

Confessions of a Cougar

CONFESIONS OF

A COUGAR

PRAISE FOR BOOKS BY MORGAN ST. JAMES

SILVER SISTERS MYSTERIES

Morgan St. James and Phyllice Bradner are as entertaining as Nick & Nora Charles or even better. If you like the late Anne George's Southern Sisters Series you'll love these two crime solving quirky characters who know how to create merry mischief and it's in their blood.

Pamela James/Reviewer Mayhem & Magic website

DEVIL'S DANCE WRITTEN AS ARLISS ADAMS

Devil's Dance is a gripping story that I simply devoured in one day. I'm usually not a reader of romance novels, but the suspense/romance of Devil's Dance turned out to be very satisfying. I am enthralled with Jen, PJ, Viola, and the rest of the characters. Extremely well written. Wrapped tight. I loved it! I'm looking forward to finishing The Devil's Due, Part Two of Jen's story. Thank you Arliss Adams for your wonderful story.

Picnic Gal on Library Thing

THE MAFIA FUNERAL AND OTHER SHORT STORIES

I love to read Morgan St. James books, short stories and her column for the examiner.com! This book is fast, fun and easy to follow! I love that...:-) Another book Morgan St. James wrote that I absolutely love and relate too, is "Devil's Dance" and "The Devil's Due"! Morgan has a way of writing that you can relate to or feel as though she is writing about you. This author is the best! I just love all of her books.

Wendy Mazaros, Author "Vegas Rag Doll"

WHO'S GOT THE MONEY?

"...a plot that keeps you on your toes while trying to stifle laughter. Every time you think you've figured it out, another surprise awaits. Good thing they're not crooks.

Joaquin "Jack" Garcia, Retired FBI Agent and Author of NY Times Bestseller, Making Jack Falcone

OTHER BOOKS BY MORGAN ST. JAMES

SILVER SISTERS MYSTERIES

CO-AUTHORED WITH PHYLLICE BRADNER

A Corpse in the Soup
Seven Deadly Samovars
Vanishing Act in Vegas

STORIES IN THESE ANTHOLOGIES

The MAFIA FUNERAL and Other Short Stories
Chicken Soup for the Shopper's Soup
Chicken Soup for the Soul: Celebrating People Who Make a
Difference
The Mystery of the Green Mist
Dreamspell Nightmares
Dreamspell Revenge
The World Outside the Window
Writer's Bloc II

FOR WRITERS AT ALL STAGES OF THEIR CAREER

Writers' Tricks of the Trade: 39 Things You Need to Know
About the ABCs of Writing Fiction

BOOKS WITH MEREDITH HOLLAND

Getting Even
Who's Got The Money?

WRITING AS ARLISS ADAMS

Devil's Dance
The Devil's Due

MORGAN ST. JAMES

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Morgan St. James

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This story is based upon the author's true experiences combined with passages produced from the author's imagination. Names have been changed for legal reasons.

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DEDICATION

The names in this book have been changed, so I'll dedicate it to the "models" for various characters. If you read this, you'll probably know who you are, even where a few of the details might have been embellished. This is a true story with small enhancements here and there.

To the former boyfriend who was the model for Bob, thanks for the trip to England because nothing in this book would have happened without it.

To my friend who was the model for Sue—we had great experiences and despite all the traveling I've done since, this still is one trip that will remain embedded in my memory. I think it changed both of us.

To the models for Nigel, Randy, James, Shelton and Jeremy. All I can say is "Mmmmm!"

And to Bert and Mary many thanks for lending us their sheets and towels.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My editor Darrah Whitaker—how can I ever thank you enough for all of the suggestions you made and errors you caught. Every time we went through a chapter you helped me polish it until it shined.

I lived the story so I was very close to it. You looked at it with fresh eyes and always let me know if the train was leaving the tracks. In other words, you kept me focused.



Judith Deutsch for catching all of the double or missing words, commas, apostrophes, periods, quote marks—well you get the picture. Her “eagle eye” saw things I missed completely. Not only that, but a big thanks to Judith for loving the story. Your opinion means a lot to me.



To members of Henderson Writers’ Group who helped critique many of the chapters in the early stages. You’ve worked with me on several of my books, and are always appreciated.



To Karen Phillips for the fabulous cover. I love it!



Thanks to all of you and apologies to anyone I’ve left out.

Morgan St. James



Cougars, also known as pumas or mountain lions, excel at stalking and ambushing their prey. They are beautiful but deadly predators.

However, in modern times, “Cougar” is also a common term used to describe older women on the prowl for much younger men, and I confess, somehow I became a member of the pack.

Did I consciously choose to join? Never! It snuck up on me during an extraordinary trip to Europe. And oh what a thrilling adventure it was, filled with steamy, torrid affairs—but hold on, I’m getting ahead of myself.

Here’s how it all began.

Morgan St. James

↻ One ↻

The pilot's voice echoed through the cabin.

"We're approaching Heathrow Airport. Please prepare for landing."

What welcome words. I'd twisted and turned in every possible direction during the eleven hour flight from Los Angeles to London in a losing struggle to find a comfortable position. I stretched one leg, groaned, then managed to stretch the other, all the while praying my aching body wasn't a prelude to what growing old would be like. The narrow seats in the coach section, obviously proportioned to fit a two-year-old, must have been specified by a sadist.

Except for short trips to Mexico and Canada, I'd never traveled outside of the U.S. Thank goodness my friend Susan was a veteran of overseas flights and had been adamant about my wearing a sweat suit on the plane. Traveling in my stylish new black velour outfit wasn't much different than wearing PJs.

The wheels hit the runway and jolted me out of a daydream where I'd been sitting on my boyfriend Bob's bed the way we did sometimes, putting together stacks of twenty, fifty and hundred dollar bills as though they were nothing more than Monopoly money. That's not as far-fetched as it

sounds. I often helped him put his bank deposits together exactly that way. I would say something like, “I need two twenties to finish this stack,” and he’d hand them to me. Then he might ask me to hand him some hundreds. Occasionally the deposit added up to as much as a hundred thousand dollars in cash. So when he’d asked if my friend Sue and I would like to go to England for a few weeks, all expenses paid, I knew he could easily afford to be that generous.

I stretched again. My neck was stiff and my back ached. Sue had slept right through the landing, so I nudged her awake, trying to be as gentle as possible. She’d endured a lot for the past several months, and I didn’t want to startle her.

She blinked, then rubbed her eyes. Still half awake, she murmured, “Hal?”

I swallowed hard. Her husband Hal had died several months before, but he still had a strong presence in her subconscious. “No, sweetie. It’s me, Audrey.”

Small pools of tears welled and threatened to overflow. She bit her lower lip, then shot me an embarrassed smile.

During the months following Hal’s death, she had seemed almost like her old self on her good days, but at other times we’d be talking about something and then, without warning, tears trickled down her face leaving damp trails in their wake.

When I first mentioned the trip I wasn’t sure she would even be open to going. Nevertheless, I had invited her to join me for lunch at the Sunset Bistro, a restaurant with food so scrumptious we had an unspoken rule of no calorie counting. I figured that would put her in a good mood.

She’d listened politely but from the expression on her face I was pretty sure she was about to say something like, “I

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don't think I'm ready yet.”

I didn't give her a chance. “You haven't heard the best part. Bob wants to *give* you the plane ticket. The only things you'll have to pay for are your food and personal expenses. Susan LeGrange, you have to say ‘yes’ or I just might drag you to the airport kicking and screaming. Besides, you know it will do you good to get away.”

I remember feeling optimistic as a slow smile lifted the corners of Sue's sweetheart bow mouth. Little smile lines formed at the corners of her eyes, too. She nodded and said, “You know what? I do need a change. When do we leave?”

I'll never know if I'd been wrong about thinking she was ready to say no. Regardless, the offer of a free trip must have cinched it. I was sure that living in a house still filled with so many reminders of Hal was keeping the pain alive. Taking this trip would be a step in the right direction.

Her pretty deep blue eyes had sparkled like twin sapphires, filling my heart with joy. Within a week, we were on our way.

The perky voice coming over the loudspeaker trilled, “Welcome to Heathrow. Make sure to check for personal belongings before departing the aircraft.”

I made an attempt to smooth out my crumpled sweats, which was no easy task after being twisted into the shape of a pretzel for several hours. We gathered our things from the overhead bin and shuffled toward the exit with the rest of the passengers.

After exiting customs, I stopped to take a deep breath. For the first time in my life, I felt no pressure. No kids, no boyfriend and no ex-husband to worry about. If Sue would give herself a chance to live a little, too, this was going to be one heck of a vacation. We walked through the wide open

Terminal B heading toward the taxi stand. I heard a little giggle and looked over at Sue. Her face glowed with excitement.

She looked nothing like she had during a heart-wrenching shopping trip we'd taken two days before Christmas. Hal's health issues dominated her thoughts so much by then that she'd totally forgotten to buy presents for him, her girls and her parents. We had navigated the shops, stopping to sit on a bench every time she lost control. I'd given her hugs while she allowed herself the luxury of a good cry. It took hours, but she was determined to hand out presents on Christmas Day. Near the end of the day she finally had everything and we popped into a cafe in the mall for a cup of tea. Both of us had tried to act as though everything was normal, but how could it be? Hal only had a short time left, and we knew it. He died shortly after Christmas.

She broke into my thoughts. "Hey, Aud. Know what? I do believe I'm ready to live again! In fact, I feel wonderful!"

"Then that makes two of us. Okay, let the fun begin." Sue giggled again.

I still couldn't believe we had three whole weeks ahead of us to do plenty of flitting around until it was time to go back home. How lucky were we?

My heart did a crazy dance.