

Happy Valentines
Ghost

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A Samhain Publishing Freebie

Author's note: The snarky ghost Maggie is one of my favorite characters in *Lions' Pride*. I liked her so much I decided to give her a story—and a lover—of her own.

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The Beginning

"Will he be all right?" Agent Gonzales asked Dr. Maggie Krantz. After the torture was done and both Agent Shaw and lion dual Jude Duclos, the specimen, had been transferred to the medical facility, one of the armed Agents remained behind. Maggie was still trying to figure out who he was supposed to be guarding from whom. She had a feeling she, as much as the specimen, was under surveillance.

"He'll be fine," she said, shuffling papers on her desk and doing her best to pretend the Agent wasn't there.

"What about the specimen?" The uniformed guy gestured at Jude Duclos, lying unconscious in containment, monitors beeping.

"I meant the specimen." She didn't realize how clipped she sounded, how dismissive of Agent Shaw's well-being, until she caught the look on Gonzales's face.

Not shock, exactly—it would take a lot to shock anyone here, even if they'd started their career with the Agency as naïve as she'd been—but confusion at her sounding as callous as most of them did on a regular basis.

She had a wild urge to laugh. Watching on the surveillance camera while Shaw goaded the specimen into attacking, she'd been rooting for Duclos and regretting that he was still too affected by the drugs to shift and rip the bastard's throat out. The taste of blood would have ruined any chance he had of escaping as anything resembling himself—it locked the magic involved in the DNA alteration—but the poor furry bastard was pretty much fucked anyway. At least it would get Shaw out of the way and Duclos would get to go down fighting.

"Agent Shaw will be fine." She was too tired to hide she wasn't overjoyed by the prospect. "Besides, you knew the setup. We weren't supposed to intervene until it was clear one way or another how the specimen would react. Shaw's life was an acceptable risk, but not the specimen's."

"Even so... Shaw's human."

Something snapped inside her.

Maggie looked from Agent Gonzales to the two unconscious forms and back to the Agent. "Are you sure about that, Gonzales? Shaw can kill people with his mind. Is that more human than a guy who can change into a lion? They both seem pretty weird to me, and Shaw's meaner and crazier than that dual."

"I don't get you. That's just magic. Shaw's human, the same as you and me." Whatever Gonzales had been recruited for, it hadn't been a genius IQ.

She had been, for all the good it had done her. A genius IQ and, she realized now, tunnel vision that let her focus entirely on her experiments and not see the big—evil—picture until it was too late.

"And how human is that? I remember from Philosophy 101 that part of what makes us human is moral reasoning. How much moral reasoning are we exercising here? Jude Duclos did by not killing Shaw. But what about us? When was the last time you or I exercised moral reasoning?"

Gonzales shook his head. "I don't...I don't want to talk about this any more." He literally backed away.

Maggie sat down, shaking, fighting back the urge to weep.

She thought at first, logically, that it was from fear.

Then she identified what she was feeling as relief.

Gonzales would report this conversation, and before long, she would have an

accident.

After that, she'd be free.

Dead, sure, and as far as she knew that was where your story ended—but dead and free was an improvement over continuing as a don't-do-this example for future medical ethics classes.

She reached for her cell phone and called her next-door neighbor. "Nancy, I need to go out of town for a few days. Could you check in on the cats until you see my car in the driveway again? Key's in the mailbox."

Nancy volunteered at the local animal shelter. When she turned up dead, Nancy would see to it that Magnet and Pixel found good homes.

She hung up the phone and saw Gonzales in the doorway staring at her. "You're crazy," he repeated.

"I'm dead," she corrected, as calmly as she could. "And we both know it. But at least my cats will be cared for when I'm gone. Moral reasoning."

Gonzales fled.

Maggie thought for a second that another uniformed man took his place in the room—not an Agent, but a soldier. She blinked, though, and he was gone.

Nerves. A girl was entitled to a hallucination or two when she'd just signed her own death warrant.

Maggie grinned. She'd figured out how to zap the locks on the holding cells. So convenient that the Agency was in love with high-tech and psy-tech! Plain old-fashioned locks would have been beyond her ghostly hands, but she could put anything that involved a computer on the fritz. Psy-tech was more challenging, since she hadn't suddenly acquired magical abilities upon her death, but the combination of magic and computer chips was inherently unstable—so eventually the lock system had caved.

Now to get the attention of the cheetah dual huddled in the corner, let her know the door was unlocked. The guard shift was changing, and there was a brief window where someone as fast as a cheetah dual might be able to run for it.

Unfortunately, Maggie could pop the lock, but she couldn't actually pull the door open, and she couldn't make the dual see her. Alive, Maggie had been the type who blended into the woodwork at parties. Now she really did.

As she tried brushing against the prisoner, who, huddled in misery, seemed to think she was a draft, something tapped her on the shoulder.

Which was quite a trick, since living hands passed right through her.

She turned around to see a fellow ghost, one she didn't recognize as one of the regulars in the compound. "Excuse me, Miss?"

"Doctor," she said instinctively. Not that it mattered when you were dead.

Then she did a double-take.

The compound had more than its share of ghosts, mostly Differents who'd died in the course of Agency experiments. But this man, she thought, came from an earlier era. The compound was on a military base dating from World War II. Maggie was no historian, but the ghost's uniform looks like it came from that era. To her, he appeared translucent, but vividly colored, which was how she knew he was a ghost. Most living people looked faded and blurry around the edges.

And he was hot—a big, blond, blue-eyed young man with broad shoulders and an outdoorsy, sun-kissed air, even in death.

Some instincts never die. Maggie smoothed her hair, even though she knew it was stuck in the disheveled state it had been in when she died, sucked in her belly, drew herself up taller. One of the few pluses to being a ghost was that she could *be* a little taller. In life, she'd barely made it to five feet tall, but she could cast a bigger illusion.

In life, a guy that handsome wouldn't have looked twice at nerdy Dr. Maggie Krantz, but the dead-girl dating pool here was limited, and most of its members weren't human. Maybe she had a chance.

"Doctor, then," he said, smiling. "Do you need some help getting the lady's attention? I'm pretty good getting living people to notice me."

"Please."

The uniformed ghost changed consistency. Thickened. At the same time, his colors faded, so he looked like a movie special-effects ghost.

"Miss?" Maggie heard. "Miss? The door's open."

The cheetah, lost in her despair, didn't look up.

He reached somewhere—no place physical, Maggie was quite sure—and drew out a bouquet of roses. They were fresh in his hand, deep, almost glowingly red.

He drew one from the bouquet and tossed it at the cheetah woman.

It was dried and faded when it struck her chest and stayed solid only long enough for her to jump, see it, and look up.

The soldier pointed at the door.

The cheetah sprang to her feet, darted to the door and pushed. The door swung open. Quick as thought, a cheetah stood where the woman had.

"Follow us," the man in uniform said, gesturing.

More solid, he led the way while Maggie made sure any surveillance cameras en route met with electrical trouble.

By the time anyone noticed a problem, the cheetah was sprinting toward the forest surrounding the compound. Good luck catching her there.

Maggie turned to her companion. "Thanks. I couldn't have gotten her out without you."

"And without you, I wouldn't have been able to do much except keep her company as she willed herself to die." The blond ghost shook his head. "You're amazing. That thing you do to the cameras—how does it work?"

"As best I can figure, we ghosts are largely made up of electrical impulses and spirit. Physics never was my strongest subject, and I'm no electrical engineer, and don't ask me about metaphysics because I didn't even believe in ghosts until I turned into one, but if we're energy we can turn ourselves into little lightning storms and fry inconvenient electronics. It's a hoot once you get the hang of it. There are some limits I haven't figured out yet and some of the tech around here is powered by magic, which is an entirely different problem, but that's the basic gist. Understand?"

He laughed. "Not even a little. Nebraska farm boy here. I could fix a tractor or a car in my day, but that was about my limit. This new-fangled technology is way beyond me. But I'd like to learn if you'd like some help fighting these creeps."

"Gorgeous, good-hearted and eager to be useful too? How come I never ran into anyone like you when I was alive?"

Maggie froze as the words popped out. Even dead, she retained her patented lack of social graces. Pretty soon Mr. Hunk in Uniform would remember he had someplace else to haunt.

Instead, he laughed. "Gorgeous? Did you misplace your glasses when they killed you, pretty doctor? I'm just a big lout of a Midwestern boy. Must be the uniform you like."

Be still her beating heart—okay, her non-beating heart that would be racing wildly if she was still alive. Could he actually be flirting back?

"Every woman likes a hero."

To her astonishment, the big lout blushed. Then he faded so she could barely see him, though his voice, when he spoke, came through clear. "Seems that you're the hero. I've been watching you since you were still alive. Saw you stand up to that

evil man who's in charge around here. Saw him kill you. I tried to stop him, but guys like that don't scare easily. And I've been watching you since. You've been fighting people who are doing truly evil things. I've been moping around since I died because I missed my chance at fighting the Nazis but you...you're doing stuff, even dead."

She thought of glossing over the truth, but she couldn't. She'd been a lousy liar in life—part of the reason she was now dead—and now that she was dead, she refused to even try to hide behind a lie.

Even though she really, really wanted to look good in this handsome soldier's eyes.

"I'm no hero. I'm a woman who realized one day I'd been conned into doing terrible things. I could only get out in a pine box. Been trying to make up for it ever since."

The soldier eased back into visibility. "I'm not sure if that's sadder or better than being all gung-ho to fight Nazis but getting killed in a stupid accident in basic training."

"If, in place of Nazis, you'll take guys who pretend to be defending the American Way or whatever their bullshit line is, but are actually up to dirty tricks that Hitler might think were a little too creepy, I think I can help you out."

He actually whooped. "You're on, sister! Private Bill Wade at your service, miss...that is, Doctor."

"Dr. Maggie Krantz." She extended her hand and he took it. Ghost to ghost, his big hand felt solid and warm. Trustworthy, she thought, a strong hand that was used to working hard and still retained that memory, even though Bill Wade had been dead far longer than he'd been alive. "But you can call me Maggie." People didn't use first names as freely back in his day, she recalled, and she wanted more than she cared to admit to hear him say her name.

"Maggie it is, then. Pretty name, pretty lady." Bill raised her hand to his lips and kissing it.

If she'd still had a body, she'd have shivered all over and wondered how good those lips would feel on her nipples or clit if they felt that sensual brushing the back of her hand.

As it was, she still shivered all over, but the all over included some places she couldn't name despite her knowledge of anatomy, some places that she thought might be more real now than they were when she was alive. She'd never believed in souls when she was alive, but she couldn't very well deny them now.

The thought made her uncomfortable.

So did the look in Bill's eyes. It was too admiring, too warm, too interested. A hunk like Bill, alive, would gaze that way at a prom-queen type of girl—and he'd stare right through her scrawny, geektastic self to do so.

"Okay, I've got to ask," Maggie flailed, desperate to change the subject. "What's with the flowers? You don't look like a flower-pelting kind of man."

"Rolled the damn Jeep on Valentine's Day. I was supposed to have a date that night. I'd already bought the flowers."

"That just adds insult to injury. Poor Bill. You missed the war and missed your chance with the girl."

Wonder if he was looking for a substitute Valentine?

Right. If he was, it wouldn't be her. The woman for whom he'd bought the flowers, the Valentine's Day date he never made it to, had probably looked like a 1940s pinup queen, fresh-faced and curvy and innocently sexy.

But Maggie would bet she wasn't a certified genius, or capable of frying circuits to fight the bad guys.

Bill wanted a chance to fight back against the evil in the world. She could give him that.

If she got a bit of flirting, that was just a very pleasant side benefit. Alive, Bill was no doubt the kind of guy who flirted with every female between six and ninety-six and meant nothing by it.

But a ghost could dream, couldn't she?

Another good day's work.

Another prisoner freed, some important files fried, the alarm system screwed up but good, and a few people scared out of their wits while they were at it. A lot of the old hands were blasé about ghosts, but being pelted with dead roses out of nowhere startled even the jaded.

"That was fun!" Bill exclaimed. "And no one ever says that about being in a war. Important, yes. Necessary, sure. Fun, no."

"At least no one you'd want to be around. The guy who killed me probably thinks war's a laugh riot, but he's a psychopath."

"That bastard. Pardon the language, but that's one of the more polite things I can call him. I've never wanted to hurt anyone as badly as I did him the night he killed you. Just couldn't manage to do it."

"Thanks for trying, anyway. None of the living people here would have." She shrugged, the memory of the gesture moving her etheric body. "Besides, being dead's not so bad. I miss my cats, and I miss chocolate and sushi, but I don't get headaches or cramps, there's not a whole lot to worry about because the worst had already happened, and I can punk idiots and bad guys to my heart's content. Plus, I have you to hang out with. The geek and the all-American hunk. Face it, would I have been your type when you were alive?"

He grinned, the kind of grin that liquefied pants and melted hearts. "You bet. I'd have started sweet-talking you so fast your head would have spun."

"Bullshit."

Bill raised an eyebrow. Even after spending a great deal of time together in the past week, he obviously hadn't gotten used to her foul mouth. He'd said, a few times, that ladies didn't talk that way in his day and she was a lady.

No one had ever called her a lady before. She wasn't sure she'd have liked it when she was alive, but she could tell he meant it as a compliment.

Then he smiled. "No bull, Maggie. Truth. Scout's honor." Bill put an arm around her. It felt different than a hug between living people, more diffuse and at the same time more intense. She'd never been a big hugger, but this hug reached places live-person hugs never had and made her feel warm all over.

Okay, hot all over.

Maybe without bodies in the way, intentions were clearer, because the way Bill stared at her, even Maggie, who wasn't too good at reading social cues, couldn't miss that he was seriously interested. Couldn't imagine why he was, but the heart that wasn't there raced, the memory of her stomach did excited back flips, and the place where her pussy should be felt heavy, weighted with need.

"I always liked smart women. My Valentine's date was a Cornell student. She wanted to be a math teacher. Little bit of a thing with a big brain and a sassy mouth."

"Sounds familiar." Her confidence sagged. Was it good or bad she reminded him of his lost love, who'd be a great-grandma by now if she was still alive? Were you still Rebound Woman if it was more than sixty years later?

He laughed, but gently, as if he sensed what she was thinking. "You and Alice had a bit in common. But you know, I liked her, but we'd only gone on two, maybe three dates. It wasn't like we freed prisoners or fought enemies of freedom together. That's the right way to get to know a gal. Lets you know what she's made of, and I like what you're made of."

"Yeah. Right." She could believe he liked her. But not in the way she thought she was hearing.

Then again, if he liked smart, mouthy women, she was his type.

His voice deepened and burred, and the sound waves traveled into her center, teasing at her senses. "Maggie, I know it's past Valentine's Day..."

"It's almost April." Why was she compelled to point this out? This could be the most romantic moment of her life—even if it was technically in her afterlife—and her big mouth seemed compelled to ruin it.

"Minor detail. I'll overlook it if you will. Maggie, will you be my Valentine?"

The roses appeared in his head.

Scientific logic told her a ghostly bouquet shouldn't have fragrance, but the heady scent of roses filled the air. She tried to tell herself they were second-hand, intended for some other woman...but this bouquet, unlike the original, had her favorite yellow roses mixed in with the red..

No one had ever given her roses. Not even at her funeral. Her friends and family had made donations to the Humane Society instead.

While she was still formulating her sarcastic comeback—or maybe fighting back tears—Bill added, his deep voice intense, "I think I love you."

Love? She didn't need a sarcastic comeback for that. She needed a whole sarcastic speech.

Only Bill kissed her and the sarcasm went up in smoke.

It was different kissing when you were both ghosts. A bit weird in that you and your partner were only as solid as you remembered to be, and the longer the kiss went on and the more interesting it got, the harder it was to remember.

But it better, in some ways. No flipper arm or needing to figure out what to do with the roses because they conveniently vanished, no bumping noses, no worrying if you had bad breath. No breath at all, so you didn't need to stop and catch it. She and Bill simply flowed together and lusted.

Oh boy, did they lust.

Maggie throbbed and tingled. Her pussy throbbed, and the fact that she didn't actually have a pussy didn't impede the heat, the wetness, the sheer need, from building. The electric impulses that made up her ghostly form snapped and sparked in fascinating ways that required more physics than she knew to explain.

But for once in her life, Maggie didn't really care about the scientific explanation, the whys and wherefores. It felt good, and for once, that was enough.

Okay, so maybe he didn't love her. Not in the grand, romantic, cue-the-movie-music way like that witch Elissa, who'd risked her own life to rescue Jude from the Agency. Not like Maggie's college friend who stayed with her partner as Joe became Joyce. Not even like her mom and dad, who fought and snarked and blustered, but still held hands at the movies. After all, she and Bill hadn't known each other very long. He didn't know just how sharp-edged she could be.

But even if what he felt was the kind of friendly love made up of affection and lust and a need to feel like he wasn't alone in the afterlife, it was real, honest. Spirit to spirit, she could tell that. And that was better than all the false starts, broken promises and sex for the sake of sex that she'd enjoyed—or more often, hadn't enjoyed, though some of the meaningless sex had been fun for what it was—in life.

Bill was a man of his times, though. He kissed like a lust-filled pirate, but his hands stayed away from the places she most needed them.

That is, until Maggie directed his hands to her breasts and put one of hers on his thigh, not quite at his crotch, but teasingly close.

Damn! Etheric cocks twitched at the slightest sign of attention from the right person, just like flesh and blood ones did. How did that work?

She'd worry about that later. After all, dead people had all the time in the

world.

Bill groaned her name. "Don't want to push things."

"What do we have to lose? We're dead. We might as well enjoy life."

He pulled back from her, caught her eye, glared in a way that might have been angry, might have been hurt. "Maggie, you deserve better than this. You deserve...I don't know...Paris or Rome or someplace beautiful. A honeymoon suite in a grand hotel. Hell, a comfortable house with a clean bed would do. Not a work table in this awful place."

She almost argued that she didn't deserve anything much.

But hell, she did, didn't she? She'd helped save lives. With luck, Jude Duclos and Elissa the witch and their other friend, the cougar dual whose name she never learned, would be able to spread the word about what was going on here and she'd have played a small part in shutting these creeps down for good. She'd done some good, important stuff in her life.

Okay, mostly in her death, but some people were late bloomers.

"Yeah," she said, "yeah I do. But I'm not sure we can get to Paris or even Cleveland. This is what we have. So let's make the most of it."

"What if someone sees us?" As much as a ghost could blush, Bill did. Poor guy—he was a farm boy from a more innocent time, after all.

Maggie made a mental note not to tell him about the time she had sex on the A train in Manhattan late at night during medical school.

Instead she laughed and said, "If they're offended by ghost sex but not offended by murder, they've got issues. Which they probably do if they work here, speaking as someone who did work here and had enough issues for a lifetime subscription."

"Good point." He was still red-faced, embarrassed, but he was also starting the totally unnecessary process of unbuttoning Maggie's shirt.

Of course, the fact she'd moved her hand to his cock might have something to do with changing his mind.

His cock throbbed, hard and heated, as she stroked it through his khaki trousers. They were wool—the memory of wool—and fastened with buttons at the fly, and she wanted to get them off so she could get to the delicious man inside. Bill was having better luck with her shirt than she was with the fly buttons, though and before she got beyond the first, he slipped her flannel shirt off her shoulders.

She quickly thought herself into a pretty red bra instead of whatever ratty thing she'd actually been wearing when she died. Cute red panties too, instead of the long underwear that she'd had under her jeans.

On second thought, she imagined the underwear away, and the jeans too, and chortled. "Always wanted to do that! So much easier than fumbling with zippers."

"Beautiful," he whispered, "but very, very impatient."

For once, Maggie thought about how to answer someone before she did.

"Always. It's a failing of mine," she admitted. "But I'm extra impatient now. I know we have eternity—literally. It's not like we have to rush off to work or make dinner. But I want to be naked with you in the worst way. After all, you've been waiting a long time for this."

"More than sixty years."

"And I feel like I've been waiting that long."

Apparently that was just what he wanted to hear, because quick as thought, Bill was naked.

Naked and hard and oh my God, he had the most gorgeous, touchable blond fuzz on his muscled chest and trailing down to a neat V at his crotch.

Almost shy, she reached out, stroked his chest.

He felt cold to the touch for a second, then seemed to remember he was supposed to be warm. His skin was soft, his muscles hard, the hair crisp yet silky. At the same time, she felt like she was reaching something far deeper than his skin. Was it only because she knew she was stroking spirit and electrical impulses? Did it matter? She tingled from where they touched all the way to her heart, and from there to her pussy.

She ran her hand down his body, drinking in the noises he made, drinking in the sensation of skin on skin, soul on soul.

His cock rested heavy in her hand, vibrating with need. Velvet over steel.

She felt her touch on her own body, so closely were they joined.

She wondered how a more intimate caress would feel.

Only one way to find out.

"No...Maggie, no," Bill muttered when she sank to her knees before him.

She paused, one hand cupping his balls, the other guiding him toward her mouth. "Do you mean that or do you just think you should say that?"

"Nice girls don't ..."

She chuckled throatily. She didn't know she knew how to do that, but apparently her store of innate female knowledge was vaster than she knew. "You need to get a few things straight, soldier. I'm not a girl—I'm a grown woman with a PhD and a sex drive. And I'm arguably good, but I'm not nice."

He sputtered.

When she took him into her mouth, the sputter turned into a groan of need. One of his hands cupped the back of her head, but not to control her. It was a soft, delicate touch like you might stroke a baby's fragile little skull, as if to assure himself she was real.

Every time she took him deeper into her mouth, she felt him entering her pussy as well, an echo, but a strong enough one to push her toward the edge. Every time she eased off, she felt him pulling back, getting ready to thrust again. She swore he was licking at her at the same time. And maybe, somehow, cradling her heart in the palm of his big hand and arousing it too.

Was this love, or was this simply what sex felt like when the body and its awkwardness wasn't getting in the way of the mind, the biggest and most complex sex organ of all?

Did it matter?

Usually Maggie was all about answers, but right now, even the questions didn't seem important. Not compared to the sensations overloading her, making her have to work to retain any form at all.

He was touching only her hair directly, but before long, she was going to explode.

"Do you feel that? It's like...it's like I'm everywhere at once." Bill's voice was husky with need, but full of wonder as a child's at Christmas.

"Oh, yes." How great was it that she didn't need to stop sucking him to answer. "You're touching me everywhere, and I'm touching you. Places I'm not sure it's even possible to touch. Like we're blending. I don't understand..."

"Hush. No need to understand. Just feel, little lady. Just feel."

She took him deeper into her throat, deeper than she thought was possible to go, and she swore the phantom cock in her sex bumped the one in her mouth, an impossible, impossibly full, impossibly wonderful sensation.

God, he was delicious, and the echo of him fucking her was wonderful. But she wanted...

Bill pulled away, hands lingering on her hand. "I want too, Maggie. Want to be inside you."

"And I want to be inside you." Bill raised an eyebrow and she quickly added,

"No, silly. Not like that...I mean want us to blur together. Want to forget where I stop and you start." She couldn't remember ever feeling like that before, but this time she meant it.

He nodded as he helped her to her feet, then eased her back onto the ugly cafeteria table.

She tensed, expecting it to be cold and uncomfortable. For a second it was.

Then she remembered she didn't have to feel anything she didn't want to feel, and the table felt as good as any bed.

Maybe it was an advantage of being a ghost.

Or maybe she was just ignoring the table because Bill was lying over her, light as a thought yet warm and solid as the big, muscular farmer he was and his cock...oh his cock teased at her slippery clit and wet, needy, aching pussy so she arched and opened for him.

He eased, opening her up inch by excruciating inch until she wrapped her legs and arms around his ass and pulled him home.

Bill's eyes widened.

For a second, he became insubstantial, everything but the cock that filled her, as if his pleasure was so intense he couldn't hold on to form. A deep, totally unnecessary breath and he turned solid in her arms again, but still barely visible. His eyes were huge in his dim face, huge and, she thought, moist.

She looked down with wonder at herself and realized she too was transparent.

Only where they joined was solid, and their hearts.

And the pink and silver cord that pulsed between one heart and another.

Maggie couldn't bear it. This was too much, too naked, too obvious a show of the feelings she had barely admitted to herself. That the cord ran both ways made it, in some ways, worse. Unrequited love was pathetic, but she knew how to build the façade you needed to get past being pathetic. Requited love was terrifying. You could lose it.

Then again, she'd gotten through losing her life with her sense of humor intact. If she had to, she could get through losing love.

And who knew? She might not lose.

She closed her eyes, but she could still see it: their sexes locked together, their hearts beating in unison, though they had no need to beat at all, the cord binding them, heart to heart.

Too much. Too much.

"Move," she said, and it came out halfway between a command and a prayer. "But don't be gentle. I don't think I can bear it."

But he was. Gentle, patient, tender—and absolutely relentless, stroking in and out, touching her with curiosity and reverence and lust. He pushed her to orgasm after orgasm, and each one broke down her walls a little more, tearing apart all the cynicism and fear and awkwardness that she'd used to protect herself when she was alive and leaving behind only pleasure, and need, and the rose and silver cord throbbing to a rhythm all its own.

Even with her eyes closed, she saw they glowed as they fucked inside a nimbus of rose and scarlet and silver light.

Then a final orgasm claimed her, so strong that words and form deserted her and she flew apart. Dimly, in whatever far place she found herself, she heard Bill call her name.

Heard him say, "I love you," and this time she believed it.

It took her a while to come back to herself, to find her wits and her voice wherever they had fled. The first thing she asked, when she could, was, "Bill, are you a witch?" It was the only thing she could think of that would explain the cords, the

glow, the way she felt herself rebuilt under his hands.

Bill just laughed. "The Army tested us for magic and stuff and I was as normy as normy gets."

"They were wrong. You're magic. Definitely."

He kissed her forehead. She felt it everywhere. "You never answered my question, little lady. Will you be my Valentine?"

A dozen wise-ass remarks occurred to her, but she brushed them all side. Some of them she might use later—she hadn't suddenly turned into a fuzzy-bunny kind of woman and Bill had fallen for her sharp tongue and all—but this wasn't the time for smart-ass. Right now, there was only one answer she could give. "Yes, Bill. Yes."

A shower of rose petals no one else could see fell around them.

About the Author

Teresa Noelle Roberts has been known to natter on about all sorts of things at teresanoelleroberts.blogspot.com and teresanoelleroberts.com. She's the author of *Lions' Pride* (Duals and Donovans: The Different, Book 1) and the September 2010 release *Foxes' Den* (Duals and Donovans: The Different, Book 1).