

Alpheratz Press
ALPHERBITE S

COMING
BACK

M.KING

An Alpherbites Free Read from Alpheratz Press Ltd.

Alpheratz Press Ltd.

...something a little bit different

www.alpheratzpress.com

This edition is to be distributed free of charge by the publisher and its licensed affiliates.

Any reproduction, copying, or transference, by any means, manual, mechanical, or electronic, of this material constitutes copyright theft and is strictly forbidden.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, places, events, and characters are fictitious or are used fictitiously, a product of the author's imagination. Any similarities to actual events, or persons, living or dead, are purely coincidental.

Coming Back

Copyright © 2010 M. King

ISBN: 978-1-907623-05-9

Cover art and design by Covershock for Alpheratz Press Ltd.

All rights reserved. Except for review purposes, the reproduction of this book in whole or part, electronically or mechanically, constitutes a copyright violation.

Published by Alpheratz Press Ltd. 2010

Find more from M. King at

www.mking.alpheratzpress.com

COMING BACK

BY

M. KING

God, but it's been a long time.

Since we spoke on the phone the other night, I've been trying to work out just how long, but I'm really not sure if it's five or six years.

Have I really forgotten?

I imagine, if I confess this to you, you'll tease me for being so forgetful, maybe say I must be starting to get old. Yet I can't believe I could ever come anywhere near forgetting you.

Not that I'll tell *you* that.

Even so, I'm slugging back the vodka tonics, waiting for you, and it seems like no time has passed at all. It's as if it was only yesterday we were in *The Holly Bush* illegally, sneaking furtive drinks we were too young for, and furtive kisses we couldn't put names to.

To be brutally honest, I'm glad you left. We were, I think, too young. Too young to cope with what was happening.

Of course, perhaps I just told myself that, because I didn't want to admit what a coward I'd been. That would be shameful, I know, but I've done worse things since then.

I don't think of them now, and I don't think anymore about the past because—as always—I've got myself a table with my back against the wall, so I can see the door opening, and I can see that you've arrived.

My stomach does that little jump it's done every time that damn door's opened tonight, but this time I know it's you, even though your body is turned to the side, turned away from me as you pass some dark-clothed woman in the doorway. Immediately, I recognise your shoulders. And, immediately, my nipples contract a little, even as my eyes are adjusting to fit your welcome shape back into the world.

It's ridiculous, isn't it? The thinking part of me, the small part that doesn't automatically become a crotch on legs the second I watch you walk to the bar, is amused by the fact that this hasn't changed. I knew it wouldn't, somehow. I hadn't really thought about you in years, but the reunion last month was like a flare to my memory, like a match to the curling corner of an old photograph.

Something that time had compressed, made flat and distant, suddenly blistered into life, coiling and writhing in the snare of a growing flame. I'd half-expected to see you there, surprised at my disappointment when I didn't, and I knew I had to see you.

I had to find out.

Put it all to rest, I suppose.

You get your drink and my hand is raised, fingers half-curved, half-waving, just waiting...yet again, stuck somewhere between inaction and decisive movement. I want to bite my lip—you've made me nervous—but I don't dare wreck my lip-gloss. It doesn't matter, because you see me then, and you smile. God, you haven't forgotten how to smile, that's for sure. I am caught up and held in that megawatt grin, and as you walk over you don't seem to have changed at all.

You reach my table, and I'm sure I'll knock something over as I stand up but, miraculously, I don't. You set your drink down and say hello and, rising, I lean across to kiss your cheek. The evenings are still warm—I'm wearing a summer dress, my wrap abandoned on the back of the chair—and your fingers are cool as they curve against my arm. You smell different, a far better aftershave than you used to use, and your skin's rougher on my lips.

I try to leave you unmarked, unblemished by the make-up I put on, I admit it, purely to impress you, and that seems funny, because once I tried so very hard to mark you.

You smile again as we part, such a brief exchange, and as your fingers slide from my skin you observe that I still wear the same perfume. I say, yes, but I don't mention that yours has improved. We sit, and I can see now that you have aged. Oh, we're both still young, in the grand scheme of things, and there's not much difference there.

It's nothing more than the light shadings of flesh, and perhaps the edges have been buffed off that youthful glow, but I can see time resting on you like attic dust.

When I ask how you've been, carefully, my lips touching the rim of my glass before the question fully hangs in the air, you lift one shoulder in a kind of shrug. Your gaze flicks down to the table and, for a moment, I can tell that you think about trying to palm me off with a 'fine'.

Your father died, you tell me, after a moment. I'm sorry, but not for him, and I'm not surprised. I know, though neither of us will voice it, that it will have been a relief. You had to watch him change so much, and I don't know whether the symptoms or the treatment were worse, or whether the thing that hurt was that he couldn't—that he *wouldn't*—help himself.

You told me once that it was hard to love him, because you knew he'd choose the drink over you in the end, and I was fool enough to tell you that everyone deserved love. I know, now, that I was wrong.

Now I understand that it has to be earned.

You change the tone quickly after that; you briskly skim over the work you've done, the places you've lived, and you ask me what I've been doing. My answers are much the same. I tell you about places I've been, about the business I'm running now, my own rental company for day launches and small skiffs. I employ five people, and we do great business, especially in the summer months when people who've never sailed before want to give it a go.

You're pleased, because you remember I never wanted to work in an office, though you say you never realised I knew anything about boats. I tell you I didn't, until I started the business, and we laugh.

I'm glad to hear that your time in Sydney was great, that you gained so much experience in the world of marketing you now inhabit. We skirt around it, but I know everybody used to think that, by now, you'd have been playing bass professionally.

It seems the band never did come together.

It's a shame.

Now, perhaps we're both nervous, or perhaps we've been sitting here longer than it seems, but we've finished our drinks. You go to get another round, insisting on paying for me, and I know I'm checking you out as you walk away. Your arse was never amazing, but that was the very thing that struck me.

There were plenty of guys with nicer, tighter arses than yours—and I had seen many that were nicer—but I never found one I liked better, simply because yours was a part of *you*. I think, given enough time, back then I could even have found your acne attractive.

Is that weird?

Nevertheless, as I watch you walk over to the bar, it still brings a smile to my face. It's not just this whole question of liking something because it's part of your, either. Yes, it's still your arse, but, to be honest, you've clearly gone and got yourself a gym subscription you never had back then.

Yum.

When you come back, we're laughing and chatting as if we're the oldest friends in the world. We share creaky, ancient jokes, new jokes, and then you make some throwaway comment, some risqué line, and it takes me right back to how we used to talk. Our friends—and they were separate circles, I know—could verge on the conservative side. You used to get a kick out of shaking things up, and I was just as bad. I remember the time we were at a really dreary

party. You'd spiked the Coke, but it wasn't helping much, so you waited until a lull in the conversation, then clapped me soundly on the arse and asked if I wanted to go and fuck in the bathroom.

You weren't serious, and neither was I when I said yes, but it was worth it to watch those underage girls choke on the beers they were drinking. We ended up walking over to the old quarry, just talking and watching the sky. I remember wondering, in light of things that came after that, why nothing happened.

I suppose, in retrospect, we spent three years in anti-climax, didn't we?

In any case, I'm busy laughing so hard that it hurts when, out of the blue, you tell me I'm more beautiful than ever. That's really very sneaky of you. I stop suddenly, and I think I could easily have swallowed my tongue, but I don't really mind. Your face is caught somewhere between serious and scared, and I can see the lust in your eyes. I thank you, and I know that, if this is chemistry, someone's just put a match to the potassium.

No-one ever loves as hard as the first time, I've been told. I know it's not true, though there is something to be said for novelty. We were never in love, of course, and it's that knowledge that makes it easy to see how we slipped out of touch, and so hard to understand why we never made the most of what we did have.

The first time I met you was at a party. New Year's, as I recall, when you oiled your way across the dance floor with a beer in your hand and a filthy gleam in your eye. You were a little drunk, and when you put your moves on me I gave you some comeback so witty that I've long since forgotten it. You blinked a bit, looked surprised, and we talked and laughed and then the evening was gone, and a whole new year was starting. For most of the time I knew you then, we were both dating other people, and when we flirted it was just part of the game.

For a long time, I believed that you making me feel the way I did was part of that game, too. I realised the rules had changed right here, in this bar, the first time we kissed. Two things we shouldn't have consumed that night: vodka martinis and forbidden fruit.

It's a stupid thought to have, because now I'm thinking of how your mouth was, and the way your breath smelt, and how incredibly warm it was to be in the crook of your arm, my fingers bunching up the smooth pima cotton of your polo shirt (you used to wear them all the time. Would you believe I've actually had a slight thing for the damn shirts ever since?) as your thumb traced slow circles on the

small of my back. It was a whole set of sensations, a living tapestry that was you, or at least you as you were through my eyes, my lips, my hands.

I remember how we broke apart, and how you mumbled some kind of apology and left, and how we barely saw each other for weeks after. I remember how hard it was to look at you, how I used to see that expression in your eyes, and not understand why you would barely speak to me, or why the sparkle was gone from our conversations.

I knew what was happening at home, that your mother had left after your dad hit her one time too many. I know now that that's when he got worse. What I can't understand is why it's so hard to breathe right now, or why the air feels thick, as if it's sliding over my skin like soup. Then I realise that you're touching my hand, that you're tracing those tiny, gentle circles on my knuckles, and I want to pull away, because that's what I would have done then.

This time, I don't.

This time, I let you keep touching me, and I let myself enjoy it. I let myself hear what you're wetting your lips, screwing up your courage to say. I look you in the eyes, remembering every fleck of green in them, every freckle that lies like a tainted snowflake on your cheek.

I'm amazed that you think you should apologise. If anyone needs to, it's me, and I tell you that, but you won't have it. You say you're sorry for running, for leaving, for not facing up to things. You say you should never have gone to Sydney, and I tell you that you'd still have left. You'd have done what I did, what pretty much everyone else did: go to college, to a university, or to some place—any place—other than home. Many of them have never come back. I wouldn't have, I remind you, but for the reunion last month at which I met that mutual friend of ours, kind enough to give me your number. No, then we were fledglings, and it was our nature to escape, to fly the nest.

You smile, and you say, yes, but have I noticed how many people we knew then who are married now? We can each list at least four, plus two divorces, and I say that those still count. It's still getting away, building something new. Making changes. You tuck in your bottom lip and look thoughtful for a moment, and your fingertips still in their movement on my hand, which is a loss I feel like a sucker punch.

Now, you do something I've not known you do before. You weave my fingers into yours, folding your palm against mine, and you look at me with your head to one side.

You say that you're glad I called, although you were surprised. You say you thought the past was gone, nothing but fond memories, and that I had nothing to come back for. I tell you, as I told you on the phone, that perhaps there was something.

I watch, with the pulse beating high and hard in my throat, as you bring my fingers to your lips. You kiss them, and I can feel the heat of your breath and the subtle strength of your mouth. Then you ask me the question that I always wanted to hear, but never fully understood.

And I say yes.

I remember this town, this place in which I grew up but was not born, like a lover. Visited again after five (or is it six?) years, I can see the changes which have touched it, but also the old bones that remain unaltered. I see it from another angle, wreathed in memories, and it is both pleasant and painful.

You still live in that grey, sloping house a little way from the museum. I suppose it is yours now, with your father gone, and I do see remnants of him as you let us in. The pictures on the walls are the same ones—his choices, generic prints of rather ugly pictures—and the carpets are old and worn and still smell faintly of tobacco, though they're faded from repeated cleanings.

One person's dishes are draining beside the sink—you are far too fastidious to let them soak while you're out—and a fat tabby cat is stretched out asleep on the sofa. She opens one yellow eye and gives me a withering stare before rolling over again, dismissing me with a flash of her white belly. You press a tumbler full of whiskey into my hand and you lean your forehead against my shoulder as I stand, looking out of your kitchen window into the blank spaces of the night-washed garden.

I sip the whiskey, but it quenches nothing, so I turn in your arms and find your mouth, and before long my glass is tipping in the hands that are crossed behind your neck. I spill whiskey all down your back, but you don't seem to mind. You have a moment of machismo and try to lift me onto the kitchen surface, but it's too high and all we manage is a clumsy lurch and a bumping of noses which sends us laughing again.

The laughter dies when I ask you if you want to go upstairs. Suddenly, there is no place for it, nor seemingly for words, because

you nod mutely and all I can see is your eyes deepening away into eternity. The cat rolls over in her sleep, paws patting at some phantom rodent, and I follow you to the bedroom. The same room in which, as a child, you saw your father push your mother in a temper, and the door from which you saw her fall, tumbling down the stairs we now climb.

You would have been, let me see, five? Or maybe six.

She was not badly hurt, but you bore scars.

You turn to kiss me again at the top of the stairs and—if you were not so choked—I think you would ask me if it's what I want. It's a stupid question, so I'm very glad that you don't. It's lighter and brighter up here, and you've bought a new bed. Good. I push you gently onto it, enjoying the fresh hardness to your chest. When the shirt comes off I am gratified to see that I wasn't wrong about the gym subscription.

You murmur my name as I unzip my dress and, as I kneel across you, your hands run up the outside of my thighs, gently brushing aside the hem of the thin material, fingertips travelling towards the lace lips of the stocking tops. A look of blissful glee crosses your face as you realise my underwear was chosen with display as well as function in mind and I shrug, looking as innocent as I can in the circumstances. We both knew as soon as we spoke where we'd be by now. Of that, at least, I am sure.

I pull the dress over my head and toss it away, clad now only in my stockings, thong, and lacy bra, and I can feel every inch of your excitement. You cup my breasts with a hazy-eyed blend of reverence and delight that makes me think you may not even notice the rest of me.

You wonder aloud, as my shaking fingers work clumsily on the hooks, why we never did this earlier and—although I think I know the reasons—I don't have a chance to voice them. As soon as I remove the bra your head is buried between my breasts, and I am too late to suppress the shriek you drag from me. If that's what your tongue can do, I shall never forgive myself for leaving.

Of course, these days, neither of us have a partner to think of. That was one of the things that stopped us the first time around, right? I was so concerned with my wannabe tennis pro, and you—well, it may have been quantity over quality—but you were never without your latest love hanging from your arm. I recall saying I wouldn't be caught dead as one of that number, but then that's not what you ever intended, is it?

Your mouth is everywhere now. I'm amazed at how you manage it, though I really can't complain. I surprise you with teeth and nimble fingers and your breathing comes in ragged gasps until I stop. You pant and vow revenge, and before I can scupper your plans, you have me at your mercy, the most secret parts of my body obviously not well hidden enough. Your tongue takes my mouth as prelude, as promise, even as your fingers dance within me, a sly come-hither motion that locks me around you. I think I should have trimmed my nails, because they scratch you, but you bite your lip and want me to do it again.

I do, twice in the space of an hour. In return, it feels like you'll split me open. Not because you're huge, but as if any touch from you could dissect me where I lay, open me up to the elements from neck to groin, and leave me defenceless.

You kiss my chest, between my breasts, and the pulse is trying to beat through the skin there. Your hands sizzle on my body and your hair hangs damp on your forehead. You squeeze your eyes shut as I touch you, touch us, touch me, and you cry out as once more I pull you against me, into me, so tight it's hard to tell where we meet or finish. I understand now. Your lips are by my ear, and you whisper it so quietly.

In those few seconds, it's true for us both. It makes sense, at last, and I realise—I finally see, between the explosions of neon black colours that mark my descent into bliss—that I loved you then, and I love you now. We sweat and swear—I think you even cry a little as your pleasure is ripped from you—and what seems to take an eternity is suddenly over.

The moments of quiet are the best. Between breaths, between hard-beating hearts and the murmured laughter of satiation, there is the time and the peace to see things clearly. Rolling over, you place your warm hand on my hip and ask if I'm back for good, and if I'll stay.

You smell of sweat and sex and the alpha male pheromones you'd get rich from if you could bottle. I ask what you mean—stay the night, or in the town?

Both, you say.

Right now, you tell me, you never want to see me go.

I smile and tell you that's because you're thinking with your little head, not your bigger one. You press both against me as you chuckle, your arms wrapped around me, and ask again for an answer.

I lean back against you, because you feel so good, and tell you that I wasn't coming back. Only visiting. I can feel you tense against me, but I tell you that—in the morning—I will be leaving, because I have a home to go to and a business to run.

But, I say, it doesn't mean I won't come by again.

You appear to think about this for a few moments, your lips pressed glumly to my shoulder.

I know if I could see your face, your eyebrows would be drawn together in that frown you used to make while doing algebra. I wonder if I should have said something different but, after a while, you relax.

As the dawn begins to break outside, you snuggle closer, and tell me how interested you've always been in boats.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

M. King lives and works in a damp, verdant corner of South West England, where she may usually be found behind a keyboard and vat of coffee.

She writes vibrant, compelling fiction across an extremely wide range of genres. Her work has been published (under various names) in numerous places online and in print, and she has contributed poetry, reviews, and columns to numerous online and print magazines, anthologies, and journals over the years. Her work has additionally been featured in mixed media exhibitions, festivals, and on radio.

On the rare occasions she isn't scribbling, M. King enjoys falling off horses, taking long, muddy walks with her dogs, and playing the guitar extremely badly.

www.twitter.com/mkingauthor
www.facebook.com/mkingauthor

www.mking.alpheratzpress.com

mking@alpheratzpress.com

MORE BY M. KING

Available from www.alpheratzpress.com



Breaking Faith

Brett thinks he has life all planned out...until he meets Tommy. But, when Tommy's father winds up dead, the romance that began over one blissful Montana summer takes a much darker turn.

Novel / Romantic Drama / GLBT



Daemon

He's been dead for thirty years, but it hasn't cramped his style. When Ellis Ross encounters the ghost of legendary 1970s glam rock star, Damon Brent, she discovers he was murdered and—as if that wasn't enough—he wants *her* to find out who did it. Of course, when you're being haunted by a man wearing more eyeliner than you are, it's hard to say no.

Novel / Mystery / Humour / Speculative Fiction



Thirteen Maidens

Jason loves Olly. Olly loves stone circles, and so begins a week's holiday monument-hopping in Wiltshire. But it can be dangerous to dance among the stones....

Short Fiction / Romance / Speculative Fiction / GLBT

Alpheratz Press Ltd.

...something a little bit different

www.alpheratzpress.com

MORE FREE READS FROM ALPHERATZ PRESS...

Alpherbites are short stories across a wide range of genres, available for free download from Alpheratz Press and selected partners.

Why not take a nibble at a new author or genre today?



Shards of Glass by Charley Oweson

Joel suffered terribly as a boy. His father killed his mother and took his rage and guilt out on his son. Joel dreams of the past too much, and it filters into his waking life. One day, Joel is unable to keep his own fury in check, and the shards of glass on the kitchen windowsill become all too appealing...

Literary fiction/Crime/Horror



The Cuckoo Child by M. King

And they say too much caring makes you numb. After a lifetime of looking after her ailing father, a woman considers her options.

Literary fiction

Alpheratz Press Ltd.

...something a little bit different

www.alpheratzpress.com