

Redemption

The Thief Comes to Stead



Alexi King

All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.
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Redemption – The Thief Comes to Steal (Book 1)

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Redemption is dedicated to the first man I fell in love with—the best and perfect father who was taken away from me too soon. My father was a man who raised his little girls to be ladies, disciplined us when necessary and fed his wisdom with honesty. Without him, I wouldn't know what to look for in a husband or be the woman of God I am today. I was in the process of getting this novel published when he left me to be with the Lord. I wish he were still here with me to see the finished product of this project I had been working on for so long. Thank the Lord it's finally completed and ready for the world to enjoy. I hope those who read Redemption find redemption in Christ and are as blessed as I have been writing this unconditional love story inspired by the Lord to share with you.

I will love you always, Daddy! Until we meet again in heaven! ♥

Psalms 14 (KJV)

*The **fool** hath said in his heart, **There is no God.** They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.*

*The **LORD** looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.*

*They are **all gone aside**, they are **all** together become **filthy**: there is **none that doeth good, no, not one.** Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the **LORD**.*

*There were **they** in great **fear**: for **God is in the generation of the righteous.** Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the **LORD is his refuge.***

*Oh that the **salvation of Israel** were come out of Zion! when the **LORD** bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.*

Satan the Thief

The thief cometh not, but for to
steal, and to *kill*, and to *destroy*.
I am come that they might have *life*,
and that they might have it *more abundantly*.
John 10:10 (KJV)

***DISCLAIMER!!! WARNING BEFORE READING!!!

Redemption is a dark, mature, adult Contemporary Christian Romance that illustrates the enemy's constant attack on the believer's light, bullying him into submission to darkness. It reveals that total surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ is the only escape to an abundant life, but not without trials and tribulations. It clarifies that we are all sinners and that there is no such thing as a perfect Christian because the Old Adam remains present. Therefore, NO man is exempt from falling. We all have our challenges in life and fall into temptation and sin, as every man does, but we don't have to live there. Redemption is freedom from the second death and is God's gift for **EVERYONE!**

The story sheds light on Satan's Criminal Underworld that he rules in darkness and the powerful satanic cult behind the scenes who govern for him in secret. It demonstrates how they want to steal, kill, and destroy every idea of God, including His children. It also reveals how Satan perverts everything God created and remakes it as his own. Because of this, the world will become darker and darker until Christ returns. However, the believer will win in the end, even in death, because Light **ALWAYS** outshine darkness, and the believer is wiser and stronger in Christ because of tribulation. That said, this book is not a fairytale of false hope. Bad things happen. If you are easily offended by discussing the real-life issues of wickedness and corruption that we face in our sinful world today, you may not want to read this book.

This book is for readers 18+ who aren't afraid to touch on topics such as, but not limited to, wicked immorality, murder, illegal criminal activity, government corruption, sex and drug trafficking, slave labor, lying, stealing, cheating, interracial relationships, racism, mild language, and sexual encounters without the explicit sex scenes.



Prologue

The damp breeze from the cool evening brushed harshly against Isabella's face as she weaved past the shrubs in the woods. Sprinting away from the prestigious hotel on the outskirts of London in six-inch heels wasn't easy. Although she was running in an evening gown, she did it amazingly because her life depended on it, and thanks to her Lord watching above, she reached the safehouse without a tail.

As the darkness spread with a chill to the earth below, Isabella said a silent prayer, looking to the heavens above, thanking the Lord for directing her path. With the lake house in view, she approached it with urgency, quickly unlocked the door to step inside, and her eyes immediately glanced around. It had been three months since Isabella was last there, and everything appeared to be in order. She was finally home. This time to stay.

She hastily walked to the ammo cabinet and retrieved her shotgun.

Making sure it was loaded, she kept it close at her side as a percussion, ready for anything. With urgency, she kicked off her heels but kept on her coat because it was freezing. She could've started a fire but thought it better to remain hidden from Victor and his goons.

Her body and mind were worn from exhaustion, so she hopped into the bed to keep warm, pulling the thick coverings over her.

Isabella expected Captain O'Neal to arrive at any moment once he heard of her escape, and she had no intention of sleeping. She didn't want to miss his surprised smile when he discovered her in their bed.

Unfortunately, when Isabella relaxed her head on the pillow, her eyelids became heavy. She struggled to keep them open for as long as possible. Sadly, exhaustion finally won, and she fell asleep only to be awakened by the early morning sunlight beaming through the window.

Thankfully, she wasn't alone. Isabella felt the captain's warm, muscled body molding her own from behind.

His arm wrapped snugly around her slender waist like old times, proof she wasn't dreaming. She immediately took his bruised hand to her lips, thanking God they could finally be a family. Without further delay, she quickly turned around to gaze upon his handsome face of dark blonde features, with thoughts of waking him with her kisses. Still, the blood that flowed from his neck onto the white linen pillow stunned her quickly to reality.

Isabella called out to him frantically, but he wouldn't respond.

Although his body was still warm and felt alive, he was dead!

She trembled all over in shock as she hastily covered her mouth and allowed a quiet scream to escape.

When she looked into his eyes, fully dilated and dazed at nothing, tears immediately blurred her vision. She blinked the tears away, knowing he would never know he was a father.

Captain O'Neal was not only her contact, but he became her husband after they fell in love. They only had one night together as husband and wife before she left to work undercover to gather more information on the House of Devereaux. Now, he was dead, which only meant one thing: She had been betrayed, and Victor and his goons weren't far away.

The movement from the hallway caught her attention, and then a familiar voice that she couldn't escape filled her ears.

Her heart trembled in panic and fear as she waited to be punished.

"I knew you would lead us to your lover," Victor started with a smirk on his thin lips.

"He's not my lover! He's my husband!"

"Not anymore. No, and I will remember the look on your face forever, love," he said cynically. "Sad and afraid. Very afraid."

Isabella gazed at a soulless monster before her eyes fell on the red wine stain on his white tuxedo. She had splashed him with her glass right before his acceptance speech at the hotel. That was the only way she could escape, but now she understood it was a setup. He had been watching and waiting the whole time. She had been a fool to believe she could get away or that Char was her friend.

She stared at Victor with hatred, still unable to believe she once thought he was a very handsome man, but that was before she saw the demon hidden behind good looks.

“How could you do this?” she asked with a terrified gape.

“How could I kill your lover?!” He spoke with anger that vibrated louder like thunder and echoed through the trees, rattling the birds away outside the window. “I’m your man, damn you!”

In his next movement, he backhanded her so hard that her head smashed with force against the wooden headboard, and pain shot to her temple, almost knocking her into darkness.

He took a deep breath and let it out with ease. He closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose with much strength as he babbled.

“Look, I’m exhausted from obvious lack of sleep, but I must prepare for your punishment.”

“You can’t expect me to return to you after this. I won’t marry you. I can’t do this any longer. I can’t live under *The Order* and pretend to condone the evil. Just kill me,” she cried out, cupping her bruised cheek and wincing in pain with more tears streaming down her beautiful face. “You have everything you’ve always wanted. My father’s wealth! Our family jewels! My father’s Russian connections have given you more power and influence in *The Order*. You’re in the election to become the next Elder of the House of Devereaux! You don’t need me,” she pleaded desperately, but she knew the words fell on deaf ears.

Victor moved closer to her face as he continued, caressing his icy cold fingertips against her soft, reddened cheek.

“You’ve made a fool of me and marked everyone you love to a torturous death. I will kill them all until your family’s bloodline is no more, leaving you for last to join them in hell.”

“Please, please don’t do this, Victor. Please,” Isabella begged, holding onto her stomach, thinking of the baby she was carrying in her womb.

Soon, she wouldn’t be able to hide her secret, so she had to find another way to escape. Once Victor discovers the truth, he will have no mercy. With that thought, more panic shot through her.

Victor gently leaned forward to kiss her soft, sweet lips, then stood and quickly turned on his heels to walk hurriedly away.

“Get her!” He pointed to the guard with his thumb as he passed by.

His large bodyguard grabbed a handful of dark hair and lifted her from the bed until she stood on her own, but not before she snatched the only thing she had left to remind her of the captain. The pain of his force throbbed down her back, but she welcomed it because she knew worse was to come.

“No, please! God, please save us!”

Save my unborn child, she said a silent prayer, squeezing the golden chain tightly in her palms.



Chapter One

Nalda

I will tell you a story, but so that you know, it's unlike any story you've ever read in a novel or seen scripted in a movie. It's not the typical fairytale romance little girls hope for, nor the dramatic thriller that leaves you with mixed emotions or discomfort. It's my story of when life as I knew it changed forever. Was it for better or worse? I'll let you decide.

It was a late-night summer in Paris in 1961. I was restless, my mind racing in every direction but sleep, and I couldn't get comfortable. I'd been lying in bed for over an hour, reminiscing about my childhood while staring at a photograph of me and Papa when I was twelve.

That was when I was still new to Paris, trying to adjust to a language where English was hardly spoken. Living in a culture of people I didn't understand wasn't impossible. It worked in my Papa and my favor because we were noncommunicating immigrants, living in hiding within our little bubble, but we were so happy.

My wide smile on the black and white photograph was proof.

In the photograph, I wore my favorite bright yellow dress with lace around the collar. I looked so young, with two pony tails hanging long

over my shoulders. My head was tilted towards Papa, who looked down at me instead of the fellow who snapped the shot.

Life was great then because it was just the two of us.

Rachel, my mama, who happened to be black, had been absent from our lives for at least a year then, and I was finally able to live in peace from her physical and verbal abuse. There was no doubt that the Lord brought Papa, a white man who looked more like me, into my life to shelter and protect me from her.

It was he who showed me how to love myself by introducing me to the Lord with his wild and vivid stories that he told. He gave me my first Bible and taught me how to study what I read. It was his way of ensuring that I remember I was never alone whenever I looked around at the world God created.

He painted a picture of a supreme being who governed the universe, bound in His light, so bright that He lit the heavens. His light was so intense that no one could look upon His glory or match His mighty power.

From studying the Bible, I understood He is the only creator known to the universe and watches over the earth from His throne in heaven. The proof of His existence and sovereignty rule is revealed in how He has governed the universe since the beginning of time and space.

I found it fascinating how the earth aged in time. Seasons make up the years, while the number of sunrises is recorded in heaven. He sets the sun every evening just before He rotates the earth at just the right angle for the moon to shine at night. The moon, earth, and sun are always aligned in the perfect position. The world is never without some sense of light, even in darkness, the very picture of God in my life.

God was always on time, never late, which is His very nature.

With a picture like that painted in my mind, it was easy to believe when I saw creation, read about it in the Bible, and witnessed goodness in others. Studying the Bible helped me to understand who I am, a sinner, and who I could be in the spirit by His grace. Knowing these things did not bring me closer to God. It was when He became a reality, no longer an idea or belief. He began to speak to me whenever I found myself wholly in His presence in the spirit, and the day the photo was taken reminded me of how far I had come.

Before my papa came into my life, only Rachel and her family existed.

Rachel was one of the three hundred black nurses in the *Army Nurse Corps* during *World War II*. Alongside the other black nurses, she worked in a German prison war camp, caring for the wounded Nazi prisoners, and that's where the horrific incident took place.

One unfortunate night, Rachel was raped by multiple white soldiers and got pregnant with me in the process. I was born in Germany shortly after the war, so as you can imagine, her family was shocked to see her with me, a *white* baby in her arms.

From day one, growing up with my black family, I was confined to my own space. In their eyes, I was an abomination—aka Satan's child who should've been aborted before I saw the day of light. I was raised never to call Rachel my mother or acknowledge her family as my own.

Rachel's family were influential black people with money in Mobile, Alabama, and I was the secret they swore to keep hidden and locked away. I remembered the occasional parties with them dressing up fancy and eating the finest food while living off the acres of land they owned. I would watch them celebrate a feast in the yard from the upstairs window.

I'll never forget the looks of hatred and disgust whenever our paths crossed. They mocked my white skin, straight, long hair, and hazel eyes. I thought they hated me because I looked different, but then Rachel made it clear when I was old enough to understand the truth.

That's when the memory of her rape became the shame I carried around every time I looked at myself in the mirror. I was the evidence of what happened, so who could blame them for hating me?

Then, Marcus Caspian, a white man from New York City, became my papa. He was the manager of an established jazz band. According to Rachel, my papa fell in love with her voice; his only focus was making her a big star. He needed a lead singer, and she was going nowhere before he came into the picture, but she had talent, so he managed her career after she joined his jazz band.

From the moment he came into her life, I noticed a change that I didn't quite understand, but I was grateful. I wasn't hidden from him like I was with everyone else.

Papa took me in from day one like he had known me forever, making me feel included and wanted for the first time. He stayed at the house while working with Rachel's vocals and writing songs. He ensured I was there to watch, and she didn't argue or make a fuss.

Papa booked many shows for her in various avenues around the states, so I went with them when they traveled. Before long, they started dating secretly.

Rachel was finally happy because she was getting exposure. Still, her father didn't approve of their interracial relationship, and when the gossip became too much, her father made us leave.

My papa had to love her, right?

What other reason would cause a well-established white man to have a relationship with a beautiful black woman, especially when she had a young white daughter conceived by rape? It had to be love, but thankfully, my papa didn't care about what people thought of his life decisions. His decisions were his own. He saw me mistreated, and he stood up for me.

After we left Mobile, Alabama, we moved to Paris.

There was an excellent opportunity for black jazz bands then, and Rachel was a hit in all the local clubs. She did very well once we arrived, but for whatever reason, she started staying out all night with other men and returning home drunk. She became confrontational with Papa, and she stopped singing at scheduled shows he had booked for her, causing him to lose income and fall behind on the payments.

Papa wasn't happy, and I always thought I was to blame because although Rachel tolerated me for him, she still despised me. She didn't hide it whenever we were alone and made it clear she didn't like how Papa included me in everything.

I wasn't shocked when Papa told me she left me after returning home from boarding school. She gave up her parental rights, giving Papa full guardianship, and her stipulations on the contract were clear. I was to *never* contact her or her family.

All tides had been terminated once Papa signed the legal documents, giving him full custody of me and restricting all parental rights from her. In return, she continued to pay for boarding school, which I never understood because the tuition was expensive.

With my papa no longer managing a jazz band, he had to find work elsewhere. Papa also had to find an affordable place to live with less luxury since Rachel was no longer with us, and once he did, I could leave school to visit him most weekends.

The years pass by with me approaching my teens, and that's when I noticed a change in him.

My papa was a handsome, charismatic man. He was jolly and loved telling jokes to make everyone laugh. I believe that's what Rachel liked about him because she could meet so many important people in the music industry because of him. Still, as I visited, I noticed he was no longer his free-spirited self.

His conversations about the Lord ceased. Papa suddenly became paranoid and always on the defensive, looking over his shoulders whenever I was around.

Papa wanted to keep me inside all the time, and then he urged me to lie about my heritage. He said I needed to make people believe that I was entirely white. Then he changed the way I dressed. Whenever I was out, no matter the season, I had to wear my cloak and hat or walk outside with an umbrella to block the sun.

When I turned sixteen and started to fill in, Papa became overprotective. He ensured I was dressed in loose-fitting clothes with long sleeves covering my arms. The skirts stopped at my ankles, and I was to keep my hair up in a bun and never wear it down.

The conversation was always about my safety, and I didn't understand the newfound concern, but it was severe. So much so that Papa started drinking more heavily than the occasional beer or glass of wine with dinner.

When I returned home for winter break, it was the first time I witnessed his health rapidly fading before my eyes. He looked older with more white hair and wrinkles. He was drained of spirit and barely spoke more than a few words during my stay. He was always paranoid, looking out the window as if expecting someone.

At that time, I had no idea it would be our last Christmas together, although I wanted to make it memorable for him. I decided to lift his spirits by cooking a meal—all his favorites.

I cleaned his apartment and went shopping for food. When I returned with my arms filled with bags of food, I cooked a big meal and baked his favorite chocolate cake.

All I wanted was acknowledgment with a smile. I wanted to give Papa a reason to move away from the window and find a reason to sit with me and talk like we used to, but it didn't work.

He wouldn't eat!

I even tried to have Bible study with him, sharing verses that I felt would make him happy, but even that didn't work because he didn't want to participate. He asked me to leave him alone. Clearly, he had

something heavy on his mind, but he kept it to himself, leaving me entirely in the dark.

Early Christmas morning, we exchanged gifts. He bought me a new Bible, which I needed very much. I was excited about the gold pocket watch I had been saving for. It was time to replace that old faded pocket watch his papa gave him years ago that no longer kept the time.

He opened the wrapped gift with no change in his behavior.

No surprise or excitement at all!

To this day, I'll never forget how he put the watch down on the table and stood from his chair. He never looked at it again after that day. The depression he was under had won, and I didn't know what else I could do to change it.

I felt defeated, so I let him sit in his room alone while I put away the food and accepted that I could do nothing to help him. Days later, I watched him lay in bed and give up on life while I feared being left alone again with no one to help guide me.

I stayed at school without a break that following summer. I didn't see him until the second week of October, the weekend of my seventeenth birthday.

He picked me up, still looking sickly, but at least he was in better spirits, so I was hopeful. He took me out to dinner at a local restaurant, nothing too fancy, to celebrate my *coming into womanhood*, which was what he called it. I was so shocked that I hardly knew how to respond.

"So, how is school?" he started once we were seated.

"The same," I said honestly. "Everyone still hates me. There's no change there, but I'm used to it. God has made sure I'm good with being alone. So, speaking of being alone, why do you seem so far away?" I asked him. "What's going on?"

He looked away briefly before he turned to me.

"I don't want to tell you this. It's better you never know."

"Know what?" I asked anxiously, my heart pounding as I saw the severity in his brown eyes.

"Nalda, this isn't the place to tell you, so let it be."

After that statement, I was alarmed.

"Tell me what?! Papa, you're scaring me," I said frantically as I leaned forward, taking his hands. "Why are you so worried? What happened?"

"You can't come to Paris for Christmas," he started with a stern look.

"Why not?" I asked him, still trying to understand what was happening with him.

"They'll take you, and I can't let that happen. I can't let you be kidnapped or murdered because you're . . . different," Papa said severely and gloomily as he looked deeply into my eyes. "They're kidnapping girls who they think could be you."

"Is this why you're adamant about me telling everyone I'm white?" I asked him, trying to understand, and he nodded.

"It's best that no one believes otherwise or knows you're connected to Rachel. If so, you'll be in danger," he said. "You can't ever tell anyone about her, Nalda. You must also forget about her, you got that?"

I knew about the kidnappings of the brown babies in Paris, which were mixed-race black children. During the war, many white mothers got pregnant by black GI soldiers while their husbands were away at war, but I was not one of them. My story was different.

The news rarely reported the kidnappings in the papers, although there were posters placed on the streetlamps.

"I wish things could go back the way they were when you were younger, but Rachel opened her big mouth. She told them about you, and now they won't give up looking for you," he continued, looking around the room while he spoke. Then he met my eyes. "I can't keep you safe anymore. That's why I've kept you away from Paris."

Papa looked hopeless and frightened, and he wasn't making any sense. He had my heart racing with fear, trying to understand.

"Papa, you're speaking in riddles. Who did she tell about me, and why do they want me?"

"It was the money. She sold our secret, and now he knows who you are, Nalda. Don't you understand why you can't come back? The men who're kidnapping the girls in Paris are really looking for you—I just know it. You're a threat to *The Order*. I can't prove it, but I know how the men in *The Order* work. I used to be . . ."

"Why would they be looking for me, Papa?" I asked him more frantically, cutting him off. "And what *order* do you mean? I don't understand what you're saying. It makes no sense."

"I—I can't . . . just know these are real nasty people Rachel has mixed herself with. They're bad. Real bad news, Nalda."

“How do you know this?” I asked him in a panic because he was scaring me.

“I can’t tell you how I know,” he said, shaking his head adamantly. “It’s too dangerous. Just know I know, and I’m frightened for you and us if he ever finds you.”

“This man who’s after me. Is he my real father? Is that it? Is that why he’s after me?” I asked him, but he ignored the question.

“Everything I do is for your safety. I promised that I would be your guardian and keep you safe. You’re the most important person in my life. I live to protect you, and I hope you can forgive me for trusting Rachel—I just don’t know what else to do except keep you here at school so you can be safe.”

I released his hands from over the table and squeezed my hands tightly into a fist, resting in my lap. I wasn’t happy about missing Christmas with him, but he seemed so afraid for me. I had to heed his warning.

“If you believe I’m in danger because of who I am, I’ll stay. I’ll do whatever you think is best. I can stay in my room and work on my Bible notes.”

“I’m glad to hear you say that.” He smiled with tears in his eyes.

For some reason, I wasn’t worried then. All I could think was that I’d receive my baccalauréat qualification in France in a couple of months, equivalent to a high school diploma in America.

For my safety, I couldn’t stay at boarding school forever, so this seemed the perfect time to address what had been on my mind for some time.

“Since I’m in danger and you need me to stay away, I suppose I will now attend the university like we discussed? I’ve decided what I want to do,” I said to him, and I saw how he shifted uncomfortably in the chair, but I continued. “I want to change the world. My professor always said I have a good way with words. I was thinking of becoming a writer and following your suggestion of publishing my Bible notes. I’ve been reading a lot on publishing books. Perhaps I’ll be the next *Jane Austin*,” I snickered. “What do you think about that for a career? Will I still be able to attend the university in the spring?”

“I wouldn’t get your hopes up too high, Nalda,” he said, not totally rejecting the notion.

“You’re the one who said my Bible notes are good enough to publish. And I love to write, Papa. You know that.”

“Ten times better than the notes I started you with. You practically took that Bible and made it your own, teaching me things I didn't even know,” he said with a smile and twinkle in his brown eyes. “You definitely have a gift that needs to be exposed by others, but I—I just don't know.”

“Well, you're the one who interested me in the Bible,” I reminded him.

“It was only because, as a pastor's son, my papa made sure the scriptures were the one thing I knew before discovering my love for music. I taught Sunday school before the war, and the things I taught stayed with me. When I met you, you looked like you needed to be lifted. The Lord put it on my heart to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with you, and it stuck.”

“I'm glad you did because learning about Jesus changed my life. That's why I must see where this writing about God goes,” I said confidently, hoping to win him over. “I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for you, Papa. You gave me purpose, and I think writing about Him is mine,” I told him with tears in my eyes. “It's the only thing that gives me complete joy, Papa. Just like what music does for you. This is what I want to do.”

“You know you don't have to go to a university to be a writer,” Papa told me.

“I know, but I also want to further my education.”

He didn't speak right away. Instead of commenting on what I said, he asked for the check when the waitress stopped at our table to refill our water. I waited for her to walk away before I called out to him.

“Papa. Don't you have anything to say?”

He shook his head.

“I wish it were that simple, but it's not,” he said firmly. “Haven't you been hearing anything I've said tonight?” he said with a grave expression. “They're searching for you and won't stop until they find you.”

“What are you saying? I can no longer have a life or make decisions about my future? Papa, I can't live in fear forever,” I told him. “I won't.”

“I'm sorry, baby girl, but you may not have a choice.”



Chapter Two

Nalda

Two weeks after my seventeenth birthday, I was in my room reading a classic romance novel when I received a call from the hospital. Apparently, my papa had been rushed to the hospital after complications. Papa had never learned French, so the language barrier made it difficult for him to be treated. Arrangements were made for me to be with him to help translate.

“You’ve been sick all this time, and you didn’t tell me,” I accused him after we were left alone. “Why Papa? Why would you do this to me?”

The doctor was transparent when he announced my papa was dying from cancer and had been for months now. Seeing him so weak, pale, and frail, like shriveled fruit, was more than my heart could bear.

I couldn’t believe how quickly he was deteriorating right before my eyes. It was hard to look at him without breaking down in tears.

I never imagined him dying so young. I thought he would be with me much longer, and I felt so guilty inside for not being there for him more. I should’ve demanded it. He’d been sick and all alone, and just the thought of his suffering caused my spirit to be crushed with devastation.

“Shh, baby girl. Don’t cry,” he started, trying to sound strong, but he couldn’t fake his pain. “I wanted to tell you when I took you out to dinner for your birthday, but Rachel came up and then the university, and I just couldn’t,” he said to me teary-eyed and a shaky voice, looking like he was about to take his last breath at any moment.

With wet eyes and a running nose from sobbing, all I could do was watch him mystified because this was my first experience with death. I never lost anyone I loved, and the scariest part of all was knowing there would be no one to love me after him. I would be stuck in a foreign country alone.

No family.

No friend.

Nothing tangible on earth could offer me support and affection. His leaving me was so final.

I held onto his hand and leaned forward to speak to him.

“Papa, what will I do when you’re gone?” I asked him in sobs and with an aching heart that made it almost impossible to breathe. “I’ll be alone like before, but only here in Paris, which is worse. I know no one in Paris. There’s nothing here after you leave me.”

“Don’t worry, Nalda. I’ve made arrangements. You don’t have to worry about anything because I found you a husband. You’ll marry immediately after school, and he’ll support you for the rest of your life. He knows your situation, so you’ll be safe with him. It’s perfect because no one will look for you on the farm.”

“What?” I looked at him as if he had lost his mind because I couldn’t grasp why he was saying this to me. “A husband?” I said, shaking my head, feeling the nausea in the pit of my stomach. “You know I want to choose my own husband when I’m ready, but I’m not ready to be married,” I said adamantly and firmly.

“It’s time to be realistic about your situation. If you marry any white man, and if he finds out about your heritage, he’ll kill you. If you have a child by him, and everyone sees the differences in his offspring, he’ll kill you, thinking you’ve been sleeping with a negro man.

“Let’s say you marry a negro man. How do you expect that to work with your skin as white as it is? You’ll be ridiculed and harassed for life. That’s no life for you, darling. Staying with a white man will keep you safer because the kidnappers who are looking for you assume you look like you’re mixed with negro. They haven’t a clue your skin is so fair, so it’s better we keep it that way,” he said.

“It’s not right. None of it is right. If men are looking for me, why don’t I go to the authorities and let them know what you know? Tell them I’m in danger and then . . .”

“It doesn’t work that way. These men are dangerous and control government officials. If you go to the police, they’ll turn you into the men who are looking for you,” he said to me, looking grave and severe while he attempted to hide the pain he was in because of the cancer. “They’re hoping you’ll go to the police, and that’s why no one can be trusted.”

“Are you going to tell me now who’s after me? Don’t you think I need to know now that you’re dying?”

“I can’t. I promised her I wouldn’t,” he said to me. “The less you know, the better.”

“Promised who?” I asked Papa, but he wouldn’t say.

“Promise me you’ll marry for me.”

“Papa. I can’t. I’d be lying to you if I did. You know I want to fall in love,” I told him, shaking my head in disbelief that he would even ask this of me. “I want to choose my husband.”

“Love is for fairytales, Nalda,” he said to me.

“God’s love is real. You taught me that God is the essence of love and that I should love God above all others. Loving God is how I learned to love myself because He created me, not my parents. That’s what you said to me. Are you saying it’s a fairytale now, Papa?” I asked him, desperately in wonder.

He shook his head.

“Of course not. I’m saying this world is far from the reality of God’s love. You’ll be lost trying to find others who believe as you do, of a God above us right now, looking down at everything we do. Yes, me telling you that story got you where you are today, but in your circumstances, you can’t live so carefree as I once believed,” he said, taking my hand. Then he wiped the tears from my eyes. “I’m sorry, Nalda, but I said what I needed to say to give you hope when you were a kid. You were a sad girl when I first met you. I went along with all your hopes about love and family, Nalda, for one reason and one reason alone. I did it to build up your confidence and give you something to fight for, but honey, we live in the real world where bad men succeed, and good men remain stagnant if they do not fail. Your dreams of true love and family aren’t possible. You can’t chase love because of who you are and where you come from. You won’t be able

to hide the truth forever because it's in your blood, so you must accept the safety I've provided and be content, knowing that it could be much worse."

"Look at me, Papa? I've been doing everything you ask. You won't tell me who's after me or why Rachel put me in this danger you say I'm in. We've been pretending I'm white, and I've been staying away from Paris, but soon, I'll be finished with school, you'll be dead, and marriage with a man I don't love or know is too much. You ask too much this time. I can't marry a man I don't love."

"You don't have a choice, but let's say you don't marry him, and you fall in love with some other man and get pregnant. Genetics, Nalda. You may pretend to be white; that's one thing you can get away with, but your children may not come out as white as you, and that's my biggest fear. This is how we keep your secret and keep you safe," he said to me, wiping the tears from his eyes.

"Are you saying I can't have children now?" I asked him, not understanding where he was going with this conversation. "I have to give up my whole life because of who my parents are?"

I couldn't believe what I was hearing from him.

"You have to be realistic about your situation, baby girl. It'll be better if you marry a man who knows who you are upfront," he said to me, looking at me with severe brown eyes that pleaded with me. "No surprises."

"Then, when I meet the man I want to marry, I'll tell him the truth about who I am," I said to Papa, frankly.

"The man who's agreed to marry you already knows who you are, and he adores you, so I know he'll treat you with respect. He's a good Catholic man. He's been married and has three small children who need a mom. You can be their mom, Nalda. If you marry him, you'll never be in danger. He's a perfect solution."

"Robert Hart," I said, and then a vision of Robert appeared before me. The old, ugly, short, stubby farmer. "I won't marry him!"

"Robert helped me after Rachel left. He was the only Frenchman who sympathized with us because we didn't speak French. He watched you grow into this beautiful woman. He has a remote farm in the country and away from Paris. He's perfect, Nalda."

"Papa, I . . ."

"Nalda, you will do this for me. Promise me," he said. What else could I do? I stared at him with watery eyes and a broken heart. "I'm

leaving, but I must know you'll be safe. Promise me you'll marry Robert Hart?"

What was the point of arguing with him? Papa's mind was made up. That night, I promised him I would marry and was devastated about the new future planned for me. I would leave boarding school at seventeen without having my first love experience.

I wasn't even thinking about marriage or love, but with Papa dying, I felt like my life was being rushed. I no longer had a say in who I could love, and I didn't have time to prepare for a world where the only man I ever trusted no longer existed.

Perhaps I was lying in bed restless because all these things were heavy on my mind. I knew this would be my last summer of making my own decisions. I couldn't escape my past, and my future was set in stone. I'd accepted Robert's proposal after my papa died.

I knew nothing about kids, but I met his children, who were, I hate to say it, spoiled brats that I didn't want to tame. I once looked forward to learning when I became a mom but being married to him, that would never happen.

I also met his mother and sisters who lived with him. They seemed nice enough, but it didn't feel like home.

The date had been set for the third week of October, a week after my eighteenth birthday. At least Robert agreed to wait until then and not right after I completed boarding school, as Papa suggested.

So, you see, I was engaged to be married.

The last thing I needed was for some handsome stranger to take me off course, but then I saw *him* sitting in the café with that same sinister look when he insulted me in our first meeting two weeks ago.

He was sitting at the table alone with his newspaper in hand, not reading. It was apparent when I felt his eyes staring at me.

The first time I saw him at *Le Bon Café*, I walked to his table to serve him coffee. I had never been so nervous serving a customer. At first glance, I immediately felt drawn to a handsome face and brown eyes. Unlike Robert, he was noticeably a young man, and he was beautiful.

My heart couldn't stop trembling.

As I walked closer and closer to his table, all I could think was that he was the definition of tall, dark, and handsome.

He seemed to like my face, too, because he stared a hole through me and did it defiantly without apology. Usually, having men stare me down made me mad, but oddly, his stares flattered me.

He was Alberta's customer, so when she refilled his coffee, my heart flipped in my chest, and I missed a step when I attempted to serve coffee to my customer.

I made a mess on the table and swiftly wiped it with a napkin.

I apologized and turned my head to peek at the handsome stranger quickly over my shoulder. Thankfully, he didn't notice that I almost fell holding a hot pot of coffee; if he did, he hid it well.

Even as I stood across from him, I couldn't ignore that same star-struck look on his face, which lingered with a sparkle of interest whenever he stared at me.

He had that same fascination last time when he didn't hide his reddish-brown eyes when they ran over me wildly.

What can I say? It was refreshing to be admired adoringly, especially by a good-looking young man in my isolation. But the way I was dressed, I couldn't understand his interest in me. I knew something about him couldn't be right.

Since Papa died, my objective was to stay hidden in plain sight.

Before he came along, I served my customers but spoke to no one. Like at boarding school, I had grown accustomed to others ignoring the poor girl in the homely clothes.

I worked at the café to make extra money before the wedding. Still, this man was persistent with his attention and conversation. When he spoke to me the first time, I couldn't help but notice that he pronounced every syllable like any other snobbish Englishman from posh society.

He definitely looked the part.

He only wore black tailored suits and a crisp white shirt. His nails were clean and manicured. Even his expensive leather loafers, the weird, golden skull ring lined with diamonds and rubies on his finger, and the golden wristwatch all spoke of his confidence and elegance.

Despite our apparent differences, I was shocked to see how well our conversation flowed then. He seemed genuinely interested in me as I was in him—so much so that I bluntly acknowledged my mother was black when I shouldn't have before he admitted to being an atheist—and then I realized I made a big mistake. He was off limits,

no matter how good-looking he was to me. I had to stay away from him.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

The hours usually flew by fast on a busy working day, but with the handsome stranger watching my every move, it seemed to slow down. I never felt so infuriated, trying to work as if he wasn't there, and then my lunch hour approached.

I removed my apron, with my mind racing deep in thought. I was nervous about why he was still there after sitting for hours, hoping my stomach would stop churning. I held it briefly as it cramped, and I frowned, only because I was uncomfortable.

I ran to the toilet, but nothing happened, so I figured it had to be nerves.

It was only because his gaze last time was so intense that I couldn't help but notice the uniqueness of his eyes. They were an unusual reddish-brown color, almost amber. I was sure I felt them piercing inside me every time he stared at me. I sensed them alluring me, and I didn't like the attraction I felt for him now that I knew he was a nonbeliever.

I washed my hands and looked at myself in the mirror above the sink. After drying my hands on the hanging towel, I shook my head and took a deep breath.

I grabbed my sack lunch in one hand, my Bible in the other, and then walked to the section where the servers ate lunch.

The two small, round tables were placed alone on the side of the building, under a large tree, and hidden away from the busy crowd in front of the cafe. It was the perfect location for someone like me who wanted to hide in plain sight and read without disturbance.

I smiled with satisfaction that I didn't have to see him since he was in the front of the café among the large crowd. Unfortunately, I didn't see him waiting for me until I walked around the corner to my section.

It was obvious because he was sitting at my table—the one I ate lunch at daily. I was appalled. My feet halted abruptly, and my heart dropped, and butterflies swirled.

What was wrong with me?

My future husband should give me goosebumps and butterflies—not this guy! He was an atheist!

I grabbed my stomach and turned around immediately to walk in the opposite direction. I rounded the corner past the busy crowd and quickened my steps when I ran into the café to hide like a caged bird.

I couldn't understand why he was sitting at my table. How did he know I would go to that table to eat lunch? Especially when, only moments ago, he was sitting in front of the café with the lunch crowd.

I couldn't face him after the way we departed last time!

"Oh, Lord, please help me! I don't know what to do," I whispered to the Lord, waiting for direction. *"I need you to rescue me, Father. Please."*

Minutes passed by swiftly as I stood still. I couldn't stand in the walkway for the duration of my lunch. I had been on my feet for hours, and they were aching. I hadn't eaten since breakfast four hours ago and had been serving food all day, so naturally, I was hungry. To top it off, I was frustrated, and my head was racing with the possibilities of my next actions.

Despite how I felt, I knew I had been in worse predicaments, especially with the nasty girls at boarding school.

I knew what I must do.

I took a deep breath to brace myself before putting one foot in front of the other and returning to my table.

My eyes were locked on his back as I approached closer.

I sat down cautiously and pulled out my food. Looking down, I ignored his glare as I opened my Bible to read.

Thankfully, he didn't say one word to me. All he did was watch me with a sneer on his handsome face whenever I caught his brown eyes on me, and then, he would stand and vanish around the corner like a ghost.

For weeks, he arrived at my lunch hour. He would sit across from my table with his newspaper and cup of coffee, pretending not to watch me, although I could see his eyes. I got better at ignoring him when I served my customers while he sat in Alberta's section. But what stunned me one day was hearing his voice speak to me after I had been accustomed to him being silent for weeks. I was serving my customer when his British accent sounded.

"I'm really impressed with you," he began. I ignored him and walked past him as if he weren't there. *"Excusez-moi mademoiselle,"*

he said in French, raising his hand, making it obvious to everyone around him that he wanted my attention, especially when he shouted.

“Où?”

I had no choice except to turn and address him; otherwise, I would appear rude. Thankfully, Alberta walked up to him before I could react, so I continued forward, ignoring him with pleasure.

“I’m speaking to you, *Miss Naldine*.” He waved Alberta away, and she looked at me with a questionable frown before walking to another table.

I was too stunned that my name slipped from his lips to react.

I hate to admit it, but it sounded lovely with his British accent, though it shouldn't have come from his lips. My eyes looked at him, startled. My stomach flip-flopped, and my heart raced.

I suddenly felt ill as I walked closer to him.

“How do you know my name?” I had to ask once I stood before him, staring intensely at him, but he picked up the newspaper and flipped the page, avoiding my eyes.

“My server called you *Naldine*, did she not,” he said in his snobbish way.

“It's rude for you to say my name without being formally introduced,” I said frankly. “However, I prefer you not call my name, and we remain strangers.”

“You didn't consider me a stranger when you joined me for coffee. Notice how you never asked for my name. Not once,” he said nonchalantly with a smirk on his pink lips, speaking of our first encounter. “However, it was ill manners on my part not to request your name. Nevertheless, a proper introduction is irrelevant now, is it not?” he said frankly, shrugging with a smile, then his look became serious. “Tell me, Naldine, do you like your job? You seem happy enough, but I believe it's an act. Who can be *so* happy and content serving people all day when there are better things to do? More money to be made?”

“At least I'm working,” I said to him, attempting to turn and walk away, but his voice stopped me.

“True, but it doesn't satisfy my curiosity in the least bit. You're smart—too bright to be a servant. You speak French fluently, although you struggle to pronounce certain phrases properly. Looking at you, I find it difficult to believe your mother is a negro, but I must believe a Christian wouldn't jest about such things. However, nothing explains

why you dress in those hideous rags, hoping to disappear, which isn't working. I see you."

I frowned at him, wondering where he was going with this conversation, but I didn't respond.

God wouldn't allow me.

"You're a mystery that I can't wait to solve," he edged on, waiting for me to speak.

Still, I was lost for words for a few seconds before thinking of the most sensible response without giving anything away.

"Oh, I see. You're a snob and a bigot. No surprise there," I said, but he didn't respond.

Those amber eyes stared deeply into mine, and my stupid heart fluttered in my chest. My eyes were glued to his dark, long lashes, which every woman wished for. I stood there like an idiot, staring at his lashes as they flapped.

"Look, we'll never be friends, so don't try to figure me out," I finally rushed out without hesitation as I shook my head and looked away.

He picked up the cup and shrugged his shoulders casually before speaking with his dimples deepening.

It didn't escape me that he looked unmoved as he stared back and said, "Cute, but that doesn't make you any less interesting, Miss Naldine, and I'm more curious to know why a beautiful half-negro girl—"

"Stop saying that!" I yelled before I knew it.

"If we can't discuss your heritage, why tell me?"

"Could you please just forget we even talked and leave me alone? Please?"

He shook his head, and his dimples deepened when he smirked.

"I can't do that," he started, thankfully lowering his voice when he spoke. "Not until I find out why you, as young as you are, are living here in the big city of wolves and thieves all alone with no family. Why aren't you in America where you belong, and why do you no longer wish to discuss, you know what?" he mumbled the last bit as he brought his teacup to his beautiful pink lips and sipped after blowing the contents. "I will find out. Nothing will satisfy me, so I could skip the questions, and you can tell me now. I would be delighted for you to have another cup of coffee with me during your lunch."

“I will not,” I snapped, hating now that I had been so honest on our first encounter.

“I’ll be pleased to find out all the answers on my own, but you wouldn’t like my way of gathering information. I promise you. I came as a gentleman today, not a snake, Naldine. I come directly to you with my questions, and I expect you to answer me one way or another. It’s your choice how you’d like to go about it.” He placed the cup on the saucer and waited for me to respond.

His look was stern, and I felt threatened at that moment, handsome or not. I was weary of this man now. It didn’t make sense for him to be so interested in me. I was a nobody. Insignificant.

“Why do you care?” I asked, my heart trembling more than before after hearing what seemed like a warning or felt like a threat. “What do you want?”

“You. I could employ you for myself, is all. I would pay handsomely, of course. I’ll buy you a new wardrobe with shoes to match. You can throw those hideous things in the bin with the other rubbish.”

My eyes followed his when he looked down to my feet with disgust, but I was more mortified that he would suggest I become his property. How dare he insult me or speak to me in such an arrogant manner?

I should’ve walked away, but I couldn’t. I had to say something, and I wanted to say something hurtful, but I couldn’t for my job’s sake. I kept it professional.

“You’ll not speak to me disrespectfully, mister,” I said, wanting to pour the coffee all over him but begging myself not to.

He wasn’t worth going to prison and ruining my life.

He went back to his paper, pretending I wasn’t there. His dimples deepened when he smirked. A glow of excitement in his brown eyes met my gaze for only a brief moment before he avoided eye contact once again.

“Are all colored girls feisty as you?” he asked, smiling, showing those deep dimples in his cheeks.

“I beg your pardon?” That question caught me off guard.

“I’ve always preferred blondes, but I guess you’ll do, considering the golden highlights in your hair,” he said as his eyes looked to my hair and back into mine before he hid his with the newspaper. “I can’t wait to remove those pins to see your hair fall down your back.”

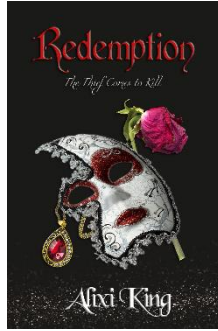
He waited for me to speak, but my mouth fell open in shock.

My hand trembled as I held the coffee pot. I quickly glanced at the nearing tables and returned to him. This man had no shame, and I saw who I was dealing with for the first time—a demon!

“We both know it will happen soon. I’ll have you in my bed, and you will love it. I’m a good lover, and I can’t wait to show . . .”

“Stop it!” I yelled before I knew it, and the pot slipped from my hands.

Then, hot coffee and glass splattered on the stone ground as everyone stopped to look at me.



Book 2 is Coming Soon!

Resurrection

The Thief Comes to Kill



About the Author

Alix King is a lover of romance and family values. Her first love is Jesus Christ, whom she gave her life to at a young age. She has been writing short stories and poetry since she was twelve with one dream of becoming a novelist. Life happened, so she put her writing career on hold after she became a wife and mom. Now that her children are all grown up and in college, she uses her free time to focus on her writing. She has been blessed to be married to a wonderful husband and father for over twenty years and is enjoying being an empty nester with their two beautiful dogs.

