romance Writers of America, and the Catholic Writers Association. She is a stay-at-home mom to two wonderful children, one biological daughter and one beloved adopted son, and two guinea pigs. She also writes under the name Honor Cummings.

*Nancy Damato*  
*General Fiction*

***BLURB:***

Josefina emptied boxes, tossing aside her plain cotton pantaloons and camisole to try on undergarments of satin and lace, admiring the seductiveness of her newly molded form. Boxes, emptied of hats, shoes and undergarments, stacked up where they were opened like a child's forgotten blocks. Josefina felt like a child in a candy shop, indulging a new taste from each selection, then going through the ritual again because each seemed sweeter than the one before.

She slept that night, secure in a silk, sleeping gown. Francois would not attack her. He was giving her complete freedom to make her choice. He offered the power, wealth, and freedom she coveted for the price of her virtue against remaining an innocent and settling for Jacob's future of mediocrity. But she loved Jacob, and Francois had been like a member of the family, generous and understanding.

No one would ever know of the agreement, as long as Francois never told. And whom would he tell? The "Elders" considered him an 'outsider', valued for his gold alone. He would never tell Mother, chance breaking her heart, or Father, for fear of his wrath and losing his standing among the other members of the cartel, and any revelation in general would besmirch the heir Francois prized so dearly. No, Francois would find the telling worthwhile only to hurt her, Mother, Father, or Jacob, because the truth would destroy them all.

The choice rested with her alone, to live with for the rest of her life.

## The Pawn

THE NETHERLANDS, 1852

Baron Josef von Tieiler's fingers twitched as he suppressed an urge to pull his timepiece from his pocket for one more look. An exaggerated pretense of adjusting the vest girdling his girth quieted their restlessness. In truth, he need not see the hour to know the time had passed for any young lady mindful of her reputation to be home among family and friends.

He paced. Hours ago darkness had draped shadows on the empty settee across the room. The housemother, endorsed by Dusseldorf Preparatory Academie for Girls, sat reading in a straight-backed chair, effectively avoiding his glares. She dared not glance in the direction of the vacant seat.

A sudden draft chilled his neck, not unsurprisingly accompanied by a feminine wail. "Josef, you arrived a day early. Would you not allow a fiancée time to prepare herself for her promised?" The scent of roses floated with the sweep of petticoats and skirt. "Ah, my Josef, you have become more handsome than the last visit." Beyond the sitting room doors, footsteps could be heard ascending the stairs.

At least she adhered to essential propriety and did not go out alone. Josef peered down at a doll-sized creature of unnatural beauty whose platinum curls swirled into a design that would shame a fancy bonnet. Startling sapphire eyes twinkled in welcome above lips rivaling a rose petal.

"Have you waited long?" Her face softened with sincerity and a need to be forgiven. "I am sorry."

Josef's body itched with a longing so ardent he could not remain angry. "I have been waiting some time, my Louise. You were not at your studies. Your house companions seemed at loss to explain your absence."

A wisp of concern veiled her eyes for only an instant.

“I suppose your unseemly absence has to do with that French boy in your letters?”

“Darling Josef, you know me so well. Yes, that is where I have been.” She paused. “Did you consider my entreaty?”

“I did. More as a threat than a plea.” Her avoidance of any explanation peevd Josef.

“Oh, drat and dumplings! You know very well I only hinted at calling off our engagement to force your hand. How else does a young woman of respectability win the indulgence of her betrothed?”

Mischief backed by confidence sparked the darkened blue eyes.

Josef waited, choosing not to answer.

Louise pursed her lips in a pout, then rose on tiptoe and kissed his cheek. “I am thankful you came.”

Her lips widened in a beguiling smile. “Now, tell me your plan to save François.”

“I came, as you asked. I promise nothing.” He dared not let her know how easily she could manipulate him.

“Josef, he is quite bereft. The French are too terrified to offer any aid while negotiating peace with the Austrians. The new German Confederacy will not help him. Our own Holland denies him entry through our borders. What are we to do?”

“We? I hear tell the boy stole funds intended to buy arms for the French crown and then was accused of quite unspeakable acts with a number of ladies under his protection.”

“Rubbish, François told me the truth. The royals concocted that history to buy his safe passage when the revolutionaries put a price on his head. Would we not do the same to protect one of our own secretly defending the royalty?”

“No circumstances exist where I would elect to become involved with a mongrel of such ill-repute.” Josef lowered his voice, striving to sound grave with authority. “And, I advise you to extract yourself from this alliance. Now.”

Louise’s eyes stormed to a blue-violet as ominous as any thundercloud. Her fingers first clutched then twirled a heraldic ring circling her finger.

Josef sought to temper her storm. “By now, this, this scoundrel must believe you fight for him out of affection rather than dedication to our nobles’ cause?”

“You cannot be jealous, Josef, so unbecoming for a man of your influence. François is but a child.

Well, perhaps more an innocent youth, pursuing noble dreams of saving a kingdom lost to revolution.” The cloak slid from her shoulders, revealing skin as flawless and luminous as a pearl. “We must help him.”

Mindful of the head mistress dozing across the room, Josef lowered his voice. “Perhaps if he were to invest those stolen funds with the Bank?” Josef nodded toward the door leading outside.

“Oh, he would be forever grateful.” Louise retied her cloak. “He has the gold you speak of, but without us he has no one trustworthy to turn to. He received word the French nobility disclaimed him today.”

Josef scowled. “You see, it is as I warned. Even his own country steps away from him.”

Louise narrowed her eyes. “If you cannot, or will not... I will undertake his plight myself.” The tempered whisper carried the weight of promise.

François duLaFevre. Josef’s heavy sigh collapsed into an inflexible stance. The lascivious dragoon will circle Louise like a wolf after a lamb during my absence. Even now he ruins my chances to woo her.

“The Bank must approve any steps before I involve myself,” Josef said. “The boy must produce proof of his innocence. At minimum, provide creditable witness of his loyalty to the House of Orange.”

Louise smiled and clasped her hands. “I saw letters signed by the French cabinet, orders to act as their agent.”

“I cannot act on your good word alone. Be practical, my love. Documents must be inspected, authenticated. These efforts take months, years, and I must leave for America within a fortnight. Too little time remains.” Josef leaned into her, mindful of respectability their shoulders barely touched.

“Am I too brash to consider a walk in the garden? Leave thoughts of treachery this side of the door?”

Two weeks, then I am gone for a year. I dislike spending my last visit discussing another’s misadventures.”

“Come.” Louise slipped her hand into his, moved toward the veranda door, then stopped. “One last plea. Allow me to take you to François?”

Josef nodded his acceptance with obvious reluctance. He needed to assess the young man, face to face. One must know the enemy.

Louise stepped out the door. “You will become as convinced as I of his innocence. If you care for me at all, you must free him. Accept his word, if that is all he can give.”

Louise’s plea troubled Josef.

Her interest blazed too brightly. Even after his complaint, she talked of the fugitive. Josef stroked his chin, his anger hidden in the darkness, his jealousy building.

“I have a proposal, Louise. A civil ceremony here, marry me tomorrow. We will have two days, then return home together.” Josef held up his hand, halting his fiancée’s interruption. “Your partisan may accompany us, and I promise to find him safe haven before I sail. By the time I return, he will have retrieved his gold and be prepared to come to America with us.”

Louise’s visible disheartenment aggravated Josef. The situation had progressed further than he suspected. He had best press her decision. “I suggest your French patriot might enjoy serving as our witness, instead of hanging.”

Louise looked up, eyes bright with tears. “If that is the price you demand, so be it.” From across the street François duLaFevre could not see Louise’s face, but she had stiffened, obviously upset. One year until the dour banker returns. Time enough for me to see that she learns to find pleasure in living. She will forget this severe Dutchman.

When the couple disappeared, François started back. He loathed the shabby hovel where he hid. Reeked of cabbage and mutton. Children papered the walls; the imps irked him. Louise will want offspring. No sons to compete with for her affection. I will choose a daughter, the likeness of her mother. Yes. But, I will teach the girl to laugh and dance and be a pebble in the shoe of pious tyrants the likes of banker Taylor.

**BIO**

Nancy lived in Illinois until retiring to Arizona in 1994. Twenty-eight years in a second marriage she and her husband have a blend of six children and thirteen grandchildren. Nancy says, "We're proud of our family. One grandson is serving his third tour in Iraq. None of them (at this moment) are in jail, on drugs or filing bankruptcy, although if you want to talk about it, we've had plenty of experiences. They've grown and are growing into responsible adults through various degrees of pain for us all."

Nancy taught school, was an assistant director for the state's community college board, and owned her own insurance agency as she followed the careers of her husband. "I write about strong-willed, determined women who face tragedies and desperation, sometimes fall and skin their shins, sometimes more, but who believe in themselves."

**THE PAWN** is the first book of the Taylor family trilogy which uncovers the good and bad choices of three generations of women from 1879 through 1917.

<http://www.nancydamato.com>

*Carol McPhee*  
*Contemporary Romance*

*BLURB:*

Jeweled Seduction: A rejected son tries to gain his dying father's approval by recovering a legendary heirloom gambled away under suspicious circumstance. One thing stands in his way: the winner's gorgeous and gutsy daughter.

*Jeweled Seduction*

*Prologue*  
*(Origin Of The Heirloom)*

*Date: 1305*

The sickly stench of death filled Iain MacAllister's nostrils. Swirling in the eerie twilight mist, the foulness clung to him, enfolding him in its revolting embrace. He gingerly picked his way amongst the bodies searching for life, searching for members of his clan.

Iain glanced up and watched the fatigued survivors stagger around looking for spoils on the battle-strewn ground. He had been hunting and returned to find that his people had fought off a surprise attack on his village by the warring MacIver clan. The inhabitants, well versed by him in the art of protecting their own, had confronted and slaughtered the invaders. But death and destruction left a bitter taste in Iain's mouth.

He was tired of the warring between the isolated clans who sought to enrich themselves, and yet, if the truth be told, no one gained wealth. As soon as goods were acquired, they were lost through thievery or retaliation.

Burying bodies would take time away from stockpiling the necessities for their survival of another winter. Perhaps Robert Bruce would unite these ferocious family units in

the common desire to vanquish the English. Until then, these useless battles would continue.

A low guttural moan rolled through the stillness. Drawn toward the sound, Iain threaded his way around the lifeless forms. Suddenly, he stumbled into a slight depression and fell next to a body--it moved. He jerked away from the death throes, then watched until the motion subsided. A cold shudder spiraled down his back as the man's last breath sighed from his body.

Iain's eyes roamed the length of the warrior who must have suffered a slow, painful death. Iain knew he should be relieved that this was not one of his men, but the futility of the death overwhelmed him.

He was about to leave this nauseating sight when a sparkling reflection caught his eye. Tightly clasped in the warrior's hand was an object with the luster of gold. Carefully, he pried the stiff fingers apart and pulled a chain inlaid with glistening gems from the dead man's grasp. "You poor bastard. You probably thought that adornment would bring you good luck. Aye, it *was* lucky for my side, though." Iain squinted and slowly turned it over in his hand, but it was too dark to see clearly. He placed the chain around his neck and shoved it beneath his tunic. He would examine it later when he was away from the field of carnage and his nerves had regained their stability.

## *Chapter One*

"Ah. Here she comes." Calum MacAllister stepped into the shadows. Hidden by the profuse yellow blooms on a rose-covered trellis, he glanced around, worried that his clandestine behavior might draw attention. Good, no one looked his way, leaving him free to scrutinize the silver Jag pulling up the circular drive. So much the better if Valerie MacIver were early--he could study her in detail before the other guests arrived.

While Calum watched, a valet rushed to the end of the walk and stopped cold. He apparently recognized the burly driver and needed to gather his courage to greet him.

"Damn it. Open her door," Calum muttered to himself as he ran an anxious finger beneath his shirt collar to allow more breathing room.

The valet appeared too rattled to follow protocol and open the guest's door; instead, the young man focused on the driver now leaving the vehicle. "May I park your c-car, s-sir?"

Without a word, the hefty bald man grinned and tossed the keys in the air, forcing the valet to scramble to catch them. They both turned when the passenger's door slowly opened.

The big man erased his smile and called out, "I'll get the door, Missy."

Calum's heart increased its beat when long supple legs peeked through the opening slit of her skirt as she emerged. Her words floated through the warm July air toward the trellis. "Why do you keep calling me, Missy? Do you still think of me as a child, Butch?"

"You'll always be that sweet little girl to me. I'm not going to start calling you Val at this late date." Butch heaved a sigh loud enough for Calum to hear. "Don't know why we had to come so early. Weddings are boring."

"You know how important this day is to me. I'm happy I could make it to California in time for Sally's wedding."

"In time for boredom, you mean."

"Listen, forever ago, Sally was captain of our high school basketball team. She gave me terrific competition in running at our track meets, and she's still my best friend."

Behind the trellis, Calum gritted his teeth. *Miss MacIver will be coming this way. Time to spring into action.* He moved into the sunlight.

As she turned and walked toward him, he couldn't believe his eyes. She was breathtaking.

He'd had a certain expectation of what she would look like from the photographs he'd studied. But this woman in front of him wasn't even close. He hadn't expected her to look so fresh, so perfectly turned out. Her lavender suit showed her trim figure to advantage. The white-piping trim on the notched lapels and pocket flaps lent a light touch of informality. She walked with easy grace in white two-inch heeled shoes that brought her up to his chin. Where were her hideous glasses and the jaunty ponytail he had seen in the snapshots?

Her glistening chestnut hair, styled in a fancy French roll, portrayed sophistication. Well-defined, slender eyebrows stretched the full length of her long dark lashes, accentuating her deep brown eyes. Her pert upturned nose was the same as in the pictures, though. *It's her all right.*

The face in the photos had haunted his dreams, and now her beauty in the flesh astounded him--and pleased him. The pictures had told nothing of her delicate coloring and

flawless complexion, nor had they transmitted the distracting scent of her perfume. As she neared, it drifted around him and smelled like jasmine on a sultry night.

“Allow me to escort you to your seat, Miss MacIver.” Calum’s formal request sounded shallow and a sharp contrast to his usual warm lilt of Scottish brogue. He had practiced his American accent, deceiving even Brian MacIver, her father. Calum waited for her hand to reach his arm, nodding pleasantly to her driver.

“You know me?” she asked, her eyes raised in elfin curiosity.

“Sally showed me your picture so I’d be sure to place you in a seat near the altar.”

From his ramrod straight height of six-foot-four, he glanced down and saw she was studying his face with an interest he hadn’t expected. Not this soon. A flood of heat washed up his neck. He looked down at his patent leather black Ferragamo shoes, then composed himself and looked back at her.

*Dammit!* With his plans ready to put into play and anxious to start off with a good impression, he’d become overly zealous and made a slip. Why hadn’t he told her he knew her father and recognized his car? Sally’s pictures bore little resemblance. If Miss MacIver realized it, she might puzzle over his answer when he needed to avoid suspicion. He had his own reason for ushering at the wedding--and it wasn’t to fulfill the bride’s plea for a replacement because an usher had unexpectedly taken ill. Nothing more effective than dropping a laxative into a cup of coffee to put an obstacle out of commission.

Calum stifled a groan. He wished he had more experience at this cat and mouse game, but he was a CEO in thriving software companies, not a commando. Still, he knew better than to frighten off his prey before he was ready to strike. Fortunately, he thought fast on his feet. *Time for damage control.*

“I’m sorry.” He hesitated, then dragged in a quick breath. “Let me introduce myself. I’m Calum MacAllister, Sally’s neighbor and last minute substitute usher for the bride-to-be.”

*Hmm, got out of that one easily enough.* His lips slipped contentedly into a confident smile. He felt like a big bad wolf raring for action with *Little Red Riding Hood*. Things would work out, if he stuck to his plan and remained unruffled.

“I’m pleased to meet you, Mr. MacAllister.”

Her hand’s light pressure on his arm lifted Calum’s spirits. He ignored the thundering brute lumbering behind them. The driver cum bodyguard. He’d take care of

him later. Nothing would stand in his way. Time was his enemy. He had to act quickly--his father had little time left to live.

Since other guests had yet to arrive, Calum made light conversation as they proceeded along the flagstone walk to the outdoor arrangement of chairs. “Sally said you flew in from Switzerland, yesterday.”

“Yes. I’m so glad I arrived in time.”

Her damn perfume preyed on his senses.

“Any turbulence crossing the Atlantic?”

“A bit bumpy at times.”

“But you made it, that’s what’s important.” Calum smiled. He was glad she had come; after all, he’d made it possible. Now only a few technicalities were left to work out, nothing he couldn’t handle. He would use every opportunity at his disposal today, giving more challenge to the venture he had meticulously designed.

~ \* ~

Val glided along holding Calum’s arm, unaware of the menacing thoughts in the man beside her. She glanced around the manicured grounds, sniffing in the delicate scent of a wide variety of rosebushes. In the background, the Pacific’s sparkling sapphire blue added to the splendor. “The family’s garden is a perfect setting for an evening ceremony.”

“I agree.”

She detected a slight tremor in Calum’s arm. When she looked up, he exchanged a frown for an engaging grin. She wondered if he had a problem with formal affairs. As a string quartet played classical music, Calum guided her to the front row, then motioned her to the second seat.

“I’ll sit at the end where I can take good shots of the procession,” she said, feeling oddly bereft of his company when she slipped onto the chair.

Calum bent down and whispered, “The family asked that no pictures be taken during the exchange of vows.”

“Of course not, I know that would be inconsiderate. I’ll take my pictures before and after the minister conducts the service.”

His eyes flashed a puzzled response, but he remained silent.

Val wondered about his bewilderment. Perhaps he didn't like women who exerted themselves. Lately, she had become irritated with handsome men who liked nothing better than to brandish their charm. At least he'd not been such a bore.

Val shifted her legs so Butch could squeeze past her knees and sit beside her. Then she turned to study the usher. Calum's broad-shouldered athletic build cut a dashing figure in his white-jacketed tux. His impeccable haircut tapered his thick black hair neatly to a smidgen above his collar. With such assurance displayed in his strong strides, he seemed an ideal example of a dominant alpha male, but the tremor in his arm didn't fit the persona. Either way, she had to admit Calum MacAllister intrigued her.

"Butch, have you ever seen that man before?"

"He's a friend of your dad's. I checked him out thoroughly at Brian's request. He moved in next door 'bout three months ago. Why?"

"No reason." She watched new arrivals enter the site and observed Calum as he went about his duties. She noted his finely carved features fit in a most pleasing way. His dark brows and lashes hovered over the deepest blue eyes she could ever remember seeing. Matched with a strong jaw line and a determined chin, the dimpled cheeks on his smooth-shaven face gave no indication of weakness.

*Women must swarm to him like ants to a picnic. I wonder if his great looks get in the way of a normal life?* "Probably nothing gets in his way... even females," she muttered, her curiosity presenting visuals in her mind better ignored by an engaged woman.

"Did you say somethin', Missy? Perhaps I should change seats with you."

"Ah, no. I want to get good pictures; the end of the row is the best spot. I can aim the lens and it won't be blocked."

She watched Calum guide Sally's elderly grandmother into the front row. He held onto her arm until her frail body was safely seated. Val was afraid he would find her gawking at his gentleness and be embarrassed so she looked away, but then sneaked another glance. He was staring at her. When he caught her gaze, he half-smiled, yet it looked forced. His intimidating eyes lingered on hers. The electricity in his inspection exerted a strange power, making her heart skip a beat, yet at the same time made her uneasy.

Her apprehension didn't make sense.

"Don't you know anything personal about him?" she whispered to Butch after Calum returned to the back of the chairs.

“Who?”

“Calum MacAllister. The usher I asked about before.”

“I know all about him. Ask Brian what he thinks of him.” Butch squinted and scanned the crowd.

“But Dad isn’t here now. Is Mr. MacAllister married?”

“No.”

“Never?”

“Nope.”

“Dad likes him?”

“He seems to, Missy. The guy’s been up at the house a few times.”

“Did Mr. MacAllister see you there?”

“I was out... er... bill collectin’ for your father.”

“Then how did he know who I was if he hadn’t seen you before?” She nudged Butch’s arm when he was slow to answer.

“He said he’d seen pictures of you, remember? Besides, he’d know the car.”

“But Sally doesn’t have any recent pictures of me. I had some ready to send to her, and Dad, too, but never got around to it. He lied, Butch! You know I can’t stand lies and you know why.”

“Don’t get into that, again, Missy. We’ve gone over it before.” Butch patted her hand. “Maybe he was tryin’ to impress you. Do you want me to go ask him about it?” He moved slightly as if to get up.

“No. I’m probably being silly.” An acknowledging grin spread across the bodyguard’s mouth.

Val settled back in her seat, exasperated, and checked him out again. *With his tan, maybe he’s a farmer or a gravedigger.* She laughed out loud, but then quickly regained her composure when Butch lifted his eyebrow.

“What’s so funny, Missy?”

“Nothing. Aren’t bodyguards supposed to be suspicious of everyone around them?”

“I know more ‘bout these people than they know themselves. I’m keepin’ tabs on things, don’t worry.”

Val was perplexed; *maybe he’s a gigolo.* With his cool, debonair carriage, it suited him, and she liked that idea; it meant he was off limits to her.

With her strong desire for independence, she refused to live off her father's wealth. She was a working girl, who'd only recently started making serious money--certainly not enough to buy a lover, even if she so desired. "What does he do for a living?"

"He's into computer stuff."

"Oh." Butch's fidgeting distracted her.

"It's too hot," he growled, wiping his forehead with a handkerchief.

Val looked around at the guests filling the chairs; few nodded to her. "Butch?"

"Yeah?"

"Have I changed much?"

"Why, Missy, I didn't know you when you got off the plane. I would've walked right on by if you hadn't spoken."

"That's what I thought. Most of the people here don't seem to recognize me, either."

"Well, look at you. You've grown into a real beauty. Ditchin' those glasses was a helluva good start. You look great wearin' cataracts."

"Contacts, Butch. Thanks. I took a class in makeup, too."

"The biggest change is your hair. I miss your ponytail."

"It didn't seem the right look for a professional photographer. With this shorter cut, I can be carefree or fancied up." She looked straight into Butch's eyes and waited for the kind of flippant reply that was part of his makeup.

The husky man's blue eyes twinkled. "I have to admit, if I were twenty years younger, I'd be within range of courtin' you and makin' your dad furious."

"Thank you, Butch." She giggled when she saw the honest affection in his eyes. "You're a boost to my morale. You've always been there for me."

Her mind moved back on track. How could Calum have picked her out from the old photos Sally had? After moving to Switzerland, she'd undergone a metamorphosis crystallized by the realization that at thirty-two, her biological clock had moved into overdrive. Worse still, his staring sensitized her body to another level that she didn't want to explore now... that of being female.

Agitated and squirming, Butch was obviously uncomfortable with his thickset weight in the white metal chair. "I still don't see why we had to come so early."

“Be patient.” Val wished she could have left Butch at home this time, but she’d given in to her father’s insistence that he come along for protection. *But protection from what?*

“I’m glad you got to come home, Missy. Brian says your career is takin’ off now.”

“Guess what?”

“I don’t have to ask. I can tell you’re burstin’ at the seams to tell me.”

“It didn’t seem likely I could come for the ceremony until three days ago. Out of the blue, all of my photos sold in one sweep. I couldn’t believe it. A guy paid a lot of money for them, and my agent said the man wants me to do more photography for him. I think I’ll turn him down, though.”

“Why would you do that?”

“I want the freedom to travel with Thomas and get our marriage off to a strong start. I can get some good pointers here for my own wedding.” Val smoothed her fingers over her purse. She hoped her love would build with time, once she married such a bright, ambitious man. Thomas asked so little of her inner self and demanded nothing except companionship at the social events so necessary for him to move up the corporate ladder.

“You’re goin’ to marry that... Thomas fella?”

“Of course. I’m wearing his ring. That’s why I was so glad to land in time to discuss it with Sally last night.”

“Your dad is the one you should hammer it out with. He doesn’t like him.”

“Dad just met him once when he flew over to visit. He’s only regretting that I have another man in my life besides him. He’ll get over it.”

~ \* ~

As he waited for new arrivals, Calum recognized a gray Mercedes parking off to the side of the street. It wasn’t until after he’d ingratiated himself into the MacIver household he’d learned the extent of Brian’s shady deals. Calum’s probing had revealed that Brian sometimes had difficulty getting payment for delivery of furniture from this thug’s employer. The punk had come to the house and threatened Brian recently when he’d been there. Without being asked, Calum had escorted the creep, none-too gently, off the property. Not that one of Brian’s own men couldn’t handle it, but they weren’t around at the time. His helpful deed wedged him firmly into Brian’s friendship. The last thing Calum wanted right

now was to create a scene with this jerk. His target today was Miss MacIver, not Brian's enemies, of which he counted himself as one.

The man made no attempt to leave his vehicle. He sat and smoked a cigarette, blowing rings of smoke into the air and keeping his eyes on the guests. Was he waiting for Brian to show up? Part of Calum wanted to tell the bodyguard to smarten up and get on the ball; the other part hoped he didn't get wind of the snoop, else the pavement on the driver's side might suddenly get bloodied. An influx of guests moved toward Calum and the other ushers. *This guy won't want more of the same, he'll buzz off when he sees Brian isn't coming.*

~ \* ~

Butch reached for Val's hand, startling her. "You okay, Missy?"

"Sure. I was thinking how stubborn Thomas is. But I inherited the same bulldog tendency from Dad, so I can't complain. Just as soon as Sally's wedding is over, I'm going to call Thomas and tell him we'll start making arrangements."

"Yup," Butch said, loosening his tie, "you're stubborn all right. Aren't they ready to start? These chairs are hard."

"Sally's mother isn't here yet. Jeff's standing off to the side and doesn't look the slightest bit nervous about marrying today," she added, attempting to change to a subject that would take her mind off the men in her life.

"Sally is a nice girl."

Val turned around and could see the uniformed staff putting last minute touches to striped green and white umbrella-shaded tables on the lawn. The white tablecloths adorned with green napkins and fresh flower centerpieces provided their own splendor. Her delight in the picturesque scene was shattered when Butch burped.

"Shhhh." She wanted to punch his muscular arm, but refrained.

"Sorry, Missy, but I'm hungry."

She loved Butch dearly, but his manners...

"I'm going to hurry and take a shot of the reception setup before the guests swarm there," she told him tersely. Butch started to get up, but she laid her hand on his shoulder. "You stay here so I can concentrate." The bodyguard mumbled something and sank back in his chair with blatant reluctance.

Calum's brow lifted in consternation as she made her way toward him. What business was it of his if she moved about? She pointed to her camera so he'd understand the purpose of her action, but when he scowled, she halted, feeling the need to justify herself. "I want to get a picture or two of the gorgeous display of tables and chairs."

He nodded his approval.

She could feel his eyes bore heat into her back with every step she took. She snapped a few pictures and crept back to her seat, thrown off kilter by discovering that her spurt of initiative under Calum's watchful eyes seemed to set her ablaze. She leaned back in her chair, her breasts heaving from the excitement welled up inside. The stimulating sensation was unexpected but pleasurable.

"I'm not supposed to be separated from you at any time," Butch griped.

"I didn't leave the grounds. There was no problem. Calm down."

"Surely they'll get underway now, Missy. No more guests have come in the last five minutes."

"Be patient, for heaven's sake."

"I don't like these people."

Val glanced around to see if anyone heard. Butch didn't like people in general, the upper crust hoity-toity types, specifically, and didn't try to hide his feelings. He looked like a turnip in a pansy patch. If Sally's father hadn't known him well, he'd never have gotten through the gate. She wondered if Calum might have been called upon to throw him out. She would enjoy seeing that effort! Butch was still as sturdy as an ox. She chuckled and looked back to see Calum glaring at her.

Val turned back to Butch. While he studied the crowd, she noticed an odd bulge inside his jacket.

"Are you carrying a gun?" she asked, a sharp edge to her voice. "I thought you relied on your enormous size to scare boogiemens away."

"Don't worry your pretty little head about it. I always carry one now."

"Why?"

"Because times have changed since you've been gone. Haven't you heard how crime has increased?"

She focused on Calum again. Did he know Butch carried a gun and that's why Calum stared in their direction so much? Still though, Calum watched her, not Butch. She

snickered. Butch didn't frighten her. He had always been gentle with her and used to let her crawl on his back to play horsy.

The music suddenly softened. The guests stilled. The groom and the groomsmen took their places at the altar.

### *Bio*

I'm from Nova Scotia, Canada, and am contracted with Wings ePress for 8 novels. I live on a mountainside with the true hero of my life, a former chemistry teacher and the greatest supporter of my writing that I could possibly have. He is continually going the extra mile to take me to locales that will provide romantic settings. Or maybe it's the benefit he derives that builds his enthusiasm. Our four children have spread their own wings and flown, but there is no empty nest syndrome at our house. We're too busy--candlelit dinners in winter, biking, long walks, camping and canoeing in summer.

<http://www.geocities.com/carolmcphee2003>

*Cathy Miller*  
*Young Adult Time Travel*

*BLURB:*

During a spring rainstorm, sixteen-year-old twins, Kara and Carl, hear rain pounding on the side of the house but are surprised to see bright sunlight beyond the study window. A shaggy-haired barbarian strides toward them, a dead deer draped over his pack pony. Carl unintentionally falls into the other world and pulls Kara with him. The window to their world closes and they are trapped in the wilds of King Arthur's Britain.

Where's a knight in shining armor when you need one?

*Outside Time*

*One*

"There's no way you can help me on this dumb paper. The topic's worse than stupid. Even the school library didn't have anything on it," Carl Freeland growled at his sister. "So drop it." He slammed the front door to his grandmother's old house behind him and stomped mud across the entry hall floor.

Kara looked at her twin as she dropped her books on the chair in the hall. "It's just a history report, Carl. What are you so bummed about?" She peeled off her rain-soaked sweater and kicked off her shoes. Spring in the Rockies. God, what a place to be stranded. Talk about a nowhere, backward excuse for a town. The closest real shopping mall was all the way back down in Denver.

She shoved her long hair back over her shoulder, and caught a glimpse of the two of them reflected in the mirror over the chair. Outwardly they looked a lot alike with the same length curly auburn hair, lean bodies and long legs. Although Carl's legs were more muscular than hers were, the two of them had the same green eyes. A pink sticky-paper hung in the middle of their reflection.

"Aunt Jen's out," she announced, reading the note she pulled off the smoky glass. "Book signing in Denver, then a meeting. Home late. Food in the fridge." Kara shivered. Just the two of them alone in this creepy house. It didn't make any difference that they'd been here almost a month now. The place was still probably crawling with ghosts. Gram's included.

"So, what's new? Good thing Aunt Jen never got married. She's always flitting around somewhere or other." Carl slicked back his wet hair with his fingers. "We could disappear into thin air and nobody would ever notice. Not that I particularly mind. I don't need anyone keeping tabs on me, breathing down my neck or telling me what to do. I like being on my own."

"Well, take off and strand me at school again and see who's breathing down your neck then!" Kara flipped on the hall light, pushing back the gloom. The more light the better as far as she was concerned, that was for sure.

Carl dropped his backpack on the bottom step. "Look, Beanpole, I came back for you, didn't I?" He stripped off his fleece vest and dropped it on the floor.

Kara glared at him, then picked up the soggy vest and added it to the pile of stuff on the chair. Aunt Jen was such a neat freak, not laid back the way Mom had been.

"You were late, so I gave Tiffany a ride home. It isn't as if I had anything else to do. She just lives down by the lake, not the other side of the state. Besides, it was raining and she'd have gotten wet."

"Cheerleader getting wet? No. You couldn't let that happen, now could you?"

"Come off it, Kara. It's not my fault you decided to paddle home like a drowned duck. Besides, I picked you up halfway here, so back off." Carl slouched down on the stairs. "Besides, you could make a few friends yourself. Try to fit in, make my life a little easier."

Kara pushed past her brother and headed toward the kitchen. *God, Carl is such a self-centered idiot. Not like Dad was, I could always count on him. He and Mom understood. They always cared what we did.* Kara heard Carl's shoes drop on the bottom step before he

started to follow her through the formal dining room and into the kitchen.

"Like you care if anyone notices me, Carl? Please. But hey, if you have any doubts that Aunt Jen knows every time you smile, just get sick again. She'll definitely have something to say about you coughing and hacking around. Besides, everybody always notices you. Me, I'm like a radio. You know, just background noise. But not you. We've only been here four weeks and you fit in after the first day, Mr. Oh Wow!" Kara sounded grouchy, even to herself. *What does it matter anyway? I don't like this house or this town or--maybe some food will help my attitude.*

"Yeah, well, that's a real problem--me getting noticed at the wrong time. I ticked off Old Man Ball, and that's why he gave me this stupid research report." Carl opened the fridge door and grabbed a package of deli meat and a handful of sliced cheese. "Dumb history prof."

"No, way," Kara countered taking an apple. "That's not how he handed out topics in my class. We asked for what we wanted, and I got life in the fifth through eighth century AD post-Roman period. Would you stop dropping sandwich crumbs on the floor! I'm tired of cleaning up after you. And stop calling me Beanpole!"

"That's the same topic I got saddled with, only he made me take it. Probably so you could show me up. One of the other basketball players warned me about Ball. Says he doesn't like the athletic types, just the flighty little flirts who hang on his every word. Who cares about his stupid paper, anyway?"

"You do. Dad would have cared too. And I'm not a flirt."

Her twin walked away from her, his back stiff.

*Kara, you dope. Bringing up Dad.* "Carl, wait. So, I'm an airhead. I think I know just the book we need for those reports. Follow me." She paced back the way they'd come, then down another hall. Proudly, Kara flipped on the light in the old study and stared at the floor-to-ceiling walls of books in the cozy room.

Or it might have been cozy if a fire had been going in the fireplace. "I left the book on the window seat over there." She pointed to where a large window seat complete with faded chintz padded cushions broke the west wall of books. "Maybe I didn't? No, Aunt Jen must have put it away."

"Or maybe your brain's like a sieve, and I'm in big trouble," said her twin. "Why do I ever listen to anything you say?"

"Yeah, well at least I've got a brain, which is more than I can say about you." Kara scanned the books on the shelf in front of her. She'd left a paper sticking out of the one she wanted.

"Forget it." Carl walked over to a sketch-filled drafting table. His steps sounded hollow on the polished wood floor. "There's not going to be anything in here about barbaric warriors in some post-Roman Britain." He flipped through some of the drawings, then strode to the window seat and plopped down.

Kara glanced out the window behind him. Icy water still carved wet rivers down the grimy glass. Outside, Gram's manicured garden looked barren, lonely and soggy. Puddles of rainy slush covered the gravel paths and coated the bare branches of the bushes. *I hate rain. It rained at Mom and Dad's funeral.* "Carl, would you just shut up and help me look? It's a little brown book."

"None of those in here." Carl sniped.

Kara ignored him. "*The Celts*, that's the title. Oh yeah, and it smells a little like roses."

"You've got to be kidding. Girly, wimpy smelling roses?"

She could feel him staring at her.

"Hey, I almost forgot. One of the guys told me about a Tae Kwon Do school here in town. I went and checked it out at lunch." Carl thunked his foot against the wood seat. "We start Monday afternoon. You can applaud any time now."

"Would you get serious? If Aunt Jen finds we've been messing with her precious research books, she'll kill us. You'd think we were still little kids."

"Speaking of killing, have you heard what the kids at school have to say about Gram's missing companion-artist friend?"

"Carl!"

"No, really. The story is Gram murdered her, got rid of the body, then died so she wouldn't have to explain anything to the police."

"You're morbid." She looked over his shoulder at the rain soaked landscape. Pines and bare-limbed aspens shivered in the wind howling off the mountain. The grass was just starting to turn green. It looked about as inviting as an oil slick. She sighed more heavily.

Carl reached behind him and pulled a book out from under the cushions. He sniffed and wrinkled his nose. "This what we're looking for?"

"That's it." Kara snatched the book from him, and it fell open to a paper-marked page.

She breathed in the scent of faded summer roses. "This is where I found the medallion."

"You mean that necklace-thing you wear?"

"Right. The medallion." Kara nodded. "I did some checking on the Internet, and I think it's some kind of Celtic design. It could be a copy from some old design or even an authentic ancient pattern."

Carl rolled his eyes.

"Anyway, this is where I found it. Right here with this page of drawings that somebody added to the book. The sketches must have been done a long time ago, judging by how faded and brittle the paper is."

"Even so, there is an imprint of something still in the paper," Carl said. "Is it your medallion?"

"I think so." Kara pulled her medallion from beneath her shirt. She'd worn it as a necklace almost since the day they had moved here.

"Well, it does look the same," agreed Carl. He studied the book.

Kara's attention centered on her medallion. Something about it pulled at her when she stared at it, had pulled at her since she first found it. If she could just trace the design in the right order, then... She let the medallion hang free as she laughed at herself. *Talk about letting your imagination run away with you.*

"Wouldn't Aunt Jen just die if she thought someone had been drawing all over the pages in this book? And not just the extra sheet."

"What do you mean?" Kara asked.

She stared, curiosity warring with dread as her brother flipped through the pages of the small volume. Page after page had rough sketches. One map had symbols written over different place names. Kara turned back to the page that had been marked by the extra sheet and her medallion.

Staring out at them from the book was a rough sketch of a barbarian hunter striding through a forest. On the added page torn from a spiral bound sketchpad someone had drawn a detailed portrait of a Roman-looking warrior.

"They look so real, like they could open their mouths and talk to us." Carl said. He sounded impressed. Definitely not his normal bored, yeah-right attitude. Sometimes his guard slipped, letting her catch a glimpse of the inner feelings they'd shared before they'd come to live with Aunt Jen. But Carl never, ever slipped in front of anyone else, especially

not any of the guys he hung with at school.

Silently the twins compared the first man's face, drawn in the margin of the page that showed a walled villa, to a different man's face on the folded sheet of drawing paper. Kara started to read from the text. "The Saxons invaded post-Roman Britain at the invitation of..."

The lights flickered, almost going out.

"Oh jeez, there goes the electric again!" Kara hunched up her shoulders. She really, really didn't like this house. Absently she fingered the intricate design on the medallion, the silver metal warming in her fingers.

"It must go out every time it storms around here." Carl shrugged. "You know, whoever did these sketches was really good. Maybe even better than me. I know." He hummed a few bars of some spooky music. "I'll bet it was our missing artist."

Kara ignored her brother. "It would be so awesome to really see these guys, don't you think? They would have been so different from the losers at school." She closed her eyes and breathed in deeply. "If I try, I can almost smell that forest and hear the birds in the trees."

A loud clap of thunder shook the room, rattling the window. Kara nearly jumped out of her skin. She jerked her hand away from the medallion. The medal thunked against her chest swaying on its chain as the lights in the room flickered and died.

Brilliant sunlight illuminated the skin of her hand where it rested on the drawing of the hunter. Kara looked up from the book. "Oh my God," she breathed, staring out the window.

Carl followed her glance, looking up, then almost dropped his half of the book they'd been studying. Brambles twisted around the outside sill. Striding through the clearing was a shaggy-haired man wearing a round metal helmet, and leading a pony laden with a slain deer and a huge shield.

"Do you see that?" Carl gasped. He watched as the man disappeared back into a forest that was not their tame backyard. Carl shoved the book into Kara's unresisting hands, then scrambled completely onto the padded window seat.

"Carl, what are you doing?"

"Standing up?" He unlocked the window and wrestled it open, leaning out to get a better view.

"Carl, stop it! Get back in here." Kara heard a definite squeak in her voice. She grasped

the intricately carved window frame for all she was worth. "Don't, please. This is *not* our backyard!"

"Jeez. He looks like that guy in the book!" Carl had his head and shoulders outside the window.

"No way. Somebody's just trying to scare us! Besides, the caption under that sketch said something about a sixth century--what about the sword on his back? Barbarians wore swords on their backs. Modern, civilized people do not wear swords sticking up over their shoulders! Something's more than just a little wrong here! We are talking prank of some kind. Wilderness re-enactors, maybe some kind of rear view projection, or how about a movie company filming some historical something or other. There is no way that could have been the guy out of the book. Do you hear me?"

"Man, you're such a worrywart." Carl shoved her away from himself, and swung one leg out over the windowsill. "I've got to check this out."

"Wait! Do *not* climb out there," Kara begged. "Carl, this is crazy. You don't want to go out there. I mean, out there can't even be out there!"

"I'm not going to do anything dumb. I just want to..."

Desperate to get him to listen to reason, Kara grabbed hold of the waistband of her brother's jeans. She tried to pull him back, but it wasn't working. Quickly changing her grip, Kara tugged on his arm.

Carl didn't want to be rescued. He pulled away from her, jerking his arm out of her grasp. He toppled out the window into the briars under the sill and into, well, she wasn't quite sure into where. Kara lost her balance and fell backward off the window seat, dropping the book. As the book fell from her grasp onto the floor, the loose sheet of sketchpad paper fluttered out the window. The errant page floated to the ground near where Carl lay sprawled.

Scrambling up, Kara scooped up the book and knelt on the window seat. "Aunt Jen will kill me. I can't lose pages from her research books! These dumb books are half the reason she dragged us to live in this backwater in the first place."

"It's just a drawing." Carl gingerly picked himself up out of the brambles, and pulled some wicked looking thorns out of his jeans. Scratches oozing blood on his hands attested to his encounter with the thorns.

Kara leaned out the window and tried to reach the paper. "What are we going to do?"

The sketch lay out of her reach on the brambles, a corner moving in a gentle breeze.

"Don't worry, I'll get it back for you," Carl said.

The sketch lifted on a breath of air and floated further from the window. "The drawing is blowing away. You've got to get the drawing, Carl."

"Yeah, yeah, I am. Whoa, Kara. You've *got* to see this forest. This is really something." He looked to either side then knelt down and touched the grass at his feet. "It is definitely not Colorado." Standing up, he held his hand out for her. "Watch out for the thorns."

"No, wait, Carl. Forget the drawing. Oh, jeez, you can't even be there! Come back in here. That guy looked more than dangerous, like some kind of old-time mountain man or something. He could still be out there! Dad was right. Carl, you do need a keeper." The medallion was getting hot, almost burning her skin through her shirt. Grabbing her brother's hand, she tried to pull him back to safety.

"Would you just come on?" Carl tugged her through the window.

## Bio

Cathy Miller has a masters in Reading Education from the University of Missouri-Kansas City and taught in the public schools for a number of years before she settled down to raise a family and write full time. When she's not writing or being an independent beauty consultant, Cathy enjoys reading, weaving, needlework, photography, teaching and being a synchronized figure skating mom. Most days she can be found either substitute teaching or at her computer surrounded by her collies.

Cathy's first published young adult novel, *Outside Time* was published by Wings ePress, Inc. in June 2003. The sequel, *Regardless of Time* was released in December, 2004, from the same publisher.

With her background in education, Cathy is available for artist in residence programs, school visits and teacher in-service workshops on a variety of writing related topics.

[www.cathymiller.net](http://www.cathymiller.net)

## J D Webb *Mystery*

### *BLURB:*

Meet Mike Shepherd, Chicago's pie-loving P. I., whose on-again, off-again relationship with ladyfriend Diana rivals that of Spenser and Susan. When former cop Mike's longtime nemesis, madman Ferlin Husky Lewis, kidnaps Diana with murderous intent, the chase is on—but just who's chasing whom? The action never lets up in a pulse-pounding game of cat and mouse as Lewis toys with his prey and wrecks havoc with Mike's colleagues and neighbors.

The gents will savor the rock 'em, sock 'em action, and the ladies will relish the romance, as Mike, Diana and their cadre of resourceful friends dish up a story with something for almost every taste. If you have an appetite for nonstop action with a satisfying dollop of romance, help yourself to Shepherd's Pie served up J. D. Webb style. I guarantee you won't go away hungry.

*Shepherd's Pie – to be released November 2006*

### *Bio*

J. D. Webb resides in Forsyth, Illinois with his wife of 37 years and their toy poodle, Ginger. Writing has been a life-long interest and Dave became a full-time author in 2001. He spent 25 years in the corporate world after a tour of the Philippines and Viet Nam in the Air Force, then 12 years owning a shoe repair and sales store. All the while writing short stories and suppressing an urge to write a novel. After two of his short stories were published the novels began forcing their way out. *Moon Over Chicago* is his second novel to be published. *Shepherd's Pie* is scheduled to be out in Nov 2006. A sequel titled *Chicago Moon* will be completed in 2006.

[www.jdwebb.com](http://www.jdwebb.com)

*Look for these authors over the coming months –*

<b>Author Name</b>	<b>Website Address</b>	<b>Author Email</b>
Dorothy Bodoïn	<a href="http://www.dorothybodoïn.com">www.dorothybodoïn.com</a>	Endora0922@aol.com
Nancy S Brandt	<a href="http://www.nancysbrandt.com">www.nancysbrandt.com</a>	nancy@nancysbrandt.com
Bill Calabrese	<a href="http://www.wjcalabrese.com">www.wjcalabrese.com</a>	billyjay1@earthlink.net
HL Chandler	<a href="http://www.hlchandler.bravehost.com">www.hlchandler.bravehost.com</a>	sandblueray@hotmail.com
Rhobin Courtright	<a href="http://rhobinlee.com">http://rhobinlee.com</a>	robinlee@ctec.net
Nancy Damato	<a href="http://www.nancydamato.com/">http://www.nancydamato.com/</a>	Ndshaman@aol.com
Michael J Davies		
Gail Delaney	<a href="http://www.gaildelaney.com">www.gaildelaney.com</a>	gail@gaildelaney.com
Sherry Derr-Wille	<a href="http://www.derr-wille.com">www.derr-wille.com</a>	derr-wille@excite.com
Trish Fitzgerald-Preti	<a href="http://www.authorsden.com/fitzgerald">www.authorsden.com/fitzgerald</a>	TrishaFitzGerald@aol.com
Rayne Forrest	<a href="http://www.rayneforrest.com">http://www.rayneforrest.com</a>	authorrayneforrest@yahoo.com
Toby Heathcotte	<a href="http://www.tobyheathcotte.com">www.tobyheathcotte.com</a>	theathcotte@cox.net
Karen Hudgins	<a href="http://www.karenhudgins.com">www.karenhudgins.com</a>	hudkaren@aol.com
Allison Knight	<a href="http://www.allisonknight.com">www.allisonknight.com</a>	allisonkngt@yahoo.com
Susanne Marie Knight	<a href="http://www.susanneknight.com">www.susanneknight.com</a>	susanne@susanneknight.com
Linda Lattimer	<a href="http://www.coffeetimeromance.com/OurAuthors/LindaLLattimer/Home.html">http://www.coffeetimeromance.com/OurAuthors/LindaLLattimer/Home.html</a>	Lynda1L@yahoo.com
Kay LeGrand	<a href="http://www.geocities.com/kaylegrand">www.geocities.com/kaylegrand</a>	dksteere@worldnet.att.net
Nikki Leigh	<a href="http://www.nikkileigh.ccom">www.nikkileigh.ccom</a>	Nikki_leigh22939@yahoo.com
Lori Libby	<a href="http://www.lorilibby.com">www.lorilibby.com</a>	

Carol McPhee	<a href="http://www.geocities.com/carolmcphee2003">www.geocities.com/carolmcphee2003</a>	<a href="mailto:mcpheekl@eastlink.ca">mcpheekl@eastlink.ca</a>
Cathy Miller	<a href="http://www.cathymiller.net">www.cathymiller.net</a>	<a href="mailto:cathymiller@cathymiller.com">cathymiller@cathymiller.com</a>
Deanne Miller	<a href="http://www.deanmiller.com">www.deanmiller.com</a>	<a href="mailto:dmiller9@comcast.net">dmiller9@comcast.net</a>
Shelly Munroe	<a href="http://www.shelleymunro.com">www.shelleymunro.com</a>	<a href="mailto:shelley@shelleymunro.com">shelley@shelleymunro.com</a>
Bethany Oliver	<a href="http://www.RomancingNewEngland.com/bethanyoliver">www.RomancingNewEngland.com/bethanyoliver</a>	<a href="mailto:boliver@romancingnewengland.com">boliver@romancingnewengland.com</a>
Belinda Palmer	<a href="http://www.BelindaPalmer.com">www.BelindaPalmer.com</a>	<a href="mailto:forwardmotion5@hotmail.com">forwardmotion5@hotmail.com</a>
Cheryl Pereira	<a href="http://www.cher-amour.com">www.cher-amour.com</a>	<a href="mailto:cherylharvey@gmail.com">cherylharvey@gmail.com</a>
Nora Peterson	<a href="http://www.norapeterson.com">www.norapeterson.com</a>	<a href="mailto:norapeterson@cox.net">norapeterson@cox.net</a>
Joan Powell	<a href="http://www.congerbooks.com">www.congerbooks.com</a>	<a href="mailto:motherbirth@mindspring.com">motherbirth@mindspring.com</a>
Lynn Romaine	<a href="http://www.lynnromaine.com">www.lynnromaine.com</a>	<a href="mailto:lynnromain@lynnromaine.com">lynnromain@lynnromaine.com</a>
Marie-Nicole Ryan	<a href="http://www.marie-nicoleryan.com">www.marie-nicoleryan.com</a>	<a href="mailto:marienicoleryan@bellsouth.net">marienicoleryan@bellsouth.net</a>
Jeannine Van Eperen	<a href="http://jdvaneperen.freesevers.com">http://jdvaneperen.freesevers.com</a>	<a href="mailto:Jlilactime@aol.com">Jlilactime@aol.com</a>
Angela Verdenius	<a href="http://angelaverdenius.freesevers.com">http://angelaverdenius.freesevers.com</a>	<a href="mailto:angela@modnet.com.au">angela@modnet.com.au</a>
Linda Wallace	<a href="http://www.linda-wallace.com">www.linda-wallace.com</a>	<a href="mailto:contact@linda-wallace.com">contact@linda-wallace.com</a>
JD Webb	<a href="http://www.jdwebb.com">www.jdwebb.com</a>	<a href="mailto:jdavewebb@insightbb.com">jdavewebb@insightbb.com</a>
Billie Williams	<a href="http://www.billiewilliams.com">http://www.billiewilliams.com</a>	<a href="mailto:wordcrafter123@yahoo.com">wordcrafter123@yahoo.com</a>
Saje Williams	<a href="http://www.sajewilliams.com">http://www.sajewilliams.com</a>	<a href="mailto:soulsaje@comcast.net">soulsaje@comcast.net</a>

We would like to invite each of you to meet us on the Wings Readers Message Board. This will give you a chance to get to know our authors better. Find out what type of books your favorite authors read. They can share what motivates them to write. You can learn more about the creative individual behind your favorite characters and stories.

There will be more samplers which will feature other authors. Keep an eye on the message board for future dates.

Join us at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/wingsreaders>

Once you get to know us, feel free to visit the Wings Press site and see which books catch your eye.

[www.wingsepress.com](http://www.wingsepress.com)

Compiled by Nikki Leigh – [www.nikkileigh.com](http://www.nikkileigh.com)

Designed by S & C Consulting – [www.sandcconsulting.com](http://www.sandcconsulting.com)