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**STEPHANIE
JAMES**
*Night Of
The Magician*



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The Storm Gathered Its Forces,

streaking the sky with lightning. Curled in the middle of the fourposter bed, Ariana dreamed of a dark-haired magician who wanted to claim power over her.

And because he was so interwoven in the fabric of her dreams, Ariana knew only a sense of inevitability when her lashes fluttered open two hours later in response to a particularly loud crash of thunder.

There on the balcony, silhouetted by a burst of lightning, stood her magician.

STEPHANIE JAMES

readily admits that the chief influence on her writing is her “lifelong addiction to romantic daydreaming.” She has spent the past nine years living and working with her engineer husband in a wide variety of places, including the Caribbean, the Southeast, and the Pacific Northwest. Ms. James currently resides in California. Stephanie James is a pseudonym for Jayne Krentz, who also writes as Jayne Castle.

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**STEPHANIE
JAMES**
*Night Of
The Magician*



Silhouette Desire

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Night Of The Magician

1



Historically it has not been considered wise to insult a magician," Lucian Hawk warned in a dark velvet drawl.

"Are you threatening to saw me in half?" Ariana Warfield demanded with great interest. "Or make me disappear into thin air?" She smiled up at him, smoky blue eyes wide and guileless behind the lenses of her oversized designer glasses.

It was her brother Drake who rushed to smooth over the incipient hostilities which had flared up a few minutes earlier when he had introduced Ariana to the magician. He did so with his usual forthright acknowledgment of what he considered his sister's failings. "Pay no attention to her, Lucian. She's always like this around men of, er, lower financial status." He grinned cheerfully. "She doesn't generally associate with men who earn less than she does, you see!"

"I see." Lucian nodded at the revelation, not appearing to be overly surprised. He studied the woman in front

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of him with a critical, speculative glance, topaz eyes examining her from behind the lenses of his own glasses. Lucian Hawk's frames were not as aggressively stylish as Ariana's. He hadn't opted for the chic aviator look or even the academic style. His glasses were businesslike and very traditional. Strong black lines framed the strange honey-gold of his eyes and matched in color the intense velvet black of his hair.

Ariana, to her horror, was aware of a rush of embarrassed warmth as she endured the gleaming topaz of his glance. Had she insulted the man? In self-defense she turned on her brother, who was two years younger than her own thirty years of age, and therefore fair game as a scapegoat.

"I was not being insulting, Drake. I merely commented upon the rather hand-to-mouth existence which must be the fate of the usual magician!"

"Asking a man why he doesn't settle down and get a decent, regular job is often considered something of an insult," Drake shot back dryly.

"Especially when the man is my age," Lucian pointed out. "I'm nearly forty, you know. It should be obvious that I'm probably not going to amount to anything more than I already am." There was a taunting challenge in his gaze now, and Ariana was vividly aware of it.

"Be reasonable, Ariana," Drake went on, his Warfield blue eyes laughing at his sister. "You didn't come to my party tonight to meet a prospective husband. You came to hire a magician."

"Voilà!" Lucian murmured, sipping from his glass of whiskey and soda. "You see before you one magician for hire. Maybe."

"Maybe!" Ariana swung her narrowed gaze back to meet his. "What do you mean, 'maybe'? Are you interested in the job or not?"

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"I'm interested in talking about it," Lucian temporized. "Why don't we let Drake get back to his other guests while we find a quiet spot and discuss the matter?" He took Ariana's arm and nodded at his host. "It's all right, Drake. I'll send for you if the insults start flying too thick and fast for me to stop them on my own."

"Now just a minute," Ariana began waspishly.

But her good-looking younger brother was already trading an easy man-to-man look with Lucian. "Okay, I'll see you both later. Try the den at the back of the apartment, it should be relatively quiet there. Be nice to him, Ari," he advised his sister. "You need him for what you've got in mind. And he's right, you know. It's not generally considered smart to insult magicians!"

Before Ariana could give her brother her views on the subject, he was making his way back into the throng of colorful people that filled his oversized living room. Drake's parties were always full of odd, eccentric, interesting and occasionally fascinating people. He collected them without regard to social or financial status. The only requirement for being invited to one of Drake Warfield's parties was being interesting. Drake was an inventor, and he claimed that he needed these parties to inspire his thinking processes.

He'd tried telling that to the IRS one year, Ariana recalled as Lucian led her firmly through the crowd. But the IRS hadn't agreed to his proposal for writing off the monthly parties as a business expense. As usual, it was Ariana who had been called upon to straighten out the resulting financial misunderstanding.

The masculine hand on her arm was beginning to become annoying, she decided as Lucian guided her toward the doorway. It was a large hand with a supple strength in the fingers, and her arm felt quite powerless in its grip.

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"I think I can manage to make it all the way back to the den on my own," she said dryly, attempting unsuccessfully to release herself. "Would you mind letting go of my arm? You're leaving imprints in the skin!"

Lucian arched one black brow as he glanced down at his captive. "Sorry. Didn't want to take a chance on losing you in this crowd."

"I'm not likely to disappear in the short distance between the living room and the den!"

"A good magician could make you disappear in about two seconds," he pointed out. "But as long as I've got a grip on you, you're safe."

"Thanks!" she muttered caustically. "Are there any other magicians here tonight of which I must be wary?"

"One never knows," Lucian said smoothly.

He whisked her through the doorway, out of the white-on-white living room which had been decorated for Drake by Aunt Philomena. Aunt Philomena redecorated both Drake's and Ariana's living rooms twice a year; not because they liked having their apartments redecorated so frequently but because Philomena loved to do it and Ariana and Drake loved her. It had been Philomena Warfield who had taken them in upon the death of their parents.

For the past six months Ariana's living room had been done in shades of French vanilla and papaya. One of the first clues to the fact that something unusual and disturbing had occurred in Aunt Philomena's life was Ariana's realization two weeks earlier that there had been no discussion of how to redecorate her apartment for the coming six months. But it was the new rash of checks being written on her aunt's money market account which had really alerted Ariana.

If there was one thing Ariana understood, it was money.

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Surreptitiously she studied the man who was leading her down the carpeted hall. A magician. Did she really have to get herself involved with this sort of man in order to carry out her plan?

Lucian Hawk stood an inch or two under six feet, she estimated. And he looked the age he had hinted at a few minutes earlier. He was definitely nearly forty.

But it was a hard, tough, streetwise forty, not the slightly paunchy, fading, comfortable forty that seemed to visit softer men. Ariana had a hunch that there had never been much that was soft about Lucian Hawk or his life.

His midnight dark hair was cut relatively short in a casual, controlled style, and there was a lacing of silver in it. The depths of his topaz eyes held a cool, savvy intelligence. Whatever handsomeness the harshly carved face had once held had been transcended over the years by an almost fierce strength reflected in the aggressive line of nose and jaw.

At least he hadn't dressed with the kind of outlandish showmanship one might expect in a magician, Ariana decided thankfully. So many of Drake's eccentric friends advertised their highly individual lifestyles with their clothes. Lucian was wearing a pair of dark-toned cotton twill trousers that rode low on a lean waist, and a buttery-soft suede pullover shirt with an open collar. There was something very right about the suede on him, Ariana thought absently. It went with the quality of rough, virile aggression that she sensed lay close to the surface of the man. A pair of casual leather handsewns on his feet and a rather worn belt completed his outfit.

"Ah, here we are." Lucian threw open a door at the end of the hall. "It looks like whoever did Drake's living room didn't get her hands on his den!" He glanced appreciatively around at the warm, richly comfortable