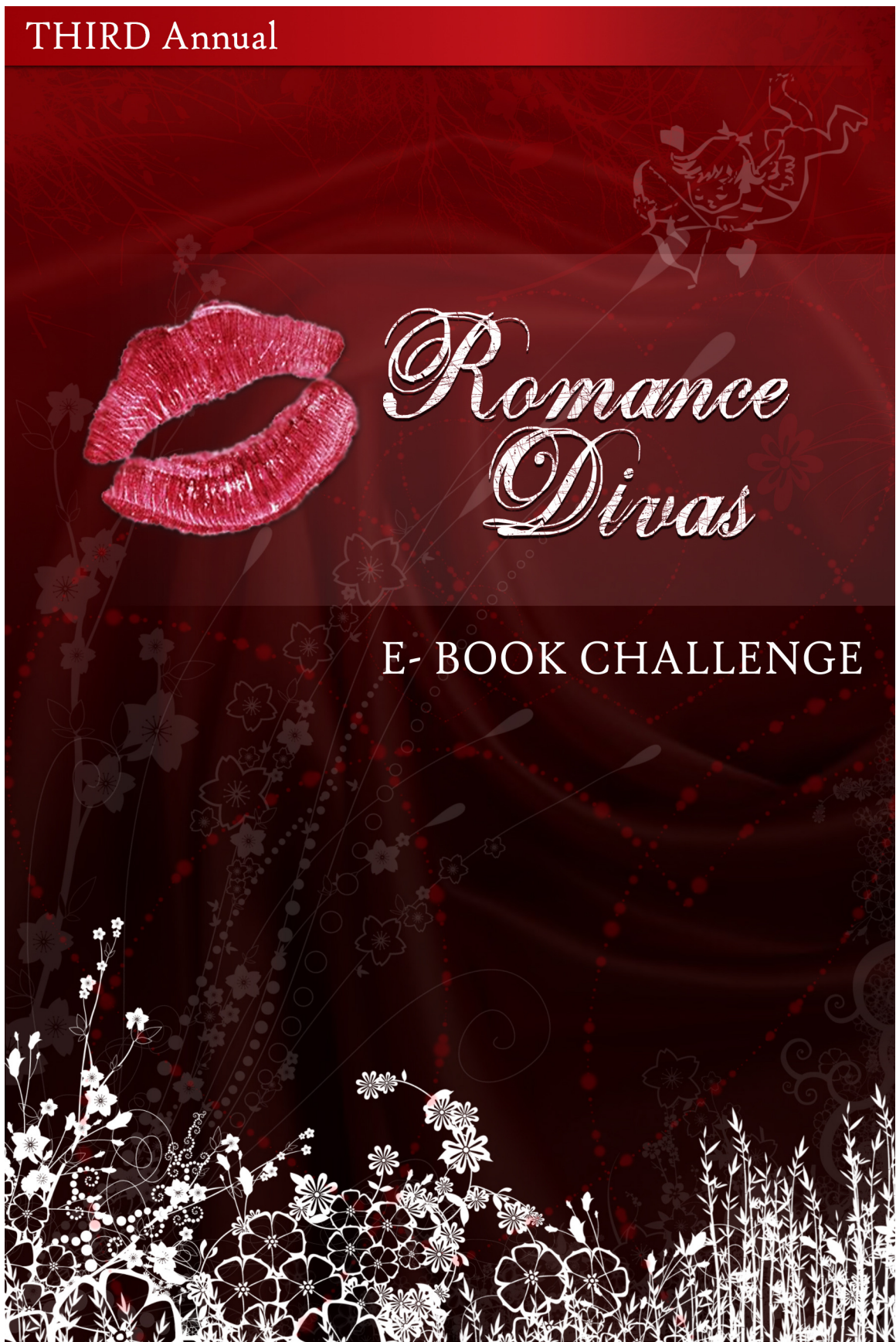


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*To my wonderful husband, Bill,  
who is always ready to brainstorm ideas with me.  
Also, this is a big **Thank You** to all my readers!  
Your support and love keep me inspired*

# Something Unexpected

BY

Debbie Mumford

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*T*he night watchman's radio crackled to life at Erin's elbow causing her to turn and stare at the unassuming piece of equipment. Stan never called her; he made his rounds quietly and efficiently, nodding to her when he passed the security desk where she logged the infrequent night visitors into the building.

"Ms. Hodges," Stan said, his voice faint behind the radio's static. "Call 9-1-1 and lock down the building. There's been a break-in on the sixth floor."

She depressed the send button with a shaky finger. "Roger that," she said, amazed at how calm and competent her voice sounded, "and Stan...wait for back-up. Don't risk your life being heroic."

"Understood. I have the door under surveillance, but I'll let the police earn their pay."

Erin made the call, watched the sixth floor monitor, and waited for the police cruiser's arrival. Her heart pounded against her ribs and she jumped every time a car's headlights slid past in the darkness beyond the plate glass windows. The soft whoosh of opening elevator doors captured her attention and held it hostage. She froze, hunched behind the massive security counter, finger on the building-wide alarm button.

Jake Edwards, one of the cleaning crew, stepped off the elevator, hands in pockets, looking tired, but at ease. Erin breathed a sigh of relief, but kept her gaze glued to the elevator until its doors slid closed. She straightened, ready to call Jake's name, but the parking lot erupted in flashing lights and wailing sirens.

\* \* \*

Jake and Erin sat in hard plastic chairs against one wall of the building's café and observed the well orchestrated dance of police officers checking a potentially dangerous situation.

"Ever seen anything like this before?" asked Jake in an exaggerated whisper. They'd been told to sit in this out of the way location, and to be quiet. "Man, these guys are intense."

"Well, I suppose they have to be, don't they?" she answered. "They've got no way of knowing what's waiting for them upstairs."

“True. Glad I followed my dad into the cleaning business.”

Erin took a deep breath and willed her hands to stop trembling. “Guess I’d better get used to the nerves and tension,” she said. “I’m training to be an emergency medical technician. I’ll probably be involved with lots of sirens and tense situations in the future.”

“No kidding? Is that why you work the night shift?”

“Yes. I go to school during the day, and work this security desk at night. I’m lucky. It’s a quiet job, so I have time to study.”

“Not so quiet tonight.” He smiled.

“True, but this is really rare.” Erin liked the way his blue eyes sparkled, agreeing with his lopsided grin. She’d never really looked at Jake before. She wondered why? Close to her age, with wavy blond hair and a good build. She didn’t like to think she’d ignored him because of his job.

“You said your dad is a janitor, too?” she asked, anxious to keep the conversation going.

“Not exactly,” he said. “Dad owns the business. We’ve got cleaning crews all over town. I’m buying him out, but this building was my first assignment and I’m not letting it go until I take over management.”

An entrepreneur, Erin liked that, but didn’t get a chance to say so. The café doors opened and Stan strode in. He pulled a chair from a nearby table and dragged it over to where they sat against the wall.

“Mind if I join you? I’ve been relieved by the boys in blue.” Stan removed his watchman’s hat and ran his sleeve across his forehead and receding hairline. “Some night, huh?”

“I’m sure it has been for you,” said Jake. “Have they found the guy yet?”

“Not that I know of, but they hustled me out of there right quick. Seemed to think I’d get in the way.”

Erin made a sympathetic noise and patted Stan’s arm. “I’m sure they’re just following protocol,” she said. “Don’t take it personally. I’ve got to admit, I’m glad it wasn’t me up on six. I was jumpy enough down here.”

Stan replaced his hat and gave Erin a wry smile. “Thanks. Truth be told, I was glad to be relieved.”

Erin opened her mouth to ask Stan which office had been involved when she glimpsed movement at the edge of her vision. She leaned forward to get a better view of the elevator doors, across the café and down the hall a few paces. A uniformed police officer stepped out of the compartment accompanied by a sorrowful looking teenage boy in handcuffs.

“Looks like they found our intruder,” she said, nudging Stan.

Stan rose and headed for the café door. “Great. Just in time for the end of shift. Hope I don’t have to stick around to answer too many questions.”

“Hey,” said Erin. “He’s right. My shift is over. As long as the police don’t need me, I can go home.”

“I don’t know,” Jake said. “I’m kind of wired. Want to join me for breakfast? Now that we’ve finally met, I’d like to get to know you a little better.”

“I’d like that, too,” she said, with a laugh. “When Stan told me to call 9-1-1, I certainly didn’t expect an invitation to breakfast!”

Jake grinned. “Maybe we owe that kid a round of thanks.”

~~End~~



## AUTHOR BIO

DEBBIE MUMFORD lives in Vancouver, Washington with her husband of more than 30 years, ghost-white cat and toasted-marshmallow colored bullmastiff. Her short fiction has appeared online in Flash Me Magazine, KidVisions, and Dragons, Knights & Angels. She has several novels available from Freya's Bower in addition to anthologies with Wild Child Publishing and Adams Media.

To learn more about DEBBIE MUMFORD, visit her online at <http://www.debbiemumford.com> or <http://debbiemumford.com/wordpress/>

## BOOK LIST

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