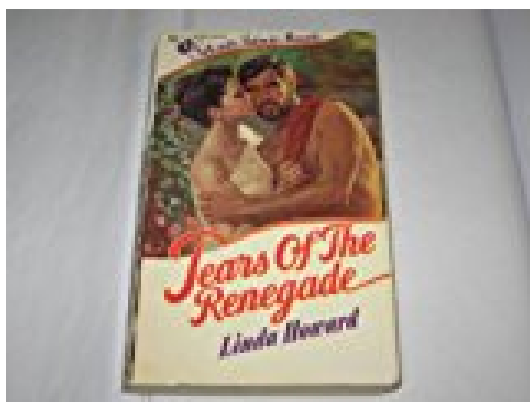


[PDF] Tears Of The Renegade (Silhouette Intimate Moments No. 92)

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Description:

About the Author Linda Howard is the award-winning author of many *New York Times* bestsellers, including *Up Close and Dangerous*, *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, *Cover of Night*, *Killing Time*, *To Die For*, *Kiss Me While I Sleep*, *Cry No More*, and *Dying to Please*. She lives in Alabama with her husband and two golden retrievers. --This text refers to the edition.

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It was late, already after eleven o'clock, when the broad-shouldered man appeared in the open French doors. He stood there, perfectly at ease, watching the party with a sort of secret amusement. Susan noticed him immediately, though she seemed to be the only one who did so, and she studied him with faint surprise because she'd never seen him before. She would have remembered if she had; he wasn't the sort of man that anyone forgot.

He was tall and muscular, his white dinner jacket hugging his powerful shoulders with just enough precision to proclaim exquisite tailoring, yet what set him apart wasn't the almost dissolute sophistication that sat so easily on him; it was his face. He had the bold look of a desperado, an impression heightened by the level dark brows that shadowed eyes of a pale, crystalline blue. Lodestone eyes, she thought, feeling their effect even though he wasn't looking at her. A funny little quiver danced down her spine, and her senses were suddenly heightened—the music was more vibrant, the colors more intense, the heady perfume of the early spring night stronger. Every instinct within her was abruptly awakened as she stared at the stranger with a sort of primitive recognition. Women have always known which men are dangerous, and this man radiated danger.

It was there in his eyes, the self-assurance of a man who was willing to take risks, and willing to accept the consequences. An almost weary experience had hardened his features, and Susan knew, looking at him, that he would be a man no one would lightly cross. Danger rode those broad shoulders like a visible mantle. He wasn't quite—civilized. He looked like a modern-day pirate, from those bold eyes to the short, neatly trimmed dark beard and moustache that hid the lines of his jaw and upper lip; but she knew that they would be strong lines. Her eyes traveled to his hair, dark and thick and vibrant, styled in a casual perfection that most men would have paid a fortune to obtain, just long enough to brush his collar in the back with a hint of curl.

At first no one seemed to notice him, which was surprising, because to Susan he stood out like a tiger in a roomful of tabbies. Then, gradually, people began to look at him, and to her further astonishment a stunned, almost hostile silence began to fall, spreading quickly over the room, a contagious pall that leaped from one person to another. Suddenly uneasy, she looked at her brother-in-law, Preston, who was the host and almost within touching distance of the newly arrived guest. Why didn't he welcome the man? But instead Preston had gone stiff, his face pale, staring at the stranger with the same sort of frozen horror one would eye a cobra coiled at one's feet.

The tidal wave of silence had spread to include the entire huge room now, even the musicians on the raised dais falling silent. Under the glittering prisms of the chandeliers, people were turning, staring, shock rippling over their faces. A shiver of alarm went down Susan's slender back; what was going on? Who was he? Something awful was going to happen. She sensed it, saw Preston tensing for a scene, and knew that she wasn't going to let it happen. Whoever he was, he was a guest of the Blackstones, and no one was going to be rude to him, not even Preston Blackstone. Instinctively she moved, stepping into the middle of the scene, murmuring "Excuse me" to people as she slipped past them. All attention turned to her as if drawn by a magnet, for her movement was the only movement in the room. The stranger turned his gaze on her, too; he watched her, and he waited, those strange lodestone eyes narrowing as he examined the slim, graceful woman whose features were as pure and serene as a cameo, clothed in a fragile cream silk dress that swirled about her ankles as she walked. A three-strand pearl choker encircled her delicate throat; with her soft dark hair drawn up on top of her head and a few tendrils curling about her temples, she was a dream, a mirage, as illusive as angel's breath. She looked as pure as a Victorian virgin, glowingly set apart from everyone else in the room, untouched and untouchable; and, to the man who watched her approach, an irresistible challenge.

Susan was unaware of the male intent that suddenly gleamed in the depths of his pale blue eyes. She was concerned only with avoiding the nastiness that had been brewing, something she didn't understand but nevertheless wanted to prevent. If anyone had a score to settle with this man, they could do it at another time and in another place. She nodded a silent command to the band as she walked, and obediently the music began again, hesitantly at first, then gaining in volume. By that time, Susan had reached the man, and she held her hand out to him. "Hello," she said, her low, musical voice carrying effortlessly to the people who listened openly, gaping at her. "I'm Susan Blackstone; won't you dance with me?"

Her hand was taken in long, hard fingers, but there was no handshake. Instead, her hand was simply held, and a slightly rough thumb rubbed over the back of her fingers, feeling the softness, the slender bones. A level brow quirked upward over the blue eyes that were even more compelling at close range, for now she could see that the pale blue was ringed by deep midnight. Staring into those eyes, she forgot that they were simply standing there while he held her hand until he used his grip on her to pull her into his embrace as he swung her into a dance, causing the skirt of her dress to wrap about his long legs as they moved.

At first he simply held her, his strength moving her across the dance floor with such ease that her feet barely touched down. No one else was dancing, and Susan looked at several people, her level gaze issuing a quiet, gentle command that was obeyed without exception. Slowly they were joined by other dancers, and the man looked down at the woman he held in his arms.

Susan felt the strength in the hand on her lower back as the fingers slowly spread and exerted a gentle pressure that was nevertheless inexorable. She found herself closer to him, her breasts lightly brushing against his hard chest, and she suddenly felt overwarm, the heat from his body enveloping her. The simple, graceful steps he was using in the dance were abruptly difficult to follow, and she forced herself to concentrate to keep from stepping on his toes.

A quivering, spring-loaded tension began coiling in her stomach, and her hand trembled in his. He squeezed her fingers warmly and said into her ear, "Don't be afraid; I won't hurt you."

His voice was a soft, deep rumble, as she had known it would be, and again that strange little shiver rippled through her. She lifted her head and found how close he had been when one of the soft curls at her temple became entangled in his beard, then slid free. She was almost dazed when she found herself looking directly at the chiseled strength of his lips, and she wondered with raw hunger if his mouth would be firm or soft, if he would taste as heady as he looked. With an inner groan, she jerked her thoughts away from the contemplation of how he would taste, what it would be like to kiss him. It was difficult to move her gaze higher, but she managed it, then wished that she hadn't; staring into those unusual eyes was almost more than her composure could bear. Why was she reacting like a teenager? She was an adult, and even as a teenager she had been calm, nothing like the woman who now found herself quaking inside at a mere glance.

But she was seared by that glance, which surveyed, approved, asked, expected and knew. He was one of those rare men who knew women, and were all the more dangerous for their knowledge. She responded to the danger alarm that all women possess by lifting her head with the innate dignity that characterized her every movement, and met that bold look. She said quietly, "What an odd thing to say," and she was proud that her voice hadn't trembled.

"Is it?" His voice was even softer than before, deeper, increasingly intimate. "Then you can't know what I'm thinking."

"No," she said, and left it at that, not picking up on the innuendo that she knew was there.

"You will," he promised, his tone nothing now but a low rasp that touched every nerve in her body. As he spoke, the arm about her waist tightened to pull her closer, not so close that she would have felt obliged to protest, but still she was suddenly, mutely aware of the rippling muscles in his thighs as his legs moved against hers. Her fingers clenched restlessly on his shoulder as she fought the abrupt urge to slide them inside his collar, to feel his bare skin and discover for herself if her fingers would be singed by the fire of him. Shocked at herself, she kept her eyes determinedly on the shoulder seam of his jacket and tried not to think of the strength she could feel in the hand that clasped hers, or in the one that pressed so lightly on the small of her back lightly; but she had the sudden thought that if she tried to move away from him, that hand would prevent the action.

"Your shoulders look like satin," he murmured roughly; before she could guess his intentions, his head dipped and his mouth, warm and hard, touched the soft, bare curve of her shoulder. A fine madness seized her and she quivered, her eyes drifting shut. God, he was making love to her on the dance floor, and she didn't even know his name! But everything in her was responding to him, totally independent of her control; she couldn't even control her thoughts, which kept leaping ahead to more dangerous subjects, wondering how his mouth would feel if it kept sliding down her body.

"Stop that," she said, to herself as well as to him, but her voice was lacking any element of command; instead it was soft and shivery, the way she felt. Her skin felt as if it were on fire, but voluptuous shivers almost like a chill kept tickling her spine.

"Why?" he asked, his mouth making a sleek glissade from her shoulder to the sensitive hollow just before her ear.

"People are watching," she murmured we... --This text refers to the edition.

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