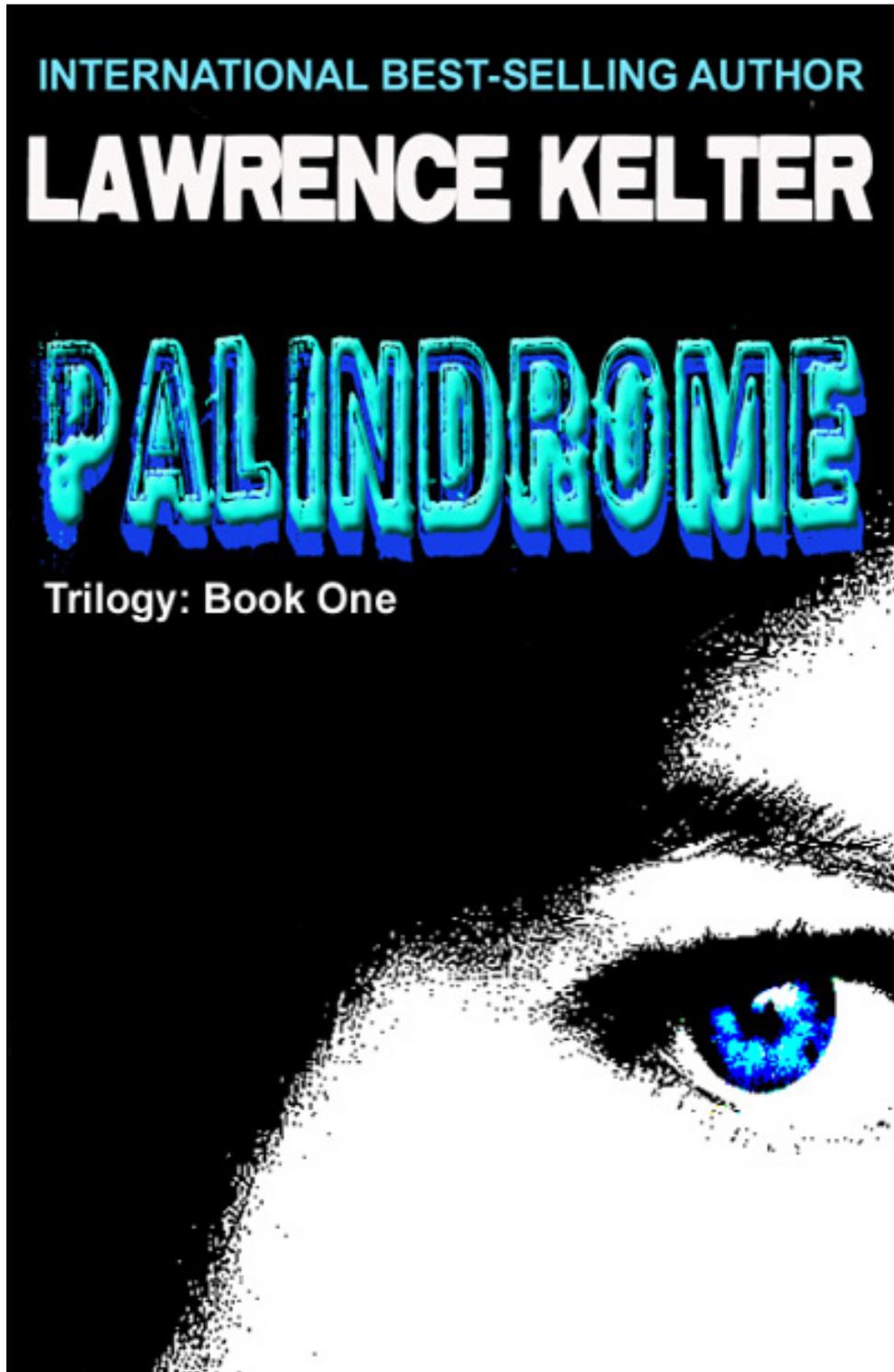


INTERNATIONAL BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

LAWRENCE KELTER

PALINDROME

Trilogy: Book One



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LAWRENCE KELTER**

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# PALINDROME

## Book One

### One: The Night Of

**I**t was a hot summer night, and the music was loud. Not just loud, pounding: Lady Gaga, pounding, Pink, pounding, Beyoncé, pounding. Three hundred kids were dancing under the moon-filled sky. The beat was so loud that it consumed you. How loud was it? It was so loud that half a mile away, citizens in the retirement community were stuffing cotton into their ears to get some sleep.

The air was warm and damp, uncomfortably damp. Skin was glistening on the dance floor. Some of it was mine. I was showing too much and not caring. I was wearing a short skirt. It was too short, shorter than it should've been. Jamie Foxx sang, "Blame it on the alcohol."

The Suds Shack was an insanely crowded Long Island watering hole. The drinks were cheap and strong. Thirsty young folks were lined up three-deep at the bar. It was a college student's dream come true. It was practically our *raison d'être*, drinking, laughing, blowing off steam, and loving it.

I was taking summer session so I would be able to graduate ahead of the pack. Jobs on Long Island were not very plentiful. They were almost nonexistent. It certainly wasn't a prospect to look forward to. So tonight, I was living in the moment and having a little fun. A couple of drinks can wash away an awful lot of pain.

My best friend Gabi was making her way across the floor. Her smile preceded her, as it always did, with those big, round cheeks and those incredible, round, hazel eyes. She was fanning herself with her hands (as if those paltry little things could cool off a girl her size). I was never sure if the Rubenesque figure bothered her. If it did, I certainly never knew it. Gabi was fun to be with all the time. She was always laughing and always smiling. If that was her way of coping with a poor self-image, I have to tell you, sign me up. She had to turn sideways so that she could cut across the dance floor. She was sweating up a storm, panting, and out of breath. She grabbed me by the hand and yanked me off the dance floor just as the band finished its set. I picked up someone's empty Corona. I pretended it was a microphone and began spooning her, singing "Grenade" by Bruno Mars: "To give me all your love is all I ever asked, 'cause what you don't understand is . . ."

Gabi didn't miss a beat. She grabbed a Coors Light out of some guy's hand just as the bottle was on its way to his mouth. She followed me right in, "I'd catch a grenade for ya, throw my hand on a blade for ya . . ."

We were drawing a crowd. We leaned in toward one another as the bar folks joined in, "I'd jump in front of a train for ya. You know I'd do anything for ya."

Our cover ended with a moment of hysterical laughter. The guy whose bottle of Coors had become Gabi's microphone came over thinking he had an opening to hit on us, but Gabi gave him the *no, no, no* finger wave. She handed him back his bottle. "Thanks for the prop, man," she said, and the guy returned from whence he came. Gabi had that in her repertoire; as sweet as she was, she could shut you down cold. I felt for that guy, getting emasculated with the slightest of hand gestures like that. To make things worse, the DJ was playing Pink's "U + Ur Hand." I hope the poor guy has a therapist on his speed dial.

As soon as the last song was over, the DJ began spinning Rihanna's "S&M." I grabbed Gabi and tried to yank her back onto the dance floor, but here too, she was in a different weight classification and there was no moving her.

"Damn, Lexa. Take a break, I'm dying," she said.

I was dancing in place, pretending that I didn't hear her. She dissed me with a look that said, *really?* I stopped for her sake and strutted over to the bar. "Two margaritas, extra salt." The bartender was on it in a flash. He poured the Cuervo heavy—his drinks were knocking me on my ass.

Gabi and I clinked glasses. The drinks were cold, sweet, and syrupy, a surefire remedy for the heat and humidity. We threw them down in a couple of quick gulps.

"*Someone's* feeling no pain," Gabi said.

"I'm miserable," I said with a grin so silly it betrayed me.

By the time we put our glasses down on the bar another round was waiting for us. I raised my hand to indicate to the bartender that we had not ordered another round. Not that we didn't want them, but who was going to pay for them? Anyway, a girl's got to know her limits. He pointed across the dance floor. I followed his gaze. "They're on *that* guy," he said.

I shrugged. "Cool," I said, waiting for the bartender to tell us his name.

He finally gave it up. "I'm Keith," he replied with a quick smile and then began to wipe down the bar.

"Thanks, Keith." He was pretty cute, but you could just see that he was full of himself. With a guy like Keith it was either "game on" or be gone.

Keith winked and then I turned to look at the guy who had plunked down his hard earned dough for us. He had piercing baby blues and a five o'clock shadow over a big square jaw. I toasted him with the fresh margarita and then turned toward Gabi. I mean I wasn't going to make it that easy for him—playing hard-to-get was fun. Besides, everything was moving so fast: too much alcohol and too much adrenaline, not the best combination for making an intelligent decision.

"Girl, he's cute. Are you going to talk to him? Gabi said."

“I’m thinking about it,” I started to giggle uncontrollably. “I’m totally shit-faced. Maybe I better not.”

“Are you *confuzzled*?”

“Yes, Gabi, I’m completely *confuzzled*.” She was using one of my self-invented portmanteaus. *Confuzzled* meant that I was confused, puzzled, and my thinking was a little fuzzy.

Gabi’s big, brown eyes grew wide. “Shit, Lexa, he’s coming over.”

“Crap!” I started to giggle again. The alcohol was taking over.

He was standing behind me. “You could be my type,” he said.

The poor guy had no idea who he was talking to. I could be anyone’s type if it suited me, and it had suited me many times before. There were things about me that were pretty bizarre. “I’m not sure that’s a proper advance,” I replied.

“Really, I thought that was a pretty good pickup line,” he said.

*Really?* I fought off another round of the giggles while I figured out how far I should let this go. You had to be careful with some of these Suffolk County boys; some of them were decent guys and some of them were pickup-truck-driving hicks, who in an earlier time would’ve sported a mullet haircut. A denim shirt with torn off sleeves was still a big look in Suffolk County. You know what I mean, the Joe Dirt look.

Which one was he?

“I’m Vincent,” he said, as he extended his hand. He was holding a Blue Moon Ale in the other. His cuffs were rolled up to the middle of his forearms, revealing the start of a full-sleeve tattoo, no colors, just black ink—an etching of an exotic woman. It was actually pretty tasteful.

*Vincent*, he’d said, not Vinnie or Vin. He sounded like a gumba to me, an Italian guy who might be a little too macho for his own good. He was cute nonetheless. Were gumbas okay? I was too sloshed to think straight. What do I do with this guy? Is a dance too much? Is small talk too little? Do I even want to get started? Like I said, we had just come out to blow off a little steam, and I didn’t need a new guy complicating my life. Not now, not so soon after putting recent troubles behind me.

Gabi was my sister in all things. She was in my head, listening to my thoughts as I was thinking them. She stepped between Vincent and me to create a little space. Okay, a lot of space, but it was badly needed space.

“Hi, I’m Gabrielle,” she said. “My friend was just about to introduce us.”

“Introduce *you*?” Vincent said. He smirked. “She hasn’t even introduced herself.”

“I’m her handler.” Gabi’s expression said, *deal with it*. “If you want to get to her you have to go through me.” I don’t know how she kept a straight face.

I wanted to break out laughing and almost lost it. Now a clod would have made a tasteless comment about Gabi’s weight and how tough getting through her would be, but Vincent had it under control. He was quiet for a moment before

speaking. His eyes softened. He actually looked kind of vulnerable. “One dance?” he said and made one of those wounded puppy dog faces.

Damn but I wanted to dance with him now. It wasn't a heavily contemplated decision; it was an impulse, like grabbing a scandal mag when you're on the checkout line at the supermarket. I took another sip of the margarita and instantly realized that it was one sip too many. My brain felt like it had broken loose and was floating around in my head—okay, I'm not being literal. Now, I've been over the edge before and knew the jeopardy of those murky, chartered waters. A girl like me, a girl with issues and secrets knew better than to lose control, but he took my hand and gently led me onto the dance floor. I didn't put up a fight. Something inside said, “Take it slow,” but the dance beat said, “Don't listen.” The beat said, “Shake your ass and have a good time.”

Gabi watched like a hawk from her post at the bar. She gave me that “I've got my eye on you” gesture that DeNiro made famous in those *Focker* movies. I acknowledged with a nod. It was my tether to stability, and to reality. Although it was meant to keep me centered, in actuality it gave me a false sense of security. It made me feel as if someone was looking after me and that no wrong could take place while Gabi was on guard.

Now, the odds of maintaining control were not in my favor; I had a primo buzz going on and the DJ started to spin Katy Perry. I mean it was like a setup or something. I'm normally a pretty adult type of thinker, but I was getting swept up in the moment and didn't feel like acting like an adult. I just wanted to have fun: screw summer session; screw the Long Island job market, a dwindling bank balance, pressure, and responsibility. Screw it all, just for a little while. I was not the responsible girl I needed to be, and for the moment, I didn't care.

Gabi was still keeping her eye on me. I had the feeling she would rip me off the dance floor if she became concerned about me. I was glad that she was watching. Did it mean that I didn't have to?

Now Vincent had some moves. He was a good dancer, a bit of a showboat, and I was doing my best to keep up with him. It wasn't long before things started to head south. Now we've all been there, teetering over the abyss but knowing you had what it took to pull yourself back to safety. I tried to think a simple thought through to a conclusion to test myself on something I had studied in school that afternoon. I tried and tried, but I couldn't string my thoughts together. The heat, the adrenaline, and the alcohol were all conspiring against me.

I looked back toward the bar for Gabi. She would see that I needed help. I never thought for a minute that she wouldn't be there when I needed her. She was always there, whether I asked or not. I caught a glimpse of her, heading to the ladies room. She looked like she was going to be sick. *Shit!* My head began to spin and the world started to close in around me. It grew darker and darker as the tunnel narrowed before me. I was no longer dancing. I was standing on the dance floor, doing my best to stay upright. I began to scan the faces around me for someone

who might help. I had made casual contact with the bartender and the DJ during the evening, but I was unable to make eye contact with either of them now.

After a moment I realized that everyone on the dance floor had begun to stare at me. I had become *that girl*, the one who couldn't keep her shit together—the one to stay clear of, or she would hurl all over you. Did anyone care enough to help?

*What to do? Find a chair. Put my head down to keep the blood flowing to my brain.*

There was only one person I could turn to for help, one person, who just happened to be a total stranger. I looked up at Vincent, hoping that he would turn out to be the guy I needed him to be. I searched his eyes to see if he understood, to see if he was concerned, and to see if he was going to be there for me. I searched his eyes for all those things, but what I saw chilled my heart and dashed any hope to bits. I didn't see concern or empathy in his eyes. He was not judging me, and he did not seem alarmed. He was staring at me coolly, like a lizard about to devour a fly. He was waiting for me to pass out.

## Two: Is That Me?

I felt groggy as I opened my eyes and was immediately aware that my environment had changed. The air was cool and dry. Even in my impaired state I knew that I was now indoors and lying on a bed. I touched my arm and felt goose bumps rise as I slid my fingers along my forearm. The room was dark and quiet, and it took a moment for me to realize that my top and skirt were gone. I frantically touched all over. *Thank God!* My bra and panties were still on. My heart started to race wildly and my adrenaline level surged. It took a moment before I was able to gather my thoughts. *What happened? How long have I been out?* The last thing I remembered was being on the dance floor and feeling as if I were about to pass out. I remembered Vincent's eyes, the eyes of a cold-blooded reptile. I didn't think I had been raped, but I couldn't be sure.

My mind was fuzzy and my head ached. My vision was blurred when a face came into view. It was my face. Christ, was I dreaming? Was I dead? I didn't know which horror to embrace. I could feel my chest tighten and my breathing become labored.

"Shhh! Don't make any noise." The face in front of me—my face—was holding a finger to its lips. "Are you all right?" she asked.

I nodded nervously before whispering. "I think so. I hope so." I felt tears welling up. "I don't know."

"You're okay. You haven't been here long. I think I got here in time."

And then I found a higher level of consciousness, and somehow I understood.

"Can you get up?" she said.

"I think so. I'll try."

"Slowly. Take it easy. You were really out of it."

I put my feet off the side of the bed one at a time and felt the cool wood floor beneath them. She handed me a sheet. I used it to cover up. "You wait right here. I've got something to do."

"No, wait with me. Wait here! Where are you going?" I pleaded in a muffled whisper.

"Don't worry," she said, "I've got this. You'll be fine." I watched as she walked to the mirror and checked her appearance. As she walked toward the bedroom doorway, I noticed that she was wearing my skirt and my top. The very edges of my lips curled upward.

She opened the door, and I watched her glide slowly but purposely out of the bedroom. She told me to wait, but I couldn't, I wouldn't. There was no glue strong enough to bind my feet where I stood. I crept slowly to the door and kept myself hidden in the shadow so that I wouldn't be seen.

Vincent was in the other room. He had just kicked off his shoes and had begun to unbutton his shirt. The TV was on and the volume was up high. He jumped when she entered the room. He clutched his chest.

“Shit, Babe, I thought you’d be out for hours yet,” Vincent said. The cocky, lizard-like expression was gone. Confronted, his expression indicated guilt.

*Out for hours yet? Why?* I wondered.

Vincent seemed as if he had been caught off guard. He shuffled his feet nervously as she approached. Clearly, he did not know how to deal with the change of circumstances. I had a clear view of them both as she moved closer.

When the change comes, it comes quickly. I watched attentively and waited for that moment when it would arrive, the moment of revelation that I knew would hit Vincent hard.

And then it came. I first saw it as the muscles of her upper back grew large. The slope of her shoulders changed into a powerful contour that led to well-developed deltoids. I saw her biceps swell and her arms become sinewy and muscular.

Vincent appeared to be frozen to the floor. He was mesmerized by the changes that were taking place before his eyes. Her leg swept backward, and her torso tilted into an aikido pose in preparation for the enormous blow I knew she was about to deliver. Without warning, her flattened hand shot forward like the release of a catapult. Her hands moved too quickly for my eyes to follow. I heard a loud whoosh as air was forced from Vincent’s lungs, and the thud of her hand as it smashed against Vincent’s chest. It was like the thunder that followed a flash of lightning. I heard the smack against the sheetrock as Vincent slammed into the wall. Plaster flaked to the floor. The wall cracked as it gave way to the force of the blow, except where Vincent’s head hit the wall, where the heavy support beam resided behind the sheetrock. Vincent slid to the floor. Blood ran from his ears.

The home theater system fell when Vincent slammed into the wall. It tumbled from the wall unit and crashed to the floor with a thud.

I continued to watch until I was sure that Vincent was unconscious and then I stepped into the room. I began to sob, although I didn’t understand which emotion had moved me to tears.

“He’s not moving,” I said. “Why isn’t he moving?”

“I hit him hard.”

“So hard that he’s not moving? Oh my God, I don’t know what to do. What should we do?”

“It will be all right,” she said. “Try to calm down.”

“Calm down, how can I calm down?”

She knelt alongside him and placed two fingers against the side of Vincent’s neck. “It’s okay; you can breathe easy,” she said. “He’s gone.”

### Three: The Morning After

**The** weather was much cooler on Saturday, and the sky was gray. Technically it was still morning, although I had the sense of being lost in time. I had lost hours the night before, as well as the memory of events I wasn't sure I wanted back. I couldn't even remember the address of the house from which I had been rescued, but somewhere in the town of Islandia, a dead man was decomposing. We had left him in the spot in which he had died, with the air-conditioning turned down so low that frost was practically blowing out of the vents. It would be days before the odor grew strong and the maggots began to digest his rotting tissue, but I doubted things would stay quiet that long.

I was sitting on a bench near Lake Ronkonkoma with my big sunglasses on, sunglasses large enough to shield me from a solar eclipse, sunglasses so large no one could see my face. I stuffed my hands into my pockets and waited for Ax to arrive. A breeze came up from the south. It felt good against my cheeks and bare arms. I had probably been alone no more than ten minutes, but it felt like much longer. I was struggling to piece it all together. What had happened from the time I passed out to the time I came to in Vincent's apartment? What had happened in between? Somewhere, down deep, I felt the need to go to the hospital and check to see if I had been raped, but I didn't. I had the sense that I had been rescued in time. Besides, a police report was the last thing I needed. I had always lived a complicated life, and I had learned for better or worse to cover my tracks. Above all else, I had learned to fly under the radar and live on the "down-low."

I heard the sound of a car approaching and then the creak of the rusted door as Ax got out. He was so light on his feet that I didn't hear him approach. He sat down next to me and handed me a cup of coffee. "Double pull of espresso—this should do the trick," he said.

I took the paper cup and shook my head woefully as I sucked the first sip through the hole in the plastic lid. "What the hell? Why does this always happen to me?"

"You know why it happened."

I laid my head down on his shoulder. "Yeah, I guess I do."

We were quiet for several moments. We sat, sipping coffee and allowing the passage of time to heal us. It was a process I was very familiar with: sitting and waiting, watching the clock and waiting for the pain to subside—sometimes it did and sometimes it didn't. I'm not sure how long we sat there, but neither of us complained about being bored. The healing was not quite done, and I didn't know how long it would take.

A pretty young woman was out walking her dog, a stunning black Lab. I noticed Ax staring at her. She looked like an early Marilyn Monroe—not the bleached blonde Marilyn with tweezed eyebrows, but the early Marilyn with auburn hair, the Marilyn that had yet to be tainted by Hollywood, President

John Kennedy, and his brother Bobby. She looked like Norma Jean Baker, the original. “She’s gorgeous.”

“By any man’s measure,” Ax said.

“Gonna talk to her?”

He continued to watch her while the Lab found a choice spot and returned to the earth that which he no longer needed. Ax turned to me, scolding me with a stare. “You know I don’t do that.”

“You’re painfully bashful. I’ll do it for you.”

“No.”

“Ah come on, I’m not wearing makeup; I can be you in two minutes. C’mon, please?” We were both in jeans, tees, and kicks. I would have to lose the bra of course, but I have the dexterity of a Three-Card Monte dealer and can get out of my bra in the blink of an eye.

“No.”

“Why? I’ve been you before.”

“And I’ve been you—but only for the right reasons. We can’t let it get out of control.”

“Ah c’mon, Ax, five minutes of innocent flirting. You can time me. If I don’t get her cell phone number in five minutes, I’ll pull the plug.”

“And what am I supposed to do, sit here, twiddle my thumbs, and watch myself flirt?”

“Go sit in the car if you don’t want to watch. Better still—” I took off my blast-shield sunglasses and handed them to him. “You’re as good as invisible.”

“No!”

“C’mon, she’s such a hottie . . . and she loves dogs. Where are you gonna find a combination like that?”

“Fine, but only because you’re such a ballbuster.”

“Yeah, right. You’ll thank me when the two of you are curled up in front of the fireplace.” I was feeling alive again. “She’s not looking.” My bra was already unhooked and on its way into my bag. “Turn toward me, I want to get this right.”

“I’m your brother, you can’t do this from memory?”

“Quiet.” I closed my eyes to clear my mind and then gazed intently into Ax’s eyes. The eyes are the hardest part to get right. It takes lots of concentration to copy the pigmentation in the iris accurately. I can’t feel the iris as it changes, but somehow I know when it’s just right. The muscles and soft tissue are easier. I can feel them moving and squeezing as I meld them into the desired shape. Ax’s nose has a slight bump in it from where his sensei had accidentally broken it. In a moment, I felt my hair retreat off my shoulders. My jeans grew loose in the seat, and the sleeves of my tee shirt tightened around my arms.

“Hurry, she’s about to—”

“Done.” I sprang off the bench and turned to go after her. “Your dog is gorgeous,” I said as I called after her. She stopped and waited for me. I turned

back to Ax after I saw the smile I had been greeted with. I whispered to Ax, “It’s in the bag.”

So I looked like a man but I was, after all, a woman and once we started to talk . . . well, you know, it was a solid ten minutes before I returned. Ax was waiting eagerly for me when I got back. “So?” he asked with excitement in his voice.

I held up my phone so he could read the new contact. “Her name is Geena, and you have plans for next weekend.” He smiled the biggest smile I had seen from him in a long time. We pounded fists.

“You’re unbelievable.”

“And she’s even prettier up close. I should’ve—”

“You should’ve what . . . kept her number for yourself?”

“Don’t knock it until you’ve tried it.” I started singing Katy Perry, “I kissed a girl and I liked it.” I’m a regular hetero girl, but there’s no denying that girls are pretty.

“What do you think would’ve happened when she realized that you don’t have any junk?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know, what do you think she’ll do when she realizes you suck at making conversation?”

Ax couldn’t hold back the laughter. “*Sista*, that’s when I break out my junk.”

We were both rolling. “You are such a smooth talker.” Tears were running down my cheeks. We had almost forgotten that we had just killed a man.

Ax stopped laughing. I saw it in his eyes immediately; reality had just clawed its way back to the surface. “No one will ever catch us,” I said.

“I don’t want to have to live the rest of my life being someone else: the guy at the mall, someone I sit down next to on the railroad—that’s not the kind of life that I want.”

“He deserved it. You said he drugged me.”

“Oh, he definitely drugged you. I found GHB tablets in his pockets. I got there just in time.”

“Thank you.” More tears, tears of sorrow mixing with the tears of laughter that were already drying on my cheeks. “So, you didn’t tell me . . . how did you find me?”

Ax lowered his head. He was embarrassed.

“You followed me again, didn’t you?”

He nodded without looking at me. “I just do it to—”

Part of me wanted to admonish him for the unending invasion of my privacy, but the other half of me wanted to hug him again and cry. “I know. You’re protective.” I kissed him on the cheek. “What would I do without you?” I thought back to the evening before and searched for the face in the crowd my brother might have hidden behind, but like the rest of the evening, everything was a blur.

I was thankful, of course, that he had been there last night. He had been there for me many times before.

"I didn't mean to kill him," Ax said, "but I knew he was dead as soon as I hit him. I lost control."

"I'm the one who lost control, not you. I got drunk and put myself in a dangerous situation. You found me with a lowlife animal who drugged me and was about to rape me. You can't blame yourself."

"But my training?"

"Easy on yourself, ninja boy, you're only human."

"I practice control everyday. I shouldn't have let my emotions take over the way they did."

"Like I said, Ax . . . Anyway, what's done is done."

My attempt to console Ax was inadequate. He stood. "I'd better go."

I knew that Gabi had been in tears since the evening before. She had gotten sick and missed the entire event while she was in the bathroom at the Suds Shack. She was going to meet me in a few minutes. I knew her so well. I knew that she felt obligated to bare her soul. She was guilt-laden over last night's poorly timed case of indigestion. I checked the time on my cell phone. "Gabi will be here any minute."

"Going, going, gone."

I agreed with a tentative nod but didn't want to see Ax leave. He was halfway to his car when I called out. "There's one thing I can't figure out—Vincent never had the chance to drug me. I had the margarita in my hand until I finished it."

Ax got into his car and pulled the creaking door shut. He leaned out the window. "Someone did it. We'll just have to figure out who's guilty."

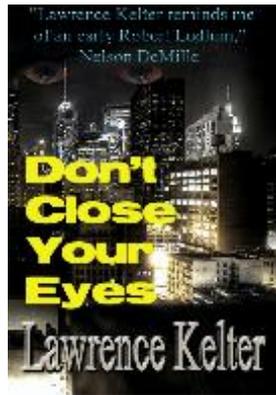
Ax pulled away. I turned and looked at Lake Ronkonkoma and wondered if it was anywhere as deep as the trouble the two of us had just found.



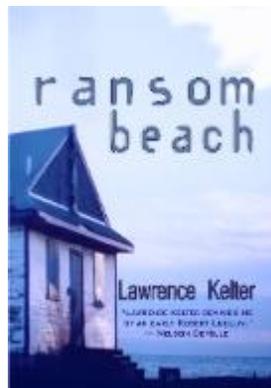
## BIOGRAPHY

LAWRENCE KELTER IS THE BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF THE STEPHANIE CHALICE MYSTERY SERIES AND OTHER WORKS OF FICTION. A RESIDENT NEW YORKER, HE OFTEN USES MANHATTAN AND LONG ISLAND AS BACKDROPS FOR HIS STORIES. EARLY IN HIS CAREER, HE RECEIVED DIRECTION FROM BEST-SELLING NOVELIST NELSON DEMILLE, WHO PUT PENCIL TO PAPER TO ASSIST IN THE EDITING OF HIS FIRST BOOK. HIS NOVELS ARE QUICKLY PACED AND FINISH WITH A TWIST ENDING.

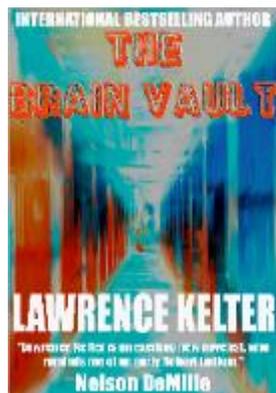
## THE STEPHANIE CHALICE MYSTERY SERIES



Stephanie Chalice is a cop's cop. She's bold, smart, independent and beautiful—a powerhouse working in NYPD's homicide unit. She's seen a lot in her years on the force, but she's never come across anything like the case she's up against now. A murdering psychopath is stalking Manhattan, on the prowl for a very special type of woman. Part of his twisted game is intentionally leaving clues for the police, clues designed not only to taunt, but also to do something much worse. Will Chalice be able to discover his real purpose before another woman dies?



Chalice is back and not a minute too soon. Her newest nemesis is a con artist and bloodthirsty killer, a chameleon able to change her identity at will. Chalice is called into action when a billionaire's ward, an autistic child, is abducted from beneath the nose of his well trained bodyguard. The kidnap victim is no ordinary child; he has never learned to read or write, and yet is capable of channeling the prophecies of his long dead ancestor; those that have long been memorialized, and those now thought to be ages lost. Chalice is forced to decipher clues that defy explanation. Will she be able to outthink her diabolical opponent before it's too late?



Detective Chalice is called into action when an unconscious man is found in Central Park. Barely alive, John Doe is clad only in a torn bed sheet and has sustained a life threatening wound. His body is covered in scars, essentially a tapestry chronicling his history as a torture victim. Stranger still, a human skull lies just inches away. Chalice has just two leads in this case, a skull that has been sterilized and found to be evidence free, and a comatose witness to a murder—tough odds, even for NYPD's best and brightest.

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### PALINDROME

#### Trilogy: Book One

It's a hot summer night on Long Island. The Suds Shack is packed-lots of kids partying at the bar. In the crowd is a girl who is different from anyone else.

A guy on the prowl-plop goes a pill into her drink. Her world spins out of control.

He thought he had her; now he's dead, and she's coming for his accomplice. He picked the wrong girl to mess with.

She can look like you or me, or anyone else she may choose to become. Lexa and her brother, Ax have a special talent, a unique gift.

In Book One, Lexa and Ax find themselves entangled in a web of murder, drugs, and manipulation.

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