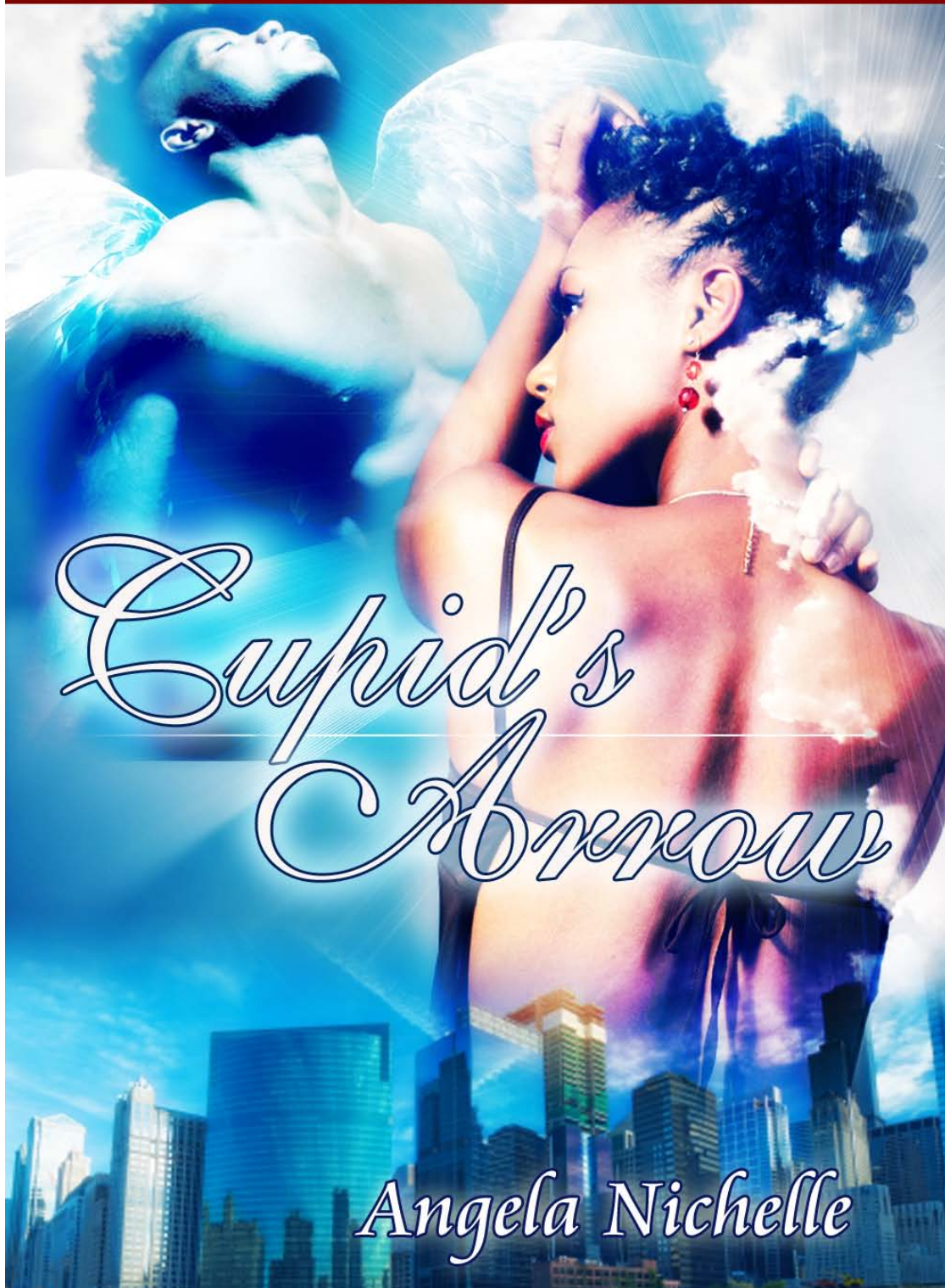
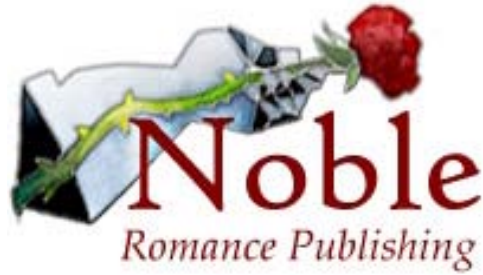


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Cupid's Arrow

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Dedication

For my husband, Greg. Your support, laughter and love have inspired more than one story yet to be told. Happy Valentine's Day!

Book Blurb

Safina Ralph is single on Valentine's Day. She's determined to have a good time in L.A. away from her home in Chicago with her friend, Lynn. The two of them have exclusive passes to *Red*, the hottest nightclub on Venice Beach. Just as the festive atmosphere begins to coax Safina into the party mood, she notices someone, or *something* in the rafters, shooting arrows into the crowd of unsuspecting partygoers below!

Chaos erupts as Safina races to stop the attack. When she confronts Kal, one of the club's sexy owners, Safina's sure he's the attacker despite his warm reassurances and her body's hot response to his touch. Consumed with overwhelming feelings of déjà vu and desire, Safina is relieved to get back home but she can't shake unsettling questions and Kal's handsome face from her mind.

After their encounter at *Red*, Kal tracks Safina down in Chicago with questions of his own. And the answers for them both could be the key to everything they've wished for, but will Safina accept the truth and can Kal trust his heart?

Kallias accepted the hors d'oeuvre from the artfully displayed platter held by the pretty hostess. Chewing slowly, Kallias savored the rich flavors of smoked cheese, salmon and dill on the crunchy cracker. With a wink at the hostess, Kallias took a sip of water before tasting the mango chocolate cake created especially for Valentine's Day at *Red*.

"You are new here, yes?" Kallias asked, wiping his mouth with the napkin she offered. He already knew the answer, having hand-picked the striking redhead himself.

"Yes, I am," she stammered, blushing from her cheeks down to her neck.

Kallias smiled, enjoying her innocent reaction. "What's your name?" He let his gaze wander down the lovely flush of color dusting the ample cleavage spilling out of her sexy cupid outfit.

"Ginny."

"Well, Ginny, tell Ronny to add a little cracked pepper to the salmon, but leave the cake as is . . . its perfection! Have you tried it?"

Ginny shook her head, her eyes widening in surprise as Kallias offered her a taste on a clean fork. She took a bite, moaning with delight.

Kallias nodded, resisting the temptation to kiss away the small blotch of chocolate frosting on Ginny's bottom lip. "Pure perfection, right?"

"Oh, yes," she agreed, licking the chocolate from her lips as she turned to leave.

"Ginny, don't forget the pepper."

She nodded with a smile. "Yes, Mr. Anthony."

Kallias watched the attractive hostess hurry off to the kitchen, appreciating the view of her backside in the short red mini-dress and what had to be killer heels. The racy outfit was exactly the sexy look patrons coming to *Red* expected from one of the hottest clubs on Venice Beach. Catering to the single crowd, the nightclub packed them in, especially on Valentine's Day.

Kallias surveyed the lavish decorations around the romantic interior of the club, satisfied *Red* would once again deliver the extra 'wow' factor their customers came to expect.

"Where's the camera?" Kallias asked, walking toward the bar where his friend and co-owner, Aaron, tossed glittery hearts around the shiny wood counter. Seeing his playboy friend taking time to place each shiny piece in place made him chuckle. "I need to get this on film."

Aaron glared, rolling up his shirt sleeves. "Don't even try it." He flung the rest of the confetti hearts onto the dark wood floor. "See, what did I tell you about those cupid costumes?"

"You know Kal won't admit they're too revealing." Nik, Kallias's other partner, laughed, pushing in one of the barstools.

Kallias gave the men a wry look. "The mini dresses are hot. The guys who come in here tonight with dates are going to have a hard time keeping their gazes off the eye candy."

"Women, too," Aaron said, nodding to one of the muscular, bare-chested bartenders walking by. The man wore a pair of fake wings, had a golden bow strapped to his back, arrows stashed at the hip, and a pair of red boxers. "This will just make your job much easier tonight, Kal."

Nik winced, loosening his red silk tie. "Seeing him dressed like that brings back a lot of old memories. Thank god for the modern century."

Kallias laughed. "Things sure have changed." He followed the other men to the huge, lavishly decorated office, all of them waiting until the thick privacy door clicked closed and locked automatically before they spoke freely. *Red* looked like a high-end

nightclub to the mortals who frequented the hot spot, but it was actually one of the headquarters for Eros and all erotes, the winged gods of love.

"Times have changed, but Eros still expects all of us to hit as many people as we can and you guys know no matter how many we snag . . . he won't be satisfied," Aaron said, pouring a generous measure of brandy into a crystal snifter.

Nik scoffed, his handsome Nordic features contorting. "Well, there was a time when he could do it all himself and he's never forgotten that. Now, he needs all of us to help keep the love balance in order."

Kallias picked up a handful of dates from the fruit bowl on the coffee table. "There are worst jobs to have," he said, thinking of Charos, Hades' helper in the underworld.

Nik nodded. "True."

"Why are you all still here?"

All three men turned toward the stunning brunette female who'd burst through the door, slamming it shut with a resounding thud. She frowned at each of them before turning down the row of plasma screens tuned into weather and news around the world.

"Nice to see you too, Dace," Kallias said, tossing a date in his mouth.

"Aww, Dacey, what's wrong now?" Aaron asked, sinking into the leather couch while lacing his tanned, muscular arms behind his head.

Dacey shook her head and her long, dark russet hair flowed over her shoulders and onto the top of her ivory wings. She looked magnificent in a black silk sheath dress that barely came to mid-thigh. "Eros said no less than a million from each of you. He's giving us until the midnight after V-Day."

Aaron chocked on his brandy. "A million!"

Dacey nodded. "Except for you." She wiggled her finger at Kallias. "Since you'll be watching over *Red* for him tonight, he's giving you a break. But he still doesn't want anyone to leave here tonight without being hit."

Kallias glanced over at the locked cabinet where they stored their bows and arrows. "No problem. You guys ready?" He couldn't be happier to be staying at the club for Valentine's Day. Trying to pierce a million humans with Eros's arrows was not an easy task, even though each of them, as demi-gods, had much greater physical abilities than an average human.

Dacey whistled appreciatively. "You all look great. It's nice to see you none of you are beginning to look like those cute little drawings of cupid these mortals are so fond of. Have you seen Piers? He's getting a little soft around the middle."

Nik chuckled. "Piers indulges in too much wine and too many women."

"And you don't?" Dacey challenged, her green eyes flashing.

Nik stripped out of his pristine white shirt, flexing his muscles as his own gigantic wings opened behind his back. "Wine, no . . . women, well tell me, do I look like the plump cherub on those cheesy Valentine's Day cards?" He pivoted, giving Dacey a nice 360 degree view of his six-pack abs, bulging biceps and strong back.

Dacey glared. "Let's just do this." She turned, gasping at Aaron who stood buck naked in the center of the roomy office, stretching his wings. "Aren't you going to wear anything?"

Aaron grinned. "You know I like to fly naked. Nothing feels better, babe."

Shaking her head with irritation, Dacey flipped the switch, opening the enormous circular skylight over their heads. "Pick your continent."

"Did Eros pick South America again?" Kallias asked with a sly grin.

With only six erotes and Eros to cover the entire world, they had their work cut out for them. Eros always had first choice, and then Dacey assigned what was left to everyone else.

"Nope, he's doing Asia. Gianna pulled South America and Piers got Africa," Dacey said, holding a small bag that contained the names of the remaining continents on folded slips of paper. "He wasn't looking forward to the heat."

Nik opened his paper and cursed. "Antarctica!" He crumpled the paper, watching the pieces combust instantly before falling in tiny ashes to the floor.

Dacey giggled. "Hey I went last year . . . it's not so bad, but you're gonna want to put your shirt back on." She passed the silk bag to Aaron. "At least you get to come back here and finish up the night. You can stand the cold for a few hours, right?" She smiled at the dark frown Nik gave her.

"Europe," Aaron said, watching the paper disintegrate before strapping his bow across his chest. "This is going to be fun." He stretched his arms overhead, causing the air to shift around as his enormous wings slowly flexed behind him.

"Just don't forget the goal." Dacey said, moving out of his way. "I'm going down under!"

"Go now, while the roof lights are off." Kallias clapped his hands. "Move your ass, Nik!" He ignored the furious look bounced in his direction.

Nik grabbed his bow and arrow from the cabinet. "I'm moving it . . . dammit, I hate being cold." He turned to Dacey. "Give me Australia and I'll make it worth your while."

Dacey chuckled. "Not a chance, playboy. Besides, you could use some cooling off."

Kallias winked at Dacey who laughed before taking flight. She disappeared into the starry night, along with the other two erotes. Kallias waited until he could no longer see them with before closing the overhead window and flipping the switch that lit up *Red's* neon sign.

Glancing at his watch, he noted only two hours remained before the club opened. Just enough time to shower, change and flirt with Ginny. Kallias whistled cheerfully as he headed to the private shower in the plush office, quickly shedding his own clothes. He stood at the mirror, checking his own rock hard abs and lean frame for any of the excess Dacey noticed on Piers. He wasn't vain, but he was fully aware of the affect his mahogany skin and powerful physique had on women.

The erotes now represented every race on the planet as a result of the god's dalliances with women from all over the world. A modern day demi-god, Kallias didn't look like man's representation of cupid. But otherwise, the human's had it right. Eroles

were very similar to cupid in every other way, and this was Kallias's night to do what he did best . . . make people fall in love before they even realized what hit them.

* * * * *

Safina struggled to squeeze her rounded bottom into Lynn's black pencil skirt.
"Damn!"

Lynn sighed. "The skirt looks fine, Safina. Between that and my red top, you look killer."

Safina rolled her eyes. "You call this skimpy material a top? I can't go like this. Oh, why did they have to lose my damned luggage?"

Lynn pouted. "Don't be like that. You promised you were going to have fun and let your hair down a little. We're in L.A. Forget Safina the Librarian, and be someone else tonight."

Safina stared at her reflection in the hotel mirror. "Well that'll be easy because I certainly look like someone else." She had never worn anything so tight or revealing in her life. Thanks to her luggage being in limbo somewhere between Chicago and L.A., she was stuck trying to make do with Lynn's clothing and her friend stood two inches shorter and twenty pounds lighter.

"You look hot. You're always hiding your bod, but honestly if I had all this" She gestured toward Safina's shapely legs and ample breasts squeezing out of the top of the soft material. "I'd rock it all the time."

Safina sighed. "We should have spent those two hours shopping instead of going on that whack tour of the stars."

Lynn looked shocked. "That was a once in a lifetime tour."

"You can say that again," Safina mumbled, rolling her eyes.

"Let's just *go* or we'll never get into *Red* and that's the whole reason I wanted to come to Venice Beach."

"Okay, okay. Just give me a few minutes." Safina tugged at the ill-fitted skirt. Grabbing two more sexy tops, she slammed into the bathroom. She changed quickly then turned toward the mirror. Her mouth fell open in shock. Lynn was right; she looked amazing. The pink top emphasized her full breasts and the black skirt hugged her ass with a vengeance. She looked ready to party . . . ready for anything, when in actuality she was anything but ready.

Pulling the pink top off, she carefully wiggled into the sleeveless aqua halter top. The cool blue color looked great against her maple brown skin and the silky material draped seductively, revealing lots of cleavage with a daring neckline. Her back was practically bare as the sexy top dipped toward her bottom. Twirling in front of the mirror, Safina sighed again. She was out of options and time. Super tight or more skin exposed. Did it even make a difference?

"Safina!"

"Woman, hold your horses!" Quickly giving her upswept curls a once over, Safina applied more lipstick and opened the bathroom door.

Lynn nodded appreciatively. "Looking good, mama. We're gonna have some fun tonight."

"Let's go," Safina replied back with a forced smile. She couldn't get excited about facing another Valentine's Day single, but she was determined to be a good sport for Lynn's sake.

* * * * *

They arrived at the club in less than thirty minutes and Safina pulled her black shawl around her shoulders in the cool night air. Not knowing what to expect, she was impressed with the nightclub's lush décor as they walked inside the dimly light entrance.

"Isn't this amazing? Look at all of those sexy cupids. Omigoodness!" Lynn gushed. "There must be a thousand roses in here."

"It is amazing," Safina agreed, looking around. The club was packed with beautiful people enjoying the romantic atmosphere. A live band crooned in the background and there were pink, white and red roses with candles in varying shapes and sizes everywhere. The scent of chocolate, vanilla, and roses enveloped them as they moved forward.

By sheer luck, Lynn snatched a table near the dance floor. With their backs against the wall, they had a great view of the entire club aglow in the candlelight.

"Boy, oh boy would you look at the hottie approaching," Lynn said, squeezing Safina's arm.

Safina grinned. "Shh."

"Ladies, my name is Royce. Happy Valentine's Day! Your first drink is on *Red*, so what can I get ya?" he asked, placing napkins on the table.

Lynn smiled, leaning toward the handsome cupid-costumed bartender. "What would you recommend, Royce?"

Royce grinned back, flashing white teeth as he leaned toward Lynn. "That depends . . . sweet or dry?"

"Dry," Lynn answered.

Safina waved her hands. "Sweet for me."

Royce nodded. "Good. For you—" He touched Lynn's shoulder. "Our *Red Heart Martini*, and for you—" He nodded in Safina's direction. "Our *White Chocolate Cupid Martini*. I'll be right back with those."

They watched him walk away into the crowd and Safina laughed at Lynn's panting expression.

"Yum, I'm lovin' this place already. The band is really good too."

Safina nodded. "I love those old standards too. Whoa! Look at the women's dress."

Lynn turned to see a shapely woman wearing a sheer white cocktail dress. Her bare breasts were clearly visible, as was a very obvious red thong. "Scandalous," Lynn agreed. "But she's got Royce's attention."

Safina laughed. "C'mon, you're not seriously interested in that hunk of meat, are you?"

Lynn stared at her. "Listen to what you just said, sweetie." She laughed with Safina as Royce delivered their drinks, placing them on the table in front of them both with flare.

"Here you go, ladies. Please taste them and tell me what you think."

Lynn needed no further encouragement. She lifted her glass and took a healthy sip. She licked her lips and smiled broadly. "Mmm . . . it's perfect!"

Safina took a small sip and coughed a little as the sweet, fiery liquid coursed down her throat. "It's good, thank you." She smiled at Royce over the rim of her glass.

Royce nodded, bowing slightly. "If there's anything else I can get for you, just wave."

"How 'bout a dance?" Lynn offered with a winsome smile.

Royce lifted one eyebrow. "A dance, huh? Well, I may get a break and if I do you're on."

Lynn gaze stayed pinned on Royce's ass as he walked away. "Do you see the muscles on that guy?" She didn't wait for Safina to answer before cocking her head to the side. "Do you really like the drink?"

Safina tasted more of the liquid dessert. "It's sweet, deadly and very delicious."

Lynn laughed. "You wouldn't like mine."

"I know."

"Drink up and let's dance."

Safina threw her hands up. "We just sat down. Someone will take our table."

Lynn shook her head. "Girl c'mon. This band is jammin'."

"What about my shawl?" Safina asked.

"Tie it around your waist or something. C' mon. Let's go."

Safina giggled, feeling the warmth of the alcohol seeping into her empty stomach. She stood, quickly tying the shawl around her hips. "Let's get this party started!"

They edged their way to the dance floor, losing themselves in the crowd of bodies gyrating and moving to the music. Lynn started dancing with an attractive man, giving Safina the thumbs up. She returned the gesture, letting Lynn know she was okay, and kept dancing. A tall football player-type of guy moved into her personal space and no matter how she turned, he was back in her face. She felt squished and hot. The loud music, the smells of heavy cologne and perfume, and the dude jutting his hips in front of her had the room spinning.

Safina stopped dancing to see if the room would standstill.

What was in that drink anyway?

"Are you alright?" Lynn yelled, coming over to her.

Safina rubbed her temples, trying to talk over the noise. "I think I need to take a break. I'm going to the bathroom."

"I'll go with you."

"No, you stay. Your guy can actually dance. I'll be right back." Safina smiled weakly at her friend before weaving through the mass of bodies. At least she shared the same shoe size as Lynn, but the heels were higher than she preferred. Relieved to finally see the bathroom sign, Safina cursed when someone bumped into her from the side. She turned to see the rude person responsible for her possibly bruised shoulder, but no one paid her any attention.

Looking heavenward in exasperation, Safina noticed something flashing overhead in the open ceiling design of the club. She narrowed her gaze and sucked in a quick breath. What the—? Someone was up there! Moving toward the bathroom door and away from the rest of the crowd, Safina looked up again and gasped in surprise. Blinking twice, she tried to make sense of what she was seeing. There was a man with wings balancing dangerously on a rafter beam about thirty feet off the ground! She watched in shocked silence as the winged man drew something from his back.

A bow and arrow!

Safina's mouth fell open in shock as he pulled the massive bow back and took aim at someone on the ground. Panic, icy cold and paralyzing, gripped her as she

watched the arrow descend with unerring accuracy to the unsuspecting women dancing with a man.

Lynn!

In slow motion, Safina saw the arrow pierce Lynn's back and disappear from view. Gasping with horror, Safina dashed back toward the dance floor.

"No!" Safina screamed. "No! Someone stop him!" She couldn't move fast enough and no one seemed to hear her over the thump of the loud music. Tears blinded her as she fought her way through the crowd. Safina reached Lynn, yanking her hard away from her bewildered dance partner.

"Lynn!" Safina cried, looking at her friend's chest. Maybe the arrow had gone straight through.

Lynn frowned. "What's wrong with you?"

Safina shook her head. "I thought you were hurt. I-I saw him . . . and he shot you!"

Lynn touched Safina's head. "You must be sick. I'm fine. Better than fine —"

"*I saw him*. Look!" Safina pointed up toward the ceiling and froze when her eyes locked with the mysterious man overhead. He studied her and Safina stared back, unable to tear away her gaze. "Do you see him?" She yelled, feeling her legs start to wobble as she shook Lynn's arm.

Lynn squinted up at the dark ceiling. "I don't see anything, Safina."

Safina watched transfixed as the winged man leapt into the air and disappeared in a flash. A second later, she crumpled to the floor.

* * * * *

Shit, Kallias thought, walking through the path of patrons moving out of his way as he approached the woman who had just passed out on the floor of his club. How could she have seen him? Kallias pursed his lips in anger. No mortal should've been

able to see him as high as he was *and* in the dark shadows. He had picked out the spot because of the position and privacy offered. Now he had to do damage control . . . something he never enjoyed.

"Back up people, give her some air. I'm Kal, one of the owners of *Red*. Are you her friend?" Kallias asked the concerned brunette dressed in a pink baby doll dress.

"I'm Lynn. I don't know what happened. Safina saw something up there," Lynn said, pointing to the ceiling.

Kallias looked down at Safina, who was beginning to stir. "Let's get her to a quieter spot." He scooped Safina up into his arms as Lynn talked in hushed tones to her confused dance partner. Kallias sensed Safina's eyes on his face an instant before he met her dazed gaze.

"You!" Safina accused. "Put me down. It was you!"

Kallias tightened his hold as Safina squirmed. "Shh! Let's not ruin everyone's Valentine's Day." He opened the office door with a push of the key pad, then stepped back to allow Lynn to go in first.

"Safina, are you feeling better?" Lynn asked as Kallias placed her on the leather couch.

Kallias listened carefully as he poured Safina a glass of water.

"I-I'm okay. I mean, I saw him" She pointed toward Kallias as he approached with the water. "He had wings and a bow and arrow."

Lynn laughed. "Safina! You can't be serious!"

Kallias lifted an eyebrow. "We do have bartenders dressed as cupids tonight . . . maybe you had a little too much to drink?" He watched her struggle to stand, tugging at the delectable skirt riding high to showcase a pair of amazing legs.

Safina shook her head. "One drink . . . I had *one* drink and I know what I saw!"

"You thought I shot your friend with a bow and arrow yet here she stands, unharmed and concerned for only you."

Lynn put the glass down on the rectangular coffee table and hugged Safina. "Let's just go back to the hotel. You can rest."

Safina frowned, obviously unsure of her next move. "No, it's Valentine's Day and we're supposed to be having fun."

"Are you sure you're okay?" Lynn asked again.

"You could rest here for a moment if you want," Kallias offered. What he really wanted was a chance to talk with Safina alone. There was something about her that was bothering him . . . something *other* than the fact she could see him when no mortal should.

"That's a good idea."

Safina looked at her friend and back at Kallias in silence as the aftershocks of bass pulsed outside the office door. "I just need to splash my face."

"To the left," Kallias said, pointing in the direction of the private bathroom. He watched her walk away on wobbly heels before turning back to Lynn. The twenty-ninth woman he had shot with his bow and arrow. "Were you having a good time, Lynn?"

Lynn nodded with a smile while running a hand through her loose curls. "*Red* is a great place. I've wanted to come here for forever."

"Thanks. I take it you two are from out of town?" Kallias asked, taking off his suit jacket.

"Yes, Chicago."

"Nice, well I'm glad you chose *Red* as the place to be on V-day."

"I never think I'm going to meet Mr. Right in a club, but . . ." Lynn trailed off, obviously lost in thought.

Kallias grinned, knowing the effects of Eros's arrow were still intensifying in her system. "Why don't you go back and dance with—"

Lynn snapped out of her lovesick daydream instantly. "Ryan."

"Ryan, right. I'll bring Safina back out in a few minutes," Kallias said, offering a warm smile.

Lynn looked skeptical. "I don't know."

Kallias nodded. "She's safe. Go!"

Blinking, Lynn turned to leave, unable to withstand the strength of the pull to her new friend, Ryan.

Kallias turned his head in the direction of the bathroom. Now, it was time to get some answers.

What was it about this woman?

* * * * *

Safina splashed cold water on her face several times before meeting her reflection in the decorative oval mirror hanging over the modern basin. Some curls had escaped from her fancy up-do, but that was the only sign to indicate she had experienced something out of the ordinary. Pulling a paper napkin off the marble counter, she patted the moisture from her face.

There was something about . . . she didn't even know his name. Safina shivered, remembering the awareness she'd experienced when his hard body had pressed so close to her own. Even in her dazed state, the scent of his cologne and the feel of his arms wrapped under her thighs had sent her heart racing.

Maybe Lynn was right; time to go back to the hotel. Taking a deep breath, she shut off the bathroom light and opened the door, instantly aware her friend was gone. "Where did Lynn go?"

Kallias downed the contents of his glass. "I told her I'd bring you back out after you had a few more moments to regroup. I'm Kal, by the way."

Safina looked around the beautifully decorated room. There were large mirrors on all the walls and an interesting collection of art pieces adorning the wooden shelves facing the desk Kal now rested against. *Red* was obviously doing very well.

"How do you feel now?"

Tearing her gaze off the exquisite ivory sculpture of a man and woman intertwined in an intimate embrace, Safina met Kal's dark brown eyes. "Better." Except

for the fact she was now experiencing a serious case of déjà vu on top of everything else.

"Beautiful, isn't?" Kallias asked, coming to stand by her and the suggestive artwork.

Safina nodded, afraid to speak. Just his presence evoked a response from her body she didn't understand. Goosebumps prickled along her skin as she sucked in a deep breath. Unconsciously, she took a step away from Kallias, who turned from the statue to study her.

"Safina?"

Those lips, those dark eyes, his voice was so familiar. She couldn't breathe. She wanted to escape whatever was happening to her. She needed to escape before she rushed into his arms. "I-I'm gonna go. Thanks, Kal."

Safina turned and rushed for the door, letting out a yelp when Kallias stopped her with a sharp tug on her arm.

Kallias moved close, bringing his face a centimeter, maybe two, from hers. "Do I know you?"

His hand on her skin was more than she could bear. Pleasurable tingles raced from his warm touch up and down her bare arm. With wide eyes, Safina tried to yank free but he held fast. "Please — "

Kallias cut her off with a kiss. His lips melded with hers and Safina forgot about struggling and moaned, going limp in his arms. She kissed him back, enjoying the heat and passion she could taste as he stroked her tongue, remembering . . . remembering *something*. Finding a bit of strength, Safina wrenched away, breathing hard.

Kallias licked his bottom lip and appeared to be just as bemused as she was. Safina used his momentary confusion to break free of his grasp. Pivoting on the balls of her high-heeled shoes, she bolted for the door.

"Safina! Safina, wait!"

Safina didn't look back.

* * * * *

Back in Chicago, Safina struggled to focus on appraising the new collection of articles brought for archiving. She couldn't stop thinking about L.A., more specifically, she couldn't stop thinking about Kal. He filled her thoughts and even crept into her dreams. One week had gone by and she still felt the imprint of his lips on hers.

It didn't help that her friend, Lynn, was head over heels in love with Ryan, who did seem like a nice guy and just so happened to also be from Chicago. The two lovebirds had been inseparable since meeting at *Red*. What were the odds of that? Safina couldn't hope for such luck.

Sighing loudly, she closed the file, grateful the library had closed over an hour ago. The last thing she wanted to do was talk to anyone and she was actually glad Lynn was already gone. She didn't think she could take another, "Isn't he great?" question from her friend.

After locking her folders in the desk drawer, Safina leaned back in her chair, recalling the ivory sculpture in Kal's office. She was certain she had seen the piece of art before. Hell, she felt like she had met *Kal* before, which was crazy, but not half as crazy as believing she'd seen him with wings like an angel. Shaking her head, she pushed all those thoughts from her mind. It was late and she couldn't wait to get home and unwind. What she needed was a nice, long bath and some of the pasta primavera she'd made the night before.

"Let's go," she muttered to herself, grabbing her wool coat as she shut off her office light. The hallway to the main entrance was quiet now and the click clack of her heels sounded offensively loud. A rush of cold air around her stocking-covered legs made her shiver and Safina noticed an open window in her co-worker's office. Surprised, she walked into the dark room, wondering who would've made such a careless mistake. Open windows were not allowed for the sake of the materials handled.

Putting her coat on the chair inside the door, Safina crossed the carpeted floor, shivering as more icy wind burst into the room. She gripped the lip on the window, struggling to close it as her nipples tightened painfully and pleurably from the cold.

"Let me help you with that."

Screaming, Safina whipped around to see Kal leaning against the door jamb, looking very calm and incredibly sexy in a dark suit. "How — ? What are you doing here? It's closing time." Her words sounded strangled and Safina would've laughed if she could have managed. *It's closing time? Not, what are you doing here? How did you track me down all the way from L.A.?*

Kallias smiled. "It took me a minute to find you, Safina."

Safina swallowed slowly. "What's going on?" She backed up to the open window behind her as Kallias approached, ignoring the stinging winter wind rustling around her.

"Something's going on here and I have to know what it is," Kallias answered, inches away from her now.

Safina watched him lock her in place with his hands on both side of her arms as he gripped the window. She was startled, but that didn't stop her from noticing how good he looked and smelled. Her eyes drank in every chiseled feature on his cocoa brown face, from his tapered moustache to the full lips that had haunted her dreams.

"All I think about is you and it's driving me crazy," Kallias whispered in her ear as he wrapped his arms around her waist. "Has it been the same for you?"

Kissing him seemed easier than questioning what was going on. Without thinking, Safina stood on her tippy toes and pressed her lips to Kal's. The instant they connected the feeling of déjà vu flooded through every pore of her body. If Kal was surprised by her boldness he recovered quickly, taking over the kiss as he crushed her to him. She threaded her fingers through the soft curls on his head. The winter air whipped around them, yet Safina wasn't shivering from cold, but rather from deep-rooted desire. Kallias cupped her bottom, bringing her closer, and she groaned with delight, eager to touch him as well. She ran her hands inside his suit jacket, caressing

hard muscle as she moved her hands around to his back. Her fingers touched something hard and she froze just as Kallias did. Jerking away from him, Safina pressed up against the window sill, shivering again, this time from the cold.

"What is that?" she asked searching his face.

Kallias blinked but did not answer.

Angered, Safina grabbed his tie and pulled. "What's behind your back, Kal?" The answer to her question raced through her mind before he reached behind his shoulder blades to pull out a sophisticated golden bow.

"There's something I have to tell you, Safina." His eyes seemed to glitter like black diamonds in the darkened room.

Waving her hands, Safina shook her head. "No, no . . . I don't wanna know."

Kallias slowly took off his suit jacket. "It's not what you think."

"I don't know what to think." Her fingers were freezing. "What are you doing?" Safina asked as Kallias began unbuttoning his shirt. Momentarily distracted by smooth chocolate abs, she gasped in complete shock when incredibly huge ivory wings unfurled from behind Kallias's back. The glossy wings stretched to the ceiling, flexing as long as the small room behind him. Goosebumps covered Safina's arms as she stared at Kal. He was easily the most magnificent thing she had ever seen . . . and the scariest.

"I won't hurt you," Kallias said, remaining still.

She sensed he wouldn't hurt her even if she didn't understand anything else. "This is crazy! What are you?" She couldn't take her eyes off him. Her mind was racing with a million different thoughts. He was beautiful and he wasn't human.

"I'm an erote." Kallias took one step toward her, holding up his hands when Safina pressed farther away.

"What does that mean?" Safina asked, transfixed by the striking contrast of the ivory feathers against his mahogany skin. She rested her bottom on the tiny windowsill as Kallias studied her.

"Come with me and I'll explain everything." He took another step toward her and offered his hand.

Safina hesitated. She wanted to reach for him . . . wanted to feel the energy between them that made everything seem okay. The warmth in his eyes made her reach forward, slowly extending her hand. It was if time stood still as her fingertips touched Kal's. The surprising blast of sirens careening down the street five stories below caught her off guard. Startled, Safina jerked backward, losing her precarious hold on the windowsill. A wild scream erupted from her throat as she fell out of the window and into the icy dark night.

Kallias lost precious seconds reining his wings in to fit through the narrow window. There was a chance someone might see him, but he had no choice. He didn't give himself time to think about what was happening. He jumped from the window, free-falling for a split second before his wings spread wide, lifting him in the chilled air. Diving downward was not easy with the bitter winds punishing his muscles, but he pushed himself. He had to reach her.

Safina's screams turned his blood cold, the worst kind of torture he'd ever experienced. He was so close, just a few more meters. He reached out, seeing the stark terror in Safina's eyes, and snatched her up right before impact. She clung to him for a moment and then she was gone . . . fainted dead away. He held her close as he ascended high into the clouds covering the stars, trying to ignore the feeling in his heart he'd never be able to let Safina go.

Safina woke up with a moan. Her head was so fuzzy, but at least she wasn't cold anymore. She opened her eyes and found Kal crouched by her side.

"You're safe, Safina. Are you alright?" He touched her hair and cheek before standing.

Looking around, Safina recognized the interior of *Red*. "I'm okay. You saved me." She stared into his eyes, seeing fierce emotion flicker in his gaze.

"Kallias, why have you brought a mortal here now?"

Safina jumped at the bellowing voice from behind her. Lifting her head, her eyes widened to see a very attractive man with wavy blond hair and piercing blue eyes. He stood over six feet tall, casually dressed in a white t-shirt, blue jeans and cowboy boots. His mouth was turned up in a slight smile, but his expression froze when he saw her. "Safina?"

"You know her, Eros?" Kallias asked with an incredulous look on his face.

Eros walked over to Safina, who still lay on the couch. "Do I know her? She's one of us . . . or she used to be."

Safina sat up, shaking her head. "What are you talking about? And what kind of name is Eros?"

Eros grinned, looking devilishly handsome. "I've been asking that question for centuries."

"Hey, Eros, we're going for a late night bite – " The deeply tanned, heavily muscled guy with sandy brown hair halted midsentence. "Safina?"

Kallias cursed again. "What the hell is going on here? Aaron knows her, too? What about you all?"

Safina watched him point to another handsome man with ice blond hair and an exotic-looking dark-haired woman, both of whom stood in the corner of the room, studying her carefully.

Eros laughed. "They all know her and so do you . . . you just don't remember."

Safina stood, suddenly tired of being talked around. "Will somebody please tell *me* what's going on here?"

Eros paced around her. "It's simple. You both are erotes, part of a group of demi-gods whose sole purpose is to make other mortals fall in love. Although we encourage others to take the romantic plunge, it's a much easier job if we remain unattached. Or fall in love with one of our own kind, like Dacey and Nik – "

"What? Oh, please!" Nik interrupted, avoiding Dacey's eyes.

Safina watched the other woman blush but remain silent. She met Eros amused gaze when he stood in front of her.

"You fell in love with Kallias, but he wasn't ready to love you back. You were heartbroken, unfocused, and essentially useless to me." Eros touched her nose. "You asked me to let you go. To let you become a mortal and find love as a human." Eros shrugged. "I was feeling generous that day and encouraged Aphrodite to make you a potion. A potion that would hide your wings and make you forget who and what you truly are."

Safina felt Kallias move besides her. When he reached for her hand she didn't resist. She felt like her legs were going to buckle beneath her. What Eros shared was too much to process.

"So, why don't I remember her then?" Kallias asked, his voice heavy and tight.

Aaron clapped his shoulder. "You weren't yourself after Safina left. We all encouraged you to go after her, but you refused."

"You were an ass all the time," Nik offered cheerily until seeing Dacey's annoyed look. "We needed you back to your old self."

Eros met Kallias's fierce stare. "I gave you a similar potion to help you forget Safina. Soon after, you were back to your regular, fun, high-performance, flirtatious self and that's what I wanted."

Kallias's jaw tightened with anger. "You tricked me into drinking a potion?"

Eros laughed. "Aphrodite paid you a visit and you drank it of your own volition. Safina was free, you were back in the game for me and everybody was supposed to be happy. I never would've guessed you two would find your way back to each other on your own."

"I want to remember," Safina said quietly. "I want to be who I am."

Eros nodded. "And you will." He disappeared from the room, returning a moment later with two glasses of purple liquid. "One for you." He handed the glass to Kallias. "And one for you," he said, passing the drink to Safina. He moved away to join the others on the opposite side of the room.

Facing Safina, Kallias lifted his glass, but she put a hand on his arm and he paused.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Her heart hammered painfully with anxiety over his answer and anticipation of what would happen to her after drinking the strange contents in her glass.

Kallias kissed her hard. "I'm sure." He downed the liquid and waited for her to do the same.

Safina braced herself for the taste, pleasantly surprised as the flavors of anise, grapes and oranges rolled across her tongue and flowed down her throat. For a moment, she felt nothing and then a tingle began at her toes and traveled to the top of her head. "It feels funny!"

Eros smiled. "Give it a moment."

Flashes of memory raced through her mind. Images of her lying with Kallias in bed, arguing, kissing, laughing . . . and snatches of the pain she had felt from his rejection. The skin between her shoulder blades felt taut and heated and Safina winced with discomfort. She felt herself sway, but Kallias wrapped his arms around her, lending his strength.

"The pain will pass," Eros soothed. "Do you remember now?"

Safina nodded. She did. She remembered every wonderful, every heartbreaking moment and she was glad. Looking up into Kallias's dark eyes, Safina smiled. "Do you remember me?"

Kallias smiled back. "I love you and I loved you then, I was just too stubborn to admit it. I was afraid."

Safina glanced at his friends, at *her* friends. "And now?"

"Now we take flight! I have just the perfect place for you and me," Kallias said before turning to the others. "Safina will have to catch up with you guys when we get back; right now we've got things to . . . *discuss*."

Eros lifted an eyebrow in merriment. "Indeed." He flipped the switch and the wide window overhead began its silent retraction.

Kallias took Safina's hand. "Ready?"

Safina blushed at the good-natured teasing and knowing looks directed toward them both. She trembled, hearing her blouse rip and another sensation of tightness between her shoulder blades as her wings unfurled. Laughing, she swirled around the room, catching her reflection from all angles in all the mirrors on the walls. She was home, she was in love and she was an erote!

"Careful with those things!" Nik complained, moving out of reach of Safina's wing span.

Dacey laughed. "Nik, shut up!"

"Let's go!" Kallias said, taking Safina's hand.

Everyone chuckled at Safina's startled yelp as Kallias yanked off her feet and into the air. Within seconds she broke free from Kallias to take flight on her own, the two of them soaring toward the bright stars in the dark night sky.

Eros shook his head, observing the couple ascend with the rest of the group. "If all star-crossed lovers find their way back to each other like these two did, we might be out of business!"

Indeed!

~The End~

About the Author

Music and romance are the two things in Angela's life that have always captured her heart. Some would say the two go hand in hand and she would have to agree. She's always been drawn to writing whether it was journaling, scribbling down poetry, songs or short stories.

She got into romance novels around the age of twelve and was hooked, despite her parents' disapproval. She actually read every Harlequin romance novel available in her high school library, earning an award that year for having read the most books! She would hoard her romance novel stash, sneak and read them late into the night at home and later during college recitals. She started writing her first love story in high school, but never believed she could become an author.

It has taken her awhile to understand that you have to reach for your dreams no matter what others may dream for you. No matter what you think is too much to hope for ... dream it and keep moving toward that goal!

Today, she's thrilled to be pursuing her dream of being a romance author. She's passionate about stories that showcase independent, strong heroines and inspire hope and belief in love. She's convinced that romance novels fuel and speak to the secret desires of many women around the world and she's so happy to be offering her own work to the genre!

She hopes her books speak to the heroine in each of us. She hopes her stories inspire, entertain, and create a literary escape that touches your heart!

* * * * *

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