



The Deepest Night (Sweetest Dark)

By Shana Abe

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A rich portrait of post-Victorian England, *The Deepest Night* seamlessly blends thrilling romance with riveting history and adventure—perfect for fans of Libba Bray and Lauren Kate.

It's 1915, and sixteen-year-old Lora Jones is finishing up her first year as a charity student at Iverson, a prestigious, gothic boarding school on England's southern coast. While she's always felt different from everyone around her, now she finally knows why: She is a *drákon*, a rare, enchanted being with astonishing magical abilities.

As war hits Britain's shores, and Lora reels from an unimaginable loss, she finds that her powers come with grave and dangerous responsibilities. At the request of Armand Louis, the darkly mysterious boy whose father owns Iverson, Lora will spend her summer at his lavish estate. To help the war effort—and to keep Lora near—Armand turns his home into a military hospital, where Lora will serve as a nurse. For Armand is inescapably drawn to her—bound to her by heart-deep secrets and a supernatural connection that runs thicker than blood.

Yet while Lora tries to sort out her own feelings toward Armand, fate offers an unexpected surprise. Lora discovers there is another *drákon*, a prisoner of war being held in Germany. And that only she, with her newly honed Gifts, will be able to rescue him.

With Armand at her side, Lora will cross enemy lines on an incredible mission—one that could bond her to Armand forever, or irrevocably tear them apart.

Beautifully written, deeply romantic, and filled with daring adventure and magic, *The Deepest Night* is a mesmerizing novel of the enduring pull of destiny, and the eternal strength of love.

Praise for *The Deepest Night*

“Fast, fun and full of surprises . . . a solid story with great writing and humor in unexpected places.”—*RT Book Reviews*

“Awe inspiring . . . The writing is beautiful, lyrical, evoking image and all the senses. . . . I highly recommend this series.”—*Badass Book Reviews*

“An exhilarating, heroic adventure . . . exceptionally romantic, entrancing, thrilling and vastly fast moving . . . *The Deepest Night* is like a fine wine. It is smoothly written, rich in taste and definitely needs to be savored! Actually, I think I will read it again; it is so exceptionally written!”—*Romance Junkies Review*

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Editorial Review

Review

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About the Author

Shana Abé is the author of *The Sweetest Dark*, *The Time Weaver*, *The Treasure Keeper*, *Queen of Dragons*, *The Dream Thief*, and *The Smoke Thief*.

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Chapter 1

From: Mrs. Charles Westcliffe, headmistress, Iverson School for Girls

To: Mr. H. W. Forrester, former director, Blisshaven Foundling Home

May 18, 1915

Sir,

I hope this letter finds you in fine health and your new state of affairs satisfactory. I wish to express again my condolences for the loss of the Blisshaven Foundling Home. No doubt it was an excellent institution, and the orphaned children of the British Empire were privileged indeed to have found shelter there during its eighty-four years of existence. It was with great dismay that I learned of its destruction in a German air raid. Thank goodness for the government's decision to evacuate London's vulnerable young residents months before.

Perhaps you've heard that we also have had a brush with the kaiser's dreadful zeppelins! Happily, the school remains unscathed and my charges unharmed.

However, I am writing once again to inquire as to the summer circumstances of the pupil you sent me, Miss Eleanore Jones. I fear I must point out that this is my third letter to you regarding her, and I still await your response. Her schedule simply must be sorted soon. The summer holiday is approaching and she absolutely cannot remain at the school during this time, as it will be closed but for a small skeleton staff.

There is also, frankly, the question of whether it will be suitable for Miss Jones to return for her final academic year with us at all. Although her marks have proven adequate and her unexpected musical gifts were a welcome surprise, she is, if you'll forgive the expression, rather a fish out of water here.

I realize this news will cause you no undue astonishment. Her history as an orphan of unknown origins was

certain to set her apart from the other young women in attendance, all of whom descend from the most prominent families of the empire. Her year spent involuntarily confined to the Moor Gate Institute for Socially Afflicted Youth (although maintained as a strict secret between me and select members of my staff, I assure you!) has indubitably only enhanced these differences.

Miss Jones has made few friends and garnered what I might charitably call the unlikely attention of a particular young man of noble blood. It is a relationship that is entirely inappropriate and rife with unfortunate possibilities. I'm sure you understand.

To be very blunt, our patron, the Duke of Idylling, is no longer in residence at his manor nearby. His situation remains delicate, and thus far I have been unable to ascertain if he wishes to continue the scholarship for Miss Jones. I do not believe that his son, the Marquess of Sherborne, has the proper authority to decide her case, despite what he claims.

Kindly inform me of where to send this child come June.

Most sincerely,

Mrs. C. Westcliffe

Headmistress, Iverson

Once there were dragons everywhere. Knit from the bones of the earth and the glory of the heavens, they hovered in the Divide, that thin wedge of existence that separates feral, untamed magic from safe, tamed lives.

They glistened metallic bright, thin as whips and swift as lightning. They scored the skies with wings and claws but walked on land as well, able to assume the shape of their mortal enemies—humans—when they wished. To live among them in human disguise.

They called themselves the drákon.

They hunted and fed. They wed and bred. Throughout history, human and drákon destinies entwined, but it was only humans who scribbled down the tales: about how dragons devoured crops or babies or virgins (one French anecdote I read swore they preferred truffles) and apparently were never quite smart enough to avoid being hacked to death by blokes in shining armor.

Then the drákon vanished. Just like that. Extinction came and ate them up like they were even more delicious than a virgin carrying a baby carrying a truffle through a wheat field.

Or so I surmised. Because as far as I could tell, there were only two of us left in this great and awful year of 1915, and ruddy little information to be found about even us two. Up until a short while ago, we both thought we were as human as anyone else.

But no.

There was me: Eleanore Jones, orphaned, impoverished, a slum girl scholarship student from the ghettos of London somehow improbably attending the prestigious Iverson School for Girls.

And the other, a boy as opposite my guttersnipe background as could be: Lord Armand Louis, the Most Honourable Marquess of Sherborne.

For a few short days and nights of my life, there had been Jesse, too. He wasn't a dragon. He was much, much more dazzling than that.

But I couldn't think about him yet.

Not yet.

So this is what you need to know first:

Ages ago, off the wild and jagged coast of Wessex, England, a stubborn fist of limestone and forest eroded from the mainland to become an island with no name. An island that sometimes wasn't even an island.

When the moon pulled just so, the island would shrink, surrounded by the blue salty waters of the Channel.

When the moon let go, the isle grew dry again, a mountain sitting on golden sand.

Ages after that, someone thought to build a castle upon it. The warlords then needed constant eyes to keep watch over the boats and tides, to stave off invasion by the barbarians who dwelled just across the sea.

The island had no name, but the castle had always been called Iverson. It was vast and eerie and composed of things like turrets and battlements and Gothic buttresses. It had a domed glass conservatory, a haunted grotto, and secret tunnels hollowed through its walls. Most significant, it had me and about a hundred other girls within it, plus a scattering of stern-faced teachers and staff. Iverson had been my home for approximately two months, ever since I'd been sent there from the orphanage in London because the Germans were bombing everything in sight.

(The orphanage, by the way, had been called Blisshaven, and you can imagine how appropriate that name was. Iverson's headmistress informed me that it'd been blown to bits four weeks after I'd left. I'd stolen a bottle of fine Riesling from her cellar that very night to celebrate its demise.)

My world of late had become a tumbling kaleidoscope of color and change. For the first time in my memory, I had a home of sorts. I had a room of my own. I had enough to eat. I had fellow students who nearly tolerated me, and one in particular who loathed me. I had the zealous attention of a handsome lord, whether I wished it or not—which had everything to do with the tolerating and the loathing.

And I had known true love. Then lost it.

“Dear Eleanore, blue-deviled again! How absolutely refreshing.”

Lady Sophia Pemington, the only girl at Iverson who would voluntarily be seen with me, plopped down in the chair next to mine at the library table and regarded me with her icy pale eyes. She was something of a mystery to me, a queen-of-the-class-at-any-cost type who still showed flashes of occasional generosity. She was also ruthlessly cunning—a trait I couldn't help but admire, since we shared it. In another life, we might have been genuine friends.

“You know, my nanny would say that if you aren't careful, your face will freeze like that.”

“Like what?” I asked.

Sophia screwed her features into an expression that could only be described as tragic, with sad pouty lips and woefully wrinkled eyebrows. She rubbed a hand across her hair, freeing flaxen strands from her normally tidy chignon.

I closed the French grammar text I’d been pretending to study and leaned back in my chair. The library at Iverson was properly tall and stately, trimmed in mahogany and polished brass and drowsy, post-luncheon students. Afternoon sunlight streaked through the stained-glass windows behind me, painting the table and my hands and Sophia, blue and amber and red.

“Is that supposed to be me?”

The lips grew poutier.

“My hair isn’t that messy,” I pointed out.

“Now,” she emphasized, dropping the face. “You should have seen yourself after—”

And Lady Sophia, who normally had all the tender instincts of a barracuda, stopped herself short. Even she knew some subjects were forbidden.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I didn’t mean—”

“Of course not.” I pushed to my feet. “Excuse me.”

But I’d stood up too quickly, and had to sway there a moment with my hands gripping the chair until the gray spinning fog cleared from my vision.

I’d been shot not long ago, you see. Shot more than once. It turned out that even dragons masquerading as girls needed time to recuperate from serious blood loss.

Sophia had a hand on my arm; she actually looked concerned. “Don’t be a ninny. I wasn’t trying to chase you off.”

“No,” murmured a new someone, just to our right. “You haven’t sense enough for that.”

Lady Chloe Pemington, brunette and gorgeous and a year older than her stepsister and I, had paused in a particularly brilliant patch of painted light. She granted us both a bloodred smile.

“Do have a care, darling sister. I’ve heard that once one touches true filth, it’s ever so hard to get clean again.”

“Well, that certainly explains your mouth,” I said. “Although it does make one wonder what you’ve been putting in it.”

“Not Lord Armand,” Sophia noted, which was really the best possible blow, because everyone knew that Chloe loved Armand, and had for years. She loved his enormous manor house and his family connections and his automobiles and his servants and most especially his glamorous future as a rich-rich-rich duke.

But Armand, it seemed, had finally noticed the tin beneath her gilt. Most of the other students were of the opinion that he was falling in love with me.

They had no idea we shared a bond far stranger and darker than that.

Chloe's eyes had gone to slits. "How dare—"

I flicked a hand at her, cutting her off. "Oh, marvelous. Are you about to go on about me daring things again? Truly? I'd think you'd have a new diatribe by now."

Mrs. Westcliffe, the school's headmistress, entered the library with a staccato clicking of heels and a rustling of black organdy skirts. She spotted us at once and paused, her gaze keen and her shoulders stiff; the three of us together could only mean trouble.

Chloe drew in a long breath through her nose. She exhaled, took a step closer to Sophia and me, and brought back the red smile.

"Soon we shall be off enjoying the summer, holidaying with all the very best people, attending dances and dinner parties and living the kind of life you will only ever read about in the rag sheets. And where shall you be, Eleanore? Which lice-ridden dosshouse shall be taking you in?"

"One with only the very best lice," I whispered back to her, but she was already swishing away.

Nightfall on the island nearly always meant velvet skies swept with stars, and the Channel filling the air with the tang of salt, and the slow, rhythmic drumbeat of waves crashing against the rocky shore.

As a child in London, I'd never smelled the sea, nor seen the heavens so spangled. I'd never known nights any hue other than black or brown or sooty gray, but here they came saturated in color. Navy, sapphire, indigo. And, very rarely: deep, pure amethyst.

An amethyst sky had welcomed me the first night I'd set foot upon the isle. It had reappeared for my first visit to Jesse in his cottage in the woods, and again for the night I'd been shot and Jesse had died.

It shone past my window on this night as well. It was a purple so thick and luminous I might well believe something Other than nature had created it. Something magical.

Less than a year ago I would have laughed at the thought. Tonight, though? Tonight I wondered.

I leaned out past the sill of my room's sole window, surveying the stars. My hair was unpinned, draping over my shoulders to tickle my crossed arms. In direct sunlight it looked an ordinary pale mousy brown, but when I glanced down at it now, I was unsurprised to see it had gone almost as purple as the heavens. It did that, taking on other tints, reflecting back whatever color was near, especially pink. I'd thought perhaps it was a dragon trait, but since Armand's hair always seemed to be the same glossy chestnut, I couldn't be sure.

My eyes were like that, too. Changeable. Lavender gray most of the time? Except, apparently, when they flashed incandescent. I'd never seen it happen—I guess I'd have to be looking in a mirror—but Armand and Jesse had told me about it.

I was sixteen years old, more or less. It was peculiar to think of my own body as a stranger, but it was. I was

learning new things about it nearly every day.

The room assigned to me at Iverson encompassed the top floor of one of the smaller stone turrets. It was round and crammed wall to wall with just a bed, an armoire, and a bureau. The other girls at the school all shared lavish suites bedecked in jeweled glass and rosewood and lace, but I didn't think any of that compared to what I had been given: Privacy. Solitude. A window glazed in a thousand diamond pieces, with hinges that worked and a view to the sea and the mainland bridge beyond.

And the stars.

Oh, the stars, twinkling and winking at me.

come out, they sang, a celestial chorus only I could hear. come out, beast. come fly to us.

Somewhere belowstairs, from one the parlors perhaps, a clock began to chime, followed by a cascade of others.

Midnight. Perfect.

I stepped back from the window so my nightshirt wouldn't blow away, took a deep breath, and Turned to smoke.

I'm not sure how best to describe what it's like. Imagine all the weight of your body, all those heavy pounds of muscle and bone and fat, abruptly melted away. You still exist, but you're vapor. Diaphanous coils, elegant and twisting, lighter than air. You can see and hear, even control your direction. You're not cold or warm. You feel no physical pain.

Only the hunger to fly.

This is the first step to Becoming a dragon.

As smoke, you can sift through an open window, float out past the walls of a castle. You can spread yourself as thin as sea spray or bunch up thick like a cloud. You can rise and rise and hear the stars more clearly than ever before, pulling at you, celebrating you. Humming and praising.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

William Fiscus:

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David Browning:

The reason why? Because this *The Deepest Night (Sweetest Dark)* is an unordinary book that the inside of the guide waiting for you to snap it but latter it will zap you with the secret it inside. Reading this book alongside it was fantastic author who all write the book in such incredible way makes the content inside easier to understand, entertaining method but still convey the meaning entirely. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this ever again or you going to regret it. This phenomenal book will give you a lot of advantages than the other book have got such as help improving your proficiency and your critical thinking method. So , still want to hesitate having that book? If I had been you I will go to the publication store hurriedly.

Billie Luster:

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Diana Erickson:

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