



*White Rose*

REVIEW  
OF  
LOVE

BY

PAMELA S. THIBODEAUX

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*Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged also.*

(Matthew 7:1-2)

Jason Stockwell watched from his small patio as Kylie rounded the corner then jogged up the stairs to her apartment. As was his custom, he fantasized about following in her wake, tugging those sweaty garments from her body, urging her into the bathroom and...His breath jagged in and out of his lungs, heart thundered in his chest and palms sweated. The sound of running water upstairs didn't help his state of mind as he envisioned her in the shower.

He closed his eyes and willed his emotions into some semblance of order. His hand shook when he raised the coffee cup to his mouth. A curse hissed between his lips when the scorching liquid burned his tongue. Should have known it was still too hot, he berated himself. Especially since this same scenario happened every single day!

To say that Kylie Erickson intrigued him would be the understatement of the century. His obsession began a year ago when *Media Alive!* commissioned him to review her work and interview her. He purchased every book she'd written and proceeded to review each one. Those evaluations appeared in an on-going segment in the popular magazine. Though known as a 'rag mag' or 'gossip mill' he did his best to present an honest and straightforward opinion of each book and every

interview he produced for the publication.

Unable to secure an appointment with the prolific author, he decided to get close to her and rented an apartment just below the one she lived in. His plan? Coax her into an interview or in the very least, snag enough information from idle chatter to create one.

No such luck.

From the day they met, and she realized who he was, she not only ignored him, she drove him insane with her erratic schedule. Up all hours of the night, the movement in her apartment kept him awake more than he slept. But like clockwork, every morning at seven she bounded down the steps for a run.

He realized the sound of running water had been replaced by absolute silence, glanced up, and wondered as he had for months—with very vivid imaginings—what she might be doing now.

*God, help me.*

More a desperate plea than a prayer, he couldn't help but smile when the newspaper landed at his feet with a thud and brought him back to reality.

“Jesus, I don't know what it's going to take for this woman to agree to an interview, nor can I seem to get her out of my mind long enough to finish that last review. I'm running out of time here, and I'd sure appreciate it if You open a door.”

A chuckle echoed in his mind, mocked. Jason wondered if God laughed at the predicament he'd gotten himself into or if the sound stemmed from the devil ridiculing his faith. He picked up the newspaper and his now-cold coffee, and trod indoors to see if he could take up where he left off in her latest novel. Perhaps a rave review would coax her out of her shell, *or cave*, and she'd grace him with a few words that he could embellish and polish to

create an interview.

That thought led quickly into another. Maybe, just maybe, once he finished the review, he could actually ask her opinion before he sent it to his editor. Then, if she saw that he really did do quality work, she just might give him that interview!

Hope beat a tattoo in his heart when he poured a fresh cup of coffee and placed his laptop on the table. Two hours later his optimism vanished when peace and quiet ended with a thud from the upstairs apartment. Followed by the thump and bump of loud music, he swore a herd of elephants did the rumba above his head, the dance interrupted by the occasional scrape and grind of furniture across the floor.

An hour later he flung back from the table with such force the chair toppled. Quick thinking and narrow vision enabled him to see, and catch, his laptop as it slid toward the floor. A low growl sounded in his throat when he stormed out of his apartment and up the stairs. Past the point of a civil knock, he banged on her door. She opened it with a flourish. He stormed through without waiting for an invitation.

“Excuse me but you’re not welcome here!”

“Well, excuse me, but you’re the most inconsiderate, stubborn, self-centered woman I’ve ever met! How do you expect me to get any work done with the racket going on up here?”

She whirled away with a snort and turned down the music. “I wouldn’t deign to call what you do work. But there, are you happy?”

“I’ll be happy when you treat me like a colleague and be as respectful of my time and work as I am of yours.”

“Colleague? More like vulture, stalker.”

*Stalker?* “I’ll show you stalker, Lady,” he muttered and pulled her in his arms. His lips

swooped over hers in a scorching kiss, arms wrapped like steel manacles around her waist. Within moments everything about the embrace softened. When the kiss ended she was plastered against him, her fists curled into his hair.

After a few moments of stunned silence, she pushed herself out of his arms. Her palm connected with his cheek in a resounding slap. Jason stepped back and used every ounce of self-control he possessed to refrain from touching her again. He turned on his heel and strode from her apartment and down the stairs into his own. He plopped down in his chair and started to write.

Peppered with adjectives like, selfish, stuck-up, and eccentric, words poured forth with scathing clarity. Within moments he had not only written a rave review, but an interview as well. He'd get her with this for sure!

His editor would absolutely love it.

His finger trembled over the 'send' button.

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Kylie paced, careful to be quiet. Three days had passed since her neighbor stormed into her apartment, swept her well-ordered life into turmoil and left her schedule in shreds. She never believed in writer's block or anything like it. Nevertheless, the nasty cloud of stymied imagination hung over her head. Every time she sat at her computer her mind froze, fingers locked up tighter than a...she shook her head and flushed at the analogy that came to mind. Even her thoughts were not her own! She closed her eyes to pray but all she saw, all she felt were those blistering eyes and scorching lips.

No one had ever devastated her with a single kiss before, and for the life of her she couldn't get past it. He'd touched some place deep inside, a part she'd never allowed anyone to touch before.

One heated embrace of his lips on hers and



he'd scaled the walls of her heart.

A sob shivered through her. *Why God? Why him?*

Why not?

The words echoed in the depths of her soul.

*Because he's a...a parasite! He writes for a rag mag for goodness sakes. I want a man who respects me, respects my craft not someone who writes gossip.*

In other words if someone isn't a *big name author* published by *large conglomerate publishing house*, he or she isn't really a writer, right? Who made you the judge of talent, a gift I give out?

She felt the chastisement from the depths of her being. A flush climbed in her cheeks. Her heart trembled with shame.

*Oh, Lord, I never thought of myself as that, but I guess that's what my actions have shown all along. I'm sorry.*

I'm not the only one you should apologize to.

Without hesitation she marched downstairs and pressed his doorbell. Her heart pounded, hands shook. She pushed the button again and heard a harried response. When he opened the door, her thundering heart pushed its way into her throat then lunged to the pit of her stomach. The towel wrapped loosely around his waist confirmed she'd interrupted his shower. His damp hair lay plastered against a perfectly shaped head. The dark mass, also moist, which curled up his chest, had her fingers hankering to reach out and stroke. Gold flecks danced in crystal green eyes, but his voice frosted when he asked, "May I help you?"

Kylie opened her mouth to speak but no words came. She stuttered, flushed then forced the lump of emotions down her dry throat, and tried again. "I came to apologize for the other day."

Jason hesitated a moment then opened the

door in invitation and waved toward the small kitchen table. "Have a seat. I'll put on some clothes and be right out."

She followed as gracefully as possible on legs that wobbled, and then sat. Questions rolled around in her head. *What on earth am I doing? What will he think? Should I give him the interview? God, help me.* Shivers shook her entire being, but all she knew was that she had to be obedient to the still, small voice inside that whispered encouragement.

A meow snagged her attention and she bent to pet the fluffy calico that rubbed against her legs. Her eyes landed on a wadded-up piece of paper beneath the table. She picked it up, smoothed it out as much as possible and read. The blood drained from her face and gelled somewhere in the region of her feet at the sarcastic words contained within the review.

When Jason strolled into the kitchen she couldn't bear to look at him, but when she finally raised her eyes to his, they swam with tears. She blinked hard to stop the floodgate from bursting and held the paper toward him with hands that trembled.

"I came to apologize but it looks like I'm too late," she remarked as she rose.

"Kylie, wait."

She shook her head and held up a hand to ward off his words. On a sudden burst of emotion she crumbled the paper and threw it at him. "I hope you enjoy your revenge. And that you choke on it," she muttered and turned on her heel.

Jason caught her by the arm, twirled her around to face him and managed to snag her hand before her palm connected with his cheek. In one swift movement, he moved her arm behind her back and pulled her against his chest. Though uncomfortable, she could tell he strove to be gentle

## Review of Love

despite the severity of the embrace. His other hand slid up her side to cup her face.

“Sweet Kylie, that’s not the review I published. That’s the one I threw into the trash. Nosey has a habit of digging out balls of paper to play with. Would you like to see the published version?”

Warmth from those green eyes seeped into her heart, stole the angst from her mind. *Judge not lest ye be judged.* The scripture floated through her soul. She nodded. He brushed his lips across her forehead, released her and moved away to pick up his copy of *Media Alive!* He opened the magazine to the page in question and handed it to her.

She skimmed the review unable to tear her eyes away from the page. Flowery adjectives replaced every scornful word she’d read in the crumpled up paper. The sweetness of his glowing prose rendered her ineffective in stemming the tears this time.

Then, Jason cupped her face in his hands and lowered his lips to hers in a tender embrace.

Dear Readers,

As Christians we are instructed not to judge our fellow man. But like Kylie, many of us still do. My prayer is, like Kylie, we put aside our judgments and open our heart and mind to the people God puts in our lives.

If you don't know Him already, I pray you seek Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If you do, I urge you to seek a closer, more personal walk with Him.

As always, THANK YOU for your continued support of my writing – may you find joy in reading.

Pamela S Thibodeaux

*“Inspirational with an Edge!”*

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