



**GINGERSNAPS**  
Changeling Press

# **Gingersnaps: Cupid**

## **Sierra Dafoe**

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## Gingersnaps: Cupid

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*Cold and heartless, thoughtless boy  
Who's never felt that which you destroy...*

Cursed by a witch over a practical joke, Cupid is doomed to centuries of life as a reindeer, unable to be freed until he falls in love. But how likely is that to ever happen, when all anyone sees when they look at him is a reindeer?

For Mercy Devers, all anyone sees when they look at *her* is the scar marring half her face, left by the fire which claimed her parents' life. Ashamed of her disfigurement, she lives as a recluse, only creeping out at night to wander the town where she grew up.

Until one Christmas Eve when she spies an ice sculpture in the town square. An ice sculpture of a reindeer so beautiful it takes her breath away...

## Chapter One

"Ho, Dasher! Ho, Dancer! Ho!"

Cupid felt the traces tug, and the bells on his harness jingled as the rumbling hoofbeats slowed to a stop. In the pristine silence, he heard the creak of the sleigh as Santa climbed out, and his heart sank as heavy footsteps came toward him, crunching lightly on snow.

He didn't want to do this. Not again.

"All right, Cupid. Let's get you unhitched."

*What's the point?* he asked sullenly. *It's the same every year. No one ever sees me.*

"None so blind as those who won't see, eh, lad?" Santa's chuckle was soft rather than mocking, but still his words made Cupid's stomach knot.

It had been Santa who'd found him running with the reindeer in the Ural mountains, moving blindly with the herds, clinging to them through the long centuries of silence and self-recrimination. It was Santa who'd taken him in, given him a home and companionship and some degree of understanding.

And it was Santa who, every year, gave him a chance once again to break the curse that had been laid on him... for all the good it had done so far.

It had been a joke, that's all. Just a stupid joke. The sight of that hag-faced crone wooing a comely young peasant nearly half her age... It had been too much for his sense of the ridiculous, and he'd notched an arrow to the string, grinning.

He remembered the way she'd looked up at him, her eyes wide and horrified as she'd felt the bite of his arrow. Whatever yearnings she'd felt for the peasant boy she'd been pursuing, with one deft shot Cupid had turned toward a nearby pig instead.

Of course, the punch line might have been funnier if she hadn't turned out to be a witch.

How many centuries ago had that been? He couldn't count them anymore. Centuries spent in the cold wastelands of the north with only the thin comfort of the dumb beasts around him for company, his fury fading slowly into miserable acceptance.

*Cold and heartless, thoughtless boy  
Who's never felt that which you destroy,  
Go earthbound and blind, a voiceless beast  
Until by mercy's touch you be released.  
Never again fly on pinioned wing  
Until even you, Cupid, have felt love's sting.*

Cupid sighed. He'd deserved it. He was everything she'd called him -- cold and heartless. Thoughtless. For a moment's entertainment, he'd obliterated whatever emotions had driven her and redirected them... onto a pig. And what was worse -- what was infinitely worse -- was the memory of the handsome youth's crestfallen face as the ill-featured witch had turned away from him.

It was as inexplicable as it was damning. For all the long, silent years he'd spent pondering it, he couldn't figure it out. Could the boy actually have cared for her? It was unfathomable.

At last he'd finally admitted that he, Cupid, had no understanding of love at all.

Nor was he ever likely to, despite Santa's attempts. *Until by mercy's touch you be released* -- how likely was that, really, to ever happen? Not once in all the centuries had a human, merciful or otherwise, so much as tried to touch him.

He stood, head lowered dejectedly as Santa unbuckled his harness, leaving him standing free of the other seven. The air seemed suddenly colder without the solid warmth of Comet along his left side. Then a breath scented with mint and apple cider touched his face as Santa bent close and spoke softly in his ear. "Have patience, lad. Things come when they come."

But for him, Cupid suspected, love would never come. And even if it did, would he even recognize it? How could he, when he didn't even know what love was?

Santa patted his shoulder reassuringly, but Cupid didn't even raise his head. It was hopeless, all of it, and yet he had to go through it again and again, stupidly, pointlessly, over and over.

*Go ahead, Santa. Let's get this over with.*

The big man hesitated, then tapped him lightly between the eyes. An electric tingle rippled out from the spot, spreading rapidly up the curve of his antlers and down his forelegs, flowing across his withers and along his spine with a sensation that seared like frozen fire.

Then it was gone -- and a moment later so too was the sled, leaving nothing but the perfectly formed shape of a reindeer standing in the snow, made of gleaming, silvery ice.

\* \* \*

The wall clock chimed, and Mercy Devers looked up from her crocheting with a small sigh. Two a.m., and she still wasn't done. Almost, though -- a few more rows and the scarf would be finished.

She glanced over at the brightly-wrapped packages piled on the sofa. Thirty-seven handmade scarves and pairs of mittens, one for each of the children at St. Jude's. So many of them were from the south, too, displaced by the devastating storms of the past few years. Imagining how miserable the New England cold must make them, she turned again to her hook and yarn, ignoring the scratchiness of her eyes and the slight ache in her fingers.

Soon, the last scarf was done and wrapped, the cheery foil paper making a slight crinkling noise as she set it atop the others. Father O'Reilly had promised to stop by before Christmas Mass to take them down to the orphanage for her.

She herself hadn't been to Mass since she was fifteen years old. That was the year her parents had died, killed in the fire which had destroyed their house. The money from the insurance settlement had allowed her, once she'd turned eighteen, to buy the run-down Victorian she'd lived in ever since, eking out a living by selling vintage books and her handicrafts online.

The scarves and mittens were her annual gift to St. Jude's, which had been her home for those three years. And while she might not have a use for God anymore, she still valued the kindness and companionship of the priests -- around them, at least, she didn't feel so damnably self-conscious.

Straightening, Mercy looked around the living room. It was shabby and plain, and other than the gaily-wrapped presents held no trace of the holiday season. Her computer desk was set in front of tightly-drawn curtains -- she hated the idea of people peering in at her. And she'd long ago stopped looking out at a world she didn't belong in.

Restlessly, she moved about, flicking on the computer and immediately shutting it back off, touching the presents lightly, then rolling up the unused yarn and returning it to the front hall closet where she stored her supplies. The one coat she owned hung in there as well, a puffy nylon parka covered lightly with dust.

She stood looking at it a moment, then reached out and pulled it from its hanger. Why shouldn't she go out, after all? It was two thirty in the morning -- no one was likely to be about, not on Christmas. And Father O'Reilly would be stopping by at six, so there was little point in going to bed. A good brisk walk would be just the thing to keep her awake until then.

Still, she felt a moment's trepidation when she pulled on the coat. How long had it been since she'd worn it? She couldn't remember. One blessed thing about living in a small town was that the local supermarket was still willing to deliver. Other than old Mr. Hawley who brought her groceries and the UPS man, the only people she ever saw were Father O'Reilly and Father Matthews.

And she wouldn't see anyone tonight either, she reassured herself. She'd simply walk down past the church, maybe look at the crèche display. Maybe even throw a snowball at the Paul Revere statue in front of the library. The idea made her smile -- when was the last time she'd thrown a snowball? Feeling braver, she zipped up her coat, reached for the doorknob -- and halted at the sight of her reflection in the glass.



Blurred as it was, there was no mistaking the knotted scar tissue covering the right side of her face. Even half-hidden by the fall of her chestnut hair -- hair which now contained a streak or two of silver -- it was hideous, arresting. Even when they hadn't meant to, people had always stared, their gazes fixing on her deformity as if drawn by a magnet before sliding uneasily away.

She'd never blamed them. The sight of her own face in the mirror was a horror to which she'd never grown accustomed. Her shoulders hunched, the excitement she'd felt at the idea of going out turning to a leaden determination.

There was nothing out there for her. At thirty-seven, she'd resigned herself to that fact. Nevertheless, she was going out anyway -- maybe as penance. Or maybe as defiance of the God who'd seen fit to take her parents but leave her like this, scarred and ugly and utterly alone.

## Chapter Two

The street was as silent as she'd hoped. Not even the markings of tires marred the smooth whiteness of the roadway, two inches deep in new-fallen snow. Somewhere in the distance she could hear the rumble and *beep-beep-beep* of the snowplow, but the sound was comfortably far off, increasing rather than shattering her sense of solitude.

Pools of light from the streetlamps dotted the sidewalk, and on most of the houses Christmas decorations glowed in colorful profusion. Within two blocks her sneakers were soaked, but Mercy barely noticed. Like a starving person, her eyes devoured the town around her.

Even the worn plastic Santas and tarnished garlands which had decorated Main Street since before Ronald Reagan held an air of mystery, as if they were the exotic trappings of some forgotten civilization. The crèche in front of the small stone church was exactly as it had been every year of her childhood, but to Mercy it seemed poignant and new, the shepherds kneeling before a miracle happening not thousands of years ago but right now, tonight.

Staring at it, she felt tears burn her eyes.

More than anything else, Christmas was a promise -- of hope, of rebirth, of redemption. Could such things still apply, even to her? *Was* there something out here for her, after all?

Something brushed her cheek lightly, and Mercy looked up, startled. The snow had started again, falling out of blackness in flakes of pristine white which caught on her lashes and in her hair. She closed her eyes, tilting her head back, her skin tingling under their gentle touch.

Then she shivered, finally feeling the cold. Her sneakers squelched as she turned reluctantly toward home, and she upbraided herself -- thirty-eight scarves and mittens,

and she hadn't even thought to put on a hat? It'd serve her right if she spent half of January with the flu.

But as she started back up Main Street, her gaze was drawn to the town square where line after line of tiny, twinkling lights had been strung between the snow-cruled oaks. White and gold and blue and green, they glimmered like fairy lamps, reflecting off the gleaming, otherworldly shapes set here and there beneath the trees.

Ice sculptures. Dimly, she remembered reading something about a contest in the local paper. Drawn almost against her will, she crossed the empty street, stepped off the sidewalk -- and gasped in wonder at the beauty before her.

Frozen mermaids frolicked on the fluted curves of a clam shell. Behind them, a castle reared spires as delicate as glass toward the sky. A whale, its back dusted with the still-falling snow, hung seemingly weightless as a bird on its slender pedestal, while ice swans floated on a surface like a pool of polished glass.

Her face glowing with unconscious delight, Mercy moved among them, transfixed by their unearthly beauty.

Then she froze, her mouth falling open in a small, soundless "Oh!" as she caught sight of the life-sized reindeer, standing apart from the others, tucked away into the shadows between two snow-covered firs.

He was perfect. Absolutely perfect. From the long, sturdy legs to the muscular flanks to the nostrils flaring as if on the verge of drawing breath, he was so beautiful, so *real* that the mere sight of him made her heart clench with wonder. And yet he looked so solitary standing there by himself, his head bowed, his graceful neck drooping, the translucent silver antlers seeming to weigh it down like grief.

He looked like the epitome of loneliness -- a loneliness the sculptor had somehow captured, as if encasing a living soul within the smooth, shining ice. And here he would stand, day after day, night after night, frozen forever in unbreakable solitude...

She couldn't stand it. He was too beautiful to be left here, forgotten and alone, his blind, dejected gaze cast on the snowy ground. She shivered, chilled to the bone and yet unable to leave him, unable to tear herself away from the mute yearning in his eyes.

Her fingers, red with cold, slid along the glassy ice. She'd expected it to be smooth but, she realized, even the indentations of his fur had been chiseled with meticulous perfection. Somehow that unexpected roughness made everything worse -- it made him too real, too lifelike. A tear slid down her cheek and, unable to help herself, she leaned her head against the strong, downcast curve of his neck.

"Oh, you poor thing," she whispered, her arms sliding around his neck. "You poor, poor thing."

She could almost convince herself that the rough ice beneath her cheek really *was* fur, that the reindeer leaned into her slightly, his warm weight returning her embrace the only way he could, that the neck against which she leaned shifted, the massive head coming up to rest against her shoulder, one sorrowful brown eye gazing deep into her own...

Mercy stumbled backward, falling flat on her butt as the reindeer stepped forward, his antlers lifting toward the sky. Then, with a quiver like a dog shaking off water, the reindeer was gone. In his place was a man, so perfectly formed that the scream welling up in her throat tangled up on itself, coming out as no more than a gurgling gasp.

Jesus, he was beautiful! Naked, motionless, he stood in the snow as graceful as a statue. Powerful thighs rose to lean, smooth hips. Mercy stared, gaping, at the sight of his sex -- she'd never seen a naked man in the flesh before. Somehow she hadn't expected it to be so... so... *big*. Wasn't it only supposed to be that big when erect?

Suddenly realizing what she was doing, she blushed furiously and yanked her gaze to his face, only to discover he wasn't even looking at her. He stood, his handsome, chiseled features wearing an expression of bemusement -- as well they might, she reflected. So might her own. God, had she really just see him transform out of a reindeer?

His head turned as if searching, and automatically Mercy hunched her shoulders, ducking her head to hide the sight of her scarred face, something bitter and familiar twisting in her gut.

She knew this feeling. She'd felt it a hundred times growing up, watching girls no prettier than she'd once been giggle and flirt with the boys who eyed them hungrily -- the same boys who flinched away from her in pity or disgust.

Sullenly, she stared at the ground, waiting for him to look down at her, to gasp with the same sudden aversion she found everywhere else.

"Is anybody there?"

His voice was so compelling it took a moment for her to make sense of his words. Deep and warm with a certain hesitant roughness, as if he was unused to speaking. Then the meaning sank in, and she looked back up at him, startled. He didn't appear to see her, and she couldn't help taking in the strong, well-shaped jaw line, the corded column of his neck, the full lips with their delicious curves... and the eyes, blue and cloudy, fixed sightlessly on nothing.

Unconsciously, she raised her right hand to her cheek, covering the rubbery scar tissue. Her mind worked furiously, trying to encompass the idea. He was blind, he couldn't see her, he couldn't see...

"Hello? Where are you?"

"Here," she whispered, dropping her fingers away from her face. Her other hand was still in the snow, burning now with the cold of it. Awkwardly, she climbed to her feet and saw his head swivel to follow the sound. "I'm here," she repeated.

An incredulous smile spread over his features, and Mercy felt her voice dying away. Dear God, how could any man be so handsome? He almost didn't seem human...

He wasn't. The unreality of the situation crashed in on her all at once. She half expected him to waver and disappear like a blown-out candle. In fact he *did* waver, or seemed to -- then Mercy realized he'd moved toward her, his arms reaching to sweep her to him, pressing her tight against his broad, naked chest.

The smooth, velvety skin of his pectoral muscles was unarguably real beneath her spread fingers. And his breath, warm and sweet against her neck as he dipped his head to whisper in her ear, was as tangible as the snowflakes brushing her scarred cheek.

"Thank you," he said, his voice low and taut with emotion. The intensity of it thrilled her even as she puzzled over his words. Why was he thanking her, for heaven's sake?

Then all thought scattered as his mouth sought hers, seizing her lips in a kiss that was both rough and tender, gentle and yet almost desperate in its barely restrained hunger. Her head spun. Her heart pounded wildly. Something deep inside her thudded with an urgency she'd almost managed to forget existed...

*Beep-beep-beep.* A rumble, approaching. Startled, Mercy gasped and broke the kiss, lifting her head to see the stuttering amber light of the snowplow a few blocks away. She stiffened.

"What's wrong?" the man asked.

Pulling back, she stammered, "I... You... The snowplow..." His forehead wrinkled in confusion. Embarrassed, she blurted, "You're naked."

The confused lines deepened. "And that's a problem?"

"Yes! No. I mean..." She laughed helplessly, giddy with the unfamiliar sensations rushing through her. "No, I think it's perfect." Taking his hand, she slid from his arms and tugged him into motion. "Come on."

\* \* \*

She'd felt so warm in his arms. Soft and yielding and precious. His lips still yearned for the taste of her, and it was all he could do not to pull her to a halt and back into his grasp. Her mouth had been so moist, so sweet, her tongue reaching tentatively to touch his as he delved between her lips, sudden need unfolding in his loins. He'd been cold, so cold for so long. Now all at once he was warm -- more than warm, in fact. Gratitude ached in his chest like the lust aching in his groin, poignant and heavy and delicious.

But was that love?

Cupid stumbled as the ground dropped unexpectedly beneath his feet, and immediately she was back at his side, her arm going around his waist to steady him. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I forgot..."

He shook his head, dismissing any need for apology, his attention more on the question he'd just asked himself than on the physical hazards around him. He followed unresistingly where she led him -- much as he'd done with the reindeer herds, he realized absently -- and turned the witch's words over and over in his mind.

*Go earthbound and blind, a voiceless beast*

*Until by mercy's touch you be released.*

And he had been. For the first time in over eight hundred years he walked upright and proud... yet he was still blind.

"A step up here," she murmured, and Cupid raised his foot. The surface they walked on was uniformly flat and smooth beneath the snow, reminding him of the broad roads and marble plazas of Rome. He felt them change direction twice as she tugged him along, hurrying for no reason he could fathom.

She guided him up a short flight of steps, then sighed with relief as she opened a door and led him inside a building. Her home, he suspected -- the warm, female scent of her permeated the air. He stood waiting as she moved somewhere behind him -- a rustle of fabric, a door opening and closing.

He opened his mouth to ask if she was still there. Then he stopped, flushing, realizing he hadn't bothered to ask her name, any more than he'd bothered to learn the name of the witch he'd so callously toyed with. The excitement inside him plummeted and he stood awkwardly, feeling hesitant and stupid. What was he doing here? What, but messing with another human whose life he had neither the knowledge nor the right to be interfering with?

It was true, he *was* thoughtless. As thoughtless as he'd been all those centuries ago. Apparently he'd learned nothing in all that time.

He scowled, his shoulders hunching -- and heard her moving softly beside him. Her footsteps were quiet, hesitant. "Is something wrong?"

He shook his head, cursing himself. "No. I... It's nothing. I should have asked your name."

Her laughter surprised him -- and did other things too. Light and tremulous as if startled out of her, it danced with genuine merriment, the sound of it easing the tenseness from his muscles, the clenched tightness from his jaw.

"It's Mercy. Mercy Devers."

Had he his sight, he would have stared. For a moment he felt as dumb and senseless as the great northern beasts who'd been his sole companions for so long. Blind or not, he knew he was gaping -- her laughter spiraled up, warm and amused.

"Well, I suppose blank astonishment is better than thunderous silence. You looked positively grim there for a minute." The teasing note in her tone grew stronger as she added, "And can I ask your name, as well?"

Cupid opened his mouth. Closed it. Cleared his throat. He didn't know much about humans, of course, but he had the distinct impression that the days when one would recognize him without hysterics were long, long gone. On the other hand, she'd seen him transform from beast to man with little more than a strangled squeak -- and besides, he knew even less about lying than he did about love. "I'm Cupid."

In the silence that followed, he could almost imagine her staring at him as blankly as he'd gaped at her. "Uh-huh," she said at last, her tone torn between politeness and disbelief. "Family name, is it?"

She was no more than three feet away from him. Giving in to the confusing welter of emotions that swept him, he reached out and dragged her roughly into his arms. "My name," he growled, and covered her mouth with his own, something fierce and primitive stirring deep in his gut. It was partly fear, he knew -- what if she didn't believe him? What if she threw him out? After all the centuries of waiting, he had finally found her...



Correction. She had finally found *him*. And he wasn't about to give up the one chance he had to make her love him. Frightened, aroused, and determined, Cupid kissed her with every ounce of passion in his ancient soul.

## Chapter Three

Cupid. She could almost believe it. She'd barely exchanged two dozen words with him and yet she was half gone on him already.

*Half? Don't kid yourself, Mercy.* All right, then. She wouldn't. What other man had ever held her like this, his arms tight and demanding? What man had ever kissed her? And what kisses they were! Not in her wildest adolescent dreams had she imagined anything like this. His lips, moving over hers, seared like fire, his tongue prodding them apart to claim every inch of her mouth, tasting, exploring, drawing her tongue out in return to tangle with his until her blood sang in her ears and her knees buckled beneath her.

Sensing her weakness, he pulled her closer, kneading one cheek of her ass as he pressed her tightly against the rigid hardness of his erection. Mercy moaned around his lashing tongue, heat blooming inside her at the feel of his shaft against her belly. A deep, mindless yearning throbbed in her groin, making her push her hips forward, increasing the pressure between his hips and hers. Dampness slicked the swollen lips of her sex and she could feel the hard nub of her clit, distended and almost unbearably sensitive, clamoring for stimulation.

When he slid a hand up to cup one breast through her blouse, Mercy whimpered, arching her back. Responding to her wordless plea, he closed his fingers around it, massaging its fullness till it tingled and ached, her nipple so tight and erect it jutted firmly against his palm. Without releasing her mouth, he moved his other hand to her front, squeezing and caressing both her breasts at once, then lightly pinching her taut, burning nipples. She moaned again, rocking herself against the delectable hardness of his shaft, standing on tiptoe to press herself even closer.

He was tall... but not so tall that she couldn't feel the warm fullness of his balls against her crotch, the base of his erection teasing her pulsing clit through her jeans. She'd shed her coat and hung it in the closet and now wished she'd shed everything else as well. Her skin was on fire, her breasts full and heavy beneath his strong, agile fingers. Wetness pooled in her groin, and her pulse there thudded so heavily she was sure he must feel it.

Blind or not, he had no difficulty locating the buttons of her blouse, and Mercy shuddered as he spread it open to glide his fingers over the thin, silky fabric of her bra. His fingertips circled her nipples over and over till she was squirming with impatience, opening her mouth wider to his plunging tongue. Squeezing her breasts firmly, he seized her nipples between thumbs and forefingers, tugging at them till she thought she might faint from pleasure. Her hands twined in his thick golden hair, pulling his lips even tighter against hers, and he groaned into her open mouth as his shaft bucked against her naked belly, leaving a trail of wetness that made her quiver with need.

"Please," she murmured desperately, the word half-buried under his sure, practiced kisses. "Oh, Cupid, please!"

With a deft, easy movement, he slid her blouse from her shoulders. She unhooked her bra, and her breasts spilled out into his palms as he brought his hands up to cup them. When he stooped to close his lips around one aching nipple, Mercy closed her eyes and gave herself over completely to the feel of his mouth upon her, tugging and sucking, each jolt of sensation spearing right to her womb. Folding her arms around his head, she cradled him there, whimpering as he released one nipple to transfer his attentions to the other, sending a fresh burst of delicious agony all the way to her swollen, throbbing clit.

Nothing she'd ever imagined had prepared her for this. She felt wild, almost feral, caught up in an animalistic need to take and be taken. Her nerves hummed with sensation. Her breasts ached with longing. Everything between her legs felt hot and rich and full of juice, like a sun-warmed fruit practically begging to be plucked. When he knelt and dipped his head downward, his lips trailing kisses down the hypersensitive

skin of her belly, Mercy gasped and stood trembling, waiting for whatever delightful thing he'd do to her next.

Slowly, he opened her jeans, undoing the zipper and tugging both jeans and underwear down past her ass. Grasping one ankle at a time, he bent her legs up and pulled off her sneakers, then placed her feet back on the floor again, leaving her with her jeans sagging around her knees, trapping her there with her thighs barely parted.

His nostrils flared, catching her scent, and his cloudy blue eyes darkened in lust. "Oh, Mercy," he murmured, his voice both smooth as honey and rough with need. His fingers trailed upward between her thighs, urging them ever so slightly farther apart. They stroked through her soft, springy curls, parting her lips, and he glided his fingers back and forth between her folds, taunting, teasing, making her squirm in anticipation. Then he -- *Oh, God!* -- leaned forward and flicked his tongue across her clit.

She froze, her body shocked to the core at the sensation that rippled through her. Without her conscious volition, her hands slid to his head, her fingers tangling in the soft thickness of his curls. Heat throbbed in her groin, and she felt his lips curve in a smile as he felt the wetness that slicked her folds. With two fingers, he prodded her opening.

Mercy moaned as they slid into her, easing her tightness with long, sure strokes. Her fingers tightened in his hair, and she closed her eyes as he nuzzled her clit, lapping and kissing and nipping it lightly. When he closed his mouth over it and sucked, everything inside her exploded.

Fire rippled through her belly, and her passage clamped hungrily around his thrusting fingers. With each lap of his tongue, a fresh wave of ecstasy seared along her nerves. Quivering, moaning, she held his head tight against her mons as her climax shook her. It left her panting, her knees shaking, barely able to hold herself upright even as his tongue teased another shock of bliss from her trembling flesh.

At last his mouth released her, and she opened her eyes. The room seemed to spin around her as she looked down at the gorgeous, inexplicable man before her. No

one had ever made her feel like this. She hadn't even known she *could* feel like this. His fingers, still inside her, slid back and forth, stroking her sensitive inner flesh.

He tilted his head back, his sightless gaze seeming to search for her face, and automatically Mercy started to draw back, hunching away from his questing gaze.

Except he couldn't see her. The realization struck her afresh. He didn't care what she looked like. He didn't know she was ugly. And the hunger on his face could be read even by a total novice.

Her heart, still pounding wildly from the orgasm that had shaken her, hammered even harder as she slid her hands to his shoulders, urging him down onto his back. His erection, huge and slightly frightening, strained upward from its nest of curls as she hurriedly shed her jeans and straddled his thighs, nervousness warring with an iron determination inside her.

For the first time in her life she was free -- free of the hideous deformity that scarred her, free of other people's reactions. Free to do anything, anything at all. Smiling, she bent down over his broad, beautiful chest, kissing him as she settled her hips above his, letting the full, curved head of his cock glide between her folds to nudge against her entrance.

## Chapter Four

Cupid groaned and grabbed her hips, holding her still. His breath burned in his lungs and his balls felt like iron, so swollen with need they ached. But he'd felt the tightness of her passage as he'd stroked his fingers inside her, and knew what it meant.

She was a virgin. He could hardly believe it. Her breasts had been so luscious in his hands, so full and firm and round. Her scent, sweet and intoxicating and wholly feminine, surrounded him, making his shaft buck against her with unfulfilled longing. It was amazing to think no man had yet claimed her -- how could any mortal male fail to respond to the ripeness of her flesh, the warmth of her voice and spirit?

But so it was. He gritted his jaw, struggling to contain the lust coiling impatiently in his groin. Centuries of involuntary celibacy had left him uniquely unprepared for the challenge that now faced him -- but he was Cupid, damn it, son of the Goddess of Love herself. What Mercy was offering him was a holy thing, a *sacred* thing.

And he would make sure she had no cause to regret it.

Kissing her deeply, he slid one hand down between their bodies, circling her clit with his fingers until he felt her breath speed, rasping in her throat. Easing her body upward, he nuzzled between the soft fullness of her breasts, suckling her sweet, nubbly tips in turn until she was squirming above him, her hips pressing down against his jutting shaft.

Gliding his fingers between her folds, he spread the wetness spilling from her, then gently guided his cock between her furred outer lips, placing it against her hot, tight entrance. Her hands were braced on either side of his shoulders, and he could picture her above him, her head hanging down laxly, her eyes half-closed in delight. At least he hoped they were -- judging from the deep, heavy rhythm of her panting, she

was ready. More than ready, he realized as she lowered herself onto him, her deliciously slick passage slowly encompassing his erection.

Then she stiffened, hissing between her teeth, and he stroked her back, her thighs, urging her to relax. "Shh, Mercy. Slowly," he whispered, and heard her choked laugh.

"I don't want slowly," she answered. Her spine flexed under his fingers as she straightened, raising herself above him. Her hands gripped his hips as she added, "I want it. All of it. *Now.*"

And with that, she pushed herself down atop him, forcing his cock past the resistance inside her to send it deep into her flesh. She froze, her thighs clamping his hips, her entire body going rigid with sudden shock and delight.

"Oh, God!" she moaned. Her passage spasmed, clamping him tight, and Cupid groaned, fighting for control. He slid his hands up her front, cupping the delectable weight of her full, proud breasts, rolling the nipples between his fingers until she whimpered in delight and began moving above him, gliding herself up and down the rock-hard length of his shaft.

He could feel her inner muscles fluttering, already on the edge of another climax, and he dropped one hand again to the soft curls covering her mound, stroking his fingers through them, teasing her clit. Her breath came heavier, faster, her weight squeezing his cock as she rode him, her hips bucking wildly.

He couldn't hold back. Not any more. His thumb rubbed her clit. He squeezed her right nipple. She gasped, and then cried out in rapture as her orgasm took her, sending her creamy release spilling down around his aching shaft. Cupid's control snapped and he slammed his hips upward, burying himself inside her as ecstasy took him.

A white-hot roaring filled his ears. His heartbeat thundered with the force of his release. His cock pulsed and jerked, straining deeper inside her, and the ache in his balls was both pain and purest pleasure, agonizing and overwhelming, going on and on till he thought he might faint.

Her breathless whimpers spurred him on and he stroked up into her once, twice, his balls clenching in one last burst of bliss before he dropped his head back, panting, and opened his eyes.

She quivered above him, her thick chestnut hair falling around her face. Her breasts were flushed and pink, dewed slightly with perspiration. Her eyes were still closed, her long brown lashes brushing her cheeks, the left one smooth as silk, the right one bearing the scar of an old burn.

Wonderingly, he stared at it. It covered the right half of her face and part of her neck, leaving the eye mercifully untouched. At the thought of the pain such an injury must have caused, Cupid's heart clenched -- then skipped a beat altogether at realizing how easily she might not have survived.

The thought shook him, and he raised trembling fingers to trace the curve of her cheek. At his touch, she jerked her head upright, her eyes wide and wild as a frightened horse's.

"What are you doing?"

Her eyes, too, were brown. Soft. Warm, like the rest of her. She was so beautiful - the more so because he might so easily have lost her. Lost her before he'd even found her. He drank in the sight of her, too enraptured to be startled at the sudden return of his sight. "Looking at you," he whispered.

And saw her eyes darken in sudden horror.

He could *see* her? Oh God.

Mercy froze, her blood running like ice in her veins, her stunned mind taking in the crystalline clarity of his eyes. Any moment now they would fill with shock and disgust, just like everybody else's...

She couldn't stand it. Tearing herself away from him, she scrambled for the door, unable to think of anything except getting away from him, fleeing upstairs, into the kitchen, *anywhere* where she didn't have to see his pity and disgust.



"Mercy? Mercy!" He lunged after her, grabbing her before she made it to the doorway, pinning her against the wall and wrestling her around to face him. She thrashed in his arms, folding her arms over her face, keeping her head down. "Mercy, what's wrong?"

"Don't look at me! Don't look at me!" Sobs racked her -- she couldn't help it. It wasn't fair. Not two minutes ago she'd felt so free, so alive, flushed with their lovemaking and the discovery of bliss. And now...

"Mercy..."

"No! Just leave me alone. I'm ugly! Can't you see how ugly I am?" Defiantly, she lifted her tear-streaked face -- but she couldn't make herself meet his piercing blue gaze.

From the corner of her eye, she saw his jaw clench -- and then gasped as he shook her roughly, forcing her to look up at him. His brow was knotted in something very close to anger as he glared down at her. "Mercy, don't you know you're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen?"

She stared at him, shocked into stillness. When she said nothing, his scowl deepened. "Damn fool woman," he muttered, pulling her into his arms. He kissed her, hard and deep, leaving her gasping for breath between her muted sobs. Then he swung her into his arms, hoisting her as easily as a child. "Where's the bedroom?"

"Up... upstairs," she stammered, reduced almost to speechlessness by his actions. Determined, he carried her from the living room, up the stairs, and found his way to the small bed.

Laying her down atop it, he growled, "If this is the only way I can prove how attractive you are..."

That was all he got out before he lowered his body above her, his mouth claiming hers with a fierceness that made her toes curl. His cock, already hard again, nudged insistently between her thighs until she spread them. She gasped as he entered her in one swift, hard plunge, so deep his hard abs pressed against her mons, and gasped again when a fresh wave of hunger tore through her.

\* \* \*

Ugly? She thought she was *ugly*? Disbelief warred with rage inside him -- that someone so beautiful should ever have thought that! It infuriated him. She cried out in desire, opening herself to him with a sweetness that took his breath away, meeting him stroke for stroke as he hammered inside her.

With an effort, Cupid moderated his thrusts, slowing his strokes to give her time to respond. He himself was already nearly at the edge again, his balls high and tight, his cock throbbing with urgency. He would make love to her, he vowed, as many times as it took, as long as it took, for her to understand how much he wanted her.

But her own eagerness defeated him. She wrapped her legs around him, dragging him even deeper inside her. Her arms slid around his shoulders, urging him on. Her murmured pleas shattered his tenuous self-control and he roared aloud, plunging into her, giving in to the fire burning in his balls and his chest.

He would do anything for her. Anything at all.

Lifting his head, he looked down at her, drinking in her warm, flushed lips, her dark, lust-filled eyes. He slammed himself in to the hilt, and her eyelids fluttered shut as her body arched beneath him and she came, crying out in bliss.

Groaning, he hammered into her, feeling his balls clench as he filled her, again and again. Something tight and hard unfurled in his chest, and he cried out in mingled agony and rapture as his wings unfolded above him, quivering with the force of his release. Opening her eyes, Mercy stared up in awe, taking in the sight of him, rampant above her. "You... you *are* Cupid," she panted.

"Yes," he murmured, his cock twitching again at the sight of her soft, parted lips. "And you're beautiful." The tears swimming in the warm liquid brown of her eyes were too much -- he dropped his head, kissing them away, the heat in his groin deepening. "And I need you, Mercy."

"Again? Now?" Pulling her head back, she stared at him in shock.

"Right now." *And forever*, he added silently as she smiled and wrapped her arms around him.

“Merry Christmas,” she murmured and clenched her passage tight around his cock, sending a bolt of lust shooting straight to his balls. Cupid groaned and sank in deeper, making her gasp in turn.

“Merry Christmas, Mercy.”

## **Sierra Dafoe**

Sierra Dafoe published her first erotic romance in May of 2006, receiving three CAPA nominations that year including Favorite Erotic Author. She has since gone on to earn numerous recommended reads and awards for her work including a second Favorite Erotic Author nomination in 2007.

Sierra lives in the White Mountains of New Hampshire with her incredibly tolerant hubby, her fourteen-year-old puppy and one extremely bouncy new feline acquisition named Took who aspires to be the first romance-writing cat, judging from the amount of time she spends trying to commandeer Sierra's keyboard. Come visit Sierra on the web at [www.sierradafoe.com](http://www.sierradafoe.com)!