

# Femmes FATALES

Volume 10, Number 1

Fall 2004

## Sex and the Single Detective

by Toni L.P. Kelner

We're all adults here, and I think it's high time we got down to brass tacks and talked openly about... You know. Making whoopee.

I mean, it's an integral part of life, and as such, it behooves writers to frankly discuss how we address pitching woo. In our books, that is.

So how do the Femmes deal with this sensitive topic? How graphic are your descriptions? How often do your characters take their rolls in the hay? Are there variations you avoid writing about, or have you lost your literary inhibitions? How much research is necessary? No, wait, forget I asked that last question. Instead, how do your



readers respond to your intimate moments? I mean, your characters' intimate moments.

And most important of all, do other writers get as flustered as I do when writing about...SEX?ff

*Toni L.P. Kelner blames her reliance on asterisks and chapter breaks for her love scenes on the inescapable knowledge that her parents read her books, though one suspects that's not the only reason. Since *Wed and Buried*, released in paperback in July, is the last of her *Laura Fleming* series, she promises to write more maturely about the subject in her next books. Until, of course, her daughters start reading them.*

### Marlys Millhiser

*Marlys Millhiser is busy recovering from rotator cuff surgery, (all that writing and throwing dictionaries, computer disks, and fits is hard on musculature, you know) and is now through with physical therapy and into strength training. She's been told that in a couple of years she will be "buff." Rumor has it her next fictional murders will occur in a fitness center.*

The woo code, the woo factor—no matter how you pitch it, you'll get in trouble with somebody. It's like religion and politics. There's a very clear split in attitudes here. What's a poor author to do? I find editors and agents like it as torrid as possible. I've had manuscripts come back for added sex scenes. I've also had a bookstore owner say about a long-ago and "steamy" jungle scene, "That was really more than I needed to know." (Tsk) I had a reader in a Southern state ask to be removed from my mailing list because there was no Jesus in my books and therefore no morality. And, yes, Toni, it drives me nuts. I think there's got to be a

middle ground between stopping at the bedroom door and hovering over the bed.

I've found it to be a wonderful cop-out to refer to the "incident" later in the thoughts of one of the combatants rather than describing it in real time. And to do so in a totally unrelated and unsexy scene. You can get hilarious results that way. I've long fancied the idea of writing elegant literary orgasmic erotica, but I know I'd end up with a punch line instead. I love sex, I just can't take it seriously. It's so wonderful, yet so awkward, if you get my drift.ff

---

### Elaine Viets

*Elaine is dying to tell you that her third *Dead-End Job* mystery, *Dying to Call You*, is out October 5. It's an insider's look at the controversial world of telemarketing. Elaine, like her character *Helen Hawthorne*, worked in telephone boiler rooms. *Dying to Call You* is slightly wilder than usual, with*

*sex in coffins and charity orgies. And you'll finally meet Phil the invisible pothead.*

Writing sex scenes is torture. I blame the nuns. In Catholic school, they told me I'd burn in hell if I even thought about sex. Naturally, I spent lots of time thinking about it. Anything that had me roasting for eternity had to be fun. Doing it was even better.

But writing about sex—that's another story. That's when Sister Mary Chandelier sits on my shoulder. She has plenty of company. I know all my friends will read this scene. And all my enemies. And all my old boyfriends, who'll say, "She never did that to me."

Another problem is research. In my new mystery, *Dying to Call You*, I have a charity orgy. There have been rumors about them in Fort Lauderdale. I had to write about one. But I'd never been to an orgy. You can't bring a nun. Besides, the thank-you notes are a drag. How did I write an orgy scene? I imagined lots of sex and drugs. But what if I got letters saying, "My New York orgy was nothing

like you described.” So I put in a disclaimer. I said Fort Lauderdale orgies weren’t as racy as the ones in New York, L.A., or even Miami. I called them suburban satyricons. Think what I’ve done for the morals of Lauderdale. People will be so embarrassed they’ll keep their clothes on and stay home.*ff*

---

## Charlaine Harris

*It’s crunch time for Charlaine Harris, who has a Sookie Stackhouse short story due early in the fall and a Harper Connelly book due at Christmas. Luckily, the kids are back in school and the lawn doesn’t need mowing as often. Until after the holidays Charlaine will only raise her head from her keyboard to attend a couple of conventions.*

In my two mystery series, I was very careful how I portrayed the sexual activities of Aurora Teagarden and Lily Bard. Because of the grittier atmosphere of the Bard books, the sex was somewhat more graphic than in the more conventional Teagarden series, but it was still very carefully indicated in a few phrases. Mystery readers have a reputation for disliking graphic sex in conventional mysteries, and my natural tendency was to comply with that stricture.

When I began writing the Sookie Stackhouse books, I knew a little more oomph was called for. I’d never written anything explicit, and I confess I was a bit nervous. To my astonishment, I found writing a (somewhat) more extended sex scene was lots of fun. I was pretty proud of myself! But that was writing what I think of as Sex Scene 101. When sexual activities venture into the slightly less conventional, my language gets less

explicit. That wasn’t premeditated; it just suits me. Readers are responding with GREAT approbation, to my pleasure.

But I think the sex in books has to be determined by the plot and the character. Including a sex scene just as an exercise is a big mistake, and it’ll ring false if it’s not integral to the plot of the book.*ff*

---

## Meg Chittenden

*Meg has no problem with writing sex scenes. She remembers the first time she wrote a love scene though. Her mother was hovering behind her left shoulder—at least that’s what it felt like. Meg decided then and there that she would write love scenes only when they seemed necessary for the story, and she would write them without resorting to purple prose or unnatural positions.*

When writing love scenes, I concentrate on the feelings of the people, rather than who puts what where. I rely on the way that making love feels to a man or a woman, using all five senses to record the scents and sounds, the closeness, the loving facial expressions, the taste of a kiss.

I’ve mostly written cozy mysteries, or romantic suspense, though I have written a few darker books. Used to be in either genre, the bedroom door stayed closed, but that’s not so now. How graphic it gets depends on the nature of the characters and the writer’s comfort zone. Making love is a natural part of life, so I’m comfortable writing about it. I don’t write hardboiled fiction, so my sex scenes are loving scenes; they aren’t about using people, or about rape, or revenge.

I don’t have a particular number of scenes in mind when I start out, each one just happens, the way it happens in life, when the characters feel like it. So far, in thirty-six books, I haven’t offended anyone, though one reader did think my mentioning armpits was unnecessary. As for whether research is needed, I’m semi-famous for announcing during a convention speech on the subject that, “If you’ve done it once, you can write about it forever!”*ff*

## Julie Wray Herman

*Julie Wray Herman is the author of the Three Dirty Women Landscaping mystery series and should be far too busy corralling her family and various animals on the family farm to even be thinking about sex. Despite that fact, in Julie’s latest book, Three Dirty Women and the Shady Acres, Korine seems to have found a man with whom she might fall in love.*

You’d think that a published author would have a skill with words that could evoke anything. Yet, one of my two children responded with, “You had to do that twice?!” when the time came for the mother/child explanation of the birds and the bees. “Well yes, dear, and a few times for practice.”

But we’re talking books here. And in terms of my writing, that darling child’s statement is true. That’s right folks; I’ve tried paper sex exactly two times—and it wasn’t pretty. Upon rereading my first attempt, instead of the warm sensation of... I’d expected a glow of... . You see, I expected to find that I could whip up feelings of... Do you begin to see my problem?

After my second attempt, I reread the pages and literally laughed myself right out of the chair. The hero of the moment would have had to own at least three hands to do what I had just assigned to him. I’ve had dates I suspected of having this syndrome, but I didn’t think a reader would buy the scene.

Unlike some writers, who have a skill with words that is clearly beyond me, I prefer to use the old standby. So if you want a good old-fashioned read, grab one of my books. If you want ‘making whoopee,’ slide your hands around your honey and fade to black.*ff*

---

## Donna Andrews

*Writing’s hard work, Donna Andrews reports. The authentic yard sale scenes in Owls Well That Ends Well required many hours of diligent shopping. And she based the crime in Access Denied on a real case of credit card fraud. Luckily the judge bought her alibi, so she’s free to pursue her lifelong goal of killing a spammer in her next book.*

## Femmes FATALES

**Editor:** Mary Saums  
**Layout:** Toni L.P. Kelner  
**Webmaster:** Donna Andrews  
**Printing:** Gavin Faulkner at Rowan Mountain

©2004 Femmes Fatales

Sex? Toni, have you forgotten that some of us are cozy?

Which doesn't mean our characters lead celibate lives, but we miss the vicarious thrill of writing about sex. Instead, we become mistresses of the suggestive glance, the double entendre, the slow fade at the bedroom door.

And it's not easy. For example, in *Revenge of the Wrought Iron Flamingos*, when Meg Langslow dons an eighteenth century corset: "Although it took longer than expected, for one reason or another, Michael eventually managed to lace me into the stays."

A hardboiled writer could expand that into a whole scene. A romance writer could get several chapters. What's the poor cozy mystery writer to do? Knock off a few more victims out of sheer frustration.

It's even tougher with Turing Hopper who readily confesses that "despite the immense amount of data available—an amount difficult even for me to absorb—I don't really understand sex."

Of course, once you accept your cozy destiny and abandon hope of ever writing off *The Joy of Sex* as a business expense, flirting with sex becomes enjoyable. So Meg will soon encounter a middle-aged cousin with a thing for racy lingerie. And when Turing's human allies form romantic attachments, she can only wonder what they're doing when out of camera range.

My readers will probably get it long before Turing does.*ff*

---

## Kris Neri

*With two books under contract, Revenge for Old Times' Sake and Never Say Die, and some stories accepted for anthologies in the US and overseas, Kris Neri goes into autumn one happy camper. Her online classes have also been huge hits among aspiring writers throughout the country. Readers can keep up with her publications and classes through her website, www.krisneri.com.*

Knowledgeable readers all know that characters talk to their writers. But you can't imagine what they say. Here's an exchange my protagonist, Tracy Eaton, and I recently shared:

Tracy: So, Kris, will I be getting any in *Revenge for Old Times' Sake*?

Kris: Not exactly. With Drew in the slammer, and then on the lam, and given the way he disguises himself—I didn't think you'd want to.

Tracy: Jeez, you mean I have to wait till *Revenge on Route 66*?

Kris: Married people get out-of-synch on occasion, especially when one of them is in the pokey.

Tracy: We only exist between the pages of a book; we don't have time for that!

Kris: Stop complaining. You had some pretty athletic nooky in *Revenge of the Gypsy Queen* and *Dem Bones' Revenge*. Even romance writers told me they found those scenes really steamy.

Tracy (remembering happily): Yeah, you wrote us some wild times in those books. But what about this one? With all the sidekicks I collect in *Revenge for Old Times' Sake*—my mother, Drew's mom, not to mention his old flame—I'm under a lot of pressure. I need a little...quality time with my stud-muffin. (sighing) I'm going to have to take this up with your editor.

Kris (blushing furiously): Better you than me. I'd be too embarrassed to talk about it.*ff*

---

## Mary Saums

*Besides ruminating over sex, Mary is working on a new novel which involves another titillating subject: woo-woo. Among her ponderings: Would explicit descriptions of supernatural acts be offensive? Or should hauntings be off the page? If they do it (haunt, of course), must the reader be subjected to every groan and bump in the night? So much to consider.*

Sex isn't an option when you have my relatives. They follow *The Rule Book* so closely they make ultra right-wing conservatives look like a bunch of sloppy devil worshippers. So when the time came to decide whether my protagonist, Willi Taft, would or wouldn't, I didn't have to think much. My chicken instincts came forward, as

they have so often in times of artistic crisis.

So I hinted, nothing spelled out about Willi's extracurricular activities, leaving readers to imagine what they like. Was I shocked later when one of my aunts called Willi a slut? Not really. Willi has been a widow for years, has had no intermediate action, and when she falls for a handsome guy, she kisses him. Of course she's a slut. Run get the matches and kindling, Grandma.

I admit Willi sometimes has thoughts that are less than pure. Maybe she makes a suggestive comment or two. She also wore a provocative outfit with fancy matching lingerie in one scene out of three books. So, if she gets a little bit off-screen, is that so bad? Surely a lady's sex life and underwear are her own business.

Poor Willi. Now I see why she's always frustrated. I doomed her to an absence of sex scenes.*ff*

## Winning Smiles!



**Donna Andrews** won the Toby Bromberg Award for Most Humorous Mystery from *Romantic Times* for her novel *Crouching Buzzard, Leaping Loon*.

**Kris Neri** won the Judge's Choice Award for her story "Showtime on the Winter Solstice" in the Ebooksonthe.net 2004 Holiday Madness Contest.

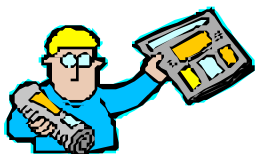
**Elaine Viets** has been nominated for seven awards this year, most recently for the Anthony and Macavity for her story "Red Meat." Her novel *Murder Between The Covers* was nominated for a Barry Award.*ff*

# Femmes FATALES

P.O. Box 1248  
Cypress, TX 77410-1248  
www.femmesfatalesauthors.com  
Fatales@femmesfatalesauthors.com

PRSR STD  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
BLACKSBURG, VA  
PERMIT NO. 158

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



## News from the Femmes Fatales

Boulder author **Marlys Millhiser's** *The Rampant Reaper*, seventh in the Charlie Greene series, is available from Worldwide in paperback and her *The Mirror*, is out from the Rue Morgue Press in a trade paperback anniversary edition. Both are spiced, if thinly, with sex in thought and deed; remorse and pleasure and subsequent consequences; and with other delights including rich food, strong drink, and cats.



**Elaine Viets** looks forward to seeing you at Bouchercon in Toronto. She's on a panel called "Been There, Done That" at 9:00 AM on Oct. 9. Her fellow panelists include the hilarious Reed Farrel Coleman—it's worth getting up early just to hear him—plus Michael Gruber, Milton Anderson and Joseph Louis. Elaine also looks forward to a rare sight for Floridians—fall. She loves fall color.



This fall, look for a novella by **Charlaine Harris** in the collection *Night's Edge* and a short story in *Powers of Detection*. Spring will see the release of a new Sookie Stackhouse (now published in five other languages), while Charlaine's new series will debut next fall with *Silent Witness*, the first of three books about human lightning rod Harper Connelly.



This year **Meg Chittenden** published two short stories: "Three Blondes Living on Geary" in *Blondes in Trouble* from Intrigue Press, and "The Spirit of Washington" in Berkley's *Death Dines In. More Than You Know* is still available. Her latest Pacific Northwest suspense novel, *Snap Shot*, came out in September. Lee Child said he loved it! Eileen Dreyer said "The incomparable Meg Chittenden does it again!"



*Three Dirty Women and the Shady Acres* was an October 2003 IMBA bestseller despite its lack of actual sex scenes. **Julie Wray Herman** is hard at work on her next book which, while it will be another good read, doesn't contain much more whoopee than her last. She will attend Left Coast Crime in El Paso in February and can be reached through [www.MysteryGarden.com](http://www.MysteryGarden.com).

*Femmes Fatales* is distributed for free, and can be copied as long as copyright information is included.

If you prefer paper copies, send us your address at *Femmes Fatales*, P.O. Box 1248, Cypress, TX 77410-1248.

If you prefer electronic copies, send your e-mail address to [Fatales@femmesfatalesauthors.com](mailto:Fatales@femmesfatalesauthors.com). Be sure to include the word "subscription" or "Newsletter" in the subject header.*ff*

Does writing two series count as two-timing, or perhaps literary bigamy? If so, **Donna Andrews** is still guilty as charged. *Access Denied*, third in her Turing Hopper series, comes out December 7, 2004, and *Owls Well That Ends Well*, sixth in the Meg Langslow series, is scheduled for April 2005. She also has a short story in Dana Stabenow's upcoming fantasy anthology *Powers of Detection*.



**Kris Neri** signed a three-book deal with Quiet Storm Publishing for more Tracy Eaton mysteries, starting with *Revenge For Old Times' Sake*. She also sold her standalone Zoey Morgan suspense novel *Never Say Die* to Hilliard and Harris. And she recently placed a story called "Buffo News: Daring, Dancing Cookie Flattens Devil To Save City Of Angels" in the *City Crimes, Country Crimes* anthology from Wildside Press.



**Mary Saums** continues touring with her new 2004 mystery *When The Last Magnolia Weeps*, in which Nashville private eye Willi Taft investigates the stabbing of a priest after a Celtic Christmas concert. Mary hopes to see fans at Southern Festival of Books in Memphis this fall, at bookstores across the Southeast, and at [www.marysaums.com.ff](http://www.marysaums.com.ff)