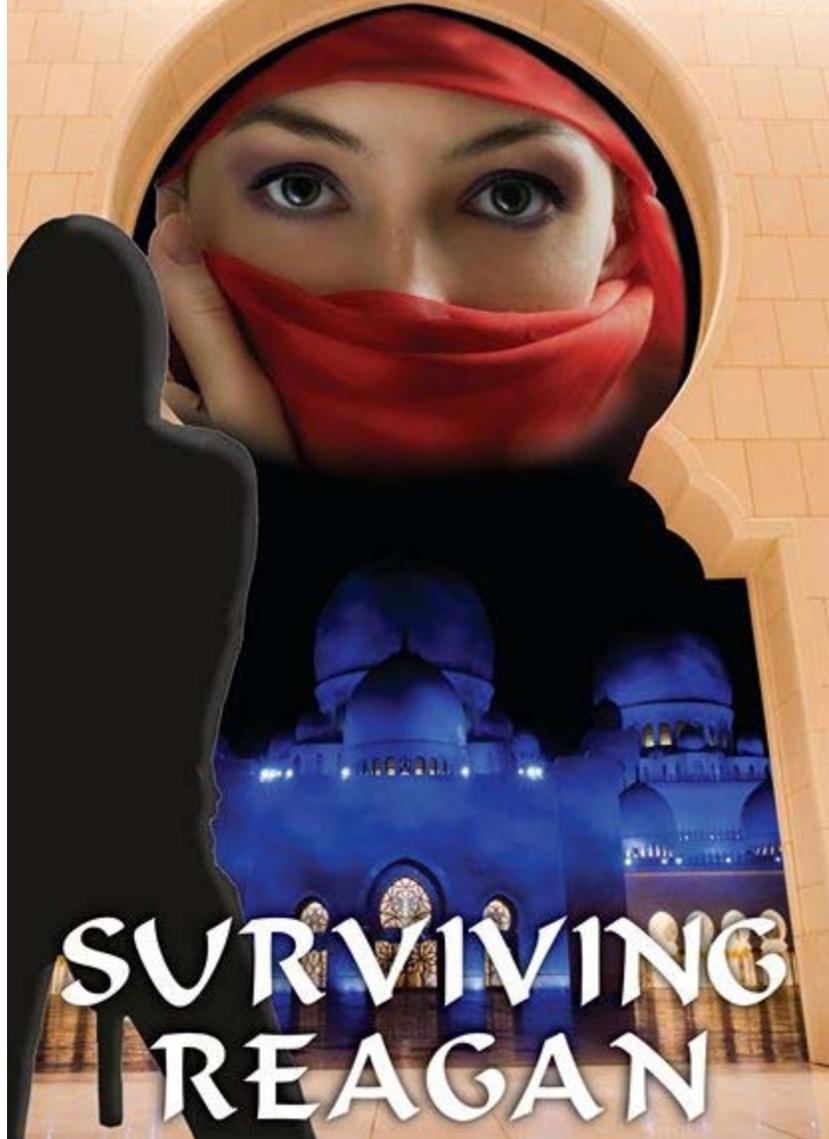


ISABELLA



SURVIVING
REAGAN

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SAPPHIRE BOOKS
SALINAS, CALIFORNIA

Surviving Reagan

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Dedication

My life has a finite number of days, and I hope to spend all of them with you, Schileen.

Thomas, Eric and Alex, forever in my heart.

Acknowledgements

Sometimes we are lucky to find friends who become family. I am lucky to have found that with all of those who have come on this journey with me.

Thank you,

~I~

Chapter One

“Chadwell Morgan here,” she said reluctantly. Chad had been off the grid for the last two weeks. It was the payoff for a long job she had taken protecting an executive traveling in the United Arab Emirates. It had been a tough gig, one where she and her team put in long hours with little sleep and spent countless hours doing surveillance. She’d been glued to the pompous ass day and night. Jack Clark had hit on her more times than she cared to count and the results had been the same each time for the stupid bastard, *no*. She should’ve just told him outright that she was a lesbian, but somehow she suspected he would see it as a challenge and pursue her even more relentlessly.

Chad tossed the jump rope on her bag and slid her arm across her forehead, wiping the perspiration off.

“Hey buddy. What’re you doing?”

“Marco. I’m still on vacation. This better be good.” She’d left strict orders to be left alone for three weeks. She couldn’t resist packing her *crackberry*, but it had been turned off to the world outside. As soon as she had turned it on it went off instantly. It was one thing to be off the grid, another to be completely out of the loop. The past two weeks had been bliss, no technology, no email, no internet. Sure, there had been plenty of opportunity. The hotel lobby had a business center that she had to ignore each time she passed it. It was chock full of people who couldn’t be on vacation without their technology tether.

She’d spent quiet time relaxing by the pool reading sappy lesbian romance books her team had bought her when they found out she was going tech free. Who knew lesbians wrote such racy novels? The main characters had better sex lives than she did, dressed better, and were always fit and trim. They were ready to kick someone’s ass, had all the answers to life’s questions, and she found herself envious. Where were all the over-forty, hardworking shmucks like her in the novels? It didn’t matter; they were good for a quick escape to somewhere else, where women loved women. Her kind of world.

“I know, boss, I’m sorry. I got a sweet deal that I couldn’t pass on. I thought I would run it by you and see who you want to push it to. I was thinking Thomas and Meme.”

Thomas had worked with Chad on the Reagan Reynolds case and was proving to be a great asset to the company. Meme, on the other hand - *who names themselves Meme*, she thought, having a shiny object moment. Focusing back on the question, she wondered if *Maryann* had enough training and was ready to work a case.

“Why don’t you send the details over to my hotel and I’ll check them out? When do you need an answer?”

Chad had decided to do more of her work via paper, lately. Electronic trails had been creating issues for high government officials, which made her job easier, but left her business vulnerable from the government snoops.

“Can’t I just send you an email with the details? You can look it over and then call me and give me an answer.”

“Marco...”

“I know, I know. You’re instituting new policies concerning electronic communication, but seriously, this is like taking two steps backwards, boss.”

“You remember that when the government comes sniffing up your ass because they got your texts, emails, your tax records, and other electronic shit. Damn Marco, someone was just snooping through our files last month and we still don’t know who it was. Obviously, the firewall didn’t protect us from someone that high up in the government. The more government contracts we take, the more shit we have to cover-up and I’m sick of burying someone else’s garbage.” Chad stroked her temples, trying to stave off the killer headache she knew was coming. It always did when she argued with Marco.

“Well, the good news is this isn’t a government job.”

“Goody, goody. Send me the file and I’ll look it over.” Looking up at the clock, she continued, “If you get it out to the messenger service, I should get it tomorrow. So if you want me to look at it, get a move on.”

“All right, all right. I’ll drop it in the mail now. Call me when you get it.”

“Now that you’ve got me working, I’m adding days to my vacation, so don’t expect me back until next Wednesday.”

“What?”

“You heard me. If you keep talking to me I’ll tack on another day, so hang up and let me get back to my women,” she said, picking up one of the romance novels she had started that day.

“Women?”

“Marco?”

“Okay, okay. You’ll have the brief tomorrow.”

“Bye.” Chad didn’t give Marco time to answer. Turning the phone off, she tossed it on the bed, hoping it would eat the damn device.

Slipping on her swim trunks and tank top, she grabbed her towel, water, and her book. Somewhere by the pool was a chaise lounge, a bikini-clad waitress waiting to take her order, and the beating sun.

Chapter Two

Reagan struggled through the piles of papers on her desk. Leafing through a stack, she was looking for one document in particular. *Grunt work. It was just grunt work*, she thought to herself. She'd been exiled to the documentation section of the R&D factory. Her job was to document the research and development phases of new equipment. She knew everything there was to know about their new 3D printers that would revolutionize small part exchange in the war theater. The military could set up small metals parts shops in the field and fix equipment on the fly. They could make parts for everything from copiers to weapons. It put the military back in control of the supply side of the war and not have to rely on contracting companies who charged exorbitant rates for shipping and fulfillment.

Reagan had brought the idea to R&D and she was spearheading its inception on a small scale. She'd rolled it out in small test markets and the feedback had been fantastic. She wouldn't break her arm patting herself on the back, but she would do everything she could to get the word out. Her marketing idea was to let the supply side of the Navy set up shop in the Asia Theater and try it out. Reynolds Holdings had sent trainers to train the staff on its use, run it through its paces, and report back. Her orders to her team were to push it past its limits. Get tough with the equipment and make it break. So far, they hadn't been able to do anything past gum up the works using the wrong metallic hardening substance in the pressure jets.

"Hey, boss, you got a minute?" A worker walking by Reagan's office flagged her down.

"Sure, what's up?" she said, slipping on a coverall jacket.

"It's the new CNC machine. We spit out about sixteen hundred parts in the last three days and it's taken a dump. I think it's the cutting fluid."

She'd picked up engineering terminology quick. Her on the job training was via the "sink-or-swim" method of learning. She'd decided to be a grunt on the floor, sweeping up the metal shavings, learning how to make her own cutting tool for the metal lathe and then she'd machined a couple hundred feet of metal stock. She was pretty proud of the fact that she could get an almost a mirror finish on her stock and she cut a mean screw thread. While that probably wouldn't get her a job, she was much closer to understanding those women known as *rough trade*. She discovered she liked to work with her hands; it was hell on her manicure, but it was rewarding in a way she hadn't expected.

"Well, Jimbo, when you're using the machine non-stop for the past three days, what do you expect from your equipment?"

"Yeah, but we gotta have these parts out of the 3D printer and in the field within the week. So, she's gotta do double time."

"She?"

“Oh, my machine, I call her a she.” He smiled at her and then rolled his eyes as he explained, “You know. Don’t you call your car *baby* or *girl*? Well, I call the CNC Bessie. I had a cow growing up that gave so much milk my family had to sell it or waste it. She was a work horse.”

“A cow that was a horse, now that’s different,” Reagan said, pulling off the cover where the gears and belts were located.

“Here, I don’t want you to get greasy,” Jimbo said, handing Reagan a pair of latex gloves.

“Thanks.”

Poking around in the gearbox, Reagan thought she might be able to gauge what the problem might be. *God, how a year has changed me*, she thought, pulling a pen and poking at one of the serpentine belts. She wasn’t the same woman who found herself charging for the CEO’s job. Now, she was a big sister to a nine-year-old brother and just off probation for a misdeed that could have landed her in prison if it hadn’t been for the testimony and faith of her father. Marcy, on the other hand, didn’t fare so well. She was in for twenty years and Reagan couldn’t think of a better deserving person.

“So, how’s that little brother of yours doing?”

Reagan laughed, wondering if Jimbo could read minds. “He’s good, adjusting well. I think finding out he had a dad was good for him. His mom...well, let’s just say we’re glad she’s out of the picture.”

“You know, I’m sorry all that crap happened to you. I mean, you’ve really turned things around and I know the guys and I are real proud to have you down here. I mean...” Jimbo blushed at his proclamation.

She knew what was coming next and she needed to defuse the situation before he said something he would regret.

“Thanks, Jimbo. I appreciate hearing I’m fitting in, just one of the guys, so to speak—”

“Well, not exactly one of the guys, if you know what I mean. I was wondering if you’d like to go out for a drink sometime.”

There, he’d said it before she could defuse the situation. Damn!

“I appreciate the offer, Jimbo, but I don’t date anyone I work with. I tried that before and it exploded. Remember? Besides...”

“Oh, right. That whole Marcy thing, I just figured it was a phase, you know...I mean...”

Reagan slapped Jimbo on the shoulder in a good ol’ boy way. “It’s fine, no worries. We’re good, right?”

“Yeah, we’re good. I didn’t mean to step over any boundaries. Sorry, you won’t tell the boss, will ya?” He smiled at the implication.

“Naw, I hear she’s pretty understanding, just don’t let it happen again,” Reagan said, hoping that he took what she implied seriously. She didn’t want to have to fire the poor guy for inappropriate behavior.

Her father had revamped the employee manual to discourage dating between employees. While he couldn’t stop it outside the doors of Reynolds Holdings, he could curtail any future possibilities. It was his contribution to the whole Marcy/Reagan snafu.

“Do you see what I’m seeing?” She said, pointing inside the gearbox.

“Yep, the gear is stripped down. Geez, guess all those parts stripped the teeth. I’ll call and get another gear. Good eyes, boss.”

“No problem. Thanks for letting me take a look at it, first.” She slipped off her latex gloves and looked down at her manicure. Still looks good, she thought, walking away.

“Ms. Reynolds, please report to the main office. Ms. Reynolds, please report to the main office.” The loud speaker shouted to the whole floor.

“Oh, I hope that doesn’t mean bad news,” Jimbo said.

“Yeah me, too.”

Wonder what dad wants? This can’t be good, she thought. She hadn’t been called to the principal’s office ever and it worried her now that she was.

Chapter Three

Chad relaxed, her hands behind her head, the sun warming her pale skin. She needed this vacation. Her thoughts finally sorted themselves out when she didn't need to worry about schedules, clients, and paperwork. She'd finally be able to leave the stress of the last year behind, with the help of a few girlie drinks with umbrellas. Now, if she could just get one woman off her mind, and out of her heart, she'd seal the deal she'd made with the devil to be free of her. Reagan Reynolds was like heroin; one prick under the skin and you forever chased the dragon's tail, wishing for more. The year before had been hell for Chad. She'd tried everything she could to rid herself of the memory of Reagan's lips on hers, Reagan's body pressed tightly against her own, and the sounds she made when she had an orgasm. Just walking down memory lane right now assured her she would snag a briar or two on her clothes, ripping her thinly skinned attempt at avoidance.

However, fear didn't reach her here. It didn't call her name, or need her attention. Even the sounds of fun in the pool couldn't prevent her from shutting her eyes and drifting off into a light nap. Waking slightly when the sudden lack of sun stopped warming her, she looked up into the shadow of a woman standing over her. Chad pulled her shades down partway and stared up into a tightly wrapped bikini. The sun behind the woman kept her features obscure, but Chad wasn't really looking at her face; the body was a knockout. She was curvy in all the right places. Chad couldn't help but smile.

"Could you move a little to the left please?" Chad shielded her eyes; she anticipated her demand would be followed.

"Hello."

"Hello, can I help you?" Still motioning with her hand to the left, Chad sat up on her elbows.

"Can I ask you a question?" The woman said.

"Depends."

"On what?"

"Can you move to the left? You're blocking my sun."

"Oh, sorry."

Peering at the woman, Chad realized she was more likely a college aged girl, well, woman. Girls didn't come packaged like that in Chad's world.

"What's your question?"

Chad took a sip of her melting margarita.

"Are you a lesbian?"

Margarita went spewing all over Chad just as she tried to swallow. It didn't sound like a question, but more like a declaration. Pushing her shades back into place, she peered around the pool, wondering if Marco was punking her. Across from Chad sat two other

bathing beauties huddled together, giggling. She was definitely being punked. Well, she was always up for some lighthearted fun, so she'd play along. Why not? She was on vacation and what happened on vacation stayed on vacation, right?

"So, let me get this *straight*, you want to know if I'm a lesbian."

"Uh huh." The girl sat down on the lounge next to Chad, listening intently for Chad's answer. She cupped her chin in her hands, looking sweet.

"What makes you ask a complete stranger a question like that?"

Blushing, the young woman at least had the decency for her question to embarrass her. She twisted her body towards Chad and hitched her thumb towards the two giggling girls across the pool. "Ever hear of the game truth or dare?"

"Oh, I think so."

"Well, this is my dare."

"Ah, I see." Chad looked over to the girls, who waved and lifted glasses with umbrellas in them. Clearly, alcohol was involved in this dare. The girls erupted into fits of laughter.

"So tell me why you think I'm a lesbian."

She just shrugged and toyed with the fabric of the sarong that wrapped tightly around her hips. While Chad didn't deny her sexuality, she thought she *passed* for straight. Androgynous, maybe. That was how she always thought of herself. Something fellow lesbians could sniff out, but the average hetero wouldn't even suspect.

"What's your name?"

"Tiffany." She smiled and offered her hand.

Didn't that name go out in the eighties? Chad thought, shaking the limp noodle of a grip. Well, it was her turn to have a little fun.

"Chad."

"Nice to meet you, *Chad*."

Tiffany flashed Chad a toothy grin and held on to her hand. Chad played along, cupping Tiffany's hand, pulling her close enough to whisper.

"Why don't you pick one of your friends over there and meet me in room 210 tonight at 10:00 p.m.?" Making a show of checking out Tiffany's body, Chad continued, "In fact, what you're wearing is fine. It'll speed things along."

"But—"

"Oh, don't worry. Remember, what happens on vacation, stays between you, me, and your friend." Chad smiled a wicked leer, lifted her sunglasses, and winked. Tiffany eked out a half-smile, clearly embarrassed by Chad's proposition. Pulling her hand back, she said goodbye, rushing off.

Chad couldn't help but watch the girl and realize Tiffany was just a young woman messing with something she didn't have a clue about. Instead of running over to her friends, Tiffany waved them over as she walked past them. Both girls looked at Chad,

frowned, and quickly ran after their friend. Chad wiggled her fingers at them and chuckled.

“That’ll teach ya to play in the big kid’s pool.”

Settling back down on the chaise, she pulled her baseball cap off the side table and covered her face. She’d seen the last of the *queer* girls, as the younger generation referred to themselves. She’d read the stories of girls who didn’t want to be labeled bi, lesbian, or straight. Their sexuality was fluid.

“Well, I’ll give you fluid,” Chad whispered, relaxing back into her chaise. The sun was warming her again.



Chad flipped through the channels on the satellite. Dinner had been a bust. She loved trying new things, but Creole-Ethiopian fusion wouldn’t make a repeat performance on her list of menu choices. It was the last night of her vacation and she wished it would last forever. She’d told Marco she was staying longer, but the reality was she’d been gone long enough and work piled up anytime she was away from the office. The peace and solitude was wonderful and yet it was still another lonely night. One more to add to the many she’d had in the past year of self-exile. She’d distanced herself well enough from her latest heartache, Reagan Reynolds, but there were days when she would catch herself thinking of Reagan. Tonight was one of those *days*. A smile, the way a woman walked or dressed would throw her right back into a moment best forgotten and yet she couldn’t forget.

Tap, tap, tap.

Chad looked down at her watch and wondered who’d be knocking on her door at ten o’clock at night.

“Shit.” Chad looked through the peephole. “You’ve got to be kidding!”

About the Author

Isabella lives on the central coast with her wife, and three sons. She teaches college and in her spare time, which there seems to be little of lately, and she is working on her writers retreat in the Sierra foothills. She is a GLCS award winner for Always Faithful and a finalist for Scarlet Masquerade. She also finaled in the International National Book awards and has two honorable mentions in the Rainbow Awards.

She also writes under the nom de plume - Jett Abbott. A darker, rogue who's a motorcycle enthusiast and loves people watching.

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Award winning novel - Always Faithful

ISBN - 978-0-9828608-0-9

Major Nichol "Nic" Caldwell is the only survivor of her helicopter crash in Iraq. She is left alone to wonder why she and she alone. Survivor's guilt has nothing on the young Major as she is forced to deal with the scars, both physical and mental, left from her ordeal overseas. Before the accident, she couldn't think of doing anything else in her life.

Claire Monroe is your average military wife, with a loving husband and a little girl. She is used to the time apart from her husband. In fact, it was one of the reasons she married him. Then, one day, her life is turned upside down when she gets a visit from the Marine Corps.

Can these two women come to terms with the past and finally find happiness, or will their shared sense of honor keep them apart?

Broken Shield

ISBN - 978-0-9828608-2-3

Tyler Jackson, former paramedic now firefighter, has seen her share of death up close. The death of her wife caused Tyler to rethink her career choices, but the death of her mother two weeks later cemented her return to the ranks of firefighter. Her path of self-destruction and womanizing is just a front to hide the heartbreak and devastation she lives with every day. Tyler's given up on finding love and having the family she's always wanted. When tragedy strikes her life for a second time she finds something she thought she lost.

Ashley Henderson loves her job. Ignoring her mother's advice, she opts for a career in law enforcement. But, Ashley hides a secret that soon turns her life upside down. Shame, guilt and fear keep Ashley from venturing forward and finding the love she so desperately craves. Her life comes crashing down around her in one swift moment forcing her to come clean about her secrets and her life.

Can two women thrust together by one traumatic event survive and find love together, or will their past force them apart?

American Yakuza

ISBN - 978-0-9828608-3-0

Luce Potter straddles three cultures as she strives to live with the ideals of family, honor, and duty. When her grandfather passes the family business to her, Luce finds out that power, responsibility and justice come with a price. Is it a price she's willing to die for?

Brooke Erickson lives the fast-paced life of an investigative journalist living on the edge until it all comes crashing down around her one night in Europe. Stateside, Brooke learns to deal with a new reality when she goes to work at a financial magazine and finds out things aren't always as they seem.

Can two women find enough common ground for love or will their two different worlds and cultures keep them apart?

Executive Disclosure

ISBN - 978-0-9828608-3-0

When a life is threatened, it takes a special breed of person to step in front of a bullet. Chad Morgan's job has put her life on the line more times that she can count. Getting close to the client is expected; getting too close could be deadly for Chad.

Reagan Reynolds wants the top job at Reynolds Holdings and knows how to play the game like "the boys". She's not above using her beauty and body as currency to get what she wants. Shocked to find out someone wants her dead, Reagan isn't thrilled at the prospect of needing protection as she tries to convince the board she's the right woman for a man's job. How far will a killer go to get what they want? Secrets and deception twist the rules of the game as a killer closes in. How far will Chad go to protect her beautiful, but challenging client?

American Yakuza II - The Lies that Bind

ISBN - 978-10939062-20-8

Luce Potter runs her life and her business with an iron fist and complete control until lies and deception unravel her world. The shadow of betrayal consumes Luce, threatening to destroy the most precious thing in her life, Brooke Erickson.

Brooke Erickson finds herself on the outside of Luce's life looking in. As events spiral out of control Brooke can only watch as the woman she loves pushes her further away. Suddenly, devastated and alone, Brooke refuses to let go without an explanation.

Colby Water, a federal agent investigating the ever-elusive Luce Potter, discovers someone from her past is front and center in her investigation of the Yakuza crime leader. Before she can put the crime boss in prison, she must confront the ultimate deception in her professional life.

When worlds collide, betrayal, dishonor and death are inevitable. Can Luce and Brooke survive the explosion?

Scarlet Assassin

ISBN 978-1-939062-36-9

Selene Hightower is a killer for hire. A vampire who walks in both the light and the darkness, but lately darkness has a stronger pull. Her unfinished business could cost her the ability to live in the light, throwing her permanently back into the black ink of evil.

Doctor Francesca Swartz led a boring life filled with test tubes, blood trials, and work. One exploratory night, in a world of leather and torture, she is intrigued by a dark and solitary soul. She surrenders to temptation and the desire to experience something new, only to discover that it might alter her life forever.

Will Selene allow the light to win over the darkness threatening the edges of her life? Two women wonder if they can co-exist despite vast differences, as worlds collide and threaten to destroy any hope of happiness. Who will win?

Writing as Jett Abbott

Scarlet Masquerade

ISBN - 978-0-982860-81-6

What do you say to the woman you thought died over a century ago? Will time heal all wounds or does it just allow them to fester and grow? A.J. Locke has lived over two centuries and works like a demon, both figuratively and literally. As the owner of a successful pharmaceutical company that specializes in blood research, she has changed the way she can live her life. Wanting for nothing, she has smartly compartmentalized her life so that when she needs to, she can pick up and start all over again, which happens every twenty years or so. Love is not an emotion A.J. spends much time on. Since losing the love of her life to the plague one hundred fifty years ago, she vowed to never travel down that road again. That isn't to say she doesn't have women when she wants them, she just wants them on her terms and that doesn't involve a long term commitment.

A.J.'s cool veneer is peeled back when she sees the love of her life in a lesbian bar, in the same town, in the same day and time in which she lives. Is her mind playing tricks on her? If not, how did Clarissa survive the plague when she had made A.J. promise never to change her?

Clarissa Graham is a university professor who has lived an obscure life teaching English literature. She has made it a point to stay off the radar and never become involved with anything that resembles her past life. Every once in a while Clarissa has an itch that needs to be scratched, so she finds an out of the way location to scratch it. She keeps her personal life separate from her professional one, and in doing so she is able to keep her secrets to herself. Suddenly, her life is turned upside down when someone tries to kill her. She finds herself in the middle of an assassination plot with no idea who wants her dead