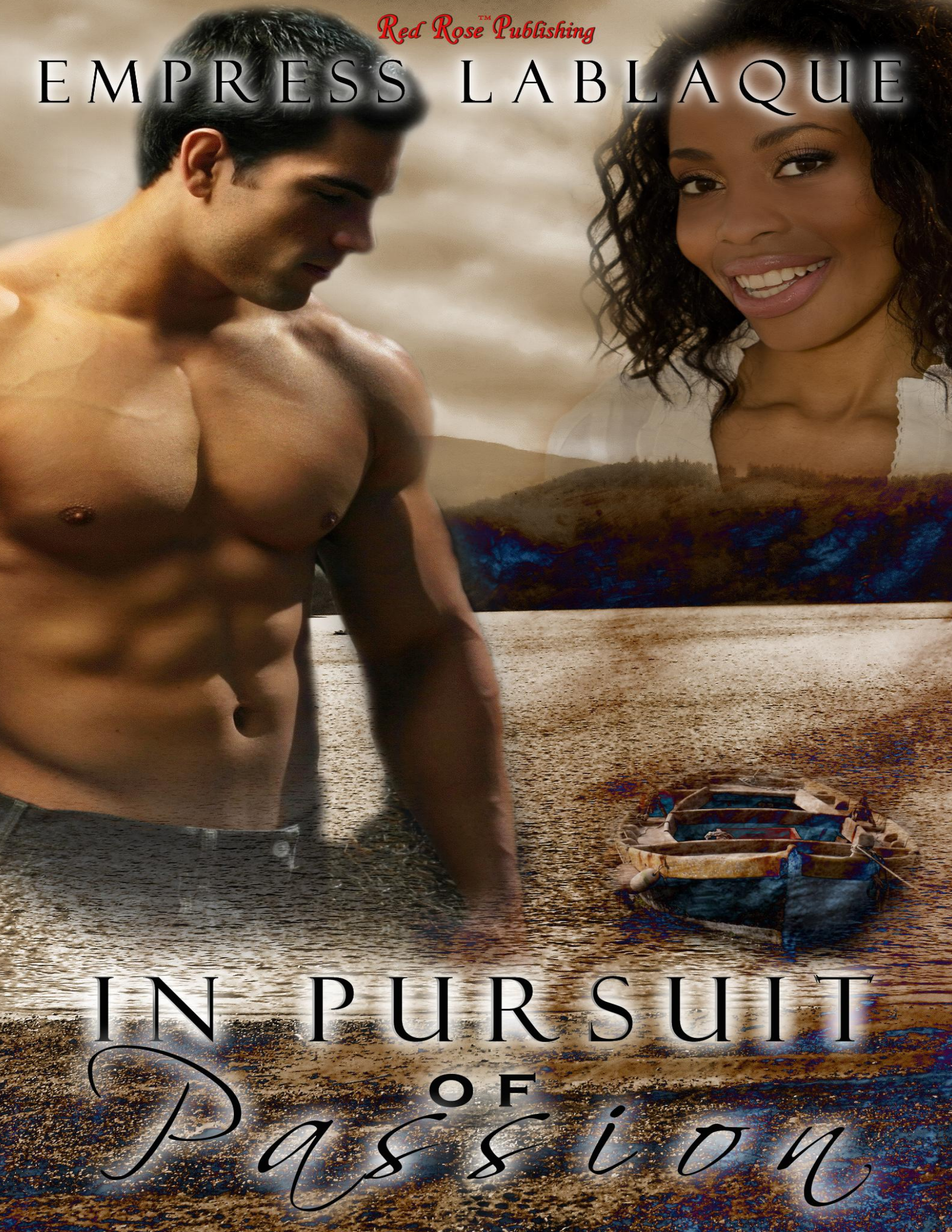


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# EMPERESS LABLAQUE



IN PURSUIT  
OF  
*Passion*



*In Pursuit*  
*Of*  
*Passion*  
*By*  
*Empress LaBlaQue*

*This Romantic Experience is dedicated to all  
Interracial Lovers.*

*Some people will never experience an  
interracial relationship.*

*To some, it's an off limits fantasy. I'm the  
catalyst who provides a safe bite of the  
forbidden fruit.*

*Imagine being loved unconditionally for whom  
you are, and what you are. Enjoy!*

*~Empress LaBlaQue*



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In Pursuit of Passion by Empress LaBlaque

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*In Pursuit*  
*Of*  
*Passion*  
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## Chapter One

If you knew how pushy Lace could be, then you'd understand why I wanted to ring her neck. We almost broke our friendship over a guy. See, Lace came to Florida to visit me. It was about two years after Jeff's death and she was really ragging on me about dating. Men were the farthest thing from my mind. After all, I was still in mourning.

Lace is a brassy, green-eyed blonde and I consider myself a sophisticated black woman. Our personalities are totally opposite, yet we managed to stay friends through thick and thin. During her visit, we were playing tennis in the sweltering heat. My tawny cheeks glistened in the sun and although my dark ringlets were up in a pony, I was melting on the court. If I didn't know any better, I'd swear the heat hadn't affected Lace. She kept chasing me around the court with her racket in hand. Finally I decided I had enough and headed for my sports car.

Lace persevered and just wouldn't give up. "Listen to me, Celeste, will you. Walter is..."

"Hello," I retorted, opening the car's door. "You're not listening to me! I don't want to hear about Walter, or anyone! I'm just not ready to date, again,

especially a white guy!” I pursed my lips, slid into the seat, and slammed the car door.

Lace mopped perspiration from her tanned forehead and walked briskly around the car to the passenger’s side. She tossed her gym bag and racket into the back seat then tugged ungracefully at her damp shorts. “Come on Celeste—go to Texas with me, and meet this guy.” She inched into the hot leather seat. “He’ll simply adore those big brown kitten eyes of yours. I know you’re not into white guys, but this guy is different. He’s a forthright kind of guy and a lot like you—you know—the professional type. Don’t be so closed minded.”

Reaching into my gym bag for car keys, I held steadfast to my decision. “I don’t trust you anymore, Lace. I told you I like being unattached, and you continue to stir in my life. I still love Jeff, plus your track record is not good with me anyway.” Folding my arms, I ran down a list to Lace. “There was— baby me Barry, and give me all you’ve got Phil. Not to mention—”

“Okay, I get it!” Lace shrank under my menacing scowl. “I’m sorry. I’m an insensitive witch. But just trust me this time and go to my family’s reunion. I promise Walter will be there. He’s always there. He’s like family.”

Starting my car, I turned toward my stubborn friend, my bushy ponytail flicking to and fro. “There you go again with this Walter. It’s Walter this, and Walter that—why haven’t you mentioned him to me before now?”

Lace choked on her bottled water, composed herself, and then turned to me. “Well, he was married at the time.”

“Ah, so he’s divorced now! What’s wrong with him?” I asked defensively.

“Nothing exactly. His wife died about two-and-a-half-years ago.”

Shaking a finger at Lace, I stormed, “Oh, no you won’t. I will not be compared to some superwoman who walked on water and parted the seas. You know how men are when their wives die. All of their sins go with them, and they’re pure as a sacrificial virgin.”

Lace reached into the back seat to get her gym-bag. It was obvious she needed her usual nicotine fix. “Well, he could feel the same way about you. Besides, that’s not like him, Celeste. Give the guy a chance.”

“You’re smoking again? No one smokes anymore, Lace. It’s unhealthy and it’s so— rude.”

Ignoring my comfort, Lace lit the cigarette and pulled out my untarnished ashtray. “I’m trying to quit, and don’t change the subject. I’ve known Walter all my life. He’s never been anything but fair, Celeste.”

I fanned the smoky air, and started to back out of the parking lot. “I know all I need to know about this Walter. Black or white, he’s still a man, and I don’t trust him.”

Lace gasped and her lips grew thin. “You can be so stubborn at times, and



stubbornness does not become you, Celeste.”

I relaxed my voice but remained tense. “Look, Lace, we’ve been friends since high school. We even took college classes together at the University. And, during the time I was working my way through Jeff’s death, you were kind to me. Of that, I must admit. But dating is where I’m drawing the line. I’ve been set up too many times.” Lace’s silence told me I had just hurt her feelings and I calmed my voice even more. “Look, Lace. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to yell at you.”

Lace seemed speechless by my apology. She blew cigarette smoke toward the open window and her full lips curled into a smile. “Does that mean you’ll be going with me to Texas?”

My shoulders slumped forward. “I guess so. If I don’t go you’ll never give me any peace.”

“I promise you’ll like our reunion, Celeste. Plus, the countryside is beautiful this time of year.”

“Yeah, cowboys and horses right.”

“Wrong,” she added, blowing a stream of smoke. “*Luscious* cowboys and horses.”

Although Lace seemed refined, discussing men always brought out the lust in her.



The week passed by too quickly for me. I hardly had time to make arrangements for the kids. I was rushing to pack my overnight case when from the balcony I saw Lace's Mercedes pulling up. That woman has never been prompt, in her life, so why today? I haven't been back to Texas since graduation, but knowing Lace, we would have a cattle rustling, pig calling, boy-howdy, good time. All in good taste, of course.



Lace drove for hours. She sang off key, listened to soft music, and smoked her horrid cigarettes. "Celeste, are you awake?"

"I wasn't asleep. I'm just thinking about my kids, and hoping that someday, I'll meet someone truthful and honest."

"Will you talk to me? You've been silent for more than three hours. You must be doing some awfully serious thinking. I'll bet you're still brooding over Jeff's death."

"Lace, tell me Walter will change my track record. If he isn't the one, I'm just going to give up for good."

"Celeste, you've already given up," Lace said, her mouth full of chips. "It'll be dark when we get there. We'll just bunk at Aunt Gladys' house because Aunt Sarah's house will be full."



The next morning, I met Lace's stepbrother. Dexter was star pitcher for the sandlot baseball game. "Who is this charming creature?" he asked, warming up his pitching arm.

"Oh, where are my manners? Dex, this is Celeste, an old classmate. I thought she'd enjoy the piney woods of North East Texas."

He turned in response to hearing his name being called from the field. "Well, they're ready for me. Talk to you later, Sis." He kissed the air around her. "Nice to meet you, Celeste."

"Wait," Lace called, waving her arms for him to stop. "Where is Walter?"

Dexter pointed to a car parked under a large pine tree, then trotted off toward the field.

Lace turned to me. "Well, kitten, the moment has come."

As soon as we started walking toward the car, I stopped. "Lace. There's a woman in the car with him."

"There is?" She pulled down her shades and peered over them, her green eyes squinting in the sun. "Well, I'll be—that just chaps my butt. I should've known he wouldn't stay single long. He's just too irresistible."

"Well, so much for that." I retreated, breathing a sigh of relief.

"Don't be asinine! I'll find out what's going on. Sit here. I'll be right back."

Lace inhaled, pushed her hands deep into her short's pockets, and walked toward the car. I knew that look. She was a determined woman when it came to filching information. Lace walked over to the car and boldly opened the door. "Walter! You old hound—how in the world are you?"

I heard some of the conversation, but pretended not to notice. Instead, I tried to get interested in the game and forget about Lace and Walter. At first, I was a little curious, but when I saw the gorgeous woman he was with emerging from the car, my curiosity died in a heap at the bottom of my stomach.

A little old lady searching for a comfortable seat, prepared to sit down on a vacant lawn chair beside me. "Aren't you Otis' daughter," she asked, easing herself into the chair.

"No, I'm sorry. I'm a guest here. I came with Lace. She's over there."

I turned and saw that Lace had pulled Walter away from his car, leaving the woman all alone. Talking to him intensely, she spoke just above a whisper. I could tell that this conversation was serious.

The little old lady repeated, "Did you drive down here with Otis? He was sick the last time I saw him. Is he better now?"

I knew that I wasn't about to win this one. "Yes, he's better now."

"I told Otis you were such a pretty girl. Big brown eyes just like your mother.

“Thank you.”

She took a long sip from her soda. “Did you marry that young man? What’s his name, Rod or Brod? Oh poot! I can’t think of nothing these days. You two made a lovely pair. I know you’ll have some fine children, just like my Albert. He’s not married yet, but I’m looking for him a good wife. There he is over there.” She pointed toward a balding man, sitting on a blanket under a tree. He was giving formula to an infant.

“Are you sure he isn’t married and has a child?” I asked, raising a brow.

“Well, he told me that he met this girl a while back. I don’t think they got married.” She jumped. “Oh, yes he did! And they’ve got a little girl too. She’s a doll. Looks just like me—you know—got my baby blue eyes.” Leaning against the lawn chair with her knees apart, she asked once more, “Did you say you drove down here with Otis?”

I heard a rustling sound behind me and turned to see Lace approaching. She carried a decorative hair clip, so it was obvious she’d been inside the house. “I’ve got news,” she wheezed, almost out of breath.

“What?” I asked, being more polite than interested.

She placed the metal clip between her teeth, pulled her blonde curls into a twist and pinned them with the clip. “That’s not Walter’s wife. It’s his girlfriend,” she said, pulling a curl down the side of her face.



“And so— that’s just as bad,” I shrugged.

“But that means you have a chance to bump her.”

“What?” I couldn’t believe my ears. I tried to read her shaded eyes correctly.

“Bump her! Don’t be simple, you know what I mean.”

I crossed my legs, tightened the band on my ponytail and placed my shades into my hair. “I’m not going to bump anyone. That’s what happened to me.”

“I don’t want to hear that crap, Celeste! Enough about Jeff and that scenario.”

“Look at Walter.” I turned and looked at him as instructed.

“See that woman with him?”

“Yes, what are you getting at? She’s a Caucasian woman with thirty-five pounds of reddish-brown hair, a killer tan, and a great body.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about. Look at how he treats her. Look at the body language. Every time she gets close to him, he moves. When she puts her hand on his shoulder, he just stands there, unresponsive. Watch the body language!” she jeered.

Surely enough, Walter did seem to be politely running from her. What I couldn’t understand was, if he didn’t want to be with her, why did he bring her along? “That doesn’t mean a thing, Lace. They could have had a spat or something.”

Lace grabbed me by the hand and pulled me from the lawn chair. “Honestly.

You're really working my nerves. Come on!"

As we talked, we walked along parting small crowds of people. Moving beneath tall pines, we finally made our way toward the parked cars. "I thought you said he was honest."

"I know Walter. If he brought her, he's trying not to hurt her feelings. He is honest, but he's also a sympathetic idiot. Now, I've got the real dirt on this story."

"And who told you this *real* dirt?" I asked, searching her shaded eyes.

Lace placed her hands on her hips and shrugged. "Doris, of course. Nothing gets past her. She said that this woman has been following him around for months. She's his boss or something, and she's forcing herself on him. According to Doris, he really doesn't want her. He's just being polite."

"Lace, if you really look at him, he doesn't look that happy."

"I told you. Now, take a good look at him, girlfriend. Take note of those rippling biceps and those nice wide shoulders, and those muscular legs in those blue shorts. Notice that neatly trimmed mustache and those lightly graying temples. Now, that's a man."

"Do you think he's too old for me? I'm only twenty-seven, you know."

"Celeste, he's thirty-two! You're old enough to do anything you wish. All in good taste. You can handle a real man, can't you?"

Tilting my head to the side, I whispered, "Suppose he doesn't like—well,

you know, black women.”

“Will you get real? I wouldn’t introduce you to him if I felt he’d scorn you.”

I couldn’t believe I was actually looking at a man who had a woman by his side. “Well, I don’t know about this,” I admitted, leaning against a pine tree.

“Celeste,” Lace gnashed her teeth, “you are simply shredding my nerves. I didn’t drag you all the way up here for you to walk off empty handed.” She stroked the moisture forming in her cleavage. “Listen,” she said, “I have a plan.” With a flick of her wrist she brushed away a bug that sat on my shoulder. “I’m going to ask Ms. Hot Pants to help in the kitchen this evening. That’ll give you time with Walter.”

“I don’t know, Lace. It sounds so dishonest.”

“Trust me.” She nodded. “Walter will thank me for this.”

“If he doesn’t kill you first,” I taunted.



We decided to sit down and watch the game. I couldn’t help but to notice that Walter and his date, Gail, had chosen seats nearby. She snuggled up to him and he ignored her. How embarrassed she must feel, trying to embrace a stone like that.

Then it dawned on me. He just might not like me either.

Lace was getting into the game. “Go Dexter!” She whistled loudly then

applauded her brother's magnificent pitch. It was a stimulating game. The players were hot and sweaty while we sat in the cool and enjoyed the vigorous game. When we were ready to leave, Lace reminded, "Now don't forget."



When we returned to Aunt Sarah's house, Lace pulled Gail away from Walter and encouraged her to help cook in the kitchen, leaving Walter all alone. At this point, I decided I didn't want to participate in Lace's little scheme. If I got a chance to talk to Walter, good and if not, then so be it. I found myself sitting all alone on the steps of the large country home. Of course, I preferred the artful array of flowers and the scenic pond across the road instead of the turmoil of the crowd. After swatting a pesky fly from my bare leg, I let the warm sun vanish my worries.

Walter walked up the side of the house from the backyard. He seemed to be looking for a place to hideout, and appeared surprised to see me sitting on the porch. "Well, hello. I didn't know anyone was out here." His voice was deep, rich, and dripping with good breeding. This visit completely caught me off guard, and I felt awkward. "Mind if I sit on the porch swing?"

"No, not at all." I beamed shyly, moving over so he could step upon the porch.

As he walked past, he explained, "Dexter and I would sit out here after an enormous meal. Aunt Sarah is a marvelous cook." He patted his firm stomach.

All I heard was *marvelous cook*. I was completely senseless over his charisma, as well as his smooth velvety voice.

Sitting down on the creaky swing, he turned his attention toward the pond. “That pond looks a lot smaller than it did when we were kids. We’d run around here in cut-offs, making homemade fishing poles.”

I didn’t say anything. I felt that anything I said would come out witless and drive him away. Lace was right; he was a real man. From his expensive sneakers, to his sun-kissed skin and graying temples, he was all man.

Walter spoke again. “How rude of me. I didn’t introduce myself. I’m Jeremy Walters.” He extended his hand toward mine, making me perceptive of his wedding band.

“A pleasure to finally meet you, Jeremy.” I nervously greeted his strong hand with my smaller one. “I’m Celeste Vincent, a friend of Lace. However, I thought your first name was Walter.”

He closed his deeply-set hazel eyes and chuckled. “Only my home-buds call me that. You see, I hated the name Jeremy when I was growing up. Kids would tease me and call me Germy. So, I didn’t really accept the name Jeremy until I graduated from college and entered the work force.”

“I can’t see why you would dislike that name. It has such a nice tone—Jeremy.” I was thinking about how powerful his voice was. Although I embraced



his friendly chuckle, I still felt inadequate. Beyond a doubt, I was fairly pretty, but somehow I felt passable at best under his six-foot frame of masculinity. Each time I tried to speak, I felt dopey and idiotic.

Walter inhaled a gentle breeze. “Are you originally from Texas, Celeste?”

There! He finally said my name, and the sound of it was desirable to my ears. “No. I’m from Florida. I went to high school in Texas. After graduation, we moved back home.”

“Florida is a perfect place to live.”

“Really?” My voice was cracking. Why was I so tense? Just treat him like any ordinary person. I told myself, I can do that. Then I looked at him as he sat sideways on the porch swing, filling it up with his colossal tailor-made body.

Walter leaned his head back, indulging in the mild fragrant breeze. He moaned. “Ahh. I love these unexpected breezes. They do relax a tired soul.”

Having little control, I wanted to slap myself out of the trance he’d put me in. His moan slithered over my body and I just couldn’t keep still. Periodically, I stared at my watch, and for no reason, just jittery, I guess. Walter was sitting there with his eyes closed and my mind was racing, my thoughts mingled. I noticed a large gash under his knee and spoke without thinking. “How did you get that injury?” *Stupid, stupid move*, I scolded myself. No one wants to be reminded of a scar on their body!

Walter perked up. “Well, that’s my favorite story to share. It’s an old football injury. And man, did it hurt! I was going to play pro until this injury brought all of that to an end. Now the best I can do is play tennis.”

“Really!” I wiped a stray spiral behind my ear. “That’s my game too.”

“You’re kidding me, right?” he brightened, pleased by the unexpected discovery.

“No. I take my racket everywhere I go. When I’m at home, of course.”

“Of course.” His brow went up and his voice went down.

I must sound like a complete idiot to this guy. Why can’t I compose myself? I’m a professional, for Pete’s sake. I talk to people every day. But this man is a total turn-on.

Walter sighed and relaxing in the warmth of the afternoon breeze, closed his eyes again. The diamonds in his wedding band captured my attention. This was a good indication he was not ready to let go of his wife’s memory, and get on with his life.

Walter’s thick brows drew together in a frown, as he swatted at a fly. “That’s one thing I don’t miss about the country,” he said, with eyes still closed, “the bugs.”

I wanted to laugh out loud just to release the building tension. His very presence was driving me insane. Looking down at my sneakers, I laughed quietly.

When Lace appeared behind the screened door wearing an apron, joy filled my heart. “Well, hello out there. Are you two having interesting conversation?”

“Sure.” In response to her arrival, I masked the pleasure in my voice.

Lace went on talking. “Did Walter tell you where he works, Celeste?”

“No he didn’t.” I glanced up at Walter, anticipating his next words.

Lace coaxed, “Walter, tell Celeste where you work.”

Walter sat up in the swing. “Lace, you wicked vixen. You know she wouldn’t be interested in that.”

“Why don’t you try her?” she urged.

“Celeste, I’m an accountant in Orlando. Dexter and I work together. We have expanded our firm and now we include life insurance as well.”

Lace quipped, “And Gail?”

I shot Lace a look that said, dumb move. Can this woman ever learn to be subtle this late in her wretched life?

Walter grinned. “No problem. I would be empty-headed if I thought no one noticed I brought a female friend. I work with Gail. She’s also our partner, and has an excellent business head. Now, she owns a great deal of our company.”

I turned my gaze toward the ground. “I see.”

He looked into Lace’s smirking face behind the screened door. “I see Lace has been talking about me.” Ignoring her presence he chided, “That witch. She’s

nosy as hell, but I love her to death. Does she interfere in your affairs too?" he inquired, sarcastically.

"Always," I twittered, following his lead. "But she means well."

Lace spoke up. "Well just talk about me, why don't you!" She placed her hands on her hips. "I'm not standing here, am I? Both of you can kiss my butt." We ended the entire conversation with an outburst of laughter.

## Chapter Two

That night, I went to sleep on a dream cloud of Walter's sensual fragrance. I had to admit, I would do almost anything to have Walter, even if that included stealing him. However, it was obvious that Gail wanted him, too. She wanted him so badly that she tried to purchase him for the price of his firm. Then I remembered what my mother always said. You can't purchase a man who isn't for sale. After a few moments of feeling trashy and ashamed, I drifted off to a realistic dream world.

*I was swept into Walter's office and stood before him scantily clad. We were engaged in a game of cat and mouse that Walter could not possibly win. In the dream, all of my inhibitions melted. I created a persona that was boorish, yet dainty, lustful, yet soft. Walter sat rigidly behind his desk. There, I confronted him. "We're not teenagers, Walter." My once nervous voice took on the confident tone I couldn't find during my waking hours.*

*However, Walter seemed distant and unresponsive toward my efforts. "It's been a long time since I gave of myself, Celeste." He pulled away from my insisting lips. "I'm not ready to make a commitment with anyone," he disclosed coldly.*

*Encouraging him, my voice became velvety. "It's time to let go, Walter." My breasts*



*brushed against his body. "Look at me Walter." With warm hands I caught his cheeks and turned his face toward mine. "You can't keep punishing yourself. Let go," I whispered, letting my aura, flow over him.*

*Sliding my hand along his neck, it finally came to rest upon his large muscular chest. There, I played with the small berries on his massive pecks; they grew taut at my touch. Then, I placed my lips on his, kissing him with fervent intensity, daring him to deny sexual arousal. When our lips parted, his body responded with undeniable chemistry. "You want excitement don't you?"*

*Walter attempted to get up from his chair. "How do you expect me to resist your sensuality?" He placed his hands in my hair and gently stroked the length of it as he would a kitten. With sensitive fingers, he traced the curves of my anticipating lips. I placed them into the wet recesses of my warm mouth, and he responded with a moan.*

*Grabbing a fist full of spiraled hair, Walter brought my lips to his and hungrily enjoyed the moistness the union provided. My body urgently craved his masterful touch. When we parted, Walter seemed confused. "You're quite a feast, Lady. You know I have feelings growing for you." Walter inhaled deeply. "I want to be the first to make love to you, Celeste. Not in the traditional way," he whispered. He placed his mouth against my ear and confessed, while his lips tenderly caressed my earlobes. "I want to make love to your mind, your body, and your soul."*

*My brown eyes closed tightly, while my heart opened to devour his words. His hands stroked the bareness of my tawny skin, then once again, he turned his face from mine in hindrance.*

*“I’m quite taken with you.” He frowned curiously, moistening his lips. “I hardly know where to start.” His hands tenderly caressed and examined every inch of my body. “Let me show you passion,” he crooned, “the pleasures tormenting me inside. Right here,” he pointed to his chest.*

*“Command this moment, Walter,” I insisted. “We’ll receive this ecstasy together.”*

*Walter stood up and sat me down on his desk. With my legs swinging, he gingerly laid my head down on the cold wood grain structure. Like a professional doctor, he proceeded to examine my body. His powerful hands found famished crevices that he eagerly titillated and massaged. It was as if I were being held captive and forced to endure his delightful prodding. As I lay upon the desk, I thrashed my head wildly, my body aglow with prickling quivers.*

*My thighs lay open, my core swollen, moist, trembling and jerking under his command. Walter’s hands were like magic. He slid them over my belly to tweak my breasts. My nipples pouted between his fingers, while bolts of sensation jolted through them. At the same time he explored my throbbing core, spilling my passions upon the wood grained desk.*

*Fighting against him was to no avail. I cupped his face and begged him to extinguish the fire. Walter was glad to oblige my wishes. From his standing position, he entered, filling me up with an agonizingly slow stride. I was ready to pull out my hair; sure my passions would end with each loving thrust. Captivating waves encased my being as he stroked my desire with the smoky fires of well guided friction.*

*Walter’s body quivered with desire. Sweat poured from his moist tanned skin, his*

*breathing became quick and ragged, his heart pounded rhythmically against mine, or so I thought.*

My eyes flew open and my body quivered nervously. What I actually heard was a rapping outside my window.

Being startled out of my wits, I dismissed myself from the passionate dream cloud and leaped from my bed. With my heart racing wildly, I rushed toward the window, my inner core still swollen with embers of desire. When I pulled back the curtains, I was shocked to see Walter standing there, dressed in fishing gear. “Open the window,” he called, tapping on the glass. “I thought you wouldn’t mind doing a little fishing this morning.”

Opening the glass, I marveled at Walter’s timing. Although reeling from the juices of my sweet dream, I fought the urge to mount him and finish the job. “Sure, Walter,” I croaked groggily. “Give me a minute.” *I’d go anywhere with him.*

While getting dressed, I shoved my passions deep inside and wondered if we would be fishing near the small cabin hidden in the thicket. I had never gone fishing in my life. Apprehension arrested my thoughts.

We took two reels, fishing tackle, and a cooler. Walking across the street to the pond, we finally disappeared down a dew-washed trail into a grove of trees and brush. Hidden from view was a one-room cabin with a large front porch. “Now this is the life.” Walter beamed.

I didn’t know where the life was, but it certainly wasn’t in that cabin. “Are

we going in there?”

“Sure, we’ll just put our things in there for now.” He opened the door. For the first time in years, cobwebs broke their hold on the old wooden structure. I was terrified, but followed him. Inside, there was a small bed draped with an old quilt, a wood-burning stove, a table and a sofa employing a brick as a missing leg.

Feeling a bit squeamish, I demanded, “Tell me how anyone could stay here?”

Walter picked up an old broom and removed a few cobwebs. “I used to stay here all the time. I love to come home and get away from the harassment of the world.”

“Can we go now?”

“Certainly,” Walter chuckled. He walked toward the door and stood. As if frozen in time, he gazed upon the peaceful pond. Slowly he twirled his wedding band around his finger. I could tell he was deep in thought, and not about fishing. With his back turned, he started to speak, “Celeste. You’ve been a real sport,” he said, never breaking his stare.

“Gail had to catch a flight out last night, and I want to be totally honest with you. I don’t like to play games. I know we only met yesterday. But, from your cute bushy ponytail to your brand new sneakers, there is something magical about you. How can that be?” He turned to face me, and I dared not utter a sound.

I gazed into his hazel eyes while he continued to twirl his wedding band.

“Let’s go,” he muttered urgently. “The fish will stop biting soon.” Without saying another word, he quietly walked away, leaving me stunned and puzzled.

Walter shook his thoughts and reached for his tackle box, his jovial nature returning. “It’s going to be mighty hot today. I’ve got the sunscreen. Get that hat, hanging on the wall,” he instructed.

I reached for the old straw hat and separated it from its home among the cobwebs. “Eww!” I removed the fine threads and checked for existing spiders. “How can you ask me to put this on my head? I’ve never done anything to you.”

Walter laughed. “Come on, city girl!”

He handed me a smelly old lifejacket. It was mildewed and riddled with holes. Reluctantly, I held it at a distance. “You don’t expect me to actually put this on my clean body do you?”

“Stop stalling and put it on, grandma.” Suddenly, something captured Walter’s attention. “Would you look at that?” He pointed to a raccoon who was scrounging up breakfast on the other side of the pond. “Have you seen anything like that in the city?”

“Sure, in a cage.”

There was one prehistoric rowboat at the embankment, tied to an old willow tree. Appearing to have seen many fishing voyages, it bobbed up and down in response to the gentle current of water. Immediately, I became frightened. “We

aren't going in that thing are we?"

"Now, would I put your life in jeopardy, sweetheart? Get in."

The mere mention of the word sweetheart made me soften. I stepped into the mud and instantly became sucked up into a muddy predicament. My footing had become lodged in the rich, black soil. "Eww!" I let out an uncomfortable screech.

Walter yelped loudly, and slapped his knee. "I had no idea you were so animated, Celeste. You're just a bundle of fun!"

Producing a fake smile, I struggled to remove my foot. "For your pleasure only."

The suction tugged insistently at my sneaker. Hobbling along, I got inside the boat, leaving a muddy trail behind me. Just my luck, I was off to a superb start with Walter. After brushing leaves off the wooden seat, I strapping on my lifejacket, and settled in. Walter heaved and pushed the boat from the bank, hopping aboard without even touching the water or the mud.

I felt like a simpleton with a tattered straw hat on my head, a moldy lifejacket strapped to my chest, and one brand new sneaker soaked with mud all the way down to the sock. But, I was a trooper.

Walter sat at the rear of the boat and paddled out into the water. I glanced at him, noticing how he gazed wishfully over the gentle current. Touched by this

solemn expression, I asked, “What’s wrong?”

Appearing startled by the sound of my voice, he said, “Oh, nothing really. But honesty is always the best policy, so truthfully, I was thinking about Heather, and remembering how much she loved fishing.”

Oh crap! Competition! He’s thinking about his deceased wife. I’m not thinking about Jeff! How am I supposed to compete with sorrow? “Oh.”

To hide my disappointment, I took interest in a crane stepping gingerly about the water.

The deteriorated boat made its way through the water. Jeremy stopped rowing. “Here’s a perfect place to fish.” He let out some strange looking apparatus that must have been some sort of an anchor.

After a while, I removed my lifejacket while Walter baited my hook. Then, we fished quietly. My curiosity was getting the best of me and I just had to know. “Walter, do you think you could ever get on with your life? I know you loved Heather. I loved Jeff, and no doubt always will. But, do you think you could find even a small space for someone else in your heart. I know my skin is darker than yours, but inside, we’re the same.” I felt as if I’d cry at any minute. Gail was human, and he’d soon get over her. But how do you fight the memory of a life filled with years of love?

“Celeste,” he held his head down as if deeply burdened. His rich voice



admitted, “Once again, I want to question my ‘honest always’ policy. Lace told me about Jeff. I’m sorry for your loss. To answer your question, I want so badly to express love to someone else. During the past two years, you have been the only woman to even spark my interest, darker skinned or not. I know that Gail thinks she’s using me. After Heather died, I lost all interest in everything around me: people, things, my job. I lost my self for almost two years. What Gail is doing to me, I’m allowing it. I’m no victim to her antics.” He tossed out his reel and watched it settle down.

“But why?” I asked anxiously, waiting for his reply.

Walter shrugged. “Gail is a remarkable woman, and when I extended my services toward her, that’s all that it was. Services. I had a debt to pay. She saved our firm. Oh, I could have found a way out of that predicament long ago, but I think—” He averted his eyes toward a grove of trees. “I wanted to punish myself. In a way, I used Gail and denied myself unadulterated love.”

“Oh, Walter.” Astonished by his confession, my eyes grew wide. “How could you?”

“It’s a good thing you came along with that cunning manipulator, Lace. You’re so easy to talk too. I’m like an infant learning to walk. I’ve got to take one step at a time.” He had a pleading look in his eyes. “Be patient with me, Celeste. It’s been a long time for me, and I’m sure I’ll make some mistakes. But, right now, I’m

willing to try to love again.”

“I will be patient with you Walter, if you are patient with me. I have my moments, too.” I tossed my hook into the water and whispered, “I will, if you will.” Forming tears blurred my vision, while nausea filled the hollows of my stomach. I understood Walter very well. He swallowed his ego, ripped open his soul, and bravely told me his most guarded feelings. Disrobing himself took courage, especially under the scrutiny of the enemy—woman. I now knew that Lace was right. He was a forthright kind of guy.

We became quiet and solemnly watched the calmness of the water. I reveled in my own world and Walter in his. All of a sudden I noticed a ripple in the water headed right for us. “What’s that?” I asked, mildly intimidated by the swift movement.

Walter glanced over his shoulder. “Oh, it’s just a turtle or something. They swim with their heads up like that.”

“Walter—Walter, it’s not a turtle. It’s a SNAKE!” I pulled in my rod and stiffened myself to the rear of the boat. “It’s headed this way, Walter. Do something!” I squirmed.

Walter seemed caught off guard. “I didn’t know you were terrified of snakes.”

I started to stomp my feet rapidly. “Here it comes, and it’s huge! Shoot it or

something!”

Walter laughed. “I’ll take care of it, Celeste.”

“Do you have a gun? It’s going to get in the boat with us!”

Smirking, Walter teased, “No, I don’t have a gun.” He chuckled to himself while picking up his rowing oar. When the snake was near, Walter whacked it with the oar. The snake thrashed wildly in the water. Flipping over and over, it showed its white underbelly then finally disappeared.

My eyes were wide with horror. “Where did it go?”

“I don’t know,” he replied, stifling his laughter. “But wherever it is, it’s not happy about having its back realigned.”

Scared to death, I hid behind Walter, holding him tightly by the arm. My heart was thumping violently through my blouse. Walter could actually feel my heart beating against his back. Looking over his shoulder, he peered down at my chest. Being a devilish sort, he tightened his muscle against my death grip and smiled mockingly.

I became incensed. “This is not at all funny, Walter. I see absolutely no humor in this!”

“You’re precious when you’re scared. Come here,” he said, turning around to face me, “let me calm you down.”

There was no calming for me; I was trembling all over. “Let’s go, Walter! I

mean it!”

“Come here. Don’t be so stubborn.” He pulled me close to his fragrant chest and stroked my back. “There, there. Now, isn’t this better?”

I allowed Walter to wrap his arms around me while looking over his shoulder for the enormous snake. I just couldn’t stop trembling. “What kind of snake was that? A water moccasin?”

“Na, just a chicken snake,” he muttered casually.

“You said it was a turtle earlier,” I recalled, with panic stricken eyes.

Walter held me tighter. “It’s just a chicken snake, darling.” He brushed away a spiraled curl and kissed my tawny forehead. “It’s perfectly all right.” He kissed my cheek. “I’m not going to let anything hurt you.” He kissed my lips.

Immediately, his hazel eyes widened, then narrowed with delight. What a wonderful mistake. At long last, I was in his arms, but this was *not* how I pictured it. I returned his kiss, and passion blossomed between us. The embers of denied pleasure had been ignited. I pulled away abruptly, desperately trying to ignore the flux of mellow fever which melted over my body. “Let’s go ashore please. I’ll take my chances with the spiders and wasps. Please.”

Walter ignored my request, but released me reluctantly. “Celeste. That was some kiss.” He touched his lips with two fingers. “I mean it. That was such an odd sensation.”

“Is that one of your *honesty is always the best policy* statements?” I asked, getting back in place on the boat.

“As honest as I can get. I wouldn’t joke about this. It’s much too serious. I’m trying desperately to go with the flow of my heart, Celeste. This is not something I take lightly.”

“I’m sorry—can we go ashore now?”

Walter burst into laughter. “Oh you. You really are something else.” He picked up the oar.

It was our luck that Aunt Sarah had packed lunch in the cooler. We took it inside the cabin, lifted the windows, and basked in the flow of a cool breeze. We ate, then much to my surprise, Walter pulled a bottle of wine from some place. He placed an old tape player on the table. “Listen,” he turned up the volume. “This is my favorite song. It’s about me.”

The words to *Ribbon in the Sky* flowed through the small speakers with the stamina of a large system. We hummed the melody and smiled, caught off guard by the romance of it.

“Shall we dance, fair princess?” As if I were his radiant princess, Prince Walter held out his noble hand and delicately lifted me from my majestic throne. He swept me up into his arms and we started to sway. When I started to speak, Walter placed his finger to my lips. “Don’t spoil this moment for us—just enjoy.

I've waited so long to feel this way. I know you have, too."

Holding me closely, Walter hummed and rocked me in his arms. Although I had removed my sneakers, Walter seemed to tower above my five-foot, six-inch frame. He stroked my back with loving glides. In the humidity of the day, my perfume became mingled with his cologne. It created a peculiar fragrance. Standing in his socks, Walter whispered the ballad in my ear. "You know, I find this song very appropriate for us. I have waited for a long time for someone like you."

"Honesty always." My female senses zeroed in on his words.

"Honesty always," he repeated pleasantly. "Thank you for listening to me today. As you can see, the sun is going down. We have a bottle of wine, and we are in each other's arms. Can you take my honesty just once more?"

I consented with a nod as we left our rustic ballroom floor. I sat down on the sofa, exploring the golden glow of his hazel eyes.

Walter licked his lips. "I wish I knew you better. I know that some women have rules from themselves where they refuse to make love on the first date, even if they both desire to make it so. That's an enigma about a woman I just don't understand. I guess it's believed that you won't be respected in the morning. But, I swear to you Celeste, that if it were within my power to change that rule, I would."

I felt numb. I had never known a man to address that issue. They only challenged it. Walter pulled me near. “Celeste. I’m a man who knows what he wants, and right now, my body wants to be with you. This is a most uncomfortable feeling. I have suppressed this yearning over and over. If you are a woman who lives by the first date rule, then I will understand. You can walk away unknown by me, unless—” He studied my eyes for a glimmer of consent.

I withdrew bashfully and shook my head. “I can’t do that Walter.” Unwillingly, I turned and walked toward the sofa.

Walter’s gaze followed me. “Great! Fine!” His brows went up. “Against my will, I allowed you to leave my grasp. But, last night, I had the most magnificent dream about us.” He took my hand and knelt before me.

“What?” I frowned, inhaling his sincere expression.

Softly, he admitted. “We kissed, we touched, and I made love to your mind, your body, and your soul.”

“Were we meant to be Walter? I had that same dream. Tell me about yours.”

“Well...” Walter stroked his moustache thoughtfully. “We were in an old abandoned night club. Of course, it was dusty, and dirty. Chairs were stacked on the table. From somewhere, music poured gently into the room. I danced with you, holding you something like this.” He pulled me to my feet and held me close. “You were wearing some sheer number. I don’t know what it was made of, Gossamer

perhaps. But, your body was almost visible to me. I recall that it was hot; therefore, I had removed my shirt. Our bodies united on the floor, our fingers interlocked, my perspiration making your garment transparent against me. And, unlike now, I didn't fight my insistent need to be one with you."

Moistening his lips, he paused, then started to talk again. "I bent my head and kissed you like this. When our lips parted, I kissed your shoulders and down your back. We slowly danced toward a table and I ever so gently placed you against it, loving and touching every inch of you. Everything about you was familiar. Your cries of pleasure, your hands desiring to hold me closer, the scent of you driving me mad."

"It was as if I had never made love, or known love until I felt you." He reached behind my head and removed my hair clip. Releasing my spirals, they fell about my shoulders. His strong hands tenderly stroked my hair as he placed my head to his chest. "You belong right here, Celeste. I've never known such a familiar and comfortable feeling as when I'm with you. Each moment is filled with excitement. It's an excitement that I want to experience again and again." He thrust his body against mine. "Please, Celeste, become a part of my life. I don't care if you're rich or poor, black or white—I know I'll have happiness with you. Please— say yes."

Tearfully, and in the passion of the moment, a whisper of yes erupted from



my soul.

*The End*

[www.myspace.com/empresslablaque](http://www.myspace.com/empresslablaque)

## Author Bio

To escape the harsh reality of domestic violence, **Empress LaBlaque** would write about men who were romantic, devoted and affectionate. As a result, many of these stories were published. Empress considers herself a connoisseur of fine romance and enjoys writing across genres. She is also an advocate for Prevention of Family Violence.

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