

The End of Purgatory

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<http://writeyourbook.today>

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Dedication

Dedicated to my sister, Tiffany, and to my nieces: Tosha, Kristina, Amber, Brocké, Ali, Bre, Jocelyn, and Charlotte, as well as to the women who encouraged me to publish this: Glenda, Kathy, and Becky.

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Chapter 1

Zhara shrugged and stared out the window, refusing to meet his eyes. She was about to lie to him, and she didn't want to see his face when she did.

"I like men who know how to handle themselves in a fight. I like men who aren't afraid to break the rules if the occasion calls for it. I like men who like to take risks. I suppose I do have a type. I suppose I do like the bad boy. The one who is the hardest to love, the one who is most likely to leave me."

John came up behind her and stood close enough that she could feel the waves of heat radiating from his body. She knew that if she wanted it all she had to do was rock backward a half an inch and she could be wrapped in his arms. She felt his breath on the back of her neck and closed her eyes. The temptation was there. It would be so easy to give into it.

His question was soft but his words hit her heart hard. "And what about me? Am I your type?"

She forced a laugh. Better to hurt him a little now than to watch him bleed for her later. "You? No. You're much too safe. Much too ordinary. Much too easy to tame. I don't think you could handle me. I'd crush your spirit and leave you broken."

It was a partial truth. She didn't think he could handle her. Not the real her. She would never let him close enough to find out. He mattered too much. "Oh, really? Am I? Do you think I'm easy to tame? Do you think you know me so well?"

She did know him. Maybe better than he knew himself. She knew he was kind and gentle and generous in a world that had no room for such things. She hardened herself, saying the words that she knew would go straight to that giant heart of his and pierce it straight through. It was the only way to protect him from her.

"I know you better than you think I do. You love me already and I haven't given you any reason to love me. I didn't have to. You love everything about me, but most of all you love the fact that I won't stay and you know it. I'll never be yours, just as he won't ever really be mine. You'll yearn for me, for the fantasy you make of me, but you'll never capture me. And that is what you find most intriguing of all. That is why you find yourself chasing after me though even you know you shouldn't. I'm not any good for you."

His voice was even but she could hear the slight tone in it that betrayed how much he wanted her to change her mind. "It doesn't have to be this way. We don't have to play this game, you know. You don't have to chase a phantom and I don't have to love one. We don't have to hurt one another."

His words made her angry. She turned to face him, suddenly furious with him, furious for his refusal to understand and for making this harder than it needed to be. "You think that, don't you? You think I have a choice in the matter, as if I can choose what I am. I can't help who I am. Hurting people is what I do. That is why you are much better off without me. It is why I won't stay. I don't want to stay and see you die at my own hand."

He reached out a hand, as if to pull her closer, and she jerked backward, bumping up against the window. He let the hand drop to her side and his eyes grew soft and sad. "Zhara, you are better than you give yourself credit for being. You don't have to hurt people. You don't have to be hurt. You can open up and let yourself be loved for once."

She shook her head and pushed past him. She suddenly felt afraid. She needed to leave. Now.

"You don't understand. You'll never understand. I CAN'T! I CAN'T LOVE YOU! I don't know what that is! I don't know what it means!"

She was out the door and down the hall before she said the final words. “I don’t know how to love you. I don’t know how to love anyone. I don’t know how to love.”

She climbed on the back of her motorcycle, blinking away the tears that were threatening, not even bothering to put on her helmet. She didn’t want to be safe. She didn’t want to be secure. She didn’t deserve it. She gunned the engine and sped off into the night without looking back, heading straight into the mouth of hell. She was headed straight for Damien.

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Damien’s dark eyes locked onto hers when she walked in the door. He didn’t say a word. He knew why she was there. Why waste words or breath talking about it?

He stood up and crossed the room with a panther-like grace that sent a shiver down her spine. He was everything she knew she shouldn’t but couldn’t help herself but want.

He didn’t ask permission or wait for her consent to kiss her. He wasn’t tender, polite, or gentle about it. She didn’t want him to be. Tenderness, politeness, and gentleness were not things she needed or deserved.

She felt a surge of passion for him that left her breathless and eager for more. He was the drug she couldn’t get enough of even though she knew it was no good for her. She would hate herself in the morning but tonight she needed him, wanted him, and would allow him to have her in any way that he wanted her.

They were halfway to the bedroom, clothes strewn across the floor, when John’s face broke through the fog of desire. John’s voice calling her name, begging her to reconsider, pleading with her not to leave.

She froze in place, unable to move. Damien growled impatiently and swept her off her feet, carrying her into the bedroom and dumping her on the bed. She looked up at him and shook her head. “No. No more.”

His face darkened and he scowled. “What are you playing at, Zhara?”

Her face flushed and she suddenly found herself ashamed of her nakedness. She grabbed the sheet from the foot of the bed and covered herself with it. “I’m not playing at anything. I just...don’t want this. I’ve changed my mind.”

Damien stared at her, his face inscrutable. “Who is he?”

Her eyes widened and she looked away. “I don’t know what you mean.”

Damien ripped the sheet out of her hands, exposing her. She covered herself with her hands as he leaned closer to her and hissed the question. “Who. Is. He?”

Damien’s normally dark eyes were nearly black. His face was flushed red.

Something clicked inside her head and a sudden realization came over her. “You – you’re jealous.”

Damien pulled back as if she’d slapped him. She saw his jaw tighten and his hands flex. His eyes hardened and he stepped back from the bed. “Get. Out.”

She felt a cold chill slide down the back of her spine. “Damien, I don’t...”

He roared the words. “GET OUT!”

She slid out of his bed and gathered up her clothes, doing her best to put them on as quickly as he was throwing them at her. “GET OUT!”

She fled out the door and into the night, unsure of where to go. She couldn't face John, not after everything she'd done to him, and it was clear that Damien didn't want her there. Where was there to go when you weren't good enough for Heaven but Hell had just kicked you out?

She checked her watch. It was 11 at night. Purgatory wouldn't close for another couple of hours at least.

## Chapter 2

Zhara stepped through the doors of Purgatory a half-hour later. The bar was crowded, the music was thumping, and the drinks were flowing. Mike's bald head gleamed in the light from behind the bar. Gabby, his twin sister, was weaving her way through, delivering drinks with the deftness of long practice, teasing some and swatting away the hands of others.

She made her way through the crowd and took a seat at the bar. Mike raised an eyebrow when he spotted her and nodded even as he finished pouring a drink and serving a customer. She waited patiently. He would come for her when he could. He always did.

"You're one of Damien's girls, aren't you?" The rough voice behind her was vaguely familiar. She turned to find a tall, well-built stranger with his arms crossed in front of his chest staring her down.

"Not tonight. Tonight, I'm nobody's girl."

A grin stretched across his face. He placed a hand on the bar next to her and leaned a little too close. "If Damien's through playing with you, you could always come play with me."

She crossed her arms in front of her chest and shook her head. Dark curls bounced around her face. "I don't feel like breaking any more toys tonight. Go find someone else to play with. I'm not in the mood for games."

A scowl settled across his face and a hint of red began to creep up his collar line. She rolled her eyes. This man just wasn't going to take no for an answer. She knew the type.

He seized hold of her arm and leaned into her, so close that she could smell the whiskey on his breath. "I said I want you to come play with me. Don't make me..."

His words cut off with a startled yelp. Zhara's knife blade gleamed in the light, just a hair's breadth from the man's groin. "I told you. I don't want to break any more toys tonight. Don't make me."

He let go of her arm and backed off. "No wonder Damien's done playing with you."

She didn't say a word. She just kept her knife in her hand and her eyes locked on his face until he returned to his seat.

"There you go again getting yourself into trouble. Zhara, Zhara, what have you been up to?"

She tucked the knife back into the strap at her thigh and turned around to greet Mike. "I don't get myself into trouble, Mike. Trouble just happens to find me."

He shook his head and winked. "It does seem to follow you wherever you go. I'll give you that much. What can I get you tonight?"

She winced. "Devil's Kiss, and Angel Tears."

Mike's grin disappeared. "Who broke your heart? Whose face am I going to need to go break?"

She shook her head and held up a hand. "Didn't. I broke my own. I messed it up. With both of them. On the same night."

Mike crossed his arms for a moment. "Promise me you're going to stay until close. I have GOT to hear that story."

She sighed. "I've got nowhere else to go. I'm not good enough for Heaven, and Hell doesn't want me there."



Mike didn't say anything. He just walked over and started pouring her drinks. He returned a few minutes later and set them down in front of her. "I'll be back later to collect the story. Let me know if you need anything else."

She contented herself with tossing back the Devil's Kiss first. The scotch seared the inside of her throat as it went down. A perfect tribute to Damien.

In the six years she'd known Damien, he'd never once said anything close to "I love you" or asked for her to be his alone. He'd certainly made it clear that he belonged to nobody and didn't want to belong to anybody.

Their relationship was undefined with no promises and no commitments. She'd been comfortable with that until she met John. She hadn't needed promises people couldn't keep or commitments they would only break later.

Damien's flare of jealousy tonight caught her off guard. It was unlike him. He'd never asked her before who she was with when she wasn't with him. He'd never seemed to care. But he did now. It confused her. His anger confused her.

But John was different. He said things and meant them. Around him, for the first time in her life, she found herself craving stability and permanence.

She'd always feared commitments. She'd feared being tied down, held in place, caged in a life too small for her. John made her want to stay in place.

He made her wonder what it would be like to be in a relationship that wasn't fluid but was solid and structured. To have a man say, and mean, that he would love you until the end of his days. To say those words to him in return. For once, commitment didn't seem like a cage but more like a safe house.

And that, even more than Damien's sudden bout of jealousy, confused her. She didn't know what had shifted in her, but something had changed. She wasn't the same woman she'd been when this began.

She didn't know what that meant, but what she did know was that the relationship she'd shared with Damien was not going to survive this change. She wasn't sure she was capable of making a lifelong commitment to anyone, and she knew she didn't have whatever it was that John needed for her to give him, but she wasn't satisfied with whatever passed for her relationship with Damien. It wasn't enough for her anymore.

She took a sip of the Angel Tears. Sweet and bitter at the same time. She lingered over this drink, not wanting to finish it. What she wanted was to go back to John. She knew she could go there right this instant and he would open the door for her and take her back in without a single question asked. He would open his arms and let her step into them and wrap them around her as if she'd never done anything to hurt him.

But she wouldn't let herself do that. She wasn't ready to be the woman he deserved to have in his arms and in his life. She didn't even know if she could be that woman. She frowned as she drank the last of her drink.

She didn't know if she could ever be that woman, but the question she needed to ask herself was, "Was she ready to try?" Could she change for John? Was that even possible for her?

She frowned. What if she tried and she failed? What if she tried to be who John wanted, needed, her to be and she couldn't be that? What if she hurt him even more because of her failure?

Mike appeared as she was asking herself the questions and collected her empties. "Last call if you want something, darlin'. It's getting close to closing time. Another Devil's Kiss for you? Or would you prefer another round of Angel Tears?"

She grimaced. No more Angel Tears. No more hurting John. No more Devil's Kisses, either. That bridge was burned. "Just a Jack and Coke this time. Tall."

Mike nodded. "Why don't you take a seat at one of the tables and I'll have Gabby bring it to you."

She slid off the bar stool and made her way through the thinning crowd to the table furthest in the back to wait for Gabby to deliver the drink. She didn't have long to wait.

Gabby threaded her way through and dropped off the Jack and Coke, along with a kiss on the top of Zhara's head. "How's my favorite little sister doing tonight? Mike said you were having some man troubles?"

Zhara sighed and shrugged. "The trouble's not with the men. It's with me."

Gabby frowned and picked her tray back up off the table. "Stay right there. I'll be back in about 30 minutes and we can talk about it."

Zhara watched Gabby work her way through the crowd and sipped her drink, watching as the place began to empty out after drinks were delivered and tabs were settled.

Forty-five minutes later, Gabby swooped in and took a seat beside her. "What a night! This place was crawling with people. Great for tips, but not so great for the feet. So tell me about your troubles, Z. I'm all ears."

Zhara sighed and told her about the evening with John and then the way things ended with Damien. Gabby's brows rose in surprise when she got to the part about Damien tossing her out when she wouldn't talk about John with him. "Wait. Wait. Did I hear you right? Damien was upset about you being with another guy? That guy changes women like some guys change socks!"

She frowned. It was true. Damien was a magnet for women. He drew them in and then discarded them so often it was hard to keep track.

She was one of the only women he'd kept around, but she suspected that was largely because she'd never made a big deal of their relationship or pushed for more than he'd been willing to give her. "He was not upset. He was furious. Angry enough to throw my clothes at me and toss me out. I still don't understand it."

Gabby grinned. "What's to understand? You got to him. The untouchable heart has been touched by you."

Zhara studied the glass in her hand. "I don't know about that. I just know he wanted me out."

Gabby put a hand on Zhara's arm. "Sounds like you had quite the evening. I'm sure Damien will come back to you when he's had a chance to cool off. If you want him to come back to you, that is."

She cocked her head to the side slightly and raised an eyebrow. "Do you? Want Damien to come back to you?"

That was a question Zhara hadn't asked herself yet. "Honestly? If I had to answer that question, I'd say I don't know. I always thought that I couldn't live if Damien weren't part of my life anymore, but right now, I think I'm just...done. I'm done with being one of many. I am done with competing for a man's attention. I want a man who looks at me and sees me, wants me, and loves me. I don't think Damien can give that to me."

Gabby clapped her hands slowly and reached over to hug Zhara. "Congratulations. I've been waiting for you to decide that for a while now. I couldn't stop you from chasing after Damien, and I'll grant you

that the man is hotter than a \$2 pistol, but I am glad you are ready for something better than being one of his girls. You deserve more.”

Zhara felt tears forming and closed her eyes to shut them down. “Do I? Why don’t I feel like I’m worth more? What if I don’t have what it takes?”

Gabby wrapped her arms even tighter around Zhara. “You have it. You just need to find it. And you will.

### Chapter 3

Damien paced the floors of his living room. Damn that woman to hell and back again. Damn her. Damn her for the fact that he wanted her, now. Damn her for the fact that he didn't WANT to want her.

She was the one constant in his life, like the northern star in the sky above, and he hated her for it. He hated her for the power she held over him without any effort or attempt on her part. No matter how many other women came and went, he couldn't let go of her. He'd tried, but she was like the ocean in that regard. She kept pulling him back to her.

Zhara was the one weakness he had, and weakness was a dangerous thing. Weakness left you open and vulnerable and made you easy to hurt. No woman was ever going to hurt him again. He'd sworn that long before he met her.

Now here he was, six years later, hating himself for letting her get close to him. Hating himself for letting her hurt him. Hating himself for loving her. Hating himself for letting her walk out that door.

He sat on the couch and put his head in his hands. He'd never minded the other men in her life before. Why did it matter? She would come back to him. He'd known it, always. She would find her way back to him just as surely as he would find his way back to her.

But not this time. This time was different. This man was different. He held a power over her that Damien did not understand. But he'd seen it in her eyes. The way she'd pulled back from him. The way she'd suddenly changed her mind. She'd hidden him from Damien, protected him. He meant something to her in a way the other men hadn't.

He stood back up and paced again, feeling like a tiger in a cage. He wanted to go and find her. To possess her. Make her his again. To kiss her until every trace of that other man was erased from her mind and her soul.

Instead, he got up and walked over to the refrigerator, pulled out a beer from the refrigerator, and popped the top. He drank it and then threw the glass bottle as hard as he could across the room, feeling a sense of satisfaction when it exploded against the wall. Glass shards spread everywhere.

He glanced over at his phone and thought for a moment about calling her number. But what would he say to her? He wasn't about to beg her to come back. He didn't want her to know how badly he wanted her, needed her. Besides, it wouldn't change anything. She wouldn't come. She was probably with that man even now.

A thunderous rage filled him at the thought of his rival. Whoever he was, wherever he was, he would find him, and he would make him pay. Nobody would take what belonged to him. Nobody. And Zhara did belong to him, as much as he belonged to her. He couldn't escape her, and he wouldn't let her escape him. She ought to know that by now.

He threw on his jacket and stepped out into the cool night air. It was time to go get what was his.

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John watched Zhara walk out the door. He didn't try to stop her. She would come back when she was ready, or she wasn't the woman he thought she was.

He heard the engine of her motorcycle roar to life and listened as she sped away. He knew where she was headed. The same place she always headed when she got scared and things got a little too good, a little too real, for her. Straight to Damien.

It was as if she needed to punish herself for feeling happy, to remind herself of just how little she believed she was worth, by going straight to the man who was most likely to use her up and leave her broken. He wished he could understand what she saw in Damien. The man seemed to do nothing but hurt her.

He hated having to compete with him for Zhara's heart. She deserved the best and that's all he wanted to give her, but no matter how much love he poured into her, she just couldn't seem to hold onto it. In fact, the more love he tried to give her, the more skittish she became.

She wasn't entirely wrong when she'd told him that he loved her and she didn't even have to do anything to earn it. He'd loved her from the moment he met her. She was fire and light, passion and brilliance. He was absolutely enchanted with her.

It wasn't her body that drew him to her, although she was an incredibly attractive woman, but her heart and the way her mind worked. He'd never met another woman like her and he knew that he never would. She was as unique as any masterpiece artwork.

He wanted her to just open up and let him in, but earning her trust wasn't easy. He could tell she'd been hurt, and often, by the men in her life. He didn't want to be one more of those. He sighed and poured himself a glass of wine before heading over to the piano and sitting down to play.

Music was the thing that drew Zahra to him, and music was what would soothe his soul now. He allowed all the hurt and the frustration and the struggle to pour out of him and into the keyboard. He played for her, even though he knew she couldn't hear it, and allowed everything he was feeling to express itself in the notes. He played until there was nothing left but peace in his soul.

She would come back to him when she was ready. He was certain of it. And when she was ready to come back, the door – and his heart – would be open and waiting to receive her.

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“Where is she?”

Mike looked up from where he was wiping down the bar and frowned as he spotted Damien. “What do you want?”

Damien stared at Mike without flinching. “Where is Zhara?”

Mike stopped wiping the bar and locked eyes with him. “What's it to you? Last time I checked, she didn't belong to you.”

Damien's scowl deepened. “Tell me where she is. Now.”

Mike stepped back and crossed his arms over his chest. “If she wanted you to know where she was, she would have told you herself. She's a big girl and she's perfectly capable of letting you know if she wanted you to know.”

Damien's jaw clenched. “I know she's here. I saw her bike in the parking lot. You tell her I want to talk to her. Tell her it's not over.”

Mike put both hands on the counter and leaned forward. “For six years, I've watched you put that girl through hell. I couldn't stop her from running back to you anytime you crooked your finger her direction. God knows, I tried. She wouldn't listen. She's finally deciding enough is enough, and I'll be damned if I'm going to help you destroy her again.”

Damien's fists curled. Mike willed him to go ahead and throw a punch. Just one was all he needed. But the man backed off.

He turned on his heel and headed toward the door. “This isn’t over. You tell her I’m going to find her. I don’t care where I have to go or what I have to do, but I’m going to find her.”

Mike crossed his arms over his chest and waited until he heard Damien’s motorcycle start up before he called upstairs to alert Gabby to the situation.

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“Six years and it turns out all I had to do to get Damien to finally decide he wanted me was to walk away? Figures.” Zhara’s voice held a note of undisguised contempt.

Gabby wasn’t sure whether the contempt was for Damien, for Zhara, or for the both of them. “You’re not considering going back to him, are you?”

Zhara shook her head. “No. Is it sad that I finally get what I always thought I wanted – for Damien to show me that he gave a damn about me – and all it does is leave me cold? He had six years to decide that he loved me and wanted me to be with him. He had all the chances in the world to show me that he cared. I finally have a man in my life who wants me and who cares about me. He isn’t going to take that away from me.”

Gabby put an arm around Zhara’s shoulders. “You’re welcome to stay with us as long as you need to. I don’t think it’s a good idea for you to go back home, though. I don’t know what he plans to do once he does find you, but I doubt it’s going to be good. Mike said he looked like he was ready to breathe fire.”

Zhara sighed and shrugged. “I’m sure if I just lay low for a week or so, he’ll forget all about me in some other woman’s bed. It’s what he usually does. We fight, he gets mad, he sleeps with someone else until he’s not mad anymore. For Damien, sex is the cure for everything that ails you.”

Gabby hugged her. “Well, here’s to new beginnings with a man who doesn’t use you as therapy. You do know you’re going to have to introduce us to John, right? I can’t let my little sister go running off with some man I’ve never met.”

Zhara blushed. “Last time I brought home a man, you didn’t approve.”

Gabby snorted. “Last time you brought home Damien. My own personal feelings about him aside, the man was 22 and you were 16. Are you surprised I didn’t approve?”

Zhara sighed. “No, not really. I just wish I’d listened. Might have saved us all some heartache.”

Gabby ruffled her hair and kissed the top of it. “Yeah, well, you’re listening now. That’s all that matters.”

Zhara frowned slightly and looked out the window. “Let’s hope so.”

[Reviews Appreciated](#)

If you enjoyed this book, please consider leaving a review wherever you purchased it. Reviews, along with purchases, are used by sites to determine what books to promote and which to bury. Furthermore, reviews help other readers decide whether or not to give an unfamiliar title a try.

Writers use reviews to help decide whether a project is worth continuing, if the work is a series, and to decide how to make the next work better. It is one of the best ways to thank an author if you enjoyed the time they took to create it.

Other ways to thank an author are to, of course, spread the word by mouth or reach out directly to the author and let them know your thoughts.

If leaving a review seems intimidating, or you aren't sure what to say, here are some questions to use:

- 1) What did you like most about the book?
- 2) What did you like least about it?
- 3) Were there any places where the narrative felt unbelievable?
- 4) Was there any place where the narrative lagged or lost your attention?
- 5) What was included in the book that you wished hadn't been?
- 6) What wasn't included in the book that you wish had been?
- 7) What was the most meaningful or memorable moment in the book for you?
- 8) Were there any places where you found yourself confused or uncertain about what was happening?

Fan Fic Welcome

This may be due to publisher copyright constraints, but many authors not only discourage fan fiction, they actively hate it. I am not one of those authors.

I encourage fan fiction. I will happily provide you with a free guide to the characters and the world in which they live if you email me at 40daywriter@gmail.com using a subject line: [End of Purgatory] Free Character Guide.

When you've completed your fan fiction writing, I ask that you submit it to me for review at the same address using a subject line of [End of Purgatory] Fan Fiction + "Your Title". This will alert me to the book the fan fiction is attached to and that it is fan fiction.

If I read it and approve it, I will offer you the option to work with me and will help you publish and promote it. If I read it and do not approve it, I will let you know why and what changes you would need to make in order to get it approved.

Those who are interested in writing fan fic and sign up for the guide will be invited to join a weekly fan fic club where we can discuss works in progress, get feedbacks and critiques, and dive into potential story ideas and lines.

About the Author

International speaker and award-winning author, Brandy M. Miller, wrote her first book in 2004, and published her first book in 2012. She currently has ten published titles in addition to this one.

Prior to this book, her focus has been on writing non-fiction with a few children's fiction titles.

The devastating impact of narcissism on relationships and families is something Brandy is intimately familiar with as she is herself a recovering narcissist. She grew up in a home where "love" was often dished out as physical, verbal, or sexual abuse.

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Other Publications By This Author:

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The Write Time: How to find all the time you need to write a book

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