

writing  
my  
love



**Claire McNab**

It starts as an erotic vision, a fantasy of perfect lovemaking where Diana and I wrestle with incendiary passion to overwhelming, ecstatic, simultaneous orgasms.

And then it changes. I'm keenly aware I'm dreaming. I don't want to wake and leave the Diana who loves me as I yearn to be loved—with total acceptance of my real, flawed self.

Tight in each other's arms, my dream Diana smiles at me, whispers, "Vonny, I never realized what love could be, until now. You complete me."

I find myself melting with tender fire. Passion for her body, yes, but much more. My feelings for Diana encompass everything about her—the Diana the world sees and also the constant, inner self hidden from all but me. In one transcendent jolt of recognition I understand what it is to truly, totally accept another person in all her contradictions, in all her strengths and weaknesses.

In my dream, I cannot put any of this into words. I can only show her the depth of my longing to be joined to her at every level of body and spirit. We make love as I have never made love before. The smooth planes of her body, her eager mouth, her beating heart—Diana is so much more than this.

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# Writing My Love

Claire McNab

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Tallahassee, FL 32302

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper  
First Edition

Editor: Anna Chinappi  
Cover designer: LA Callaghan

**ISBN 1-59493-063-5**

*For Sheila, my Diana*

### **Acknowledgments**

Thank you, Karin Kallmaker, for your helpful suggestions made during our conversation in York, U.K.

Thank you also to Anna Chinappi for her comments and suggestions, and for introducing me to the wonders of electronic editing.

I am also indebted to Ruth Stanley and Pam Berard for proofreading and Therese Szymanski for typesetting.

## About the Author

Claire McNab is the author of sixteen Detective Inspector Carol Ashton mysteries: *Lessons in Murder*, *Fatal Reunion*, *Death Down Under*, *Cop Out*, *Dead Certain*, *Body Guard*, *Double Bluff*, *Inner Circle*, *Chain Letter*, *Past Due*, *Set Up*, *Under Suspicion*, *Death Club*, *Accidental Murder*, *Blood Link* and *Fall Guy*. She has written two romances, *Under the Southern Cross* and *Silent Heart* and has coauthored a self-help book, *The Loving Lesbian*, with Sharon Gedan. Claire is the author of six Denise Cleever thrillers, *Murder Undercover*, *Death Understood*, *Out of Sight*, *Recognition Factor*, *Death by Death* and *Murder at Random*.

Claire visits her native Australia at every opportunity, but lives in Los Angeles with her partner. She teaches fiction writing in the UCLA Extension Writers' Program.

# CHAPTER ONE

“You’re not going to meet your deadline, Vonny?”

Diana K. Browwell, senior editor at Crimson Loon Press and the woman I secretly adore, is clearly disturbed. Her phone rings and frowning, she snatches it up.

I look around her office approvingly. It’s a cool room, white and blue the dominant colors. Accents of brighter color come from the Crimson Loon books displayed on the shelves behind Diana’s desk. My volumes are prominently featured.

Diana’s still talking, and this gives me time to admire my editor while she’s concentrated on something else. The tawny tones of her voice contrast nicely with her blond hair. I contemplate her with pleasure, thinking of how I’ve spent hours at my computer getting her description just right, as if

she were a major character in one of my novels—which in a way, she is.

Early this morning, when I couldn't sleep, I went to my computer and wrote:

This woman is incandescent! She's not traditionally beautiful, but her face is full of humor and intelligence. To-die-for cheekbones. Shoulder-length golden hair. Her eyes blue-gray, her mouth frankly tempting. She has a luscious figure—high-breasted, flat-stomached, long-legged. Dynamite!

I become aware that Diana is looking over at me as she says, "I have Vonny here at the moment." She mouths to me, "It's Paul." That would be Paul Oberlin, Crimson Loon's owner and publisher. Paul says something at the other end and Diana smiles and nods. "Yes, they are indeed excellent sales figures for *Torrid Hearts*." Her smile disappears. "Vonny's next book? I'll get back to you on that."

My name is Vonny Smith, but I'm better known by my pen name, Veronica Vanderveer, author of best-selling romance novels. My last book, *Torrid Hearts*, not only won awards, it also garnered some of the best reviews of my career. My favorite quote, which, slightly edited, will be featured on the cover of my next romance, came from Ayleen Noonan, a normally acerbic critic. She was moved to say: "Adverbs and exclamations proliferate and clichés abound in Vanderveer's *Torrid Hearts*, but scorching sexual encounters ignite the pages in a conflagration of desire."

A conflagration of desire is exactly what I feel for Diana K. Broswell. It's a stressful situation: I'm in love with her, but she doesn't love me. Yet.

I've never told Diana how I feel, in fact, never even hinted at it. Why not? It's too important to me to mess this

up and every instinct tells me that if I did blurt out my love, Diana would stare at me, bemused. Or even worse—amused. Then she'd say something soothing. Diana wouldn't want to alienate Veronica Vanderveer, best-selling author, so she'd deal kindly with lovesick Vonny Smith's unrequited passion.

"Yes, I'll remind her." Putting down the receiver Diana says, "As one of our premier authors, Paul particularly wants to check that you'll be attending Crimson Loon's celebration of twenty years of quality publishing."

"Wouldn't miss it for the world," I declare. Actually, I'm looking forward to it, as Diana will be there.

I've already decided to buy something new for the occasion, money no object. It's my chance to have Diana see me at my best. I mentally review colors. Black? Half the women will have on a little black dress. Crimson? It would contrast with my dark hair, but perhaps give too brash an impression. Blue's always safe but rather boring.

Diana clears her throat. I realize she is leaning back in her chair contemplating me. Not with deep affection, unfortunately—though I'm sure she's quite fond of me in a business-like sort of way—but with professional concern.

"You've never missed a deadline before," she points out. "What's up?"

I shrug. "A touch of writer's block."

Diana snorts derisively. She does this so elegantly I wish there were a better word than *snort* to describe the sound she makes. The only alternatives I can think of are *grunt*, *sniff* and *snuffle*. None apply to Diana. Note to self: Work on this.

"Writer's block? You've never had it before, Vonny."

"True. But there's always a first time."

It's clear Diana is not inclined to believe me. "Perhaps you need to cut back on your wild social life," she says with

a smile. “That will give you more time to devote to your writing.”

I’m not quite sure when Diana got the idea I have a wild social life. Perhaps it’s because I’ve always been careful to portray myself as one who rarely spends an evening at home. There’s no way I want her to think I’m not in demand.

Diana picks up the phone again and asks her assistant Rosie Reeves to bring in the folder with the cover art for the novel I’m supposed to have nearly completed. Rosie appears almost immediately. She’s only been at Crimson Loon Press a few weeks and is one of those constantly up people who chirp a lot. “Hi!” she says to me with a white tooth-veneer smile. “I just loved *Torrid Hearts!* Absolutely loved the *relationship!* So involving.”

“Thank you,” I say. In my writing I use italics liberally, not to mention exclamation marks, but this Rosie’s gone overboard. It’s a wonder Diana isn’t wincing—she ruthlessly cuts italics in my manuscripts but she doesn’t seem to notice all this unnecessary spoken emphasis.

Is it my imagination or do Rosie’s fingers brush against Diana’s hand when passing over the folder? I feel my eyes narrow. My task will be difficult enough without competition. I’m forced to concede Rosie’s quite attractive, if one can cope with her super-cheerful attitude. As a writer, a stream of descriptive words leaps immediately to mind—*bubbly, effervescent, chipper, vivacious, bouncy, truly tiresome.*

“Truly tiresome,” I hear myself say. Diana and Rosie look at me. “The weather,” I add hastily.

“But it’s *beautiful* weather,” Rosie declares. “Like, it almost always is in LA.”

“Hmmm,” I murmur, not wanting to get in any deeper.

Rosie lingers for a few moments more, then leaves. Diana smiles at me. She flips open the folder. “Here’s our artist’s

concept for the cover of *Desire's Desperate Drumbeat*," she says, leaning over her desk to hand it to me. We'd had quite a fight over the title. Diana had wanted simply *Drumbeat of Desire*, but I insisted on *Desire's Desperate Drumbeat*. As I pointed out to Diana, one can hardly have too much alliteration.

"As always," Diana says, "your name will be larger than the title and there'll be a photo of you on the back cover."

If you've read any of my books, you'll know what I look like. Okay, I admit it—the image has been retouched, but only slightly. In truth, I'm not bad looking, if you like the dark-haired, intense sort with a strong jaw line.

I inspect the cover art. It depicts two impossibly beautiful women gazing longingly at each other beneath palm trees on a yellow tropical beach edged by aquamarine water. One wears a brief scarlet swimsuit, the other tailored shorts and a tight purple T-shirt. Behind one palm tree in the distance lurks a shadowy female figure, symbolizing the Other Woman.

"Sorry," I say, "it won't do."

Diana looks surprised. I've always been blown away by the Crimson Loon artwork for my novels. "There's a problem?" she asks.

She hasn't seen a manuscript yet, just a brief outline of the story. With my sales record, Crimson Loon will give me a book contract on the strength of a short description. At this point I'm supposed to be well advanced in the manuscript for *Desire's Desperate Drumbeat*, but I'm seriously behind schedule—too busy planning my strategy to win Diana's love.

"I've made some changes to the plot we discussed," I announce.

"Oh? Anything major?" Diana raises her elegant eye-

brows. I forgot to include them in her description. They curve beguilingly.

“Well, for one thing,” I tell her, “I’m changing the main character’s name from Gloria to Davina.”

I’m thinking, as I say this, of the potent subliminal effect on Diana when she edits love scenes featuring a character with her initial and the same number of syllables as her name: *Di-an-a and Da-vin-a*. Subtle, but I hope effective.

“Davina?” Diana could hardly be less impressed. “I thought we’d agreed Gloria was a perfect name for a swimsuit model.”

“She’s not a model anymore,” I hasten to say. “I’ve made her a professional woman.”

Diana’s eyebrows rise a touch higher. “Just what sort of profession would she be following on a remote tropical island?”

“That’s changed too,” I declare. “I’m setting the book here, in Los Angeles. Davina’s an editor with a lifestyle magazine.”

Now Diana’s winged eyebrows have settled into a puzzled vee. “And Gloria’s—I mean Davina’s love interest? Is Marilyn still running an ecotourism business in partnership with Ashleigh, the oversexed other woman?”

“’Fraid not. It’s a catering firm now. And Marilyn’s had a name change. She’s Velda.” An image of the bubbly Rosie rises in my mind, and I add, “And Ashleigh, the other woman, is now Roxy. And she works in Davina’s company.”

“I see,” says Diana, but of course she doesn’t see how my strategy is spelled out in the initials—a D falling for a V. I can only hope Diana’s subconscious mind is receptive.

“This doesn’t sound anything like the book we signed a contract for,” says Diana, now unambiguously frowning. “What does Emily think of these changes?”

Emily Illingsworth is my formidable literary agent. Frankly, I'm a trifle nervous about how Emily will react but I don't share this with Diana. "I haven't told her yet," I say airily. "Be seeing her tomorrow."

Diana is far from pleased with the situation. "Publicity's gearing up for a tropical island," she points out.

"Sorry," I say, contrite. "I wouldn't make these changes if they weren't absolutely necessary for the vision I have of *Drumbeat*."

Diana represses a sigh. Or perhaps it's a snarl. I hate to cause her angst, but remind myself it's for a good cause—our future happiness together.

"You're not changing the title," she announces in a don't-argue tone. "*Desire's Desperate Drumbeat* is already in the catalog."

"I wouldn't dream of it," I say. To placate her, I add, "There'll be lots of hot sex."

"You do that so well," Diana concedes. "Our readers can't get enough of you."

I acknowledge this truth with a modest nod. I've been good for Crimson Loon's bottom line and Crimson Loon, in turn, has been very good for me.

You'd think, since I write romance, I'd have some luck in the heart department. In truth, my fictional characters have a great deal more success in love than I've ever achieved. Sure, over the years I've had many romantic flings and, one time, something rather more substantial—I resolutely push that debacle out of my mind—but I've never fully experienced the tumultuous, all-consuming emotions about which I write so confidently. At least not until now.

Once I realized Diana was the Love of My Life, I sat around for ages waiting for her to notice my romantic potential. Didn't happen. So now I've been forced to take a

more active role. I'm going to woo her through my writing. I'll pursue her, entice her, court her in the pages of my current manuscript. My hope is I'll be able to sneak in under her defenses and she'll slide into love with me before she's aware what's happening. In short, she'll realize that for her, Vonny is The One.

You'll be wondering if Diana K. Broswell is available, or if I'm planning to break up a happy twosome. Irritatingly, I have no idea about Diana's life outside the office and all my attempts in the past to turn our professional conversations onto more personal matters have been fruitless. And casual chats with other Crimson Loon employees have failed to turn up any information either.

Diana is what we authors call a *Mystery Woman*. In fiction, that quality is intriguing and frequently leads to dark moments of desire, but in real life it's merely exasperating.

Fortunately, I have a plan.