

RADCLYFFE



Sheltering Dunes

Where do you run when you've
reached the end of the road?





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SHELTERING DUNES

Acclaim for Radclyffe's Fiction

2010 RWA/ FF&P Prism award winner *Secrets in the Stone* “is a strong, must read novel that will linger in the minds of readers long after the last page is turned.”—*Just About Write*

Foreword Review Book of the Year finalist and IPPY silver medalist *Trauma Alert* “is hard to put down and it will sizzle in the reader's hands. The characters are hot, the sex scenes explicit and explosive, and the book is moved along by an interesting plot with well drawn secondary characters. The real star of this show is the attraction between the two characters, both of whom resist and then fall head over heels.”—*Lambda Literary Reviews*

Lambda Literary Finalist *Best Lesbian Romance 2010* features “stories [that] are diverse in tone, style, and subject, making for more variety than in many, similar anthologies...well written, each containing a satisfying, surprising twist. Best Lesbian Romance series editor Radclyffe has assembled a respectable crop of 17 authors for this year's offering.”—*Curve Magazine*

In **Benjamin Franklin Award finalist *Desire by Starlight*** “Radclyffe writes romance with such heart and her down-to-earth characters not only come to life but leap off the page until you feel like you know them. What Jenna and Gard feel for each other is not only a spark but an inferno and, as a reader, you will be washed away in this tumultuous romance until you can do nothing but succumb to it.”—*Queer Magazine Online*

2010 Prism award winner and ForeWord Review Book of the Year Award finalist *Secrets in the Stone* is “so powerfully [written] that the worlds of these three women shimmer between reality and dreams...A strong, must read novel that will linger in the minds of readers long after the last page is turned.”—*Just About Write*

Lambda Literary Award winner *Stolen Moments* “is a collection of steamy stories about women who just couldn't wait. It's sex when desire overrides reason, and it's incredibly hot!”—*On Our Backs*

Lambda Literary Award winner *Distant Shores, Silent Thunder* “weaves an intricate tapestry about passion and commitment between lovers. The story explores the fragile nature of trust and the sanctuary provided by loving relationships.”—*Sapphic Reader*

Lambda Literary Award Finalist *Justice Served* delivers a “crisply written, fast-paced story with twists and turns and keeps us guessing until the final explosive ending.”—*Independent Gay Writer*

Lambda Literary Award finalist *Turn Back Time* “is filled with wonderful love scenes, which are both tender and hot.”—*MegaScene*

Applause for L.L. Raand’s Midnight Hunters Series

“Raand has built a complex world inhabited by werewolves, vampires, and other paranormal beings...Raand has given her readers a complex plot filled with wonderful characters as well as insight into the hierarchy of Sylvan’s pack and vampire clans. There are many plot twists and turns, as well as erotic sex scenes in this riveting novel that keep the pages flying until its satisfying conclusion.”—*Just About Write*

“Once again, I am amazed at the storytelling ability of L.L. Raand aka Radclyffe. In *Blood Hunt*, she mixes high levels of sheer eroticism that will leave you squirming in your seat with an impeccable multi-character storyline all streaming together to form one great read.”—*Queer Magazine Online*

“*The Midnight Hunt* has a gripping story to tell, and while there are also some truly erotic sex scenes, the story always takes precedence. This is a great read which is not easily put down nor easily forgotten.”—*Just About Write*

“Are you sick of the same old hetero vampire/werewolf story plastered in every bookstore and at every movie theater? Well, I’ve got the cure to your werewolf fever. *The Midnight Hunt* is first in, what I hope is, a long-running series of fantasy erotica for L.L. Raand (aka Radclyffe).”—*Queer Magazine Online*

“Any reader familiar with Radclyffe’s writing will recognize the author’s style within *The Midnight Hunt*, yet at the same time it is most definitely a new direction. The author delivers an excellent story here, one that is engrossing from the very beginning. Raand has pieced together an intricate world, and provided just enough details for the reader to become enmeshed in the new world. The action moves quickly throughout the book and it’s hard to put down.”—*Three Dollar Bill Reviews*

By Radclyffe

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| Beyond the Breakwater | Returning Tides |
| Distant Shores, Silent Thunder | Sheltering Dunes |
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By L.L. Raand

Midnight Hunters

The Midnight Hunt

Blood Hunt

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by

RADCLYFFE



2011

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CREDITS

EDITORS: RUTH STERNGLANTZ AND STACIA SEAMAN

PRODUCTION DESIGN: STACIA SEAMAN

COVER DESIGN BY SHERI (GRAPHICARTIST2020@HOTMAIL.COM)

Acknowledgments

Safe Harbor (the first in the Provincetown Tales) was one of the first books I wrote, and at the time, my intention was to write about a place I loved and populate it with characters I admired. I hoped to tell a love story filled with passion and healing. I wasn't thinking about archetypes, or the hero's journey, or any literary convention. I was thinking about what made a hero, and words like *honor*, *valor*, *bravery*, *dedication*, and *sacrifice* came to mind. I like to write lesbian heroes, because heroism is a daily part of queer life, whether we are serving our country and our fellow human beings, or living our lives, day by day, as honestly as we can, even as we demand our right to do so. Reese Conlon turned out to be an archetypal hero—the warrior chief whose attributes have not changed in centuries. She is not without weakness, or fear, or uncertainty, and she finds her strength as heroes often do, in a woman as strong as her.

When I wrote *Sheltering Dunes* (book seven), I wrote a different kind of hero than in many of my books. I usually write women of action because I believe women need to see themselves portrayed as being in charge, being leaders, being fearless, being capable and competent—because we are all those things. And of course, we are far more. In this book I had the opportunity to write a spiritual warrior, and Flynn Edwards has been one of my most satisfying characters to explore and develop. Like so many others in this series, Flynn came to Provincetown to leave her past behind and to search for her future. I hope you enjoy her journey and the unlikely love she finds, along with the return visits of other characters from the Provincetown and Justice series. Thank you all for continuing on the journey.

I'd like to thank my assistant, Sandy Lowe, for research support and the many ways she finds to free me to write; author Nell Stark for being an enthusiastic reader and a sensitive critic; Ruth Sternglantz for her tremendous job of editing this and all my novels; Stacia Seaman, who

always brings a fresh eye and impeccable knowledge to the final edits; and my first readers Connie, Eva, Jenny, and Paula for support during the most difficult stage of all, the first draft.

And to Lee, who has weathered every storm, literally and figuratively, and still provides unwavering support—*Amo te*.

Radclyffe, 2011

To Lee
My shelter in a storm

CHAPTER ONE

Provincetown, MA

She couldn't be late on the third morning of a new job, not when the job was the only thing standing between her and everything she'd escaped. Pedaling the borrowed bicycle as fast as she could down the center of Commercial Street, weaving around parked delivery vans, early-morning coffee seekers, and dog walkers, she sped toward the restaurant at the far west end of town. Despite the chill coming off the harbor at six fifteen in the morning, sweat trickled down the center of her chest, dampening the pale blue tank top in a small circle directly between her breasts. Wisps of hair escaped the tie she'd carelessly wrapped around the thick waves at the back of her neck in her haste to leave the small, nearly airless room in the sprawling rooming house across the street from the harbor. One strand caught in the corner of her mouth, and she jerked her head, trying to dislodge it in the wind. Her heart beat a staccato rhythm against her rib cage. She couldn't lose this job. She had nowhere else to go. Here, she was safe, or as safe as she might ever be.

She glanced down at the thrift-shop watch, the hands moving far too quickly beneath the scratched crystal. Five minutes. She would make it just in time. Relief flooded through her like a tender word, unexpected and rare. She rocketed into the intersection of Standish and Commercial at the foot of MacMillan Wharf. A white van with black letters appeared like an apparition rising in a dream. She had one heart-stopping second to jerk the handlebars and swerve around the front grille, the screech of brakes and the blare of a horn piercing the early-morning stillness. The impact startled her more than anything else, and then she was airborne. The cool, damp air smelled of salt and seaweed,

so different from the pungent odors of trash and broken dreams on the streets of the barrio.



“Hey, Flynn,” Dave called across the squad room, “are you going to play or not?”

Flynn closed her book, keeping her finger between the pages to hold her place, considering her answer. She’d been avoiding thinking about the Columbus Day weekend touch football fund-raiser for a week and a half. She ought to play. The game was a town tradition, the proceeds went to a number of community outreach programs, and she couldn’t avoid seeing Allie in social situations forever. Other than brief encounters on the job, she hadn’t seen Allie since the day Allie had been shot and Flynn had told Ash Walker that Allie needed her. Allie had needed Ash, not Flynn. No matter how much Flynn had wanted to be the one standing by Allie’s bedside, had wanted to be the one Allie needed, she hadn’t been Allie’s choice. She’d never been Allie’s choice. Allie had always been in love with Ash, and it hadn’t taken Flynn more than seeing them together once to figure that out. So she’d walked away and Allie and Ash had worked out their issues, just like she’d known they would. She’d pretty much worked out her own too. She wasn’t in love with Allie, not exactly. She might have been, if they’d seen each other a few more times. If they’d slept together, but they hadn’t. Not quite. The spark had been there, the possibility had been there, but the timing had been wrong.

Flynn almost laughed. Timing seemed to be everything with her, and she had yet to get it right. She kept almost falling in love, only to discover she’d been too late or too love-struck to see there were problems, time after time. When she’d come here, changing the entire direction of her life, she’d hoped the pattern of her life would change as well. As if that were in her control. She knew it wasn’t. Even if she hadn’t believed that a greater plan, a greater power, was at work, she couldn’t alter the road her life was destined to follow any more than she already had. She was done running. This was home and she was staying.

“I’ll be there,” Flynn called, because she couldn’t change the facts. Not about Allie, not about herself, not about where she’d been or where she was going.

“Good.” Dave tossed the damp rag he had used to polish the medic unit into a bucket. “I’ve seen you run and we need a fast cor—”

An alarm blared—the computerized dispatch system signaling a callout. Flynn dropped the book into the gear bag she carried everywhere when on duty, jumped up, and jogged into the vehicle bay. Dave was already climbing behind the wheel as she grabbed a radio. She dove into the passenger seat, stashed her bag on the floor, and buckled in as Dave roared out onto Shank Painter Road. He liked to drive, and she didn’t mind riding shotgun. She slid the electronic tablet from the slot on the dash and pulled up the stats on the call. The details came up on her screen, relayed from the officer in the field to the emergency dispatcher who had entered the data into the system.

She read them out. “Standish and Commercial. Vehicle versus bicycle. Two injured. Police on scene.”

“I still think the town oughtta close Commercial to vehicular traffic during the season,” Dave muttered, swinging onto Bradford. “It’s amazing we don’t get more of these.”

They were two minutes away, and Flynn quickly logged in the details on her tablet. “The next few weeks are going to be crazy, what with Women’s Week coming up and then Fantasia right after that. Hopefully this isn’t just the first of many.”

Dave pulled in next to several police cruisers angled haphazardly across the four-way intersection, light bars strobing and radios squawking. Onlookers crowded the sidewalks and uniformed officers directed them back. One officer was taking a statement from the driver of a white catering van stalled in the center of the intersection, and two more flanked a person lying on the ground. Even from a distance, Allie was easily recognizable as one of the officers with the injured individual—her ebony hair, gathered in a twist at the back of her neck, and her statuesque body were impossible to miss.

“I’ll check the pedestrian,” Flynn said. “You clear the driver.”

“Got it.”

Flynn jumped down from the cab, unlocked the side compartment on the medic unit, and pulled out the red field-trauma kit. As she jogged over to the scene, Allie looked up, and the beauty of her dark soulful eyes was like a kick in the chest. Painful and exhilarating. Allie smiled and said hi with a hint of Southern drawl, and Flynn smiled back. No point in avoiding the truth. Allie was Allie, gorgeous and sexy without ever trying. Fate had made another decision for her, bringing her face-

to-face with Allie's irresistible charm. Why fight it? Better just to let another piece of the past go, even if another part of her heart went with it.

"Hi, Allie." Flynn deposited her kit on the ground and squatted next to the victim, a young woman, who lay motionless on her back in the street. The woman, in jeans and a blue tank top, appeared to be in her early twenties, dark-haired, Hispanic maybe, with nutmeg skin, bold dark brows, a strong nose, and a wide, full-lipped mouth. Right now, her lips were pale and her coal-dark eyes unfocused and stunned. Flynn reached for her BP cuff and glanced at Allie. "What do we have?"

"She was on a bicycle," Allie said, "and she and the van over there met up in the middle of the intersection. According to the driver, he clipped the rear of the bike and she went over the handlebars. She was conscious when we arrived and moving all fours, but she's disoriented."

While Allie talked, Flynn wrapped the cuff around the young woman's right bicep, noting a tattoo of a heart with a knife thrust through it high up on her deltoid. She leaned over so the girl could see her face. "Hi. I'm Flynn, a paramedic. Can you tell me your name?"

The girl didn't answer.

Dave knelt down across from Flynn and smoothly slid a cervical collar around the young woman's neck, securing it with the Velcro tab. "Driver's okay. Shook up. How we doing over here?"

"Ninety over sixty," Flynn said as the digital readout on the blood pressure cuff settled. "Confused, but no apparent loss of consciousness." She tried again. "Hey, can you tell me your name? Do you remember what happened?"

The young woman muttered, "Mi—Mica. I'm Mica." She struggled, twisting from side to side, trying to get up. "I have to get to work. I'm going to be late."

"Don't try to move." Flynn rested her fingertips lightly against the girl's shoulder. Just that little bit of pressure was enough to keep her down. She set her stethoscope onto the bare skin of Mica's chest above the scooped neck of her tank top and listened to her heart and lungs. Everything sounded good, and she tossed the stethoscope back into her box. When she looked down, the girl's dark eyes were focused on her, clear but wary. "Can you tell me where you hurt?"

"Nowhere. I'm fine. I have to go." Mica looked past the blonde with the concerned gaze and gentle hands to the circle of uniformed

officers surrounding her. A swell of panic flooded her throat. She couldn't afford to be hurt—she had no insurance and almost no money. Worse, she couldn't afford to be noticed, not by anyone, but especially not by the police. She needed to go to work. If she missed work, she could lose her job. Her boss hadn't wanted to hire anyone so late in the season, but she'd promised to stay all winter and work for partial wages if she had to. She needed the job. She needed to stay anonymous, unknown, unnoticed. She tried to pull the blood pressure cuff off her arm. "Please. I'm fine. I have to go."

"Whoa, take it easy." The paramedic—Flynn?—had a deep voice, calm but commanding. "You need to be checked out. We're going to transport you to the hospital in Hyannis."

"No!" The panic turned to terror. She'd worked so hard to disappear—she couldn't surface in the system now. "No! I'm fine. I don't want medical treatment."

"You've got a bump on your head," Flynn said, "and a scrape on your shoulder that need evaluation."

"I'm not going to any hospital." Details were coming back to her now—the wild bike ride, the white van in the intersection. The time. The time. She tried to turn her head to see what had happened to her landlady's bike. God, hopefully it wasn't trashed. She didn't have the money to replace it. "What time is it?"

Flynn frowned. "A little after six thirty."

"*Dios*, I have to go. I'm going to lose my job."

"You've been in an accident. It's not your fault. You're not going to lose your job because of it."

Anger replaced the terror. "You don't know that. You don't know anything about me." Mica pushed herself up. Her head swirled, and she swallowed back a wave of nausea. "You can't take me anywhere if I refuse."

"You're right," Flynn said, still sounding calm, still patient. "We can't. But you need to be examined." Her handsome face tightened in concentration. "How about if we take you to the local clinic. If the docs say you don't need to go to the hospital, we won't go."

"I can't," Mica exploded. "I'll lose my job."

"Okay, okay," Flynn said, gently squeezing Mica's arm. "How about this—tell me where you work. I'll call them myself and explain what happened. Will you come with us if I talk to your boss and make sure you're not going to lose your job?"

The other paramedic cleared his throat as if he was trying to

interrupt or get Flynn's attention, but she ignored him, her eyes steady on Mica's. Something about the way she spoke, the way she looked, made Mica almost believe her, even though she knew better. People in authority said what they wanted you to believe and then did whatever they pleased. She knew better than to trust her. "Why should you care?"

"Why shouldn't I?" Flynn murmured softly.

Mica laughed, bitterness making her throat burn. "You don't know me. What do you want?"

"I want to be sure you're all right." Flynn's eyes, a crystalline blue, darkened like the storm clouds rolling in over the bay. "Look, I don't want to argue with you. I just want to take care of you. Let me and my partner take you to our unit and get you settled, and I'll stand right there and call your boss. You can listen to everything I'm saying."

One of the cops leaned down, a woman so beautiful she ought to be a model in some kind of magazine. "Flynn, we can take care of notifying her boss. Just get the information for us."

"No," Flynn said, still holding Mica's gaze. "I'll do it."

The cop sighed. "Ever the crusader." She squeezed Flynn's shoulder in a strangely intimate way, and Flynn's face changed for a second, as if the touch were painful.

"I want to talk to my boss," Mica said.

Flynn's mouth flickered and she smiled. "Are you always so stubborn?"

"None of your business."

"Fair enough. Dave, get the gurney." Flynn started to pack up her kit. "You got a deal. I'll call him, explain the situation. And you can talk to him after. Agreed?"

"Like I've got a choice?"

"You do have a choice," Flynn said seriously, as if she somehow knew that mattered. "I just want you to make a good one and not put yourself at risk, okay?"

Mica couldn't look into her eyes anymore. If she did, she might start believing this stranger really meant what she said, and she knew better. People didn't really care about each other, even when they were supposed to, but for sure not about an outsider. What did this stranger know about her, know about risk? She couldn't let herself be tricked into believing that anyone was going to care about her. It'd taken her long enough, but she'd learned. Now she knew better. The only person

she was ever going to trust again was herself, even if it meant being alone for the rest of her life.

“Here we go,” Dave said, positioning a backboard on the ground next to Mica.

Flynn said, “We’re just going to slide you onto a backboard and then onto the stretcher so we can move you over to our unit. Let us do all the work. Just relax as much as you can.”

“Just do it,” Mica snapped.

“One, two, three,” Flynn counted, and Mica felt herself being lifted with arms beneath her shoulders and legs. Then she was on the backboard and straps were tightened across her chest and pelvis, trapping her. She wanted to struggle. She wanted to tear the restraints away. She hated to be held down.

“Hey,” Flynn said softly. “It’s okay. We just don’t want you to roll off. As soon as we get into the unit, I’ll loosen the straps. Can you handle that?”

“Yeah, whatever.” Mica struggled to calm her breathing, telling herself she wasn’t a prisoner, these people weren’t going to hurt her. Tears leaked from the corners of her eyes and she pretended they weren’t there.

Then she was being rolled over the bumpy surface of the street to the yawning mouth of a medical van. Again she was lifted, and this time placed on a bench along one side of the van. She tried to raise her head again, wanting to find the blonde—Flynn. The panic wasn’t so bad when she could see her.

Flynn pulled her cell phone from her belt. “Are you okay? I’m gonna climb out so I can get a good signal.”

“Fine. Just get on with it already.”

“What’s the number?” After Mica reeled off a familiar-sounding number, Flynn hopped out of the unit and punched in the digits, trying to place the establishment. Ten seconds later, a man answered.

“Shoreline.”

“This is Flynn Edwards, a paramedic here in town. One of your employees was in a traffic accident on her way to work. Mica.” Flynn realized she didn’t know the girl’s last name.

“Christ,” the guy said, “is she okay?”

“We’re taking her to the clinic. She was worried about missing work. She doesn’t want to go with us if she’s going to lose her—”

“Tell her to get her butt over to the clinic and get checked out.

Have her call me later so I know when she'll be able to come back to work. I've gotta go call in a sub now—we're swamped. Big breakfast crowd."

"She wants to talk to you, but if there's no problem—"

The guy sighed. "Jesus. Just take her where you need to take her. Her job will be here when she gets back. I gotta go." And he hung up.

Flynn pocketed the phone and climbed into the back of the unit. She squatted down next to Mica. "He says your job is okay. He had to call someone in for you." She signaled Dave to go ahead and pulled the doors closed. "We'll be at the clinic in just a few minutes." She leaned forward into the front of the cab and grabbed her tablet. "What's your last name?"

The girl hesitated, and for a minute, Flynn thought she wasn't going to answer.

"Butler," the girl said finally.

Flynn filled it in. "Address?"

"606 Commercial."

"Is there someone you want me to call?"

When the silence grew heavy, Flynn shifted her gaze from the tablet to the girl on the stretcher. She was obviously in pain—her jaw was clenched and her eyes narrowed, as if holding back any sign of weakness. Her fingers were closed in tight fists. "Mica? Is there someone you want me to call for you?"

"No," Mica said in a flat, hollow voice. "No one."

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