

AN EMERGENCE OF GREEN



Katherine V. Forrest

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GREEN

by

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About the Author

Katherine V. Forrest's 15 works of fiction are in translation worldwide and include her eight-volume Kate Delafield mystery series, the lesbian classics *Curious Wine*, *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* and *An Emergence of Green*. Her stories, articles and reviews have appeared in national and international publications. Awards and honors include four Lambda Literary Awards, the Bill Whitehead Lifetime Achievement from the Publishing Triangle, and the Lambda Literary Foundation's Pioneer Award. Senior editor at Naiad Press for a decade, she is currently supervising editor at Spinsters Ink and editor-at-large for Bella Books. During her almost three decades of editing she has worked with many LGBT authors, and she has edited or co-edited numerous anthologies. She lives in San Francisco with her partner of almost two decades and their two personality-plus cats.

Author's Foreword

From the perspective gained during a two-decade writing career, it's easy to track the trajectory of my growth as a novelist: it forms a direct parallel to the jagged upward line charting the struggles and growth of the LGBT community. The novel you hold in your hands signals a distinct departure in topic and tone from the three books I wrote previous to it, just as it marks an extending horizon line in the advance of LGBT civil rights.

Curious Wine (1983), my first novel, is a classic coming-out story reflective of much of the literature of the day—discovering and coming to terms with our sexual identity. My second book, *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* (1984), dramatized a lesbian ideal while it explored some of our politics: the kind of world women might build when they seize the freedom to create it. My first mystery novel, *Amateur City* (1984), fell somewhat within these same realms in its portrayal of a police detective deeply closeted because she perceives this as necessity. Kate Delafield begins her fictional life insulated from virtually any exposure to her wider community.

The third novel, *An Emergence of Green* extends most directly from *Curious Wine* in its candid scenes of sexual discovery between the two female characters; but it departs from that novel and other coming-out stories in the immediate identification by all three major characters of what is happening among them. The quandary for Carolyn Blake and Val Hunter is not to search for the essential nature of their desire nor to flounder over acquiring the language of their attraction; it instead lies in defining its dimension, power, ramifications, and the parameters of their own

needs and courage. Nor is there much mystery for husband Paul Blake. From the moment Val Hunter enters his life he clearly understands what is at stake—that the assertive woman who has moved in next door represents the gravest possible threat not just to his marriage but to his entire concept of power-centered masculinity.

As the strands of characterization in this novel were coming together, I was determined not to portray Paul Blake as the standard male villain extant in most lesbian fiction. In fulfilling this vow I introduced his point of view into the novel: I inhabited his mind. He in turn took up residence in my own. He stubbornly resides there still.

Certainly the world and its view of our LGBT community have changed since the time of *An Emergence of Green* in 1984 Los Angeles. Were I to begin writing this novel now, and set it in 2004, it would convey society's greater awareness and grudgingly eroding prejudice, but Carolyn and Val would not be much different in how their encounter transforms them nor in their internal conflicts over what it will essentially mean for them. Paul Blake would be not one iota different. Nothing about who, why, or what he is about has changed in our contemporary context. He is the quintessential American male, the successful, upwardly mobile, self-made achiever—an American cultural ideal.

Here then: the 1984, yet very today, story of Carolyn, Val, and Paul.

'With Loving Thanks'

To Montserrat Fontes, Janet Gregory, Jeffrey N. McMahan, Karen Sandler, Naomi Sloan—members of the Third Street Writers Group, whose talent and integrity have helped me with this novel and all my work.

To Jean Bjorklund, whose enduring friendship has sustained me and helped me with my life.

Chapter 1

Carolyn Blake, just home from work, walked with automatic swiftness through the cool stillness of her house into the bedroom. She heard faint but vigorous splashing from the pool. She froze, her glance raking the room: the gold chains spread over her jewelry case were undisturbed. Whoever was out there taking a dip was not a thief brazenly cooling off after vandalizing the house.

With the release of fear came intense irritation. She stalked into the living room. *Kids*, she thought. *They've somehow climbed the alley wall...* She yanked aside the drape covering the glass door leading to the backyard.

For a shocked instant she stared at the shadowy shape in the pool. Before she could drop the drape to run to the phone, the shape rose—dark-haired, in shorts and a T-shirt, pulling herself up to sit on the side of the pool. As Carolyn unlocked the glass door, the woman stood. In a sudden tight spring she dove, uncoiling

straight and clean into the water with a distinct splat. The feet were slightly apart, the splashes from the entry of the shoulders tiny and sharp-edged. Walking across the shaded cement patio and the narrow stretch of lawn to the pool, Carolyn watched the woman come up through the water in a slow coursing, her body like a scimitar—back arched, arms tight to her sides, eyes closed, the face raised and rapt. The slow-motion curving plane to the surface contained such sensuality that Carolyn felt a sharing of it.

Stopping, the swimmer brushed fingers across her eyes. She saw Carolyn on the pool deck and swam with easy breast strokes toward her, and rose to her feet in the shallow end, water running over broad fleshy shoulders, streaming from dark tendrils of hair, dripping from a curling edge onto the nape of her neck.

Carolyn's gaze rose from faded cutoff jeans scarcely reaching strong tanned thighs, to a gray T-shirt glued to large breasts—the T-shirt bearing a legend so faded it was indiscernible—to keen dark brown eyes and a wide full mouth that twitched in amusement.

The woman tossed black hair from her face in a shower of spray. "Six foot two," she said.

Carolyn's laugh was involuntary. "Who on earth are you?"

The woman brushed at a few dripping curls clinging stubbornly to her forehead. "Val."

As in Valkyrie, Carolyn thought, staring in awe. Even the chesty resonance of the voice seemed perfect. A memory tugged at her, elusive and tantalizing; she struggled to retrieve it.

"I live next door."

"Oh. You're Mrs. Hunter."

After a vivid white instant of smile, Val Hunter nodded. She crossed her arms and regarded Carolyn.

Early thirties, Carolyn guessed, observing without resentment the self-possession of the stance. "Do you swim in other people's pools very often?"

"Just yours. Every day, during the week. No one ever uses it, at least in the daytime. It's the biggest in the neighborhood—I've

looked. And the cleanest, I might add. I've been swimming here all spring."

"Really." Carolyn smothered a laugh.

"I couldn't see the harm. It seems a shame not to use it when your husband works so hard to keep it nice." She gestured beyond the fence. "I hear him."

"Paul likes to fuss over it. He's never satisfied with any of the pool services. Mrs. Hunter, how in the world do you get past a fence and locked gate?"

"Please call me Val. I hop the fence."

"You hop the fence," Carolyn repeated. "You just hop right over our little seven-and-a-half-foot fence."

"It's a little high," Val Hunter conceded, "but I get a good toehold and leap on over."

The June sun, pitiless San Fernando Valley sun that had long since burned through the protective morning haze, beat fiercely on Carolyn's shoulders. The steamy smell of water that had splashed on the hot cement deck clung to her nostrils. Moisture had formed in a light coat under her hair; she shifted her shoulders in her silk dress as she squinted at Val Hunter. "Does your son swim here too?"

"Of course not. I'd never let Neal do anything like that. You certainly know a lot about me."

"We knew you and your boy moved into the Robinsons' guesthouse in April. Paul talks with Jerry Robinson when they're out working in the yard."

Again there was the vivid white smile. "So you avoid Dorothy Robinson like the plague, too." As Carolyn, disarmed, groped for a response, Val Hunter shrugged. "Lonely prattling old woman. Pathetic." Again she smiled. "You're not usually home at this hour."

Carolyn found refuge in irony. "My apologies. My hours just changed. God, it's hot. June's not supposed to be this hot, is it?"

"Sometimes it can be. Allow me to invite you into your own pool." With large darkly tanned hands Val Hunter gripped the

edge of the pool and hoisted herself out in one smooth motion. With three long strides to a chaise she picked up a towel and briefly rubbed her face and hair. “Guess I’ll have to find the second best pool. I do want to thank you. I’d decided when I moved on I’d leave a note, a little thank-you gift, tell you how much I enjoyed it.”

“Don’t stop,” Carolyn said quickly. “Why not use it? It really does go to waste.”

Val Hunter nodded. “A lot of things people have go to waste. But people have all these ideas about ownership and property rights.”

“What time do you like to swim?” Carolyn asked, thinking that Paul was one of those people; he would object violently to anyone sharing their pool. He even pursued hovering insects with vengeful swipes of the skimmer.

“About now, between three and four. In the heat of the day. Neal gets home from day camp around four-thirty.”

“From now on I should be home about ten after three. I’ll let you in.”

“Thanks. Thanks very much. But I don’t want to trouble you. I’ll just come in my usual way; I’m used to it by now.”

Carolyn glanced at her watch. “You have what, thirty-five more minutes? Jump back in. I’m going in the house before I collapse.”

“Why not cool off in the pool? Enjoy the sun?”

“I don’t swim,” Carolyn said, turning and walking rapidly toward her air-conditioning, wanting to change her dress before perspiration damaged the silk.

“If you ever want to learn,” Val Hunter called, “I give lessons. Free.”

She changed into the bright red Chinese print Paul loved, a shift slit up one side to the thigh. To the sounds of continuous splashing from the backyard she made a vodka and tonic. She

pulled aside the living room drape. Val Hunter's arms seemed to rip the water apart with each downward plunge of her body. In the turmoil of her passage Carolyn could see only broad shoulders and wide hips that rose so powerfully and generated such propulsion that the feet, tight together, flipped up out of the water. Again the elusive memory tugged at Carolyn's mind; she could not recapture it.

The swimming stroke Val Hunter performed was misnamed, Carolyn thought—totally unlike a butterfly, a delicate, fluttering creature...At the end of the pool, with a sudden compacting of her body, Val Hunter performed a flip-turn, glided, then resumed her dramatic stroke. Impressed, entertained, Carolyn watched for some time before she dropped the drape back into place.

She switched on the stereo radio and as Irene Cara began "What a Feeling," she turned the volume control up to seven. The music pulsed into the room, filling it to the corners. She felt charged by the music's energy, the heavy beat bouncing off the walls. Fishing a paperback historical romance from under the cushions, she curled up in her favorite corner and in a blissful cocoon of velvet sofa and vibrant music and cold tangy drink, skim-read her novel, lingering only over the love scenes.

At five o'clock the phone rang. She turned down the music, knowing the caller would be Paul. Even before her hours changed he always called at this time to explain why he would be late, refusing to concede after almost a year that eighty-thirty to six o'clock was now his normal working day. She murmured sympathetically, as she always did. At six o'clock she went out to the backyard and dropped her novel into a trashcan, pausing to breathe the coolness beginning to invade the Valley heat. The pool was aquamarine stillness, its surface slightly ruffled. The deck was dry, pristine. She made a salad and prepared the steaks for the barbecue, the task performed with leisurely and profound enjoyment; usually weekday dinner was a flurry of frenetic activity. At six-thirty-five she poured enough chilled vodka for three martinis, one for her and two for him, and made a bucket

of crushed ice. She carried all this into the living room to the bar, switched off the stereo and turned on the channel seven news. *Maybe when he sees how everything's ready now before he gets home, he'll stop being so angry about my new hours.*

*We hope you enjoyed this
Bella Appetizer.*

