

Total Eclipse of the Heart: A Novel

By Zane

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Waitress Brooke Alexander is in love with Patrick Sterling, one of the most prominent attorneys in Washington, D.C. On his good days, Patrick is the man of every woman's dream. On his bad days, he's a complete nightmare. . . .

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When a tragic event brings Brooke and Damon together, they see truths about their relationships they never wanted to accept. Sometimes two people meet by pure chance, but sometimes it's . . . a total eclipse of the heart.

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Editorial Review

Review
“Arguably not since the emergence of Nancy Friday has American letters produced a purveyor of erotica with such mass-market appeal.” —*The New York Times*

“Zane’s writing warms me, heats me up, satisfies me with a passion.” —Eric Jerome Dickey

About the Author
Zane is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Afterburn, The Heat Seekers, Dear G-Spot, Gettin’ Buck Wild, The Hot Box, Total Eclipse of the Heart, Nervous, Skyscraper, Love is Never Painless, Shame on It All*, and *The Sisters of APF*; the ebook short stories “I’ll be Home for Christmas” and “Everything Fades Away”; and editor for the Flava anthology series, including *Z-Rated* and *Busy Bodies*. Her TV series, *Zane’s Sex Chronicles*, and *The Jump Off* are featured on Cinemax, and her bestselling novel *Addicted* is a major motion picture with Lionsgate Films. She is the publisher of Strebor Books, an imprint of Atria Books/Simon & Schuster. Visit her online at EroticaNoir.com.

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Damon

December 3, 2007

Carleigh dropped by my office to see how I was readjusting to being back at work. She was a welcome surprise...at first. Then things quickly turned ugly, when I shared with her what I *thought* was good news.

"I registered a new domain name today!" I told her once she was seated across from me at my desk. She didn't comment, just looked down at her hands, so I asked, "Want to know the name?"

Carleigh sighed. "Can you tell me over lunch? I'm starved."

"Sure. We can go downstairs to the cafeteria."

We had a great cafeteria in our building. It put most of the restaurants in the vicinity of the office to shame. That was not good enough for Carleigh though.

"You know how I despise cafeteria food. Can you have your secretary make us a reservation at La Ferme?"

"That's all the way out in Bethesda."

"And?"

"And it'll take a good forty-five minutes to get there in traffic."

"And?" Her voice was dripping with heavy sarcasm.

"And you just said you were starved." I sighed and tapped my fingers on my desk. "How about B. Smith's? You love the food there."

Carleigh rolled her eyes at me. *Say what!* "I'm in the mood for some French food."

"Then I'll have her call Brasserie Beck. They've got great duck."

"I want to go to La Ferme."

"Then I can't go," I said vehemently. "I'm not driving all the way out there for lunch; not today. We didn't even have plans."

"I wasn't aware that I need to make *plans* with my husband."

"You do when I'm in the middle of a workday." I got up from my desk and paced the floor for a moment, intentionally keeping my back to Carleigh. Then I turned and faced her. "Listen, I'm going to grab a sandwich at the cafeteria and then eat at my desk. I don't feel like playing this game with you today."

"What game, Damon?"

"You have an attitude and I'm not going to be your willing victim. You pretended to come here out of concern, but obviously your panties are in a bunch because of something." I thought of the date in my head. "It's not time for your period."

Carleigh rolled her eyes again. "Why do men always try to put a woman's emotions off on her period? As if we only have emotions for part of the month."

"At least that would be an excuse, but it looks like you don't have one," I stated. "I wanted to share some good news with you since you popped up, but forget it."

I sat down on the leather sofa in my office. Carleigh got up from where she was seated, came over, and plopped down beside me.

"Crandall and Dee want to go biking across California again in the spring."

Crandall and I had attended college together. He and his wife, Dee, short for Demetria, lived in Los Angeles. Carleigh and I had gone on motorcycle excursions with them for the past three years in a row. We would fly out and then ride motorcycles up and down the coast. Harleys. The best of the best. Crandall collected them.

"Sounds great!" I said.

"Great?" Carleigh looked like I had slapped her. "What are you talking about, Damon?"

"Tell them we'll go; just like we do every year."

"They didn't know about..." Carleigh stared at my arm. "About the accident."

I slapped my thigh. "Things have been so crazy that I haven't had a chance to even shoot Crandall an email. I'll call him."

"Call him and say what?"

"That we'll narrow down some dates in a month or so."

"You can't ride a motorcycle," Carleigh said. "And I'm not getting on the back of one."

I glared at her. "Why not? Because you think I can't ride with one arm? Rarely do I ever hold both handlebars anyway."

"I'm *quite* sure that if you ran this past your doctor, he'd think you were a fool, too. Driving a car is one thing, Damon. Riding a fucking motorcycle is something else."

"Don't curse at me," I said, getting loud. "Don't curse at me and don't talk down to me." I shook my head in dismay, then changed to a nod. "This proves that I'm on the right track."

"On what right track?"

"My *news* is that I'm starting a new website called Able Minded Dating, for people with disabilities."

Carleigh gasped. "Tell me you're joking."

"I'm not joking. I'm dead serious, Carleigh. I'm going to continue running the Last Good Men site, but I'm also going to do this one."

"So now you're going to set up poor women in wheelchairs to be run over by four-legged creatures!"

"Your low opinion of men is astounding."

"I don't know why you'd find it astounding when most men are pieces of shit. Besides, most people with disabilities don't even have sex."

"That's not true, and how can you make such a blanket statement about other people's lives? I'm technically disabled, even though I disagree, and we have sex."

"But you're not confined to a wheelchair and you don't have a spinal-cord injury." She sighed. "Are you talking about people who are cuckoo, too?"

"What the hell do you mean by *cuckoo*?"

"You know what I mean, and now you're cursing at me, so watch it." Carleigh was really testing my patience. "I *mean*, people who can't even think straight."

"Do you ever listen to a word that comes out of my mouth? I said it is called *Able Minded Dating*. Obviously I am not suggesting that someone take advantage of a person who has dementia or Alzheimer's. You're trippin'."

"No, you're trippin' if you think that nonsense is going to work for five seconds. How long have you been doing that Last Good Men crap? I went on there the other day and the women on there are pissed off."

"We've had half a dozen couples get married after meeting on my site. I know that for a fact. Why don't you read the testimonials we post, instead of feeding into all the negativity? You're the most negative person that I know."

"Then why are you married to me?"

"Why are you married to me?" I asked back. I immediately reached out and took her hand. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. I love you, Carleigh."

She yanked her hand away. "I'm going to go to La Ferme for lunch *by myself*." She stood up. "Jordan and I are hanging out tonight. It's her birthday."

I didn't realize witches had birthdays, I wanted to say. "That's nice," I blurted out instead. The mere mention of Jordan's name still stirred me the wrong way. "What time will you be in?"

"When we're done celebrating! I came over here to spend some quality time with you this afternoon so you wouldn't feel neglected tonight, but we both see how that turned out."

I stood up. "If you really want to go to La Ferme, I'll go. Let me clear a couple of things off my schedule for this afternoon."

"No!" Carleigh walked toward the door. "Do your thing. I'll tell your secretary to go get you a turkey club sandwich on my way out. You do still eat those, don't you?"

"Yes, of course I do."

"Just checking. You've changed a lot lately."

Carleigh left without saying another word.

"No, you've changed a lot lately," I said, after she had closed the door behind her.

That evening, I was sitting in my study, going over the initial concepts for Able Minded Dating. My mind wandered to Brooke and I wondered what she was doing. It was late, close to midnight, but I decided to take a chance and give her a call, hoping that I wouldn't interrupt quality time with her man. She answered on the third ring.

"Hello, Damon. Is something wrong?"

"No, nothing's wrong. Sorry to call you so late."

"Oh, it's no problem. I'm awake." I could hear her trying to mask a yawn on the other end of the line. She was so sweet, telling fibs to accommodate me. "What's up?"

"I decided to start a new website today."

"That's great! What's it called?"

Wow, she actually cares! "It's called Able Minded Dating, for -- "

"That's wonderful! For people with disabilities?"

"Yes, exactly."

"That's so wonderful, Damon. You're such a compassionate person. Is there anything I can do to help?"

I found myself grinning from ear to ear. Someone once told me in a seminar that the world is full of dream stealers and reality stealers. The man giving the lecture stated that if you tell ten people close to you about a new business venture or life aspiration, eight out of the ten will say something negative. The other two will be happy for you and ask if they can do anything to help. Brooke was refreshing, and I was not surprised that she was in the positive 20 percent. Carleigh was in the negative 80 and had always been.

"Sure, I would love your help," I told Brooke. "Maybe we can meet for lunch tomorrow."

"Oh, I have to work tomorrow, but I work the late shift on Thursday. Can we meet up then?"

"That'll work. I'll give you a call to confirm on Wednesday."

"I'll be waiting. Meanwhile, I'll do some brainstorming and try to come up with some ideas."

"I appreciate that."

"I appreciate you, Damon. More than you realize." Brooke paused before adding a sweet "Good night."

"Good night, Brooke."

After she had hung up, I tried to focus back on the outline of the site, but I couldn't. Brooke Alexander was invading my thoughts. So much so that it got to the point where I tried to turn in, but couldn't get to sleep. I finally took a pain pill that I had left over and knocked myself out, but then she consumed my dreams.
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Ines Patterson:

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Allison Sala:

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