

FELICITY HEATON



*Snow in
the Desert*

Snow in the Desert

Felicity Heaton

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First Published November 2005

Second Edition December 2007

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Stepping out of her cool car and into the fading heat of the evening, Katie tugged the over-filled grocery bags towards her and tried to figure out just how she was going to carry them to the house.

She juggled them in her arms as she closed the car door with her foot and then bit back a squeal as the heavy brown paper bags tried to escape her grasp. Freezing to the spot, she hoped to freeze the motion of them along with her. She held her breath and gave herself a few moments to slowly recover her grip on her groceries, shuffling the vegetables with careful jolting movements until they were stable again and then straightening up.

Finding her balance, she heaved a sigh and began up the winding gravel path that led to her small suburban home. Out the corner of her eye, she noticed that the drive next to hers was empty, Billy's old red mustang nowhere to be seen. She remembered him mentioning something to her the other day about having to work on Christmas Eve and then continued into the house.

Placing one of her bags down on the porch, she smiled as she turned the key in the lock and pushed the front door open, revealing the highly decorated hallway and stairs. Stepping into the cool of the house, she let out another sigh, her thoughts turning to getting changed out of her waitress uniform and into something more relaxing.

She ignored the pleading cries of her two cats, Jenkins and Toodles, as she walked straight into her kitchen, dumping the groceries on the counter and then heading upstairs to the bathroom.

Untying her hair, she let the long brown locks fall down around her shoulders and ran her fingers through it, loosening it up further.

Katie stared at herself in the mirror for a few moments, noting that she looked as tired as she felt, and then stepped over to the shower and switched it on. She slipped out of her clothes and waited for the water to warm up before stepping into the cubicle.

Closing her eyes, she ducked her head under the water. It ran over her, soothing her body as it ached from the nine-hour shift she'd just completed—she hadn't even meant to be working today.

Last night she'd teased her next-door neighbour, Billy, about him working on Christmas Eve, and this morning karma had caused her boss to call her up and ask her to work in place of Janine, who was apparently sick.

Katie didn't believe that for one second.

She knew that Janine had family from across the country over for Christmas and everyone at her work knew she herself had no family, or at least none that came to visit her. Every holiday she was always roped into working, her boss always guilt-tripping her into it because everyone else had family to spend the holidays with.

She should have told him that she had plans, that she did have family coming over, but she couldn't bring herself to lie to him.

Stepping out of the shower, she dried herself off and silently swore that she wouldn't work any more before the New Year—even if she had to completely ignore the phone in order to achieve that.

Padding softly across the carpet to her bedroom, she rifled through her clothes and slipped into a pair of grey sweat pants and a black zip up sweater before putting on a thick pair of socks.

She glanced out of the window as she tied her wet hair back into a French plait and smiled at the Christmas decorations that adorned the houses opposite hers.

It was nice, but it was no New York.

Since moving to the little town on the edge of the desert near Los Angeles late last year in order to pursue her non-existent acting career in the big city, she'd been happy eleven months out of twelve. She'd been happy every holiday except this one. Christmas in California was too different from what she was used to back in the New York state. She was accustomed to white Christmas', ones full of her sisters and her parents, full of laughter and cheer.

It had been a few years since her parents had passed on and her two sisters had moved abroad, and she'd spent a lonely Christmas or two in New York before moving. By leaving the place where she'd made all her best memories she'd found someone who was like family to her, rather than finding herself alone like she'd thought she would.

Billy.

He'd been the only one on the block who had greeted her when she'd first arrived, and since then they'd grown as close to each other as a brother and sister. He'd never ceased to amaze her with how supportive he was of her career, more supportive than her sisters had ever been, and he'd been like it from the start.

Walking down the stairs to the kitchen, she smiled to herself as she remembered how Billy had been there for her last Christmas—her first Christmas away from the place she'd grown up in. Not only had he got her a small speaking part as an extra in a movie that he was working as part of the production team for, but he'd spent the whole of Christmas day and the holiday period rehearsing it with her. She'd been so nervous about her first part that she'd wanted to practice it until she knew it off by heart and Billy hadn't hesitated when she'd asked for his help.

Since then, he'd been more helpful than her agent at getting her auditions and she'd always smiled and given him a secretive wave when she'd seen him working in the effects department on the lot. They'd spent hours each night over summer just sitting on the porch or in the garden and talking about the movies he was working on and the parts that were coming up that she could audition for. She hadn't had anything other than a few extras parts since moving but it was a start, and it was more than she could have hoped for while she was settling in.

She smiled as her fluffy grey cat, Jenkins, wound itself around her legs, purring sweetly at her as she boiled the kettle. Bending over, she picked him up and set him down on the kitchen island next to her chocolate brown cat, Toodles, and stroked them idly before starting to unpack her groceries.

Putting them all away, she kept a can of cat food out and watched as her cats rubbed against it, pawing it in the hopes that it would miraculously open for them.

"Okay, okay, I get the hint." She took hold of the can and opened it, leading the two cats to their bowls and sharing the contents between them.

Hearing the kettle switch off, she took down her favourite blue mug and put several spoonfuls of hot chocolate powder into it before filling it with water. She stirred it as she stared out the window, listening to the gentle clink of the spoon against the ceramic of the mug.

It was starting to get dark.

She felt as though she still had a million things to do before tomorrow. It would be the first time she'd prepared a Christmas dinner and she wanted to get it right. She knew Billy wouldn't care if she missed something, or overcooked anything, but she wanted it to be perfect—just like her Christmas' used to be.

Sighing to herself, she took up her mug of hot chocolate and walked from the kitchen to the living room. She couldn't stop the smile that erupted on her lips as she flicked the switches on and the room was illuminated by the soft glow of the multi-coloured fairy lights on the Christmas tree.

Looking at it, its boughs laden with decorations to the extent that she could barely see any green, she found herself remembering all the times she had helped her mother with the tree at their house. Ever since she was a little girl, she had always loved Christmas more than any other time of the year. There was something magical about it, something warm and inviting that made her feel as though there was nothing better than this holiday. She smiled as she remembered how her mother used to decorate the top of the tree while she decorated the branches she could reach, and how when they had covered it in baubles, lights and tinsel, her mother would lift her up and let her place the star on top of it.

She really missed those times.

Life seemed so simple when you were little, nothing to worry about and no having to work to make ends meet. All you had to do was sit back and enjoy the festivities and the long break from school.

Settling down on the couch, she curled one hand around her mug as she sipped her drink and flicked the television on. She searched through the channels until she found a festive movie and curled up, relaxing against the soft cushions for the briefest of moments before spotting the unwrapped present sitting on the coffee table.

Her eyes lingered on it for a second, tracing the outline of it idly as the smallest of smiles curled the corner of her lips.

He'd love it.

She felt sure about that.

Sitting up straight, she cleared a space on the table and unrolled some of the glittering silver paper that was adorned with snowflakes. She pulled the small open box toward her and looked over the watch it contained.

She'd had to save for almost a year to afford it, but it would be worth it just to see the smile on his face when he opened the present. She knew he would protest, would tell her that he couldn't accept such an expensive gift from her, but she wasn't going to back down. He would accept it whether he liked it or not.

Since she had been the instrument in breaking his watch earlier in the year, she felt that it was her place to give him a replacement. Even though he'd said it was no problem, she knew how much it irked him not to have a

watch, and how many times he'd got into trouble for being late on the lot.

The watch was almost exactly the same as the one she'd broken in the garden but there were small differences. For a start, it was more expensive than his last one and had a lot more fancy functions that she didn't understand. She was almost certain that Billy wouldn't understand the point of them either, but still, it was nice to give him something he'd appreciate.

Closing the black velvet box, she placed it down in the middle of the paper and cut a few strips of tape, sticking them to the side of the table so they didn't get tangled up. Folding the paper neatly over the box, she wrapped the present carefully, ensuring that each edge was crisp and each fold was done with perfection.

Katie smiled as she turned it over, straightening it up on the table and looking at it approvingly. Sipping her hot chocolate, she picked up the little matching card and looked at it with a frown wrinkling her nose.

She swallowed hard, her thoughts running a million miles an hour over what she could write inside the small rectangle of card.

Placing her mug down on the table and taking up the pen, she pressed the end of it thoughtfully against her mouth before going with just writing his name, 'Happy Christmas' and 'Love, Katie'.

She stuck it firmly to the silver wrapped box and then carried it over to the tree, setting it down underneath it and smiling as she imagined presenting it to him after their dinner tomorrow.

Her stomach dropped slightly as she thought about that.

She'd never cooked for Billy before, and it unnerved her a little that she had chosen the first time to be Christmas dinner. Anything and everything was likely to go wrong and she just hoped that if it did he'd see the humour in it.

He was good at that.

A smile touched her lips as she remembered the timbre of his laughter and the way his deep chocolate brown eyes lit up with it. It was always infectious, causing whatever embarrassment or anger she felt to disappear within seconds, even when she'd made a complete fool of herself.

Walking back to the couch, she curled up on it, resting her head against the arm as she watched the black and white movie on the television. She reached her hand down as Toodles passed her, offering a soft meow as recognition of her presence and then starting to purr contentedly as it felt its owner's fingers running through the long hair on its back.

Katie let her eyes close for longer and longer periods as the length of her day at work began to take its toll on her and before she knew what was happening, she was fast asleep with a smile on her face.

When she awoke, the television was playing a different movie, one a lot less festive and a lot more violent. She frowned at it, waiting for her brain to become more alert and less sleep fogged as she tried to figure out what was going on. Glancing at the clock as she stifled a yawn with the back of her hand, Katie blinked repeatedly when she saw it was telling her that it was gone ten o'clock, as though she couldn't bring herself to believe it.

A persistent scratching noise roused her further and she let out a small moan as she remembered that she'd been holding her cats captive during their favoured evening hunting hours.

Drowsily standing, she ran her hands over her face and then smoothed down her clothes as she weaved through the furniture towards the back door.

She frowned as she rounded the corner into the kitchen and found the cats weren't there. Turning around, she looked down the hallway and saw they were scratching at the front door, both of them clearly desperate to get out into the night.

"Okay...okay..." she mumbled as she walked toward them, trying to wake herself up as she did so.

Fumbling with the locks and latches, she groggily opened the door and watched the cats slink out onto the porch. She suppressed another sigh as she raised her head and then froze to the spot as she saw something that had her wondering if she was still asleep and dreaming.

Snow.

It was snowing.

Stepping out onto the porch, she frowned and inclined her head to one side as she regarded the strange scene in front of her.

It was snowing in California.

Looking up the street, she realised that the fact it was snowing wasn't the only strange thing that was happening.

Her next-door neighbours garden was still as green as it had been when she'd arrived home that afternoon, no sign of snow on it like her lawn had. She blinked sleepily as she looked at the inch of white powder that blanketed her front garden and then looked over the road at the houses there.

No sign of snow.

Starting to feel as though she was either going insane or she really was dreaming, Katie slipped into her house and put her trainers on before heading back outside to investigate—intent on finding the reason behind the localised snowstorm.

All thought of discovering the reason this was happening rapidly left her as she stepped onto the fresh snow, hearing the familiar sound of it compacting underfoot—something akin to cotton wool being rubbed against itself.

She took hesitant steps out to the centre of her garden and then smiled as she raised her face to the falling snow and felt it settle on her skin, melting against her as it was unable to resist the warmth. Raising her hands by her sides, her smile turned into a wide grin as she closed her eyes and revelled in the feeling of being out in the snow once more.

Slowly opening her eyes, she frowned curiously at the snow falling from above and let her gaze gradually follow it, noticing that it was like a fountain. She looked incredulous as her eyes followed the jet and came to rest on a machine parked in Billy's front garden where his car should have been.

Her eyes met his as he stood on the machine, holding something in his hand that was attached by a wire to it.

"You!" she started and saw him smile as she giggled over what was going on.

"You weren't supposed to see this until after midnight," he stated flatly, not bothering to explain what he was doing as he gave her a slightly reprimanding look.

Unable to think of anything else to say, Katie went with what was at the forefront of her mind.

"Why?"

Billy chuckled slightly, his full lips curving into a smile that looked both amused and embarrassed at the same time. Katie took a step towards him and waited for his explanation, smiling all the while.

"Remember last year?" he said with a shrug that had Katie figuring that it was the only explanation she was going to get. "I pulled in a few favours. It's the real stuff...well, it's little flakes of ice anyway. Just thought you'd like this for Christmas."

She tried to think of what she could have said that would have prompted him into doing such a thing for her. She could remember mentioning that Christmas wasn't the same without snow, but she hadn't expected him to go to the lengths it must have taken for him to borrow the machine from his work.

It must have cost a fortune to get all the ice she could see stacked up beside the machine, not to mention the inch or so of crushed ice snow that already covered the grass.

Feeling a little awed by the lengths he'd gone to in order to give her a Christmas present she would love, she found all she could do was smile up at him as he looked

down at her, his lips still playing into the wide mischievous smile. Her chest felt warm and tight as she kept her eyes locked with his, her heart hitching in it as she thought that he'd given her the best present she'd had in her life without knowing it.

Billy ran his fingers through his dark hair, pushing the loose tendrils of it out of his face and feeling unable to take his eyes away from Katie's. He swallowed noisily as she stood there in the middle of the garden, neatly tied back hair and shoulders rapidly being covered in flecks of snow from the machine.

He felt as though he couldn't breathe, the intensity of her smile and the weight of the silence that was engulfing them made his throat tight and he couldn't find the words to break it.

Katie drew her eyes away from his, her teeth teasing her lower lip as she smiled at the snow surrounding her. Bringing her eyes back to Billy, she broke the silence for him.

"How much will there be?" she asked, her eyes twinkling at him like a small child's as she thought about all the things she would be able to do with the snow he'd given her. "Enough for snow angels?"

Billy couldn't help smiling again as he looked down at the ice and then at her. "Enough for a snowman or two."

Katie grinned happily and then let it fade away as she thought about the present sitting under her tree, waiting for Billy.

"Your present is going to look pretty shabby now...I'll need to think of something better to give you."

Placing another large block of ice into the machine, Billy stepped down off it and let it run. He watched Katie as she bounced around her garden, laughing at her two cats as they gave the snow a disdainful look, clearly not as pleased to see it as their owner was.

Stopping in the middle of her lawn, Katie looked straight at Billy with a serious expression.

“Get your butt over that fence and come play.”

Billy chuckled and did as instructed, unable to deny her request and happy that she was overjoyed by his present. As he reached her, he found himself dragged down onto the ground and stared at the snow falling against the backdrop of black sky before letting his head roll to one side and looking at her.

Katie grinned at him as she spread her arms and legs, making a snow angel. She stopped when she caught his eye and felt warmth spread through her as she realised that for the first time since her parents passed on she felt happy.

Poking him in the arm, she gestured that he was being sorely deficient in the role of playmate and smiled as he rolled his eyes and began in earnest to make a snow angel of his own. Letting her head roll back, she just lay on her back and let the snow drift down onto her, her eyes picking out flakes to follow on their descent from the heavens.

Billy found himself intently watching her profile as her eyes remained fixed on the falling snow. He frowned slightly as a sadness flitted across her features and then she smiled again. He wanted to ask her what was troubling her, wanted to chase away anything that was

lingering and making her sad when she should be enjoying to the fullest what he'd given to her.

Before he had time to say anything she was on her feet, hopping away from the angel she had created and then smiling broadly as he followed suit.

Katie stood still for a moment as she looked down at the two angels, memories of her family, of her parents coming flooding back as she took in what felt like such a familiar scene. Raising her eyes to the sky, her thoughts drifted quietly with her parents for a moment before she realised that she was being watched. She brought her eyes down to meet Billy's and offered him a slight smile as she saw the concern shining in his eyes. Taking hold of his hand for a second, she squeezed it a little, trying to show him that she was okay, and then grinned mischievously as she hopped across the garden, scooping up snow as she went.

He was too slow on the uptake as he realised what she was up to and didn't have time to dodge the snowball.

It hit him square in the face.

Clenching his jaw tightly, he set a scowl on his face and gave her a hard look as he spoke, "That's war you just declared."

Katie just smiled and shrugged, already arming herself with another two snowballs and looking for something to hide behind as she saw Billy do the same. She furrowed her brows into a worried look as she realised that on her side of the garden there was nothing to hide behind.

Billy grinned.

As she held her hands up to protest, he pelted her with two snowballs, one hitting her on the thigh and the other smashing against her forehead as she raced to cover her face with her hands. His grin widened as he heard her make a small growling noise and then he ducked behind her car.

"Come out...you...you coward." She mock frowned at him as he poked his head up and then disappeared again. She weighed up the snowball she was holding as she tried to think of something to say that would lure him out into the open. She smiled. "You know...um...that little dent...that kinda appeared in the door of your car last month...the one I said I had nothing to do with..."

"You little..." Billy popped his head up, frowning at her as she confessed to denting his pride and joy.

The next thing he felt was the cold slap of snow against his cheek. He closed his eyes and wiped it from his face, barely suppressing his annoyance as he disappeared from sight. Gathering up the snow around him, he created a whole stack of snowballs and peered around the back of the car at Katie.

She was doing the same. He could see the small stack of them like cannonballs at her feet. Loading up his arms, he took a deep breath and then when she had her back to him he sprinted out from behind the car.

Katie barely had time to turn around and reach for a snowball as he hurtled toward her, pelting her mercilessly until she was crouching down with her hands over her head to protect herself. As the barrage of snowballs stopped, she kept still for a few moments and then uncurled to see Billy standing proudly above her, his hands on his hips as he grinned triumphantly.

She scowled for a moment before grinning wickedly.

The smile dropped off his face as he realised that he was defenceless and she was sat next to a neat pile of snowballs.

Katie laughed as he ran for cover and she threw her snowballs as quickly as possible at him, smiling internally as at least half of them connected, splattering against his retreating back.

She scrambled for more snow at the same time he did, hurriedly making as many snowballs as possible before unleashing another attack on him. As he turned to face her, a snowball at the ready, she hit him square in the face and the chest, before pelting his legs.

Billy let the snowball fall limply from his hand to the floor and looked down at himself as he cleared the snow from his eyes. He arched a brow at the snow that clung to his work clothes and his shoulders sagged as he looked at Katie, thoroughly unimpressed.

She just shrugged where she was stood a few metres from him, slightly out of breath from gathering so many snowballs so quickly.

"Truce?" she asked and he gave her a distrustful look and then nodded almost imperceptibly.

Katie smiled.

A snowball clocked her hard on the side of her head and she turned a frown on Billy.

"It slipped?" he shrugged, mimicking the innocent look she'd given him moments before.

Deciding to rise above it all, Katie looked around at the patchy snow. The amount of snow that was falling wasn't enough to replace what had already been lost and she felt a momentary pang of sadness that this couldn't last. She watched in silence as Billy crossed the fence again, loading up more ice into the machine so she would have more snow. Even the stack of ice blocks beside it seemed to be diminishing quickly.

She sighed and then smiled as she noticed Billy was watching her again, that same look of concern he'd been wearing earlier back on his face.

"Will it all be gone by morning?" Katie saw his expression turn pensive, as though he was calculating something and then watched as he gave her a sorry look.

"Probably."

She took a look around her snow covered garden, watching the flakes as they settled on the decorations and the porch roof, making the house look more festive than she could have wished for, and far better than if she'd chosen the fake snow covering she'd been looking at just last week.

"I'm going to get my camera," she said with resolution as Billy strode across the lawn towards her.

He watched her disappear into the house and then took in his surroundings too. After a few seconds of standing idly on her front garden, a smile crept onto his face and he bent down, scooping up the snow from all around him and concentrating on executing another plan to perfection.

When Katie reappeared with the camera, she stopped the instant she saw what Billy had done.

He was standing proudly beside the scariest looking snowman she'd ever seen. Not only was the snow it was made of all knobbly rather than smooth, but he'd found some small rocks in the border and used them to decorate it. This wouldn't have been so bad had one of its eyes not been larger than the other and its grin not been so lopsided.

And still she couldn't help smiling at it.

It was charming in a funny kind of way, a little like the person who'd built it.

Snapping off a picture, she walked down the steps and took another one that comprised of her two cats now gingerly walking around in the snow and looking as though they were trying to make sense of it. She then took a picture of the snow angels that she and Billy had created and finally walked out into the quiet road in order to take a picture of the house and garden together.

She smiled broadly as she walked up to Billy, the warm feeling returning to the pit of her stomach as he smiled back at her.

"Thanks," she said shyly and then dropped her eyes to rest on the floor as he smoothed her hair, clearing the snowflakes from it.

"No problem," he replied with a customary shrug of his shoulders.

Katie hesitated for a moment before raising her eyes to meet his. "You...you want to come in for a drink and warm up?"

Billy nodded immediately, flexing his slightly numbed fingers as he thought about a nice mug of hot chocolate.

Leading the way toward the house, Katie felt increasingly nervous as she walked up the porch steps. She kept thinking about the present he'd given her, and what she'd gotten him and couldn't help thinking that his was far better. Stopping on the porch, she turned sharply and gave him a small, embarrassed smile as he almost bumped into her.

"Billy..." she started, swallowing down her nerves as she looked straight into the dark eyes now watching her intently, "...this...this really is the best Christmas present I've ever had, and it makes mine look so...well...what I'm trying to say is, is there anything you really want for Christmas?"

Billy stood mute for a few seconds as he absorbed what she was saying, what she was asking. He wondered if she could really be so blind, if she hadn't noticed the feelings that he'd been harbouring for her from the moment he'd set eyes on her, feelings that were often roused by the notion that she felt the same way.

Katie felt the nerves in her stomach twisting and turning upon themselves, churning as she waited, enduring the silence that she longed for him to break. She was close to wringing her hands by the time he finally answered her, albeit wordlessly.

He simply raised his eyes.

Katie looked up too, her eyes widening as she saw the mistletoe hanging above them.

“Oh,” she said idly and then it dawned on her. “Oh!”

For a second, she didn’t know what to do, she just looked at him as he waited patiently, his face impassive and hiding all his emotions. She glanced over his shoulders at the neighbours that were beginning to appear in their windows and on their lawns, all staring at the machine that was still churning out the flakes of snow that were covering the garden.

Then she stepped toward him, squashed her nerves down and smiled internally as she realised that this is what she’d been waiting for all year. Catching hold of his jacket lapels, she tugged him towards her and smiled as he looked as nervous as she felt. She tiptoed slightly as she slid her arms around his neck, feeling his warm breath against her skin and then slowly brought her lips to meet his.

They brushed against each other in the gentlest of caresses and she felt hers tingle warmly.

Closing her eyes, she leaned into the kiss and smiled against his mouth as his arms encircled her waist, pulling her closer to him. Her lips played against his softly, languidly as she allowed herself to get lost in the feeling of their first kiss—the first kiss she’d had in what seemed like forever.

Letting her tongue run along his bottom lip, she didn’t care if the neighbours were gawping at them as Billy deepened the kiss, holding her tightly against him.

She sighed out through her nose as her tongue played against his, brushing it softly and exploring his warm mouth as she forgot where they were.

As they broke apart, she smiled into Billy's eyes and bit her lip slightly as she gave him a coy look.

"So, you still want that drink?" she asked and saw a wicked little smile settle on his lips.

He nodded slightly and she took hold of his hand, leading him into the house. When the clock in the town church struck midnight, he paused and made her stop with him.

He soundlessly counted the number of strikes and then smiled at her.

"Happy Christmas."

Katie smiled back. "Happy Christmas."

Wrapping him up in a hug, she smiled as he took the opportunity to kiss her again and her heart fluttered against her ribs as he confirmed that the kiss under the mistletoe wasn't going to be a one-off.

She giggled as she tugged him into the house, watching him disappear into the living room before turning her attention to the door. Holding onto it, she took one last look at the snow in her garden and smiled softly, memorising how it looked and how she felt.

Slowly closing the door, Katie looked over her shoulder and found Billy smiling at her, his clothes saturated from the snow and his hair all tousled and wet.

Listening to the door click shut, she didn't take her eyes off him as she thought about how good it was going to feel to share Christmas with someone she loved again.

She wondered if he could read in her eyes and her smile what she was thinking, because he smiled too.

Not only had he given her one perfect present, snow in the desert, he'd unconsciously given her another too.

He'd given her back Christmas.

The End

About the Author:

Felicity Heaton is a great believer in love at first sight and the romantic ideal. Having grown up reading extensively, she developed a deep love of classical literature, ranking *Jane Eyre*, *North & South*, and *Persuasion* amongst her all time favourite reads. The most romantic moment of her life was when her husband got down on bended knee on the steps of *Sacré Coeur*, Paris, at night in front of several hundred spectators and proposed. She was too drunk on love, and subsequently champagne, to care about the audience. All she could see was the man that she loved. A writer of emotion and life, she always strives to touch a chord of familiarity in her readers and give them characters they can love and a read to remember.

To see her other stories, visit:

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Other books by Felicity Heaton:

In Heat (shapeshifter romance)

A heat wave isn't the only thing making London too hot for lawyer Kim. She's been spending each night with a man who sets her body and heart on fire. The problem? He's a man that always sprouts black fur and purrs, and he's only a dream. Walking into work on the hottest day of the year, the last thing she expects is to meet Erik, a man who send her temperature soaring and who resembles her dream guy exactly.

A black panther shape-shifter, Erik Blackwell has been searching for his mate for twenty-seven years. The visions they share each night are getting hotter but finding her is proving impossible as he's never seen her face. That is, until it turns out she's working as his lawyer on his contract negotiations with his brother, Alistair.

Kim can't deny her attraction to Erik. The heat she feels with him is intense and it's only a matter of time before they surrender to their desires, but something haunts her. Is Erik really the man of her dreams? If so, can he grow fur and purr? And what about the

terrible feeling she has about Alistair and the contract? How far is he willing to go to get his hands on the company Erik owns?

What will Kim do when she discovers Erik's secret? Will she turn her back on him, or will she complete the mating and become like him so they can be together forever?

All of Felicity Heaton's books are available from Alinar Publishing – <http://www.alinarpublishing.com>