

Green Flash

Angela Caperton



According to legend, the green flash--an almost magical effect seen at certain sunsets--signifies the opening of the world beyond life. In Key West, where green flashes are sometimes seen, Claire Marion and her boyfriend, Ian, have come to the annual Fantasy Fest with very different agendas. Ian has body paint and three-way sex on his mind, but Claire is seeking something she cannot name.

Amidst the wild revelry of the fest, Claire meets one fascinating man and then another. Together the three of them will explore new worlds of pleasure and dark magic, illuminated by the green flash.

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By

Angela Caperton

Dedication

*To Drake: Thank you for the inspiration beyond
the light of day.*

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Pan's lips were full and firm, but overly moist, the teasing tip of his tongue tasting of beer. He bent Claire back, his arms around her waist and shoulders the only thing supporting her as he kissed her, playful and promising.

Her brain swam, dizzy as if her head whipped in fast, tight circles. She wrapped her arms around Pan's broad shoulders and embraced the moment—and the atmosphere.

Fuck Ian. He brought her here, he could deal with the consequences.

Her fingers tangled in the satyr's shaggy artificial hair as her tongue slid against his invitingly. Her fingers traced the hard resin ram horns that curled around his head, the points riding just below his ears.

“Excuse me?” Ian didn’t sound amused.

Pan righted her back onto her feet and pulled away, the grin on his face more mischief than lust. He nodded to Ian and winked at Claire.

“Welcome to Key West,” her kisser said with a grin, then turned and wended his way down Duval Street, his satyr’s horns glittering in the burnt orange sunset and the glare of the lights that lined the streets. The shaggy goat legs added a convincing touch to the elaborate costume.

“Who was that?” Ian asked, his voice lightly powdered with jealousy.

“Welcoming committee?” Claire offered, mischief in her smirk, before sitting back down and sipping her wine.

Ian blinked once, then laughed as he lifted his beer to take a long swig. “Sure...but where’s mine?” He grinned at her, the corners of his lips turning devilishly thin.

“I’m sure we could call him back.”

“Not what I meant, Claire, but if Billy there is part of the welcoming committee,

they should travel in pairs. Like, maybe with her, for example.” Ian pointed.

Full breasts gleamed under the thinnest sheen of body paint, midnight hair cascaded down her back, shimmering with flecks of gold and silver. Her lips matched the blood red roses that twined in her hair. But it was the lush canvas of her skin that captivated Claire. In grays and blacks, the young, firm body displayed the image of an angelic tomb marker, the detail exquisite, the writing so artfully painted it appeared chiseled into her flesh. “Fanta C. Fest,” Claire read before the woman turned away, her perfectly cleft ass bare save the paint. If the woman wore a thong, Claire couldn’t see it.

“Amazing,” Claire said in admiration, her words lost in the cacophony of music and conversation.

“This place is completely unchained, Claire. We’re going to have a blast,” Ian half-shouted to her as he slapped down his empty beer bottle and caught the arm of a passing waitress to order another round.

Claire stared at the chaos of Duval Street, the press of wild, exotic, completely chaotic humanity, and tried to visualize what it would look like in two more days, when Fantasy Fest hit its peak with the all day parade that had helped make the Key West, Florida annual celebration a decadent rival to New Orleans' Mardi Gras.

Music mixed and meshed in an intricate backdrop for the exuberant crowds. The outdoor café table Ian had chosen provided a first class view of the show, a perfect place to scout and assess. Everywhere Claire looked, she saw costumed and painted people. Most of the body paint was reserved for the hordes of topless women, the colorful designs often using their breasts as points of reference for artwork that touched on the year's theme of *Eros and Thanos* – Love and Death. Grim reapers cavorted with Cupids. Roses and lilies dotted skin, adorned hats, were woven into skimpy sashes and belts. The press of bodies became a focused pallet of black,

grey, white, red, red, red. Color and laughter and alcohol flowed endlessly into the streets of the tiny island, turning it into a frenzy of flesh, high spirits and abandon.

Ian grabbed Claire's hand and pointed at a man, his face painted white with sooty black circles surrounding his eyes. His face, arms and feet were all that could be seen outside the coffin that concealed his body. The costume of creatively crafted foam and veneer was light enough to carry around, the bottom cut away, allowing him room to walk, a drunkard in a casket.

Ian's snorted laughter grated on Claire. "See, honey, only here could you find a way to finally fuck one of your clients—legally, at least."

Her spine became an iron rod. She coolly stared at her boyfriend without concealing her irritation before she shook her hand free of his. "You never get tired of that, do you?"

Ian's gaze flicked from hers before she finished speaking, and she knew he'd not

heard a word as his eyes kindled with lust. "Holy fuck," he uttered.

Claire rose and spoke to Ian, not particularly caring if he heard her, or even listened. "I'm going to try and find the cemetery," she said. "I'll see you back at the room." Without waiting for a response, she turned, knowing if Ian had heard her destination, he'd protest and scowl. He hated her job, sexton for a historical cemetery, and he never missed an opportunity to remind her of his disapproval. She shook her head. Fuck him. He brought it up.

She pressed through the crowds in the street, brushed up against scantily clad women and men, enjoying the heat of the erotic energy that pulsed and grew in the island streets. A man dressed as an Egyptian, his face and hands painted green, complete with a false beard and a glittering golden flail and crook tucked into his gold cloth belt, stroked Claire's ass, his fingers reaching under so that he

almost brushed her pussy. Her irritation at Ian vanished with the probing familiarity.

“Nice hands there, Osiris,” she purred as the god of the underworld added a slap to her rump as she walked away from him, weaving her way through the revelry. She turned with the crowds, slid into undulating pockets of open space, and tried to stay focused on the direction she wanted to go. The music waved, pulsed through her, and vibrated, mingling with shouts, laughter and screamed words in conversations that made no sense. She drew breath in small gulps. The metallic mix of body odors laced with tanning oil and the tang of spilled alcohol fought against the oxygen in her air. She lost sight of the cafe where Ian sat, couldn’t even find any familiar landmarks above or through the living sea of humanity and vehicles, but with one final aggressive push, she exited the press and found herself on a side street where she could stand without the flood washing her away.

“Crazy, isn’t it?”

Turning to the voice, Claire looked into the grinning face of a mature man with trim, dark hair, fine lines creasing his eyes and around his mouth, the sure evidence of laughter. The setting sun turned the walls of the buildings behind him blood red and framed him in an aura of warm crimson. Claire's moment of wariness eased. The man didn't look at her, but watched the flow of the crowd on the sidewalks and in the crosswalk. His arms were crossed across his chest, his feet apart as if braced against any potential amoebic engulfment from the throng.

"I think *crazy* left the island about three hours ago," Claire said with a smile. "But I have to admit, there's an overwhelming freedom to it all. It's almost contagious."

"Almost? This isn't your taste?" His voice hinted at humor, but also possibility.

"No, not exactly. Well, maybe. Sort of?" Claire dropped her chin to her chest, her long red bangs concealing her embarrassment as she ended the babbling with a sad chuckle.

The laughter came from his belly, and with his broad shoulders still shaking, he unfolded his right hand and extended it toward her. "Dwight Fagan."

Claire peeked up through her hair and saw him looking at her for the first time. She shoved her hair back from her eyes and took the hand. "Claire Morian."

He shook her hand and released it casually. "Well, if this isn't exactly your speed," he looked at her and winked, "sort of—it's time for dinner, I'm starving and I came up this way to get some of the best damn conch chowder in Key West." He half-turned, his feet still planted and pointed at a sleepy doorway half a block away. Bright neon blinked unsteadily from a sign above the door, *Duskwind's*. "Care to join me?"

Claire's stomach tightened, a nearly forgotten sensation. This trip had been Ian's plan to help Claire recapture excitement, to embrace her sensuality and explore different possibilities. She grinned at Dwight. "Sure," she said. "Why not?"

“You’re kidding me,” Dwight said as he lifted his beer to his lips.

“No, I’m serious.”

“*Dead* serious?” Dwight grinned at her, two playful dimples pitting his cheeks.

Claire rolled her eyes and let her torso go boneless as she flopped back against the humidity sticky vinyl seat of the booth. Her irritation quickly turned into laughter as she saw only humor in Dwight’s grin—no mild disgust, no judgment hidden in the bloodless poke.

The low light inside Duskwind’s bar hid sins Claire didn’t want to contemplate, but the door opened often, letting revelers, local patrons, and once a uniformed policeman pass into what could only be defined as a dive.

One of the shapes that came in from the street lingered near their table. “This is not what I expected to find in Duskwind’s.” The voice caressed Claire’s spine, massaged her sides, slid over her nipples like dark chocolate on a tongue.

She saw the outline of broad shoulders and a narrow waist against the flicker of cheap votives dotting the bar across the room. The man was tall, his face in shadow.

“Ashton, damn your timing,” Dwight said as he slid over, making room on the booth seat across from Claire.

The man eased into the booth, the red glass of the votive holder casting luxurious shadows upon his face, giving his eyes jewel intensity.

“Claire, this is Ashton Kessell—my boss. Ash, Claire Morian,” Dwight said as he settled into the corner of the seat and pulled a long draught from his beer.

Claire smiled and studied Ashton. A well-dressed, virile forty, if Claire had to guess, with an angular beauty that drew her eyes to his high cheekbones and strong but narrow chin. Eyes of dark amber studied her intensely. Defined lips accented by a mild pout made Claire wonder what it would be like to kiss him, or to feel those lips tight on her nipples.

“Claire,” he said, the tenor more intoxicating than her wine, “a pleasure to meet you.”

She smiled—and successfully squashed the simper that bubbled just below the surface of her response. “You actually employ Dwight?” she managed without a heated pant.

Ashton laughed as he waved the waitress over. “Hard to believe, but he’s invaluable to me,” Ashton said before turning his warm gaze to the waitress, reaching for her hand with easy familiarity.

“Rita, the usual,” Ashton said as he kissed the waitress’ open palm. With a girlish giggle that fired shots of surprised jealousy through Claire, the waitress disappeared into the belly of the bar. When Ashton turned back to Claire, his appraisal kicked her pulse into overdrive.

“Are you here to enjoy Fantasy Fest?” he asked, the deep cadence of his speech exotic, his accent edged yet airy, and impossible for her to place.

“What I’ve seen has definitely left an impression. It’s pretty wild, and I know the real excitement is still days away.” Claire took her wine and sipped it, hoping the alcohol would unknot her stomach. “I’m here with my boyfriend.” She mourned the mention of Ian even as she tucked the truth of the telling neatly into place.

Ashton glanced around, subtle but playful. “Is he hiding under a table?”

Claire gave a sardonic chuckle. “If he’s being true to his declared intentions for this vacation, he’s probably getting his cock sucked by some chick in body paint.”

Dwight’s swig of beer spewed across the table before his fullthroated hoot of laughter rocked the booth. “Damn, Claire!”

“And what about you?” Ashton asked, his gaze steady on Claire. “What are your intentions?”

The waitress brought a wine glass, the liquid inside almost black in the flickering red tinted candlelight, and set it in front of Ashton before turning and strolling away, the swing in her hips an open invitation.

“Oh, I’m going to the cemetery,” she said with a grin, watching for Ashton’s reaction. “If not tonight, then tomorrow evening. After that, anything’s possible.”

Ashton didn’t move, didn’t speak, and his dark eyes grew bright with a black fire that shivered Claire’s skin pleasantly.

Dwight chuckled and shook his head. “She was just telling me, she’s a sexton up in Bonely.”

Ashton’s smile spread like warm honey. “So is your fascination with our cemetery purely professional, or is there something you’re not telling us?” he queried, the tone light but probing.

“There is some professional curiosity, I’ll admit. The cemetery here has a long history, like mine in Bonely.” Claire turned her wineglass in tense circles, her body suddenly stiff, waiting for the first vibrations of disapproval and disgust to flow from the men.

“But it’s more than that?” Ashton asked calmly.

Claire brushed her hair from her face, uselessly tucking the ends of her long bangs back only to have them fall again across her forehead. "It is." She took a sip of her wine, the liquid failing to cure the dryness of her throat. "I respect the dead, and find an odd joy among them that I don't find elsewhere." She shook her head. "I can't believe I'm telling you two this."

"You're not afraid of death?" Dwight asked, filling the soundless void.

Claire shook her head. "No, not really. I'm not keen on the idea of...ending, and I am not a big fan of serious pain, but the idea of death doesn't bother me."

"Why?" Ashton's quiet question brushed her ear like a kiss.

She thought a moment, turning her wineglass again. "Death is the ultimate problem solver, the most just equalizer. Death is the beginning of the next adventure."

"Not many would agree," Ashton said before sipping from his glass. "There's room for debate."

“Absolutely. My attitudes toward death and the dead are mine, but I’m always willing to hear other opinions. Most people aren’t comfortable talking about death.”

Ashton smiled. “I’m not most people.”

Claire watched him, her heart jolted by desire, her blood racing. She smiled, genuine and full, and settled against the padded back of the booth. “No, you certainly aren’t.”

He set the glass down and reached out one long elegant finger to trace the back of her hand. His touch was feather-soft, the pad of his finger resting on her wrist for a timeless moment before he closed his hand over hers, the gesture oddly dominant, and completely charming.

Claire’s pussy slicked.

“There is an obscure legend I know, and one I think you will appreciate. Upon the death of a man or woman who had been touched by the gods, these blessed—”

“Or cursed,” Dwight injected.

“—or cursed, individuals were taken to the sea, and there were submerged to await

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their ultimate fate. To the west, the families would stare at sunset, waiting. As the last of the sun dipped below the horizon, if a green flash of light was seen, the families rejoiced, knowing their loved one had been found worthy beyond measure and the door to the next world had been opened to them. If nothing was seen but the dying red of the sun, they consigned their loved one's fate to the mercies of the underworld." Ashton's smile lit the aristocratic angles of his face.

Claire released her breath slowly, the sound of Ashton's words still stroking her nerves. When she found her voice, she spoke softly, as if afraid to break the spell. "I know about the green flash," she said. "It's a light refraction phenomenon at sunset. It's seen all along the west coast of Florida and especially down here in the Keys. I've never heard that story though."

"Perhaps while you are here, you will see the flash yourself and catch a glimpse of your next adventure." He lifted Claire's

hand to his lips and pressed a kiss to the peak of her middle knuckle.

Blood pulsed in her fingertips, her toes, pooled and rushed back through her body to burn her cheeks, constrict her lungs, and throb in her nipples.

Ashton stood, never releasing Claire's hand. Standing next to the table, he turned her hand over and kissed the pulse of her wrist, his teeth, gently possessive, raking the delicate skin and bolting arousal directly to her sex.

"I look forward to our next meeting, Claire Morian. Enjoy Key West, and the festival."

He walked away from the table and out into the night, swallowed by the painted crowd.

Pleasure flowed around her nipples and soft hands stroked down her sides, over her stomach, teased at the edge of the trim triangle of red curls that crowned her pussy. Claire's hips arched against the hand, her mind swimming with wine, her

body pleasantly exhausted. Visions of Ashton, of his lean body bare against hers, his cock, hard, veined and perfectly crowned driving into her, filling her, claiming her, spun in her dreams like silk.

And Dwight, impish grin on his face, offering the glistening bead of his desire to her lips, the purple head sliding easily into her mouth, feeding her the salty promise of his release. Claire moaned her way from sleep, her hand automatically seeking the head attached to her nipple. She arched into the soft bite and tangled her fingers in his hair.

He slid his fingers through the curls, teasing her clit, entering the already wet folds and followed the path to the gate.

A cool breeze blew over her wet nipple as he pulled away. "Fuck, Claire, you missed me?"

Ian's voice, coated by ego and good humor, jolted Claire from her dreams. Her eyes opened, the damp grey of the hotel room startling her for only a moment, the

harsh glow from the bathroom the only source of light.

“Ian? What time is it?” Claire rasped, her shock and stab of guilt quickly lost under Ian’s talented fingers, his thumb sliding along the edge of her clit, his middle finger teasing the entrance, slipping inside her to only the first knuckle, baiting another moan from her.

“Does it matter?” Ian kissed her nipple again. “I got something for you,” he whispered against her stomach, his finger inching its way deeper and deeper into her with each slow thrust.

Claire closed her eyes again and gave herself over to pleasure. Ian knew her body, knew how to bring her to delicious climax, and his attention to her clit and pussy would have her coming in no time. Then he’d fuck her, or she’d ride him, and she’d come again and so would he.

“Mmm...a present?” Claire pushed against Ian’s hand.

“Yes,” he said, biting lightly at her mons as he sat up between her spread legs. With

a light slap on her hip, he closed his hands around her waist to help her roll over.

Claire grinned and purred into the pillows. She loved it when he fucked her from behind. She rose on her knees, leaving her chest and shoulders braced by stacks of pillows. Ian's hands ran like warm satin over her skin, tracing along the sides of her breasts, gripping her hips and her ass, sliding his thumbs along the valley of the cleft, teasing her anus.

"Close your eyes and relax, Claire," Ian whispered into the room.

For the first time Claire noticed the roar of the sea. The air that brushed her hot skin tasted of salt and was weighted by humidity. The window to the balcony of their hotel room was wide open, the beach and rhythmic sea three floors down and thirty seconds away. The tangled harmonies of distant music from the endless party floated to her on the breeze. A high, sharp laugh, the song of drunken revelry, reached her from the sand below.

Open, to all the world, to any adventure.

Ian's hand continued to stroke over her ass, sliding down to tease her pussy. When *would* he put his cock in her? Warm and testing, Ian's thumb played with her anus—not only played, but coated it with something slick and sensual. Claire's ass tingled, her pussy clenched, and her heart raced. "Ian..."

"Shh... Keep your eyes closed and relax."

Claire held her breath, afraid the sensation would stop, would degrade or morph into something terrible. She savored her anticipation, tasted the tang of expectation and the mild bitterness of fear.

The pressure against her anus didn't surprise her at first. Ian sometimes ventured a fingertip into her ass when he fucked her from behind, and she'd liked it, but never expected more. Slippery, hard and invasive, the pressure grew, spread, filled.

"Relax, Claire," Ian repeated.

She released her breath and the pressure grew again. She relaxed her sphincter to allow the intrusion. Pulses of sensation

flooded her core as a slick, cool object slid into her ass, then retreated slowly, achingly, and then pushed forward again, slow, a little further.

Claire groaned loudly, her pussy near dripping with pleasure.

His triumphant chuckle met her groan. "You like that, you dirty little cunt? You like your ass filled?"

Claire's legs trembled. She did. By God, she did.

"A little shop off Duval had a Fest special on these little babies. Tempered glass butt plug," he said.

Her anus stretched further with the slightly wider end, then seemed to snap shut around the tapered neck. The cool flair base bridged the small distance between her ass cheeks.

"God, baby, you look so fucking hot with that in your ass. How's it feel?"

Claire tried to speak, the words nothing but air. She cleared her throat and muffled into the mattress. "Good. Very good."

“Yeah, that’s what they said.” He pulled her hips to him, his cock a bat against her thigh.

Every movement sent rivulets of sensation streaming through her, her ass suddenly the center of the universe. Ian rubbed the head of his cock along the weeping folds of her pussy before aiming and pushing into her. Pleasure blasted through her, the hard glass butt plug a rigid counter to Ian’s thick cock.

“Fuck!” Ian howled, his fingers digging into Claire’s hips. “Fuck that does feel good!”

His rhythm faltered, his thrusts into her shallow, but the glorious friction of his cock head rubbing through the thin flesh that separated it from the hardness of the butt plug obliterated her senses.

She panted, and cried out, unconcerned about the world beyond the open window. The orgasm ripped her to shreds, baring her soul and shattering her.

She hardly heard Ian’s cry when he came, barely felt him collapse on top of her.

The glass instrument still hard inside her bottom, and Ian's softening cock slipping out of her were only incidental to what she saw against her eyelids, illuminating the darkness, a warm and magical fantasy.

Ashton, smiling.

"Don't forget, Ian. I'm going to the cemetery late this afternoon." Claire said quietly, then sipped her orange juice.

Ian's gaze remained focused on the beach just beyond the tiled terrace of their hotel's luxurious restaurant.

"Ian?"

"Yeah, got it," he said irritably, then his face lit up and his voice raised with excitement. "What about her, Claire?" Ian pointed to another curvy, bouncing beach babe walking along the ribbon of white sand.

"She's lovely, Ian. Do you think they're real?" Claire smoothed apricot jam on a warm hunk of grilled Cuban bread.

Ian leaned close, his arms crossed on the edge of the table and pressed his lips to her

ear. "I'll get her to join us," he whispered, the tip of his tongue flicking against her lobe. "Live a little, Claire."

Her knife clattered against the bread plate as she stiffened. "What's that supposed to mean, Ian?"

He jerked back like a petulant child. "What do you think it means?" He pushed his plate away, the half-eaten omelet and home fries glistening in the relentless morning sun.

Her shoulders relaxed a little. "Ian, I'm sorry. That wasn't fair." She took a bite of the warm bread, but the delicious treat she'd been looking forward to devouring now tasted like ashes on her tongue. Silence wrapped around them while she chewed.

"Ian, it's not that I'm not interested in a ménage, but it has to be right." She covered his other hand with hers and felt him tense, then relax under her stroking fingers. He looked back at her, his consternation fading as he grinned like a boy.

“What makes it right? Brunette? Redhead? Maybe smaller tits?”

She closed her eyes and shook her head, forcing a smile for him. “I don’t know, Ian. Maybe a world class dong will make it right.” She opened her eyes and savored the stunned expression on his face. Her smile turned genuine, her giggle blooming into laughter. “What? I thought you liked sharing me with your little glass friend last night. Shocked?”

“Well, no, but I was thinking we could try it my way first,” Ian said after a mock sniff and a wan smile.

Her belly tightened, but she didn’t look away from him, her gaze direct and open. “Ian, when I’m ready, I’ll know it, and it won’t be just about sex.”

He gave a half-nod and turned his attention back to the beach, his head tracking the path of a tall, sleek woman with skin the color of bronze and a fall of shining black hair.

Claire returned to her toast. It tasted pretty good after all.

She leaned against Ian's back as he piloted a jet ski along the coves and beaches, but as much as Claire loved the speed, the heat, and the diamond reflections of the sun, her mind churned in directions she continually had to shove away. What was Ashton doing at this minute? Was Dwight laughing with some other tourist, or doing...whatever it was he did for Ashton? She shivered and closed her eyes as she pressed her nose into Ian's shoulder to try and suppress the shiver of anticipation rising in her.

Returning to their hotel hot, salty, and exhilarated, Claire stripped off her bikini and headed for the shower, calling over her shoulder as she turned on the blast of hot water. "We've dinner reservations at eight-thirty." She stepped under the stream and began to rinse the sea from her skin, lathering her hair.

"Change them. We'll be late to the La Petit Mort paint party at Henry's Bar," Ian

remarked as he stepped out of his surfer shorts.

Claire froze in mid-rinse and gave Ian a glittering stare. “The party doesn’t start until ten. That’s plenty of time.”

Ian grinned. “Not if you’re getting painted, darlin’,” he cooed as he leaned against the doorjamb, legs and arms lazily crossed, his cock standing at attention.

“No, Ian,” Claire said before dunking her head back under the beating stream and angrily sluicing water through her hair. “Besides, I told you, I am going to the cemetery. I won’t be back until it’s time to leave for dinner.”

“Jesus Christ, Claire! This is a once in a lifetime opportunity, baby. Can’t you fucking leave off with the dead shit for a few days?” Ian’s voice ground stone.

Claire snorted, water spraying from her lips as she closed her eyes and rinsed her face. “Ian, what’s the theme this year— Eros and Thanos? And you’re right, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to see the Santa Teresa statue at sunset. I will be back

in time for dinner—not in time to be covered in color and paraded in front of a howling crowd.”

“Fuck!” Ian roared, his fist slamming against the jamb. He stalked out of the bathroom, and as Claire shut the water off, she heard the door of their room slam shut.

She knelt carefully, her camera steady in her hand, and focused on the aged marble headstone, the shadow from the angel beside it perfectly imaged on the veined marker. She snapped the photo and then began to walk toward Santa Teresa. Claire found the saint, her ecstatic face unmarred by lichen or dirt, the stone as white as eggshells, the chiseled perfection of the folds in her robes enough to squeeze Claire’s heart with its beauty. The statue had stood for eighty years, survived hurricanes, vandalism and neglect, and except for a slight tilt due to shifting ground, she looked almost untouched by time.

“They say she guards the dead from the living. Don’t know how true that is, but it’s a nice thought.”

She turned, recognizing the humor-tinged voice, and was not surprised to see Dwight. She had hoped he might be here. Him and Ashton.

“It’s pretty amazing, isn’t it?” Dwight said.

Her smile bloomed. “It really is. We have an angel in Bonely that is a little older than this, but an oak limb came down during a storm and took out one of its wings. After they cleaned her up and repaired the wing, I thought I would never see anything so beautiful. I was wrong.”

Claire reached out to touch the base of the statue, her fingers caressing the marble. She thought about what he had said. “The dead need all the help they can get.” She stood, facing the statue and looked over her shoulder at him. His eyes glowed ocean blue in the fading light. “It’s not like they can fight back.”

Dwight chuckled. "I wouldn't say that. Don't you believe in ghosts?"

"I'm a sexton. It's part of our job description to believe in ghosts. Alone in a cemetery, I think everyone does."

He smiled. "You don't get scared?"

Claire shook her head. "No, not really. I think ghosts are the dream images of those who have gone on to the next adventure. People who can't let go of the past."

Smooth as silk, confident as summer, his arms slid around her waist, the heat of his body pressing against her back, his iron strength not hostile or intimidating, but honest and true. His body formed so naturally to hers for a dizzying moment Claire wondered how she'd survived so long without this.

His lips touched the curve of her ear, the sensation a tremor that drifted toward her center. He exerted just a touch of pressure, an ounce of persuasion. His words floated through her ears into her blood. "Look," he said, and with a trail of fingers down her arm and away from it, he positioned and

pointed west. “Watch as the sun falls. Watch Teresa,” he murmured. The masculine musk of him filled her, churned long forgotten impulses. The hard bulge between his legs should have shocked, should have frightened her, but only wonder and an open, natural lust bloomed inside her.

The western horizon blazed with colors—the intense oranges and reds of the falling sun beyond the capture of any art, the line of deep purple clouds that hovered over an unseen sea blazing along the edges with white-hot sunset fire. She held her breath, her eyes locked on the brilliance beyond the headstones and monuments. Claire saw Saint Teresa’s sublime face bathed in the dying sunlight. Slowly, as if by a languid pour of magic, light danced around the statue, glimmering and winking gold and silver, ruby red and citrine. Claire pressed Dwight’s arm against her stomach, amazed, enchanted and somewhere deep within her, knowing. She felt Dwight’s smile, and as the glamour

died with the fallen sun, she heard the voice she expected, that she wanted with all her heart, Ashton's voice.

"They say the marble holds small particles that make the light dance, but I think it is magic, fire from the souls that are freed into the night." Somehow, he had appeared before her, though she had not seen or heard him approach.

She smiled at him, completely comfortable in Dwight's arms, at perfect peace in the moment, desire for both men like a dangerous fire burning within her.

Dwight released her and let her step toward Ashton, while Saint Teresa stared at heaven, lost in her own ecstasy and oblivious to all of them.

Ashton smiled easily at Dwight, then focused on Claire. With one hand, he traced his fingers under her chin and took her right hand in the other, lifting it to his lips. His kiss flashed erotic lightning up her arm to spread across her body—her nipples tightened, her pussy slicked, the

nape of her neck tingled and her toes curled against the padding of her sandals.

He slid his hand into the crook of her arm, lightly placing his hand over hers, one finger stroking erotically, each caress a pebble of sensation that rippled through her.

They walked together among the graves, Dwight a few steps behind them.

“When the Spaniards discovered Florida, they didn’t understand they had found a new world,” Ashton said, his voice caressed her as they walked. The fading twilight painted the rising stones, humble and elaborate, gray to black, the harsh light of the streetlights almost obscene against the serenity of the cemetery.

Claire smiled and leaned into Ashton. She said, “And they found in this land, just like back home, that death will not be denied.”

“Very true,” Ashton agreed, “but perhaps here, in this strange new world, death presented them with something unexpected.”

Claire rested her head against his arm, the shadow of a hulking mausoleum black against the growing night.

“Ah,” Ashton said as he stopped, his head cocked to the south. He turned, facing that direction, pulling Claire in front of him just as Dwight had held her only moments before. “Listen,” he whispered in her ear. “Close your eyes and stretch beyond the traffic and the distant music of the Fest. Do you hear it? Do you hear the ocean?”

His body fit hers, the cool skin of his hands electric on her arms. She obeyed him and filtered out the pedestrian noises, let her senses dance along the limbs of trees and the shimmers of otherness that surrounded her. Ashton’s hands slid up her ribs to cup her breasts, the pressure as delicate as his breath on her neck and shoulder. Beyond the gates of the cemetery, beyond the walls of buildings, the brick streets and the hiss of congestion, she heard it, a sound so very much like the joyful laughter of an ethereal crowd.

The lightest press of his teeth against her earlobe shot pleasure through her body. "The ocean is vast, Claire." His words whispered in her blood. "It is difficult to find one's way across it alone."

She didn't know when he'd unbuttoned her blouse, or unhooked the front clasp of her bra, but shivered as his lips played at her nipple, his tongue worshipping the tip. She arched into Ashton's mouth, the edges of an orgasm just beyond the haze of breath.

His hands explored, cupping her pussy through her shorts, pressing, promising as his mouth assaulted her breasts. On her left, Dwight took her hand and brought it to his mouth, kissing each fingertip, flicking his tongue at the racing pulse at her wrist. She bit her lip, fighting against the need to cry out. The marble against her back vibrated with presence. The looming monuments to the dead, their outlines almost obliterated by the dark, pressed against her need for release.

A trembling in her belly grew as Ashton's skilled attentions to her breasts brought her closer to peak, his hand now inside her panties, stroking the wet lips of her sex, his fingers finding her clit and owning it with each masterful stroke.

Dwight cupped her free breast and bent his head, kissing the nipple, cloud soft. The overwhelming sensation of both men's attentions exploded inside Claire with the force of the sun. The wave of ecstasy rolled through her like a tidal wave, the crash of the climax shattering. She came—hard, brazen, her body bucking against Ashton's hand, her back arched into the mouths of both men, her teeth clamping into her lip in a failed attempt to stifle her cry.

Ashton folded her into his chest, his arms around her like a vise. She held him with one arm, weak, her other hand wrapped around Dwight's head, his lips pressing kisses into her ribs and side.

"I..." she started, dazed, then licked the blood from her lip. "I need to...go."

Ashton pulled away.

In the new night, she couldn't see his face, but knew he looked at her with intense eyes, knew he smelled her regret.

He cupped her face as Dwight rose and stepped back. "We'll be at Duskwind's," Ashton whispered against her lips before he claimed her kiss, devouring her.

She tasted her blood on his tongue, tasted his lust, drowned under the ferocity of it, and savored his desire. Her head spun with the want to give herself to him completely. His tongue ravished her mouth and she wanted more, needed more, eager to feed his hunger and to feast.

He pulled away with a feral growl, but then claimed her again, closing his arm around her, implacable. The moment stretched for a silken eternity, then his muscles eased. She closed her eyes, breathed deep, and drew from him a calming strength and a visceral balance she had never imagined. Claire turned, confident that she would see them again soon, and without another word, another

glance or motion, she walked a path of total clarity out of the cemetery.

She was late for a dinner she had no desire to eat.

From six blocks away the music, laughter and drunken revelry of Fantasy Fest followed Claire into the hotel lobby as she envisioned every possible conversation she could have with Ian. In the elevator, she tamped down her desire for a fight. She knew her relationship with Ian was over, and perhaps a liberating *fuck you* might be just the ticket, but fairness and practicality weighed against it. For the most part, Ian had been good to her and he deserved more than spiteful drama. He and his family had strong political and societal connections in Bonely, Jacksonville, and even as far away as Atlanta. Claire would wait until they were home, and then find a dignified way to end it. Ian deserved a companion more suited to his own temperament, and Claire

realized for the first time in her life that she deserved a partner who understood her.

She slid her card key into the lock and stepped into the dim light of their hotel room, her stomach in knots as she braced for Ian's anger. "Ian, I'm so sorry..." her words died on her lips. Dozens of candles burned on the small desk and the nightstands that bracketed the bed. Gilded in flickering light, over-round and full breasts glistened with saliva. Hair the color of summer wheat shone in a pile of looping curls atop a smooth, elfish face, and blood red lips smiled sheepishly as the young woman settled over Ian's hips, his hands gripping her waist as she straddled him.

"Claire, there you are. I was getting worried." Ian grinned, his fingers caressing the blonde's waist. "I told you I'd bring her to you. Ready to make this a real Fantasy Fest?"

Claire blinked twice as emotions clawed their way through her, fighting for the king-hill position in her reaction. She snorted a laugh, shook her head and

approached the bed. Blondie didn't move, her eyes suddenly wide.

Claire looked down at Ian, her smile spreading quickly. The *fuck you* now had merit, but instead, Claire turned to Blondie, stroking the young woman's cheek, marveling at the warmth of her skin, the smooth, taut surface that the young couldn't properly appreciate. She cradled the girl's chin in her fingers, and turned Blondie to her. Light as a feather, Claire pressed her lips to the unreal red of the blonde's, her tongue lightly flicking. Claire pulled away and smiled at Blondie, stroking her cheek once more before she turned her gaze on Ian. "Be happy, Ian." She said, then walked back out the door.

Outside the hotel, the images of death and love engulfed her. She wove her way through the crowds along Duval Street, the energy of the fest infusing her with power as she danced, drank, and flirted with men and women, all of them animated with the magic of the festival, all of them alive in the surreal craziness of the night.

As she entered Duskwind's, she saw Dwight in the booth they'd shared the day before, a short glass of whisky in his hand and a glass of wine waiting for her. She slid into the booth and smiled at him, even as the ache of her situation turned her eyes to mist.

Dwight covered her hand with his. "I'll take you to Ashton's. He's got a place on Red Sky Key just a little south of here. You okay, Claire?"

She closed her eyes and nodded. It wasn't so much regret or loss that trembled inside her, but a sense of overwhelming, guilt-ridden relief. "Yes, I'll be fine. I'm...just not used to having to really search for sorrow. It seems wrong to be okay with this."

Dwight smiled and stroked her hand with his thick-calloused fingers. "He wasn't right for you, Claire. You knew that before you walked in the room."

Claire looked at him. "How do you know?"

“I know because I saw your face as the sun set on Santa Teresa. Ashton knows because he saw your ecstasy.”

Claire looked down and nodded. She took the wine and sipped, savoring the crisp sweetness of the Riesling. He was right. It didn't matter how he knew or why. The wine heated her blood and she felt a sense of freedom and possibility. Silently she said a quiet goodbye to Ian and gave a warm greeting to the new life ahead of her.

Dwight had shown her to a bedroom and kissed her goodnight. She slept till nearly noon, dreamlessly and restfully, and Dwight woke her with another sweet kiss. He had left her after her late breakfast, pledging he'd bring her things back from the hotel, a promise he kept by mid-afternoon. She didn't have time to ask Dwight if he had seen Ian before Dwight departed again, telling her he would return before evening.

Claire had not seen Ashton when Dwight brought her to the house on Red Sky Key, and the only evidence that Ashton had even graced the premises was a note left for her to find in the morning, on the black marble-topped island in the massive kitchen.

My home is yours. After sunset, together we will hold the night.

Ashton

Throughout the day, she read the words over and over, shivers of anticipation coursing through her each time she unfolded the paper and read his elegant scroll. She watched the clock, and watched the sun, waiting for the night, waiting for Ashton, and, too, she realized, for Dwight's return.

The house settled around her and the sun slid down the dome of an endless blue sky. As the afternoon turned to evening, Claire stepped outside, unable to listen another moment to the tick of the clock.

She'd dressed in clothing she found, a decadent, ivory silk robe that brushed her skin like a thousand tiny clouds. She walked barefoot along the paths of Ashton's extensive gardens, her heart aching at the vivid colors and heady scents of hibiscus and irises, oleanders and lilies. Magnolia trees, heavy with deep red seeds, shaded the path closer to the ocean. The salty air and soft, cool kiss of the sea breeze eased her.

They would come when it was time, Claire knew. And she'd be ready.

She walked onto the white beach that stretched into water as blue as heaven, the sand still warm from the day's sun. The endless song of the sea played for her. Little, lapping waves caressed the shore in easy comfort. She looked up and down the narrow beach, but only gulls and a pair of bobbing pelicans joined her. She saw no other homes, nor piers to mar the landscape, only white sand, pristine water and the sliced orb of the sun, already touching the Gulf of Mexico. No clouds

cluttered the horizon and Claire folded her arms across her chest and stared at the falling sun, the crimson truth of it, and the golden shimmer of its fading light upon the mystery of the ocean.

She didn't hear Dwight behind her, but felt his presence a moment before his arms slipped around her, his fingers igniting her blood through the thin silk of the robe, and the sheath of her skin suddenly itching with desire. She leaned back into him and exhaled, overwhelmed with the rightness of the moment. "It aches to see such beauty," she whispered as if her voice might shatter the vision.

"It should. Such sights are priceless and fleeting." He kissed her hair above her ear as his hands slowly stroked her hips through the robe, a tender kneading that pulled at her blood began the slow pooling in her belly and nipples.

His lips trailed along the back of her neck as he loosed the robe's wispy tie. The ocean breeze caught the edge of silk and did the work for him, pulling the robe

away from her body, exposing her to the blazing sun and the captive sea. His hands slid over her belly, his strong fingers webbing across the skin in a caress that pressed against her heart, a longing and desire that spanned time and place. His teeth found her shoulder, the rake of them releasing heat all through her. He cupped her left breast, his thumb tracing the lower hemisphere of her nipple, worshiping the flesh with rough pressure.

She pressed back, the hard rod of his cock against her ass both thrilling and humbling. Her mind whirled. Arousal surged within her, longing for Dwight to slip that cock out of his pants and plunge it into her, but she knew, it was more than the two of them. Somewhere, Ashton waited.

Waited, and Claire knew, watched. She turned in Dwight's embrace and wrapped her arms around his neck, her body tight and ready against his, her gaze open to him, knowing, feeling, that what they shared, so would Ashton.

This was her time, her place. She would have them both. She trailed a finger down Dwight's cheek, his gaze filled with unfathomable lust, but she saw, too, a depthless control.

Her lips met his in a kiss as hot as a newborn star, vibrant and alive with desire. He lifted her up, his lips constant, never leaving hers, and carried her the short distance onto the beach.

Dwight let her feet down, his kiss growing in intensity, one hand sliding down between them to stroke the edges of the curls above her pussy, his index finger teasing her clit. She pressed against him, wanting more, hungry to feel him inside her, her senses stretching beyond the sand to touch fevered passion.

He pulled away, his hands cupping her face. "Are you sure, Claire?" he asked, his body pulsing, his cock a rock of intention against her belly. "This isn't just now, you know that."

She gripped his wrists, looked into his eyes. He spoke from a place she

instinctively understood. Lust coursed in her blood, but she spoke with clarity and certainty. "Yes, Dwight. For you. For both of you."

His lips plundered, ravaging her mouth, and Claire found her own tongue as demanding as his. She pulled viciously at the button of his khaki shorts, her hands hungry for him.

He found her breast with his teeth, the sharp possession flashing lust through her, her pussy reacting in a fall of wetness. She ground her hips against his, thrilling at the roughness that brushed her belly and thighs.

He lowered her to the sand, the setting sun turning his hair to fire as he kissed his way to her pussy, his tongue exploiting her clit until she writhed, the waves of mounting pleasure building inside her. She gripped at the sand, the damp grains sliding between her fingers like time through endless space. As she hovered on the edge of orgasm, he pulled away and Claire cried out in protest, the chasm

between their flesh criminal. The drowning sun across the Gulf turned his grin a devilish red.

“Hungry?” he growled.

“Ravenous,” she grinned, stroking up her body.

“Then you shall feast,” he said with more seriousness than Claire expected.

Firm hands gripped her hips and forced her onto her belly, onto her knees. She braced her arms, hands in the sand. She stared out across the ocean to the sun, burnt orange, sliced to a meager quarter of its full glory, the glittering golden ocean a defined line beneath its falling.

Dwight gripped her hips and pulled her back against him, rubbing his cock the wet length of her pussy, the engorged head bumping her clit in its long slide. She pushed back against him, closing her eyes. She wanted this, to be filled by him.

“No, watch, Claire. Watch the sun.” Dwight said, his voice tight as he rubbed the head of his cock in her pussy, coating the head with her juices.

Her knees trembled, her skin blistered with desire, and her pussy became a molten cauldron. Reluctantly, she opened her eyes and looked at the glowing red outline of the dying sun.

Dwight slid into her, filled her, his hard, thick cock pushing against the walls of her pussy, hot against the nerves, forcing bliss through her so completely the shock of it nearly tumbled her to orgasm.

He pulled her hard against his hips until they met her ass. She wiggled against him, triumphant as he groaned. "Sweet Claire," he moaned as he pulled away, then thrust into her.

He held her against him for a moment, his cock inside her pulsing in rhythm with his rapid breath. He reached his fingers into her hair, holding her head up, the strain on her neck not entirely comfortable, but the possession of the grip arousing.

"Watch the sun, Claire. Watch," Dwight commanded as he thrust hard into her again, the force unbalancing, overwhelming and dominant. He held her

head ratcheted up, her eyes wide as they watched the last gasps of the sun, his cock slicing through her, pounding forcefully into her, each thrust more manic, more powerful than the one before, each one pushing her closer to the edge of the cliff she desired beyond measure.

His cock owned her, split her, pushed and pulled inside her, the tides, the sun, the seasons. The edge of ecstasy peaked, held her prisoner as his fingers curled in her hair, pulled against her scalp and a voice not Dwight's commanded her one last time.

Look!

The ragged edges of the red sun slipped beyond the edge of the horizon, the gray-purple sky of dusk hovering in victory, and there at the line of inky sea, above the plum night, a gem, elongated and pure, a green as vivid as a summer leaf, as precious as a Columbian emerald. The flash of verdant light bathed Claire in destiny as her eyes brimmed with tears. Her body ached for only a moment as

Dwight withdrew, leaving her, and cool, possessive hands gripped her hips, and a new dark sensation flooded her body.

Ashton. She knew it without looking back. He thrust into her, cool at first and steel hard, pushing *through* her, claiming her, binding her to him, to Dwight, to the moment. No tender strokes, no romantic kisses, he fucked her voraciously, dominating, unquestioning, unforgiving and Claire bloomed.

Dwight appeared in front of her, his cock shining with Claire's own juices, and she smiled at him as she reached up and took a firm hold, bringing him to her mouth, savoring the flavor of her own essence, her tongue flickering over the swollen head before she swallowed him deep.

For an endless twilight, she spun in ecstasy, Ashton fucking her, her mouth filled with Dwight's cock, soaked with her own juices. Only a heartbeat beyond the flash of the sun, Ashton gripped her hips, his nails biting into the flesh of her thighs,

and gave a final thrust that freed her spirit and opened her to ecstasy.

And as the orgasm trembled at the edge of her awareness, Ashton's body molded to her back, his hands holding her upright at her breasts and the most savage sweetness ripped through her soul as sharp, agonizing pain melded with joy and sense-obliterating pleasure.

His fangs penetrated the skin of her neck, breached her jugular and loosed not only her release, but her blood, her life, the emptiness she would leave behind forever.

Her cry, muffled by Dwight's cock, turned into a clamp of teeth. Dwight howled and laughed as he gripped her head to him and came in a thick warm stream that filled her throat even as her own rolling orgasm pumped her blood into Ashton's greedy mouth.

Ashton came, she knew, and another orgasm drowned her in mind-destroying pleasure as his seed spilled into her fading body.

They didn't let the sand claim her. Drained of both blood and energy, still shuddering from ecstasy, pain and amazement, she savored the trilling rapture that filled her beyond capacity.

"Now you are ready, Claire." He kissed her lightly, the taste of her own blood upon his lips shocking fresh sensations through her body.

"Ready?" she barely whispered, the hum of the night growing in her blood with the glow of each emerging star. Exhausted, fading, her eyelids fell against her cheeks as final as the setting sun.

"Yes," he said against her lips, the sensation more than flesh, beyond breath or pulse. "The next world awaits you. Let go of the light, my love, and welcome the night."

Endless dark, as vivid as the green flash, painted her, and when she opened her eyes, the next adventure had already begun.

About the Author

When asked, "Where are you from?" my answer tends to be, "I'm from all over." Born in Virginia and later raised on a sailboat, I have traveled extensively and have grown up to appreciate the world in all its forms. I am always looking for the next adventure.

Angela can be reached at this email:

muse@angelacaperton.com

Angela's website is located at:

<http://www.angelacaperton.com/>