

KAREN MARIE MONING

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF FAEFEVER

DREAMFEVER



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Karen Marie Moning



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First Edition



I am alive. I am so alive. I have never been more alive in my life. I sit, cross-legged, nude, in a tangle of silk sheets. Life is a sensual banquet and I am voracious. I glisten with sweat and satisfaction. But I need more. My lover is too far away. He is bringing me food. I do not know why he insists. I need nothing but his body, his electric touch, the primitive, intimate things he does to me. His hands on me, his teeth and tongue, and most especially what hangs heavy between his legs. Sometimes I kiss it. Lick it. Then *he* glistens with sweat and hunger and strains beneath my mouth. I hold down his hips and tease. It makes me feel powerful and alive.

"You are the most beautiful man I've ever seen," I tell him. "You are perfect."

He makes a strangled sound and mutters something about how I might seriously reconsider that at some point. I ignore it. He says many mystifying things. I ignore them all. I admire the preternatural grace of his body. Dark, strong, he pads like a great beast, muscles rippling. Black and crimson symbols cover much of his skin. It's exotic, exciting. He is large. The first time I almost couldn't take him. He fills me, sates me completely. Until he is no longer inside me and I am empty again.

I push onto all fours and arch my rump invitingly. I know he cannot resist my ass. When he looks at it, he gets a funny look on his face. Savage, his mouth tightens, his eyes harden. Sometimes he looks away sharply.

But he *always* looks back.

Hard, fast, hungry like me.

I believe he is divided in desire. I do not understand that. Desire is. There is no judgment between animals. No right or wrong. Lust is. Pleasure is the way of beasts. "More," I say. "Come back to bed." It took me a while to learn this exquisite thing's language, but when I did, I learned rapidly, although parts of it elude me. He claims I knew it all along but had forgotten it. He says it took me weeks to regain it. I do not know what "weeks" are. He says they are a way of marking the passage of time. I have no care for such matters. He often speaks nonsense. I ignore it. I shut his mouth with mine. Or with my breasts, or other parts. It works every time.

He shoots me a look, and for a moment I think I have seen that look before. But I know I have not, because I could never have forgotten such a divine creature.

"Eat," he growls.

"Don't want food," I growl back. I tire of him making me eat. I reach for him. I am strong. My body is sure. But this fine beast is stronger than me. I savor his power, when he lifts me on top of him, when he holds me down and fills me, when he's behind me, driving deep. I want him there now. He knows no limits. Though I have drowsed, I have never seen him sleep. Though I demand incessantly, he is always able to please me. He is inexhaustible. "I want more. You. Come here. Now." There goes my rump again. Up.

He stares.

He curses. "No, Mac," he says.

I do not know what "Mac" means.

But I know what "no" means.

And I do *not* like it.

I pout. But it quickly curves into a smile. I know a secret. For a beast of such power, his self-control with me is weak. I have

learned this in our time together. I wet my lips, give him a look, and he makes that raw, angry-sounding noise deep in his throat that makes my blood hot, hot, hot, because every time he makes it I know he's just about to give me what I want.

He cannot resist me. It bothers him. He is an odd animal.

Lust *is*, I tell him, again and again. I try to make him understand.

"There's more to life than lust, Mac," he says roughly, again and again.

There is that word "Mac" again. So many words I do not understand. I weary of talk. I tune him out.

He gives me what I want. Then forces me to eat—*boring!* I humor him. Belly full, I am sleepy. I tangle my body with his. But when I do, lust takes me again, and I cannot sleep. I roll on top of him, straddle him, breasts swaying over his face. His eyes glaze and I smile. He traps me beneath him in a smooth graceful roll, stretches my arms above my head, and stares into my eyes. I grind my hips up. He is hard and ready. He is *always* hard and ready.

"Be still, Mac. Bloody hell, would you just be still?"

"But you're not *in* me," I complain.

"And I'm not going to be."

"Why not? You want me."

"You need rest."

"Rest later."

He closes his eyes. A muscle works in his jaw. He opens his eyes. They glitter like arctic night. "I am trying to help you."

I arch up against him. "And I am trying to *help* you help me," I explain patiently. My beast is dense sometimes.

He growls and drops his face in my neck. But he doesn't kiss or nip it. I grunt my displeasure.

When he lifts his head again, he wears a mask of impassivity that does not promise more of what I want. My hands are still trapped in his.

I head-butt him.

He laughs, and for a moment I think I have won, but then he

stops and says, “Sleep,” in a strange voice that seems to echo with many voices. It pressures my skull. I know what it is. This beast has magic.

I have magic, too, in a place in my head. I push back at him with it, hard, because I want what he has and he will not give it to me. It angers me that he resists, so I push into him, I try to make him do what I want him to do. With my beast magic, I search for his weakness to use it against him, like he’s trying to use mine. Then something gives way, and abruptly I am no longer snug between the pleasure of silk at my back and man at my front but—

I stand in a desert. I am inside my lover’s body, staring out from his eyes. I am mighty, I am vast, I am strong. We breathe stifflingly hot night air. We are alone, so alone. A scorching wind gusts across the desert, kicking up a violent sandstorm, blinding us to all but a few feet ahead, driving thousands of tiny, needlelike grains into our unprotected face, our eyes. But we make no move to shield ourselves. We welcome the pain. We become the pain, unresisting. We breathe grains of sand. They burn our lungs.

Others flank us; still we are so alone. What have we done? What have we become? Have they gotten to her? Does she know? Will she denounce us? Turn her face away?

She is our world. Our highest star, our brightest sun, and now we are dark as night. We were always dark, feared, above and beyond any law. But she loved us anyway. Will she love us now? We who have never known uncertainty or fear now know both in what is absurdly the moment of our greatest strength. We who have killed without conscience, taken without question, conquered without hesitation, now question it all. Undone by a single act. The mighty, whose stride has never faltered—we stumble. We fall to our knees, throw back our head, and, as our lungs fill with sand, roar our outrage through cracked and burning lips to the heavens, those mocking, fucking heavens—

Someone is shaking me.

“What are you *doing*?” he is roaring. I am in bed again, between silk and man. I still feel the searing heat of the desert, and

my skin seems gritty with sand. He stares down at me, his face white with fury. And more. This beast that does not rattle is rattled.

"Who is she?" I ask. I am no longer inside his head. It was hard to stay there. He didn't want me there. He is very strong and cast me out.

"I don't know how you did that, but you will *never* do it again," he snarls, and shakes me again. "Do you understand?" He bares his teeth. It excites me.

"You preferred her to all others. Why? Did she mate better?"

It makes no sense.

I am a fine beast.

He should hold *me* above all others.

I am here. Now. She is gone. I do not know how I know it, but she has been gone for a very, very long time. Far longer than his "weeks."

"Stay the fuck out of my head!"

Fuck. There's a word I understand. "Yes, please."

"*Sleep*," he orders in that strange, multilayered voice. "*Now*."

I resist, but he keeps saying it over and over. After a time, he sings to me. Finally, he gets inks and draws upon my skin. He has done it before. It tickles . . . but soothes.

I sleep.

I dream of cold places and fortresses of black ice. I dream of a white mansion. I dream of mirrors that are doorways to dreams and gateways to hell. I dream animals that cannot exist. I dream of things I cannot name. I weep in my dreams. Powerful arms band me. I shudder in them. I feel like I'm dying.

There is something in my dream that *wants* me to die. Or at least cease living as far as I understand it.

It makes me angry. I will not cease to exist. I will not die, no matter how much pain there is. I made a promise to someone. Someone who is *my* highest star, my brightest sun. Someone I want to be like. I wonder who it is.

I push on through the cold, dark dreams.

A man wearing red robes reaches for me. He is beautiful, seductive, and very angry with me. He calls to me, summons me. He has some kind of hold over me. I want to go to him. I need to go to him. I belong to him. He made me what I am. *I will tell you of she for whom you grieve*, he promises. *I will tell you of her last days. You long to hear.* Yes, yes, although I do not know of whom he speaks, I want desperately to hear about her. Did she have happy days, did she smile, was she brave at the end? Was it quick? Tell me it was quick. Tell me there was no pain. *Find me the Book*, he says, *and I will tell you all. Give you all. Call the Beast. Unleash it with me.* I do not want this book. I am terrified of it. *I will give you back she for whom you grieve. I will give you back your memories of her and more.*

I think I would die to have those memories back. There was a hole. Now there is a hole where the hole was.

You must live to get those memories back, another voice growls from a distance. I feel tickling on my skin and hear chanting. It drowns out the voice of the man in red robes. He is fury in crimson, melting into blood, then he recedes and I am safe from him for now.

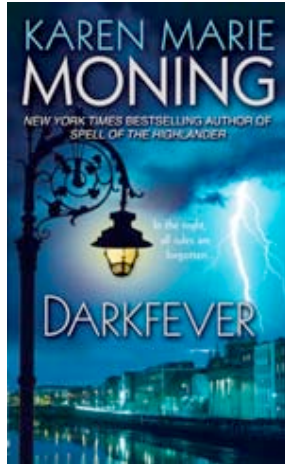
I am a kite in a tornado, but I have a long string. There is tension in my line. Somewhere, someone is holding on to the other end, and, although it cannot spare me this storm, it will not let me be lost while I regain my strength.

It is enough.

I will survive.

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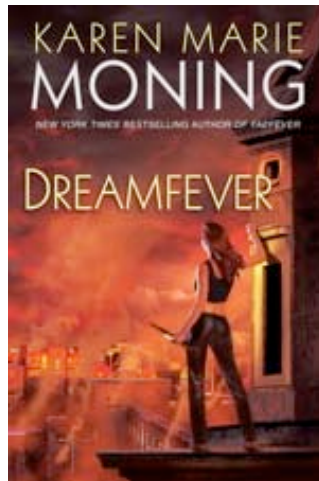
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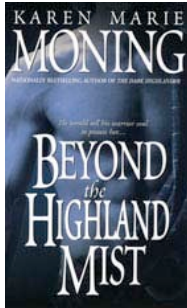
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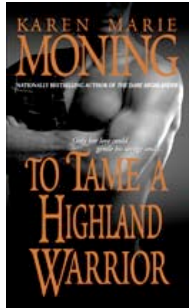
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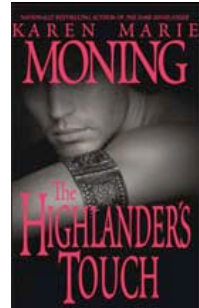
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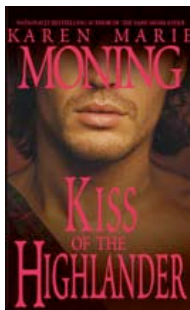
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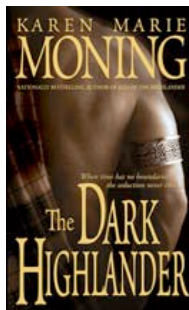
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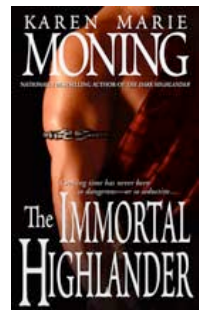
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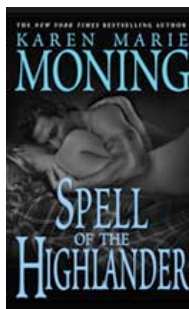
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