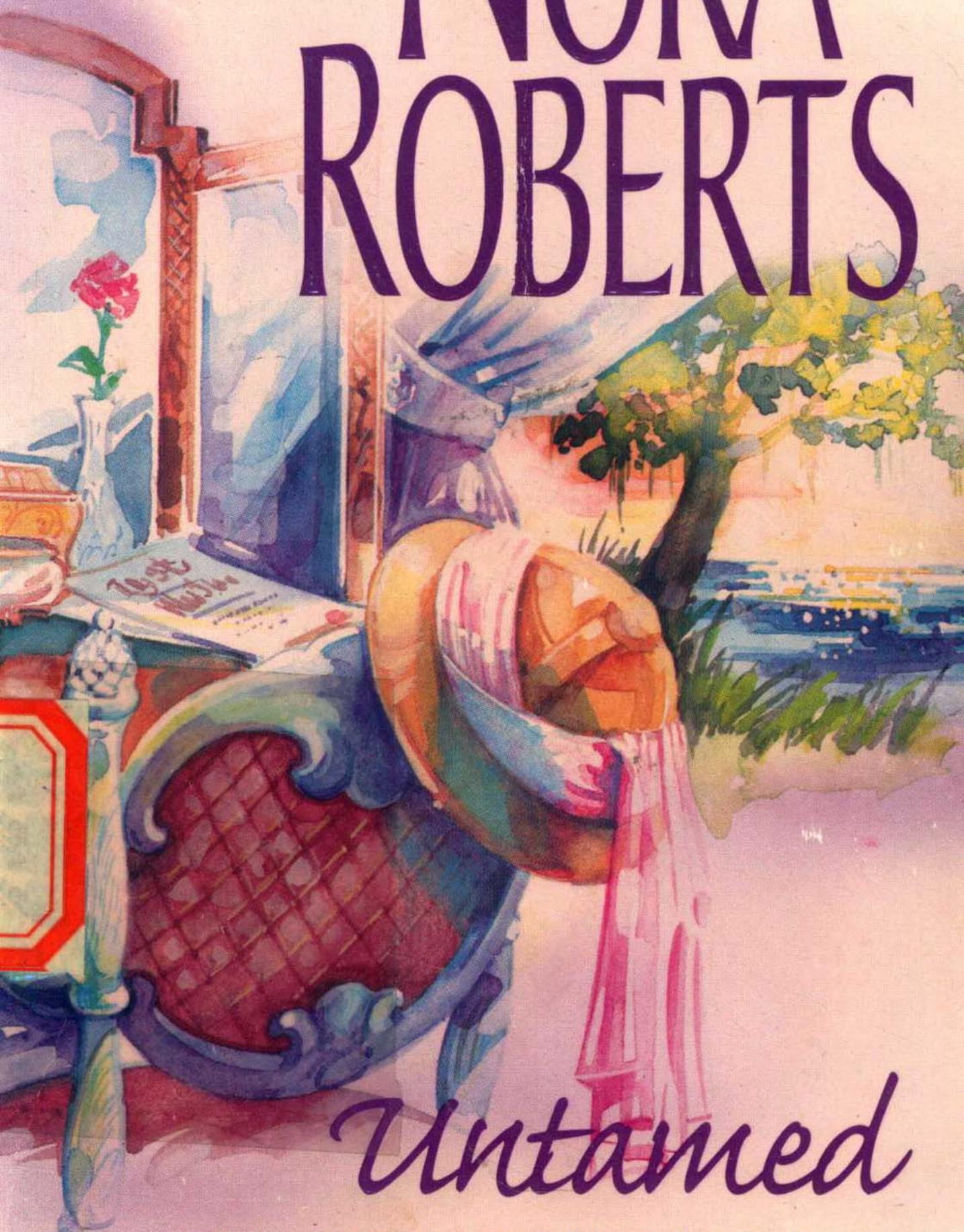


Multi-New York Times
bestselling author

NORA ROBERTS



Untamed

She was willful, wild and about to fall head over heels in love!

NORA ROBERTS

Untamed



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America's Publisher of Contemporary Romance

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For my sons.
Life's a circus.
Go for it!



SILHOUETTE BOOKS



UNTAMED

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Dear Reader,

There is nothing like a classic romance—especially when it's from beloved author Nora Roberts! In fact, the book you hold in your hand received the prestigious RITA® Award when it was first published in the Silhouette Romance line many years ago. With its spirited yet innocent heroine and strong yet single-minded hero, *Untamed* is a masterful example of the kinds of stories Nora wrote when she was first starting out as a writer. It is the tale of Jovilette Wilder as she struggles to protect the only life she has ever known from Keane Prescott, the man who seems determined to destroy her home—and steal her heart.

We hope you enjoy this romantic treasure from Nora's early career.

Happy reading!

The Editors
Silhouette Books

Praise for #1 *New York Times*
bestselling author

NORA ROBERTS

"Her stories have fueled the dreams
of twenty-five million readers."

—*Entertainment Weekly*

"Roberts is indeed a word artist, painting her story
and her characters with vitality and verve."

—*Los Angeles Daily News*

"Nora Roberts just keeps
getting better and better."

—*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

"Roberts creates exceptional characters who...
live on in the reader's imagination and heart."

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"Roberts has a warm feel for her characters
and an eye for the evocative detail."

—*Chicago Tribune*

"Roberts...is at the top of her game."

—*People magazine*

"Roberts' bestselling novels are
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—*USA TODAY*

"...an author of extraordinary power."

—*Rave Reviews*

"Nora Roberts' gift...is her ability to pull the reader
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- Birds, Bees and Babies* 1994
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"All I Want for Christmas"



NORA ROBERTS

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Nora Roberts is "a word artist, painting her story and characters with vitality and verve," according to the *Los Angeles Daily News*. She has published over a hundred and forty novels, and her work has been optioned and made into films, excerpted in *Good Housekeeping* and has been translated into over twenty-five different languages and published all over the world.

In addition to her amazing success in mainstream, Nora has a large and loyal category-romance audience, which took her to their hearts in 1981 with her very first book, a Silhouette Romance novel.

With over 200 million copies of her books in print worldwide and a total of eighty-seven *New York Times* bestsellers as of 2002, twenty-two of them reaching #1, she is truly a publishing phenomenon.

Chapter One

At the crack of the whip, twelve lions stood on their haunches and pawed the air. On command, they began to leap from pedestal to pedestal in a quick, close-formation, figure-eight pattern. This required split-second timing. With voice and hand commands the trainer kept the tawny, springing bodies moving.

“Well done, Pandora.”

At her name and the signal, the muscular lioness leaped to the ground and lay down on her side. One by one the others followed suit, until, snarling and baring their teeth, they stretched across the tanbark. A male was positioned beside each female; at a sharp reproof from the trainer, Merlin ceased nibbling on Ophelia's ear.

“Heads up!” They obeyed as the trainer walked

briskly in front of them. The whip was tossed aside with a flourish, then, with apparent nonchalance, the trainer reclined lengthwise across the warm bodies. The center cat, a full-maned African, let out a great, echoing bellow. As a reward for his response to the cue, his ear was given a good scratching. The trainer rose from the feline couch, clapped hands and brought the lions to their feet. Then, with a hand signal, each was called by name and sent through the chute and into their cages. One stayed behind, a huge, black-maned cat who, like an ordinary tabby, circled and rubbed up against his trainer's legs.

Deftly, a rope was attached to a chain that was hidden under his mane. Then, with swift agility, the trainer mounted the lion's back. As the door of the big cage opened, lion and rider passed through for a tour of the practice ring. When they reached the back door of the ring barn, Merlin, the obliging lion, was transferred to a wheel cage.

"Well, Duffy." Jo turned after the cage was secured. "Are we ready for the road?"

Duffy was a small, round man with a monk's fringe of chestnut hair and a face that exploded with ginger freckles. His open smile and Irish blue eyes gave him the look of an aging choirboy. His mind was sharp, shrewd and scrappy. He was the best manager Prescott's Circus Colossus could have had.

"Since we open in Ocala tomorrow," he replied in a raspy voice, "you'd better be ready." He shifted

his fat cigar stump from the right side of his mouth to the left.

Jo merely smiled, then stretched to loosen muscles grown taut during the thirty minutes in the cage. "My cats are ready, Duffy. It's been a long winter. They need to get back on the road as much as the rest of us."

Duffy frowned. As circumstances had it, he stood only inches higher than his animal trainer. Widely spaced, almond-shaped eyes stared back at him. They were as sharp and green as emeralds, surrounded by thick, inky lashes. At the moment they were fearless and amused, but Duffy had seen them frightened, vulnerable and lost. He shifted his cigar again and took two quick puffs as Jo gave a cage hand instructions.

He remembered Steve Wilder, Jo's father. He had been one of the best cat men in the business. Jo was as good with the cats as Wilder had been. In some ways, Duffy acknowledged, even better. But she had the traits of her mother: delicate build; dark, passionate looks. Jolivette Wilder was as slender as her aerialist mother had been, with bold green eyes and straight, raven black hair that fell to just below her waist. Her brows were delicately arched, her nose small and straight, her cheekbones high and elegant, while her mouth was full and soft. Her skin was tawny from the Florida sun; it added to her gypsy-like appearance. Confidence added spark to the beauty.

Finishing her instructions, Jo tucked her arm through Duffy's. She had seen that frown before. "Somebody quit?" she asked as they began to walk toward Duffy's office.

"Nope."

His monosyllabic reply caused Jo to lift a brow. It was not often Duffy answered any question briefly. Years of experience told her to hold her tongue as they moved across the compound.

Rehearsals were going on everywhere. Vito the wire walker informally sharpened his act on a cable stretched between two trees. The Mendalsons called out to each other as they tossed their juggling pins high in the air, while the equestrian act led their horses into the ring barn. She saw one of the Stevenson girls walking on stilts. She'd be six now, Jo mused, tossing the hair from her eyes as she watched the young girl's wavering progress. Jo remembered the year she had been born. It had been that same year that she had been allowed to work the big cage alone. She had been sixteen, and it had been another full year before she had been permitted to work an audience.

For Jo, there had never been any home but the circus. She had been born during the winter break, had been tucked into her parents' trailer the following spring to spend her first year and each subsequent one of her life thereafter on the road. She had inherited both her fascination and her flair with animals from

her father, her style and grace of movement from her mother. Though she had lost both parents fifteen years before, they continued to influence her. Their legacy to her had been a world of restlessness, a world of fantasies. She had grown up playing with lion cubs, riding elephants, wearing spangles and traveling like a gypsy.

Jo glanced down at a cluster of daffodils growing by the side of Prescott's winter office and smiled. She remembered planting them when she had been thirteen and in love with a tumbler. She remembered, too, the man who had stooped beside her, offering advice on bulb planting and broken hearts. As Jo thought of Frank Prescott, her smile grew sad.

"I still can't believe he's gone," she murmured as she and Duffy moved inside.

Duffy's office was sparsely furnished with a wooden desk, metal filing cabinets and two spindly chairs. A collage of posters adorned the walls. They promised the amazing, the astounding, the incredible: elephants that danced, men who flew through the air, beautiful girls who spun by their teeth, raging tigers that rode horseback. Tumblers, clowns, lions, strong men, fat ladies, boys who could balance on their forefingers; they brought the magic of the circus into the drab little room.

As Jo glanced over at a narrow pine door, Duffy followed her gaze. "I keep expecting him to come busting through there with some crazy new idea," he

mumbled as he began to fiddle with his prize possession, an automatic coffee maker.

“Do you?” With a sigh Jo straddled a chair, then rested her chin on its back. “We all miss him. It’s not going to seem the same without him this year.” She looked up suddenly, and her eyes were angry. “He wasn’t an old man, Duffy. Heart attacks should be for old men.” She brooded into space, touched again with the injustice of Frank Prescott’s death.

He had been barely into his fifties and full of laughter and simple kindness. Jo had loved him and trusted him without reservation. At his death she had grieved for him more acutely than she had for her own parents. In her longest memory he had been the core of her life.

“It’s been nearly six months,” Duffy said gruffly as he studied her face. When Jo glanced up, he stuck out a mug of coffee.

“I know.” She took the mug, letting it warm her hands in the chilly March morning. Resolutely, she shook off the mood. Frank would not have wanted to leave sadness behind. Jo studied the coffee, then sipped. It was predictably dreadful. “Rumor has it we’re following last year’s route to the letter. Thirteen states.” Jo smiled, watching Duffy wince over his coffee before he downed it. “Not superstitious, are you?” She grinned, knowing he kept a four-leaf clover in his billfold.

“*Pah!*” he said indignantly, coloring under his