

# PHAZE FLARE

FREE FICTION



## WHISPERS IN THE WIND

CHARLOTTE  
BOYETT-COMPO

Phaze  
6470A Glenway Avenue, #109  
Cincinnati, OH 45211-5222

This is a work of fiction. Names, places, characters and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to any actual persons, living or dead, organizations, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Whispers in the Wind © 2007 by Charlotte Boyett-Compo

All rights reserved under the International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover art © 2007 by Debi Lewis

Phaze is an imprint of Mundania Press, LLC.

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

Pale mist rose from the forest pond and danced along the shoreline, leaving silky tendrils of vapor upon the grass as it stepped. Above the greensward, the golden orb of the moon played hide-and-seek among the wisps of cloud. The sound of gently-lapping water and the occasional forlorn hoot of an owl were the only intrusions into the night. The creatures of the day had long been abed and the night denizens had yet to begin their roam of the forest.

On the rolling hills above the forest, a lone figure stood, his night-aware eyes fixed on a cottage to the north of the pond. The windows were darkened, shuttered, barred against the encroaching night and whatever the shadows held; but to the solitary figure keeping watch, the intrusion of locks and shutters were no barriers to what he sought.

He turned his face up to the bathing rays of the moon and inhaled the special scent of night: the trace of wood smoke from the cottage's chimney; the delicate aroma of dew-glistened foliage; the thick, pulsing sulfite heat of life's blood flowing through the forest creatures who-keenly aware of his presence-kept their safe distance.

The moon's light fell harshly on his dark features for a moment only before a trailing cloud passed over the lunar surface. But in that brief span of time, his feral eyes drew in the luminescence and a bright spark flared in their amber depths. Bemused and enslaved by the power of the lunar orb sailing above him, he opened his mouth and keened in supplication, his eerie ululation carrying on the night breeze around him.

In the cottage to the north of the pond, Caitlin Brady stirred in her restless slumber. The spectral sound had woven its way into her subconscious mind and taken root, tugging gently at a memory stored there. She turned over, one hand flung out across the bed as though seeking the touch of another, and sighed deeply.

Even from the distance he kept from her, he heard that gentle sigh and his head cocked to one side in anticipation of another. When it came-soft and infinitely lonely-his heart began to ache in his powerful chest.

"Caitlin," he whispered, his words a mere breath of sound on the midnight wind.

Her eyes fluttered open, took a moment to focus, and then stared into the twisting shadows dancing about the ceiling. Slowly, she turned her head toward the window.

"Caitlin..."

She knew he was there. When she had taken to her bed, she had known he would come this night. The full moon was riding high in the late October sky and the crisp chill of autumn was already laying frost on the greensward where he dwelt.

"Come to me, Caitlin..."

His soft voice beckoned to her, playing havoc on her womanly senses. She had no defense against that seductive call for it was a magnet drawing her toward the man, himself. To deny the whisper from the NightWind was to deny the very life in her own body.

Caitlin threw back the comforter and swung her legs from the bed. Slipping her feet into her slippers, she reached for the robe lying over the brass foot board. She stood, wrapped herself in the protective warmth of the chenille robe, and padded quietly to the window. Easing the lace curtain aside with the back of her left hand, she sought-and found-him standing on the hill overlooking the pond.

One moment he was a thousand yards away; the next he was right there under her window, gazing up at her with those lambent eyes alive with fever and need. His darkly handsome face was turned up to her and she allowed her gaze to wonder over those well-remembered features, taking in their stark male beauty.

"My love," he whispered and the sound wound its way into the very pit of her.

She placed her free hand on the glass of the window pane, the only thing separating her from him. The glass was cold to the touch-as cold as she knew his hands would be upon her flesh-but she barely noticed for the heat of his gaze sent a wave of warmth through her body.

"You should not be here, Kiernan," she whispered back, fearful of waking the cottagehold.

His night-glazed eyes softened as she spoke and he reached a hand toward her. "Come to me," he pleaded, his loneliness and aching need apparent in his words and in the terrible sadness flitting across his face. "Be with me."

Caitlin shook her head. "I can not. You know I can not."

For a tick or two of the clock longer he kept his hand out to her, then slowly-the glow in his eyes fading-lowered it to his side and his head slumped to his chest, his powerful shoulders sagging beneath the weight of his hurt.

She ached to go down to him; to take his face in her hands and lift it to hers; to plant the sweetest of kisses on his wide brow, his full lips; to push aside the curly locks of black hair which hid his amber eyes-and the awful pain-from sight.

"Do not hate me, Kiernan," she begged and a part of her died when his head snapped up and his love shone eagerly in the look he gave her.

"Hate you?" he queried, his face mirroring his surprise. "How could I ever hate you, Heart of my heart?" He came closer to the cottage, casting a wary look about him lest someone should have heard his approach. "Could I hate the air which inflated my own lungs, Beloved? Or the Life Force which pulsed through my veins?" He shook his head in denial. "Doomed as I am, I could never hate you, Caitlin."

A single argentine tear fell down Caitlin's cheek at his words and she leaned forward, resting her forehead on the windowpane. "Did I

doom you, Kiernan?" she asked. "Was it my love for you that placed you where you are?"

He heard the misery in her voice and wanted to leap up and burst through her window; to snatch her up and carry her away with him to the depths of the forest that were now his home. He would gladly forsake his course of action if he could only hold her but one more time.

But that was not to be. He was a condemned man-nothing more than a specter now-and she was the vicar's only daughter: well-loved and well-protected by that vicious man.

"You did nothing to me save love me, Caitlin," he answered, his own misery making his words hard to voice. "My fate did not come from your sweet hands, but from the hands of the man intent on keeping us apart."

Caitlin nodded at his words, knowing full well it had been her father's meanness that had turned this gentle suitor into the night creature he had become.

"Thou art not worthy of mine daughter's hand!" Vicar Brady had hurled at Kiernan McGregor when the poor farmer's son had come to ask for Caitlin's hand in marriage.

"But we love one another. Does that not count for anything with you, Sir?" Kiernan had protested. "I love her and would care for her as no other would. Can you not see that you are hurting her as well when you deny us?"

The Vicar's prim mouth had tightened and his pale gray eyes became chips of arctic ice. "Thee will be denied Heaven, Itself, if thee persist on seeing mine daughter, young sir!" the elder had raged. "I will not tolerate thy impudence nor allow thee to question mine authority. Doest thou understand me?"

Kiernan's love for Caitlin had surpassed his fear of the most powerful man in the valley and he had squared his shoulders, intent only

on making the stubborn man see reason. "Caitlin and I love one another. And we will be together whether you approve our union or not, Sir. If you force us to leave this place in order to be together, we shall leave and never return!"

Absolute rage had settled on the Vicar's florid face and he had shouted for two of his bondsmen to come at a run. When the two burly men hastened to do his bidding, the Vicar pointed a rigid finger at Kiernan. "Take this blasphemous heathen and throw him in the gaol!"

"On what charge?" Kiernan had demanded, struggling without hope against the two men who had laid hands on him and were even then dragging him toward the stone hut that served as the village jail.

The Vicar's long nose rose in the air. "Witchcraft," came the ominous reply.

"What?" Kiernan could not believe he had heard the man correctly. He increased his attempt to be free of the sturdy hands which held him. "I am no warlock!" he protested.

"Thee have bewitched mine daughter and thee will suffer the pangs of hellfire's damnation for trying to lure her from the path of Godliness!" A wild gleam of vengeance had lit the elder's face. "I will see thee hanged, Kiernan McGregor, for thine sins!"

The trial had been a farce with twelve good men and true condemning her lover to the hangman's tree. Not her imploring cries for lenience or her tearful promises to never go near Kiernan again had saved him from the gallows. She had been made to stand there-at the front edge of the crowd gathered in the village square-and watch as the only man she would ever love was led to his fate.

His gentle, grieving eyes had met hers and he had smiled tenderly upon her that one last time before the hemp was placed around his neck. She had been made to endure the sight of that thick rope dragged tight against his throat and had suffered the pain of it herself as the executioner had tugged at the knot.

"Do ye have any last words, Kiernan McGregor?" the magistrate had smirked.

Kiernan's amber eyes were already locked on Caitlin's tearful green orbs. With his great love flowing from his hopeless gaze, he sought to lend her a portion of his own dwindling strength. He was afraid-not so much from the uncertainty of where he would spend his afterlife as the contemplation of the possibility of his own eternal existence without her. But he held his head high, refusing to give his tormentors the satisfaction of seeing him grovel before them.

"I will but love one woman for as long as there is counted time and even beyond those measured days. My heart, my soul, my being belong to Caitlin Brady and I will take with me to my grave the memory of her beloved face."

He had broken eye contact with her then and his narrowed gaze had swept insolently about the jeering crowd before finally coming to rest on the Vicar's triumphant face. A look of pure hatred had turned Kiernan's handsome features to a mask of vengeance.

"Here me well, Tobias Brady," Kiernan had said, his jaw tight and his amber eyes reflecting the fires of Hell, itself. "You have not seen the last of me nor heard my voice for the last time." His revenge-filled vision had sharpened unmercifully on the Vicar. "Look to the heavens when the moon rides full across the sky on All Hallow's Eve for it will be then when I shall return to exact my vengeance on those who have condemned me! For on that night of nights, no villager will be safe lest he be behind doors beyond which I have never ventured!"

A gasp had rang out over the crowd and children had grown close to their mother's shirts, wives to their husband's coats.

"Witch!" the magistrate had accused. "He curses us! There is no cottage in the village to which he has not been invited!"

"Hang him!" the Vicar had screamed, his finger once more jabbed toward Kiernan. "Hang the witch!"



"Hang him!" the chant had begun.

The black-clad executioner had stepped smartly to the lever which controlled the rope wound tightly around the condemned man's throat. Behind the eye slits of his mask, he, too, feared the words Kiernan McGregor threw at his tormentors.

"You may kill me, Tobias Brady, but you will never extinguish the love I have in my very soul for your daughter! I shall return for her on that night of nights and no one will be able to keep me from her!"

In every nightmare Caitlin had after that tragic day, she would hear the release of the trapdoor as it sprang; the snap of Kiernan's beloved neck as it broke; the squeak of the rope as his lifeless body hung there on the gallows. She had tried to turn her head away from the sight, but her father had made her look and she had released a wail of wretched anguish upon seeing the quiet look of resignation on Kiernan's still face.

It had taken weeks for her to break free of the numbness and the emptiness that had pervaded her every waking breath. At night, she dreamt of him and reveled in the warmth of his strong arms clasped around her. During the day, she saw him everywhere she looked and avoided turning her eyes to the gallows at the end of the village square.

The closer the hands of time moved toward the end of the year and the last week of the month of October, the more unsettled her gaze became. She moved about as though an aged crone, bent from years of living alone; refusing the hand of every suitor who dared venture her way. Soon, there was none left in the village that had not marked her for spinsterhood.

Nor whispered covertly that the Vicar's winsome daughter had set her foot on the path of madness.

She took long midnight walks in the greensward below the village and was often seen gazing with rapt attention at the moon on those nights when it rode full in the heavens. If one listened closely, they could hear her singing as she plucked nightflowers along the pond's banks and threw them into the still waters.

But on that night of nights-with the full moon sailing closely by overhead-she did not venture from her father's cottage for she knew well what she would encounter walking about the greensward. Loving him even as she still did-and ever would-an encounter with her lover's ghost was something Caitlin knew she could not endure.

"Come to me, Caitlin," she heard him beg once more and she shook her head.

"If I come to you, Kiernan," she answered, "I will condemn myself to walk beside you throughout eternity for I would not come back to this cottage alive."

Hurt filled his handsome face. "Do you believe I would harm you, Beloved?" he asked, stark pain filling his eyes until they glistened with golden tears.

"No!" she was quick to reply. "But once more in your arms-cold as they may be from the grave-I would never willingly return to the land of the living." She tried to make him understand with her eyes. "I would stay with you and walk these hills for all eternity rather than return to my lonely bed and empty life. It is not my time, yet, Kiernan, but have no fear, Beloved: When it is my time, I will come to you gladly and with a happy heart!"

He understood her words and accepted them-as he did every year-though they cut him to the very marrow of his being. Once more his mighty shoulders slumped and a solitary golden tear fell to the ground at his feet. "Then I must leave you, my sweet one," he sighed in defeat then turned his eyes to the village where he knew he would wreck havoc this night.

Caitlin followed his gaze and nodded in compliance to the revenge he sought on those who had denied them. "Kiernan?"

He looked up at her, his great love showing in his eyes.

She smiled. "When it is time, I will come to you, Beloved, and together, you and I, we will be free of all this. That I promise you."

"Aye," he whispered, his attention once more going to the village beyond. "When it is time." He turned to look at her once more, brought his fingertips to his mouth and kissed them, blew the kiss to her on the night breeze.

One moment he was there beneath her window, the next he was gone, like a will-o-the-wisp or a flare of St. Elmo's fire dancing along a ship's shrouds. All that was left of his passing was the rising shriek of the night wind as it howled in the eaves and set the cottage to trembling on its foundation.

"Until next year," she heard the whisper from the wind.

"Aye, Beloved," she answered and knew by this time next year, she would be with him. "Next year."

And so they say on that night of nights-when the moon rides full in the midnight sky-the vengeance of the NightWind sweeps down on Wixenstead Village and not a cottagehold there does not feel its wrath. Fires are damped and the ashes scattered about the housewives' clean floors; bread left to rise will never know the oven's heat; animals mysteriously break out of their pens; and the grain bin doors come upon of their own accord to flap and bang in the harsh wind. When the first rays of dawn spread over the village, there will be debris scattered hither and yon: the physical reminders of the ghostly rage of a lover denied his lady.

And a promise he would return.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Charlee is the author of fifty books, the first ten of which are the WindLegends Saga. Married 41 years to her high school sweetheart, Tom, she is the mother of two grown sons, Pete and Mike, and the proud grandmother of Preston Alexander and Victoria Ashley.

A native of Sarasota, Florida, Charlee was adopted at birth and grew up in Colquitt and Albany, Georgia. She says of her heritage: "I was born in Florida and raised in Georgia so that makes me an official Sunshine Cracker!" She now lives in the Midwest where she enjoys the changing of the seasons.

Her hobbies are writing, watching Gerard Butler strut his stuff in period movies, and trying to keep her adorable husband, Buddha Belly, from snoring and hogging the TV remote. She is owned and operated by five cats who allow her to only leave the house for catnip, kitty kibble, and clumping kitty litter.

Currently, she is at work on a new erotica novel for Phaze.



The hottest romance, the most memorable heroines,  
and the most gorgeous heroes...

Welcome to the next PHAZE in erotic romance!

Join us online for author chats and writing workshops.

Win big prize contests with our FREE monthly newsletter!

**[www.phaze.com](http://www.phaze.com)**

**[groups.yahoo.com/group/PhazeChatters](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PhazeChatters)**

eBooks available at  
[Fictionwise.com](http://Fictionwise.com), [CyberRead.com](http://CyberRead.com),  
and [AllRomanceeBooks.com](http://AllRomanceeBooks.com)

Print titles available at  
[Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com), [BN.com](http://BN.com), [BooksAMillion.com](http://BooksAMillion.com),  
and on the shelves of Borders bookstores!