

Samhain Scorchers Anthology

SAMHAIN SCORCHERS ANTHOLOGY

by

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WHAT THEY ARE SAYING ABOUT *SAMHAIN SCORCHERS ANTHOLOGY*

“While reading this anthology, I couldn't help noticing that it was different from other anthologies that I've read where the stories are choppy and too short for a decent story line. While the stories in this anthology were shorter than a normal novel, their plots were wonderfully written and the characters well developed for the most part. The steamy sexy scenes were nicely balanced by smoothly moving story lines. This anthology definitely deserves its 'scorching' title...In general, all of the stories left me with the desire to seek out the authors' websites to see if they've continued the story lines with other characters. This anthology of stories definitely rates keeper shelf status and I give it a firm 4 stars for writing and 4.5 stars for steamy scorching sex.”

Mendy Vinson
MyBookCravings

“I admit I have rarely found a book I have devoured as rapidly as I did this one. The stories just flew before me, sapping at my control. All I wanted, all I craved, was to read it all...All in all, every story carried its own brand of magic. Magic of the storyline, and magic of the authors' writing. It is one book I would recommend to everyone looking for a good time, an escape from reality, and also to anyone who wants to witness the magic of love happen across places, planes, and between unique individuals. Of course, the scorching sex scenes and the blazing heat in every story do help as well. But for once, the heat does not override the story, and is just one part of a bigger whole.

“A delightful read, to be highly recommended.”

Zee

Enchanting Reviews

“*Samhain Scorchers Anthology* was a great mix of writers providing you with a little bit of the best of all genres and styles. There is something guaranteed to please everyone, if you are like me, you will be greatly pleased by the fact that a storyline you didn't expect to be one you pick out, is one you end up really enjoying! Anthologies are a wonderful way to get a little taste of each author, and I think each one put forth a captivating work. I really enjoyed the diversity and I highly recommend it to lovers of paranormal romance. It spans the paranormal, vampires, ghosts, werewolves, shape shifters, gargoyles and aliens, it's got it all. You won't be disappointed.”

Stephanie Q. McGrath

Paranormal Romance Reviews

“Each of these stories was a delight to read. They all had great heroes and heroines...*Samhain Scorchers Anthology* was exactly that...scorching.”

Chris P.

Fallen Angel Reviews

Dedication

To Our Readers

We hope the shivers down your spine,
the sigh in the night,
and your trembling bed sheets
come from reading this book—
and may the bumps in the night come from your own
doing!

THE DOOMSDAY INCIDENT

by

Michelle Marquis

Chapter 1

Nate Butcher had been in the SHU—or the Security Housing Unit as they called it—for two solid weeks. This was the beginning of a longer sentence that would last for the rest of his life. He lay on his cot daydreaming about the only ray of light in his miserable life—Maria Gonzalez. He relieved his boredom by remembering her every detail—the scent of her shampoo, the easy movement of her body beneath that prison guard’s uniform, the music of her Hispanic accent. The more he thought of her, the more erect he became.

Every night, he played scenarios in his head and masturbated himself to sleep. His favorite one was of her slipping into his cell unnoticed for a deep, long, thorough fucking. The scenes came quickly now. He and Maria exchanging heated whispers, her frantically undressing, peeling one item off at a time. Slowly, taunting, teasing him. With trembling hands, he unbuttoned his orange prison jumpsuit and wrapped his hand around his aching cock.

“Maria,” he whispered as he stroked his dick. “I need you, baby. Give it to me nice and slow.”

She was naked and smiling, stroking her nipples to tease him. She strolled toward him as he lay on his bed, the musk of her sex charging his senses. Straddling his hips, she lowered herself down onto his cock and...

The pleasure rode up his dick and into his hips in rippling waves. He held back, not wanting to come too soon, he loved this fantasy and wanted it to last.

A loud metallic clanging drove his thoughts away and he swore. It was Maria banging her night stick on the metal door to wake him up. *Could it be exercise time already?*

"Nate? Are you awake in there?" she said. She didn't wait for a reply. "Come on, man, you know the drill."

Nate got up and straightened himself out. He hoped she'd see his fierce erection. *It's all for you, babe. All twelve inches of it.*

He approached the metal door and turned his back to it. Placing his hands out the narrow slot, he waited patiently for Maria to handcuff him. She did, touching his hands innocently as she did so. He made a mental note of that sensation. He'd recall it again later during another one of his fantasies.

She pulled the door open and stepped back. He came out and stared down at her. She avoided looking him in the eye, instead she gestured toward the yellow line that led to the tiny exercise yard.

Nate hesitated, reveling in the fear he caused her. She was not a petite woman, in fact, far from it. She was stocky and tall, probably around five foot eight. Her hair was dark brown and of medium length but she always kept it bound to her head in a tight braid or bun. Just once, he wished he could see it free over her shoulders.

She was a honey-skinned Hispanic goddess with dark brown eyes that sometimes turned hazel when she was nervous. Today they were very hazel. He liked it when she looked into his eyes; he knew what she saw there. Annoyed and edgy from his stalling, she met his gaze.

"Are you going to give me shit today, Nate?" she asked. Her voice had a slight tremor to it.

Ignoring the question, he dragged his left boot over to the line, then his right. He stopped. A moment passed, then two. He started walking toward the exercise yard whistling a nameless tune. Then he stopped and said, "I was just thinking about you, Maria."

She walked along behind him and didn't say a word.

"Don't you want to know what I was thinking?" he said playfully.

"I'm sure I can guess."

He chuckled dangerously. "Do you want me to tell you about it?"

Maria sighed. "No, Nate, I don't."

He came out into the tiny brick yard and fought the feelings of despair that threatened to overwhelm him. She unlocked his handcuffs and moved behind the first set of bars.

"How goes the war?" he asked, picking up a basketball and bouncing it on the ground.

She stared at him stunned, as if she didn't know he could speak English. He made a mental note to taunt her a little less. "We're losing."

Nate stopped bouncing the ball and held it. A tense moment passed between them. Maria paused and didn't close the second steel door.

"If we lose," he said, "you think they're going to let us go?"

Her lips moved but she didn't speak. A long silence followed. Then she said, "I don't know."

He pulled a deep breath from his nose hoping to catch her scent. All he sucked in was the smell of old rust. She was too far away. "You won't let me die in here, will you, babe?"

Maria's eyes softened. "I'm not your friend, Nate. I'm not your babe either." She closed the second door and waited for his exercise time to be up.

Nate put the ball down and did some stretches. He only had half an hour to exercise before he'd have to go back to his cramped cell. Soon he'd be back to his lonely life and his erotic dreams of Maria. She was much nicer to him in his dreams.

Getting down on the ground, he grinded out a hundred pushups. He'd been at the Raven Lakes Supermax for six years. A drop in the bucket of his life sentence. He wondered how close the aliens were to winning the war. Not aliens, he reminded himself, *Grays*. Everybody called them that because of the color of their skin.

If the invaders did win, he was sure the government would cut the prisoners loose. It would be the perfect final gesture to stick it to the alien conquerors. He hoped the World Federation did lose the war. Then he'd finally have a chance to be free.

Chapter 2

Florida's Raven Lakes Supermax was one of the largest prisons in the United States. Maria Gonzalez had become a prison guard here almost eight years ago and hated every minute of it. Unfortunately, she couldn't beat the money. With this dangerous job, she'd been able to buy a great house, a new car, even attend some college. The money was definitely what kept her here.

Then, about a year ago, the Grays came to Earth. They were humanoid aliens with bluish skin and strange, featureless faces. Their eyes were huge solid-colored lenses that gave them a B-horror movie look. They all came on one ship the media nicknamed *Doomsday* and soon after they landed, people started disappearing. It wasn't hard to figure out what happened to them; the evidence was everywhere in the piles of bleached human bones left behind in the streets.

All the nations banded together to stop them, but no army was a match for the Grays. They had weapons far superior to anything anyone had yet imagined. Whole governments collapsed. At last report, even the United States was losing the war.

Maria leaned against Warden Striker's desk with the other prison guards waiting for the inevitable announcement. Everyone had expected this; the layoff of all guards and release of the prison inmates. This was the last gasp of a dying

civilization and everyone would have to fend for themselves as best they could.

The warden came in holding an official-looking memo. He took a seat behind his desk, adjusted his glasses and studied everyone with a grim expression on his face.

"I'm sure you've all been expecting this," he said, "so I won't prolong it any longer. As of this morning, we have been dissolved. Our final task is to free all the prisoners."

A terrified quiet filled the room. No one seemed to know what was worse; the Grays or the prisoners. "I won't need all of you for the releases," the warden continued, "I'll just ask for volunteers."

Three of the guards plucked off their badges, lay them on the warden's desk, and walked out. This job was over for them, to hell with letting the prisoners go. Maria didn't blame them.

She let out a tense breath. *Nate free, now there's a scary thought.* Maria had known Nate Butcher a long time and, although he'd never harmed her, he was not a man to be trusted. He was pure savage aggression; a prison animal in African-American skin. He walked and talked like a man, but Maria knew he was a ruthless murder and had many more kills under his belt than he was convicted of. He was also strikingly handsome. Standing well over six foot, he was a wall of thick muscles and demon tattoos. His eyes were so dark they looked like two black bottomless holes where every manner of evil could hide.

As far as Maria was concerned, he only had one redeeming quality. He'd once saved her life by killing another inmate who'd jumped her in the mess hall. She was convinced he hadn't done the deed out of heroism, but rather his own sadistic reasons. Unfortunately, it was that crime which had landed him in the SHU.

Maria glanced around at the other guards. Her throat was dry. They looked nervous but everyone knew what they had to do. "I'll do it," she said.

The rest of the guards nodded their agreement.

The warden nodded grimly. "Okay then. Let's get those rifles loaded and get started." He stared hard at Maria. "We'll do the SHU last."

* * * *

The rest of the prisoners had been easy compared to the hardened ones in the SHU. They'd saved Nate Butcher for last.

Maria sat in the armory taking deep breaths and trying to control her panic. Her bulletproof vest weighed a ton and her hands were sweating uncontrollably. She looked over at Tim MacIntyre and watched him nervously checking his rifle.

He glanced up at her and gave her a weak grin. "Ready?"

She nodded and got up. They made their way down the hall to Nate's cell. "Get away from the door!" Maria commanded. She looked through the peephole, and seeing Nate at the back of his cell, nodded to Tim.

The heavy steel door groaned open. Nate walked out slowly, his dark eyes studying them. When he was only a few feet from Maria, he stopped and held his handcuffed wrists out to her.

Tim fixed his rifle on Nate as Maria unlocked his handcuffs. They fell to the floor with a metallic clink and ice gripped her gut. She saw Nate go for her and jumped back.

Unfortunately, she was a second too late.

Nate grabbed her upper arms and pulled her to him. Maria felt her legs buckle beneath her. Only Nate's grip kept her from collapsing to the ground. She was dimly aware of Tim shouting at the prisoner to let her go.

Ignoring Tim, Nate leaned in close and pressed his lips to hers in a searing, hungry kiss. A flood of relief moved through

her as he awakened a tiny carnal spark in her soul. She pushed him off and stumbled back, surprised he'd let her escape.

Leaning back against the wall, she wiped her mouth with the back of her sleeve and checked for blood. There was none. He hadn't hurt her, only scared her. "You're free to go," she said breathless.

He stared at her, his eyes black like ravens. "Come with me, Maria," he said.

She was shaking. "No," she said. "You got your freedom. Get out!"

He took a step toward her.

"Stop!" Tim shouted, his fingers growing white from his tight grip on the rifle. "Or I'll blow you're goddamn head off!"

Nate hesitated, his gaze fixed on Maria. His tongue stroked his bottom lip as if he could taste her, then he smiled. Turning away from them, he strolled off down the hall as silent as a jungle cat.

Maria almost felt sorry for the Grays.

Chapter 3

The drive home was the longest Maria had ever taken. It was like someone had come down with a magic wand and made all the people disappear. Shops remained open with no one inside, trash blew through the empty streets, and no cars waited at stoplights. The effect was eerie and terrifying. All she wanted to do was get home.

She pulled onto her street and was relieved to see a few of her neighbors packing what they could in their SUVs. Pulling into her driveway, she left the car running and tried to decide what to do. For the tenth time today, she dialed her sister Cassy's number only to be met again with the same old tired recording with her sister's voice telling her to leave a message. She'd left plenty. She snapped her cell shut.

She stepped out of her car and went into her house. She was just about to close the door, when someone placed their hand on it to stop her. Panic rushed through her until she realized it was her elderly neighbor, Mister Steinmann.

"Maria?" he said. His voice held a strong quiver.

"Hi, Mister Steinmann." She glanced out the door to his idling RV. "Are you leaving too?"

"You're damn right, and you should too. There's no news, all the stations are snow. I figure the Grays have killed almost everyone off by now. Ain't safe to stay around here anymore. Why don't you come with me and the wife?"

“Where are you going?”

Mister Steinmann pulled back and regarded her with surprise. “Well, to join the resistance, of course!”

Maria grinned at him feeling hopeless. She wished she could get her sister Cassy on the phone, at least then she might feel better. “Thanks,” she said. “I really mean it, but I’m going to wait here for a little longer. I’m hoping my sister will come by. I haven’t been able to get in touch with her since last night.”

Her neighbor nodded sagely, as if he knew a secret he couldn’t tell. Suddenly, all Maria wanted was to be left alone. “Good luck with your journey,” she said, closing the door on Steinmann.

When he’d driven off, she pulled out her cell and tried her sister again. Nothing, just that stupid recorded message. She sure hoped Cassy was all right.

Making her way over to the window, Maria looked out at the gloomy day. It matched her mood. What a combination—gloom, terror and worry. Enough to give anyone a premature heart attack. She sat on the sofa and tried her sister a few more times, and then she drifted off to sleep.

* * * *

Nate stalked through the prison making his way to the warden’s office. Except for a few mentally ill prisoners too confused to know what was happening, most had already left the facility. That was good news for him. He had a lot of enemies and didn’t want to have to fight his way out of here. There were tons of other murderers in this fucking place that wanted him dead.

Stopping by the armory, he took a quick look inside to find a weapon. To his great delight, he found a Glock inside one of the lockers. He checked the clip and noted half of it was spent. *Better get more ammunition on the outside and make every shot count.*

As he made his way through the administrative offices, he couldn't believe his luck. Every door he tried was unlocked. He came into the warden's office and a strange haunted feeling came over him. The room was filled with stuff the warden had just left behind. Stacks of files sat on the desk with bright yellow sticky notes attached, pictures of family and co-workers lined the walls, even a jacket had been left hanging over the back of an office chair.

Another thing was here too. Maria's scent. He stopped and inhaled deeply, as a maddening rush of desire filled his loins. Pushing his feelings aside, he scanned the filing cabinets and looked for the personnel folders. He opened a few drawers until he found the tab with the 'G' on it. *Here it is: Gonzalez.* Hers was one of the first ones.

Nate pulled it out and stared at the smiling picture of his soul mate. He dragged his index finger across the glossy black and white image and smiled. Leafing through the rest of the file, he found the original application with her address and phone number. Pulling it out, he folded it up and took it with him.

Chapter 4

The first place Nate stopped was an Army/Navy store to get some clothes. He stepped through the front door, his shoes crunching on broken glass. The whole place smelled like death. Not the fresh smell of decaying flesh, but old death, like bones. As he approached the center of the store, he spotted the source of the stench. There, in a neat pile, were stripped bare bones. Not an ounce of flesh remained on them and they were definitely human. Wary, he pulled the Glock out of his waistband.

The military pants were on display near the cash register and he dug through them until he found his size. Next he grabbed a black t-shirt, a pair of socks and combat boots. Keeping a watchful eye, he stripped in plain view and changed. The effect of discarding the orange jumpsuit was amazing. He finally felt alive again.

Working quickly, he smashed the display case and selected a large combat knife, strapping it to his leg. He also took a large olive-green backpack and stuffed dry rations into it and a few small bottles of water. Next, he slipped out to visit the supermarket.

The streets were deserted. Stray scraps of paper and candy wrappers floated along the sidewalk pushed by a random breeze. Nate stopped for a moment and listened carefully for any sign of life.

He heard nothing.

Save-A-Lot Supermarket had already been visited by other looters. A car that had been driven through the entrance sat empty and quiet like a long extinct dinosaur. Packaged food and cans were scattered around the aisles. Whoever had come here to get supplies had definitely been in a big hurry.

Then Nate heard it.

It was a high-pitched buzzing sound that started off low, and then rose to a deafening hum. The sound filled the supermarket then died away into silence. Sensing something wrong, he ducked into a back storage room and pulled out his gun.

He was there a long time before he saw them. *Grays*. They crept through the supermarket, stopping every few feet to listen for movement. Nate felt the hairs on his arms stand up and a chill move down his back.

They were shockingly ugly, with pale gray skin stretched over their vaguely humanoid faces. Their eyes were large ovals and solid in color. They walked with a stiffness like their limbs didn't want to move and Nate guessed they must not be adapting to Earth's gravity very well.

A frantic scream filled the silence and Nate could see one of them seizing a man in a supermarket uniform. The man was armed with a knife, but once he looked into those huge metallic eyes, he dropped it and was passive. Two of the Grays escorted him out while one stayed behind.

Searching.

Nate thought about shooting the remaining one, but hesitated. There were two more outside and the shots would surely bring them. He needed to know more about them before he started picking them off.

The remaining Gray was getting closer, stopping every few feet and turning from side to side with unnatural, jerky movements. Its eyes were silver and it wore some kind of light silver uniform. The creature seemed uncertain what to do next.

Nate didn't move an inch, his eyes fixed on the Gray now only ten feet from the swinging doors of his hiding place. Suddenly, the Gray turned and walked out.

He waited until he heard the ear-splitting whine again. Then moved out when it was over. He crept out to the front of the building and saw no one, just as when he'd come; no one except a fresh pile of naked bones by the store's entrance.

Nate thought about Maria, wondering if she was still alive. He couldn't face the possibility she might not be.

He had to get to her.

He understood her better than any woman he'd ever known. She was too soft for this kind of survival.

He'd be the only hope at living she'd have.

* * * *

Maria drove down her street watching the few of her neighbors left packing. They stuffed what they could into their vehicles in frantic haste. *There weren't many neighbors left.* Pulling into her driveway, she pulled out her cell phone again and tried her sister's number.

It rang four times then a message picked up. *"Hi, this is Cassy Gonzalez. Please leave a message for me after the beep!"*

A cold wave of fear and helplessness moved over her like a dark cloud. Maria felt like she'd been afraid all her life, from her tense childhood with her abusive father to her job as a prison guard. But nothing compared to how terrified she was of Nate. She'd seen what he could do in a fight and it made her blood run cold. He had never hurt her, although he'd had plenty of chances. He'd just work her nerves in subtle ways to watch her jump. She hated that about him and wondered why he held such intense power over her. Perhaps it was because he reminded her of her father.

When the recording was over, Maria left another message and snapped the phone shut. Getting out of her car, she looked

up at the approaching night and thought about driving to her sister's house, then thought better of it. She'd spend the night at home in case they came here, then if there was still no answer tomorrow, she would drive over there.

Wiping a few stray tears from her eyes, she headed into the house and carefully locked all the doors.

Chapter 5

Try as she might, she couldn't sleep. The night's darkness closed in around her like an evil blanket and everything made her skin crawl. If the Grays were going to come for her, she hoped it would be a quick death. Rolling over, she glanced at the clock and it read three fifteen in the morning. She picked up her cell phone and made sure it was working. It was.

Getting up out of bed, she padded to the bathroom. The night was so quiet it felt dead. She opened her medicine cabinet and took a few pain relievers, gulping them down with a glass full of water.

A strange metallic humming started softly then grew steadily louder. Maria went to the window to look out, a dull panic rising in her gut.

Without warning, she was grabbed from behind. A large hand covered her mouth as the intruder held her close to his powerful body.

"Don't make a sound," Nate said in a harsh whisper, "or we're both dead."

Maria didn't process a word he said. Her mind exploded with horror. *Oh my God, it's Nate Butcher! He's come here to kill me!*

He pulled her backwards into the closet and closed the door. His embrace was python-tight leaving her powerless to fight him. Her breath came in short, alarmed pants.

The noise grew louder and louder until Maria thought it was going to burst her eardrums. Then everything grew deathly quiet. She expected Nate to release her, but if anything, he held her tighter.

She wanted to scream at him; to tell him to get his goddamn hands off her, but something told her to remain still. She tried to ignore the discomfort of his bone-crushing hold.

Then she heard footsteps inside her bedroom. The sounds were irregular as if the intruders couldn't walk very well. She immediately knew it was the Grays. She'd heard the early news reports of others who'd encountered them. It could only be the Grays.

Maria's body shuddered. For the first time since she'd been pulled into the closet, she noticed Nate had a gun and felt a little tinge of relief. If there was anyone able to fight the Grays, it was him.

The Gray wandered around her house for what felt like an hour. The entire time she worked on keeping her breathing under control and not moving a muscle. Nate was so still, he seemed to have been turned to stone. She figured if he was being cautious, he must know something she didn't.

Far away in the night, a screech filled the quiet. It was high, raw and gritty like a tomcat defending its territory. No, Maria realized, it wasn't a cat. *It was human.* The Grays had found someone. The screaming reached pitches she didn't think the human voice could achieve. She wanted to throw up but focused on her breathing instead.

They'd been in the closet so long, Nate's scent had become comforting and familiar. She relaxed against his iron hold, and a moment later, he too relaxed a little.

The high whining of a machine began again and Maria cringed in the darkness in a hopeless attempt to escape it. Then all was quiet once again.

Nate let her go and opened the closet door.

They both stood in the middle of her dark bedroom, trying to get the normal rhythm of their breathing back.

Maria shook her head. "I don't understand. How did you know where I live?" she said. "Why did you come here?"

Nate holstered his gun under his arm and sat on the bed. "I found out where you live from your personnel file, and I came here to save your life. Good thing too, because if I'd been a few minutes later, there'd be nothing left of you but a naked pile of bones."

"But *why*, Nate? *Why* did you come here to help me?"

Nate smiled wickedly. It was a flash of white teeth in a pitch-black room. "Isn't it obvious? I came because I love you, babe."

Chapter 6

Nate loves me.

Maria took a moment to digest this information. Searching her emotions for a response, she came up empty. All she could manage was, "Okay."

He walked over to her bedside table and turned on the light. It illuminated the room and made her blink. "Don't do that!" she said louder than she'd meant to. "The Grays will see it and come back."

He moved up to her and stroked his fingertips across her lips. It was an affectionate, intimate gesture that she never would have expected from him. Strangely, it calmed her a little. "Don't worry, Maria. There's a signal before they come. Trust me, you'll hear it when they're coming."

She shuddered. The thought they might come back was too much for her to absorb. "Thank God I'm leaving in the morning."

He sat on the edge of her bed, a grin curling the side of his mouth. "Where are you going?"

"To find my sister in Citrus Park," she said. "I'm having a really hard time getting in touch with her."

"She's probably dead."

Maria clenched her fists and turned on him. "No, she is not dead!"

Nate studied her with those dark eyes. An old familiar fear rose in her. A fear she'd been running from her whole life. It was the terror of unbridled violence that had started with her father when she was five years old.

Nate got up off the bed and she backed away from him quickly. He moved up to her with the deadly grace of a predator. Maria could barely breathe.

"Don't touch me," she said.

He cornered her and spoke to her in a voice like black velvet. "Why not? What are you afraid of?"

Maria swallowed. "I mean it, Nate. Don't you put a hand on me."

He stroked her hair and leaned down to kiss her. He stopped just close enough for her to feel his lips tickle her mouth when he spoke. "What are you always so scared of?" he whispered.

"I'm not afraid of anything."

"Come on, Maria. That's not true. Ever since I've known you, you've been afraid of me. Not like the other guards are afraid, you're scared in a different way. What happened to you?"

Maria pushed him back and slipped out of the corner. She could never tell him about her father. She didn't dare; he'd only use the information to manipulate and hurt her.

"I have to pack," she said coolly.

He lay on the bed staring at the ceiling. "You plan to go alone?"

She threw a duffle bag on the bed next to him and started throwing things in it. Glancing out the window, she could see the sun starting to rise. She wondered if she'd ever be able to sleep again.

"Yes," she said.

"Wouldn't it be easier and safer to let me come with you?"

Maria stopped packing. *Here we go. The Deal. Convicts always had a Deal for you. She could probably guess what this Deal would entail.* She wished she didn't want his help in this new and terrifying world. But he was cunning and he'd be a big help to her in finding her sister.

"What do you want? Sex?" she asked.

"Yes," he said with a lazy smile. "That will do nicely."

Maria sighed and climbed up on the bed next to him. She kicked off her shoes, not feeling the least bit sexual. "All right," she said. "Let's get this over with."

Chapter 7

Nate leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. He rolled onto his side, sliding one hand under her shirt and rubbing her belly. A gentle shiver rolled down her. His hand wandered lazily, stroking her body in wide circles until he'd covered the whole of her stomach. He leaned in close to her neck and planted soft kisses there as he exhaled close to her skin.

Maria closed her eyes and willed herself to relax. If she was too tense, this would be miserable. Then his mouth came over hers in a demanding, lustful kiss. Keeping her eyes closed, she kissed him back.

Maria felt him peel her clothes off, taking his time to stop and linger over her now bare breasts and exposed pussy. She opened her eyes and watched him take his own clothes off, marveling at the sculpted iron of his muscles. He was breathtaking and made all the more desirable by his forbidden deadly nature. His tattoos gave him a strange exotic look, like a piece of art to be seen but never touched.

His body was an amazing sculpture in dark chocolate. His chest was a wall of muscle with thick pectorals and detailed abs. He was beautiful in every way that word had meaning and Maria found herself catching her breath when she touched him.

When he was naked, he leaned down and stroked her jaw, softly dancing kisses on her lips. His hand moved down into the downy pelt of her sex, and then beyond to the secret places it

hid from view. He stroked her vaginal lips, running his fingers gently through her and Maria thought she saw him whisper something.

Her body was betraying her, heating up and responding to his every touch. She placed her fingertips to his lips. "What did you say?" she whispered.

He gave her a slight grin and leaned down to her ear. "I said, your pussy is sweet." Then he added, "I can't believe how much I want you, Maria."

Don't fall for this. He'll tell you anything you want to hear to get you to fuck him. Just let him take what he wants, but don't feed into him.

"Take me," she said.

He laughed and it was low and dangerous. "I will, baby, I will. But I want to take my time. I've waited a long time for this and I'm not going to rush it. Not for you or any fucking aliens that might show up."

His mouth roamed and explored her body, touching every part of her. With every feathery kiss and every gentle caress, she became his more and more. He was taking possession of her slowly, bending her will so she would no longer resist him. Her body was tense and hungry and she wanted him like no man she'd ever known.

He teased her lips with half-kisses until she was so frustrated she thought she would scream. "Nate, please!"

"Please what?" he taunted as he eased a finger into her aching channel.

Maria arched her back as ripples of lust rolled through her hips. She ran her hands down his thick arms, stroking them. "Please take me."

He kissed her chin. "Not yet; you're not ready yet."

Two can play at this game. Reaching down, she wrapped her hand around his rock-hard erection and stroked. He moaned and pumped his hips twice, then he grabbed her hand.

He rose up on the bed, pulling her with him to position her on her hands and knees. Maria lost herself in the moment. She became a slave to her swirling animal hunger; all she could think of was how good he would feel inside her. She wanted him to use and consume and dominate her, and she knew very soon she would get her wish.

Mounting her from behind, he plunged deep into her aching body and stopped. Maria gasped. The pleasure was more intense than anything she had ever felt. It radiated out from their union, up her spine and down her legs until the center of her whole being was in her pussy.

He began slowly, easing himself in and out; stopping and squeezing the base of his cock when he became too excited. Then he'd begin again, prolonging her delicious agony. He'd rub her anus with his thumb as he worked, tenderly playing with it to enhance her desire.

Maria let her torso collapse on the bed. She mumbled lover's words to him as he loved her, never wanting this to end. Forgotten was the world outside; the savage, deadly place the invaders now walked at will. All she felt was this ecstasy and joy; all that existed now was her and Nate.

He changed. Soon his thrusts grew more feverish and intense. His cock seemed to swell inside her. The pleasure within her became unbearable and Maria let go. The orgasm took her like no other ever had. It was pure white heat and it ground out of her body like a living thing trying to escape.

All she remembered from it was the ferocious sound of Nate crying out her name.

Chapter 8

When morning came, they packed what few items they'd need—food, water, and extra clothing—and set out to find Maria's sister.

Although she knew the streets would be deserted, the stark reality of it shocked her. Cars sat in the middle of the road, their doors open and keys still in the ignition. Each one was as quiet as the grave, the engines dead from drained batteries. Homes sat with open doors waiting an eerie vigil for their owners to return. Everywhere Maria looked there were discarded signs of everyday life. Paper trash floated in the breeze and the sidewalks were cluttered with abandoned clothes and suitcases. All of them were remnants of those poor souls who had not made it.

Shrugging off her despair, Maria focused her attention on Nate's broad back and the steady sound of his footsteps before her. She was jealous of him and his cool detachment to all the destruction around them. She desperately wanted to be like him—to let the fear melt away and replace it with an empty box that held nothing but hunger and rage. She wanted to live only on impulse and instinct, but as hard as she tried, she couldn't. Everything just hurt too much. She heard him stop suddenly and she looked up.

Off to their left was a large car dealership. Rows and rows of brightly colored cars lined the lot, their windshields announcing things like, *Sale* and *Low Miles!* Nate stalked between

the cars and disappeared into a forest of shiny metal and paint. Maria suddenly felt very alone, like a child who'd lost sight of her parents in a department store. She thought about following him, but then decided to just wait. Surely he wouldn't just leave her here. After all, he did claim to love her.

After what seemed like an eternity, she heard an engine roar to life deep within the dealership. Soon, Nate pulled out in a midnight blue mustang convertible. He pulled onto the street and revved the engine. The sound pierced the dead silence and made Maria cringe. *Men and their toys.*

He pulled up next to her and she got in.

Ignoring the power of the vehicle, Nate drove carefully down the streets avoiding all clutter and debris. Maria noticed the keys in the ignition. She was surprised he hadn't hot-wired it.

"How did you find this car?" she asked.

He glanced at her and followed her gaze to the ignition. He shifted the car into second gear and eased up on the clutch. "Most dealers have a flashy model ready for a test drive. This one was tanked up and sitting by the showroom floor." He shrugged. "It just seemed to be waiting for us."

She nodded and turned her attention back out the window. "I have a question for you," she said. "Since the answer doesn't matter anymore, I'd appreciate it if you'd answer honestly."

He downshifted and navigated around some abandoned cars. A muscle moved in his cheek. "Okay."

"How many people have you killed, really?"

Maria watched a sly grin curl his lips. He shook his head as if he'd just told a joke she didn't get. "Why would it matter now?"

She looked around the lifeless city and almost laughed out loud. She hadn't seen any animal life in days. Of course it didn't matter, nothing mattered anymore. Something inside her

shriveled up and hid. She should just let the question die without an answer, but felt the need to fill the silence.

“No,” she said after a long pause. “I guess it doesn’t matter very much after all.”

Chapter 9

They spent the night in a gun store huddled in a backroom. Maria snuggled close to Nate, jumping at every sound. She barely slept a wink all night. Nate however, slept like he'd been up for days. He even had the nerve to snore.

When daylight finally colored the small, dingy windows, she decided to get up and make them breakfast from whatever his backpack had to offer. She was pleasantly surprised to find crackers, hard cheese, and a stick of dried salami. Using his buck knife, she sliced off a few pieces of cheese and salami, spread them on a napkin placing a sleeve of crackers on the side. Next, she took his thermos and poured them both some water into Styrofoam cups.

Nate woke up and stretched, giving her a sleepy wink. She placed his breakfast before him and he smiled. He sat up and wolfed it down before she'd even taken her first bite.

She nibbled the corner of some salami and watched him scratch his unshaven face. "You must have been hungry," she said.

He grunted and took an electric shaver out of his backpack. "I'm trying to make the food last. We don't know when we'll have a chance to restock." Using touch as a guide, he clicked the razor on and shaved.

Maria watched him and nodded. He looked like he was always thinking and planning things out. Interestingly it had been

one of the things she'd hated most about him in prison. Now she was grateful for it.

She finished eating and carefully packed the rest of the food up. "Do you think we really have a chance against the Grays?" she asked.

Nate laid back and placed his hands behind his head. He looked so relaxed he could have been lounging on a couch at home. "Sure we do. They don't know any more about us than we do of them. They're bound to make a mistake that we can exploit. All we have to do is study them and look for weaknesses."

"Nate, why are you a criminal?" she asked after a few moments of silence. "You're a smart guy. I've seen your record. You even attended some college. Why choose a life of crime?"

At first, Maria thought he wasn't going to answer. Then he said, "I had a lot of demons, Maria. I used drugs, hung out with bad people, wanted easy money. I can't explain all the reasons why I did the things I did. Would I take them back if I could? No, I don't think I would."

"Why did you help me that day in the mess hall? Why did you save me from that inmate who wanted to kill me?"

"I told you, babe. I love you. I've loved you from the moment I saw you. There was no way I was going to let that bastard carve you up like a Halloween pumpkin. I did what I had to do."

"Even though you ended up in the SHU for it?" she asked.

"I knew what I was risking by killing that guy. But I also knew if I didn't take him out, he'd try again, and the next time, I might not be around to help you."

"I never said thank you for your help that day. So, thanks."

Nate studied her face. He reached out and pulled her down into a sweet loving kiss. "Surely, Maria," he said, "you can think of a dozen better ways to thank me than that."

Chapter 10

Maria ran her hand down the thick mat of his chest. Of the few men she'd known and loved in her life, none had ever made her feel like Nate did. Just touching him made the tight muscles in her neck soften. She leaned down and kissed him, gently biting his lower lips as she pulled back.

A faint whine filled the air, growing louder by the minute.

The fear came over Maria in a blinding wave. Ice froze her heart and her limbs felt like they'd been turned to lead. Nate grabbed her and dragged her into a nearby closet, pulling the door closed behind them.

The noise grew louder until Maria had to put her hands over her ears. She wanted to run so far and so fast, the Grays would never find her. Unfortunately, she knew they'd find her in minutes. Soon the whine stopped and everything was silent once again. Nate was as still as a statue behind her.

Staring out the small, tinted window, Nate eased his gun out of the shoulder holster. He placed the muzzle to the window and held it there, while he groped for her hand. Maria couldn't figure out what he wanted. She relaxed and let him place her trembling hand over the weapon.

"What are you doing?" she whispered.

"Helping you kill our enemy," he rumbled in her ear.

She wanted to stop him and tell him this wasn't a very good idea, but she remained silent. She was certain any Gray

wandering around looking for people wouldn't be alone and the gunfire would certainly bring more. Nate didn't seem concerned with any of that. He wrapped his massive hand over hers and made sure her finger was on the trigger.

A few moments later, a Gray emerged. He was tall and skinny with that horrible ash skin. Maria shuddered to think they might put their hands on her. Behind her, Nate was calm and calculating. He helped her keep her aim on the Gray's head, following the alien as he wandered around looking for a victim. The Gray turned toward the closet and Maria's breath froze in her chest. *He found us; he knows where we are!*

"Don't panic," Nate whispered in her ear. "He has no idea you have a big surprise waiting for him when he opens that door."

"But won't the gunfire bring others?"

"I hope it does. We'll have a big surprise for them too."

The door flung open and Maria stifled a scream. Nate squeezed her hand and she pulled the trigger. The shot exploded before her making her cringe. Without thinking, she pulled the trigger five times. When she opened her eyes, all she could see was green blood all over the floor.

Nate stepped around her and crouched by the dead alien. He looked up at her and smiled. "You sure shot the hell out of this poor bastard."

"Is that all it takes to kill them? I can't believe it. Why hasn't anyone finished them off yet?" The terror inside her was shrinking, melting like an ice cream on a summer day.

"Don't forget they transport fairly fast," Nate answered. "I think they get careless when they're hunting. Good news for us, because that's what's going to help us destroy them."

Maria nodded and swallowed. "I want to join the resistance, Nate, but first, we have to find my sister. Please."

Nate reached out and gently pulled the pistol out of Maria's hand. "All right, let's go find your sister."

Chapter 11

By the time they reached her sister's house, Maria had a lot of time to think. The shock of losing her old life was fading now and all that was left was a dull empty space in her soul. The fear however, that nagging constant companion, was gone.

Being with Nate had helped her a lot. His emotionless acceptance of the alien invasion was oddly comforting. Sometimes he was so cool it was like he'd expected something like this to happen. Nothing fazed him.

Maria sat in the car as Nate reloaded and watched her sister's house for signs of life. It looked quiet and empty. A cold shudder moved across her shoulders. *What will I find inside? If my sister is dead, I don't think I can take it.* She looked over at Nate but he was already exiting the car. She followed him out.

They stood side-by-side staring at the house. He handed her an automatic. She took it and licked her lips. Some birds chirped in a nearby tree making the day seem all the more normal.

"I'll go first," Maria said.

She advanced up the walk with Nate falling into step behind her.

Maria pushed the partially-opened door open and peered inside.

Nothing.

“Cassy?” she called. The silence that greeted her filled her with an icy dread. Swallowing it down, she searched the house room by room.

“Over here,” Nate called from the kitchen. Maria rushed in, her heart rising in her throat. *Please don’t be dead; please don’t be dead.*

There was a note on the fridge. It was Cassy’s writing.

Dear Maria,

I pray this note finds you safe. We are fine.

Gone to join the resistance. Hope to see you there.

Love,

Cassy

Maria looked up and sighed with relief. Nate was watching her, a slight grin on his lips. “Thank God,” she said in a voice so fragile it might break. “Thank God for that.”

Nate holstered his gun and leaned against the counter. “Now what?”

“Now?” she said, gazing out the kitchen window at the empty streets. “Now we go join the resistance.”

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rusty Wicks is a woman who likes to live on the edge. The edge of the beach, that is. She lives in a small cottage on a secluded stretch of sand in Maine, a place that she shares with her three cats, Moe, Larry and Curly, and two poodles, Rock and Roll. When she's not busy writing she can be found water skiing, sailing or beach combing. For Rusty, life is more about the journey than the destination.

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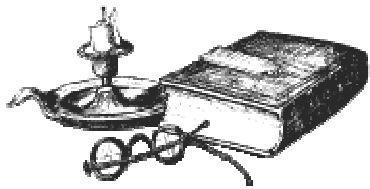
Michelle Houston has been writing erotica/erotic romance since 1995, and a member of The Erotic Readers & Writers Association since early 2002. Michelle has several stories published in multiple print anthologies, including *Heat Wave*, *Naughty Stories From A To Z vol. 3*, *Three-way, Naughty Spanking Stories From A To Z vol. 1*, *Down & Dirty vol. 2*, *The Merry XXXmas Book of Erotica*, *Naughty Stories From A To Z vol. 4*, and *Slave To Love*. With several erotic/erotic romance eBooks available, she has an infinite supply of ideas waiting to be penned. Find more info on Michelle and her writing at her personal website, The Erotic Pen <http://www.eroticpen.net>.

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