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# NORA ROBERTS

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Containing three classic novels, *Partners*,  
*The Art of Deception* and *Night Moves*

# NORA ROBERTS

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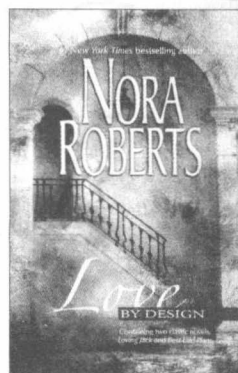
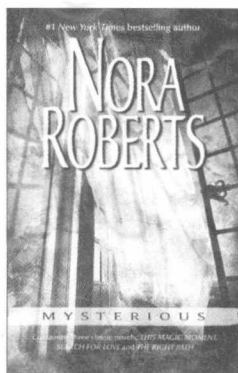
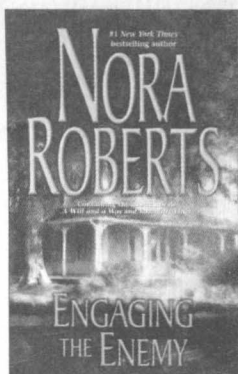
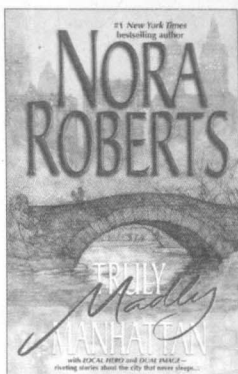
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Dear Reader,

In this trio of classic novels, the incomparable Nora Roberts shows her mastery of romantic suspense. *Suspicious* features three thrilling tales full of mystery, intrigue and—of course—love.

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While visiting the home of an eccentric sculptor, Adam Haines is drawn to his host's beautiful daughter, Kirby Fairchild. But what secret is he hiding from her? Is Adam well versed in *The Art of Deception* as well as passion?

Maggie Fitzgerald left California seeking peace and solitude in the Maryland hills. She never expected to find a skeleton in her backyard—or love in the arms of irresistible Cliff Delaney. Can Cliff keep Maggie safe until the mystery of the skeleton is solved, in *Night Moves*?

We hope you enjoy these reader favorites, available again for the first time in several years.

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# PARTNERS

For Bruce, who changed my plans.



## *Chapter 1*

Bedlam. Phones rang continuously. People shouted, muttered or swore, sitting or on the run. Typewriter keys clattered at varying paces from every direction. There was the scent of old coffee, fresh bread, tobacco smoke and human sweat. An insane asylum? Several of the inmates would have agreed with that description of the city room of the *New Orleans Herald*, especially at deadline.

For most of the staff the chaos went unnoticed, as the inhaling and exhaling of air went unnoticed. There were times when each one of them was too involved with their own daily crises or triumphs to be aware of the dozens of others springing up around them. Not that teamwork was ignored. All were bound, by love for, or obsession with, their jobs, in the exclusive community of journalists. Still each would concentrate on, and greedily guard, his or her own story, own sources and own style. A successful print reporter thrives on pressure and confusion and a hot lead.

Matthew Bates had cut his teeth on newsprint. He'd worked it from every angle from newsboy on the Lower East Side of Manhattan to feature reporter. He'd carried coffee, run copy, written obituaries and covered flower shows.

The ability to scent out a story and draw the meat from it wasn't something he'd learned in his journalism courses; he'd

been born with it. His years of structured classes, study and practice had honed the style and technique of a talent that was as inherent as the color of his eyes.

At the age of thirty, Matt was casually cynical but not without humor for life's twists and turns. He liked people without having illusions about them. He understood and accepted that humans were basically ridiculous. How else could he work in a room full of crazy people in a profession that constantly exposed and exploited the human race?

Finishing a story, he called out for a copy boy, then leaned back to let his mind rest for the first time in three hours. A year ago, he'd left New York to accept the position on the *Herald*, wanting, perhaps needing, a change. Restless, he thought now. He'd been restless for...something. And New Orleans was as hard and demanding a town as New York, with more elegant edges.

He worked the police beat and liked it. It was a tough world, and murder and desperation were parts of it that couldn't be ignored. The homicide he'd just covered had been senseless and cruel. It had been life; it had been news. Now, he wiped the death of the eighteen-year-old girl out of his mind. Objectivity came first, unless he wanted to try a new profession. Yet it took a concentrated effort to erase her image and her ending from his mind.

He hadn't the looks of a seasoned, hard-boiled reporter, and he knew it. It had exasperated him in his twenties that he looked more like a carefree surfer than a newsman. Now, it amused him.

He had a lean, subtly muscled body that was more at home in jeans than a three-piece suit, with a height that only added a feeling of ranginess. His dark blond hair curled as it chose, over his ears, down to the collar of his shirt. It merely added to the image of a laid-back, easygoing male who'd rather be sitting on the beach than pounding the pavement. More than one source had talked freely to the façade without fully comprehending the man beneath the image. When and if they did, Matt already had the story.

When he chose, he could be charming, even elegant. But the good-humored blue eyes could turn to fire or, more dan-

gerous, ice. Beneath the easy exterior was a cold, hard determination and a smoldering temper. Matt accepted this with a shrug. He was human, and entitled to be ridiculous.

With a half smile lingering around his mouth, he turned to the woman seated across from him. Laurel Armand—with a face as romantic as her name. She had an aura of delicacy that came from fine bones and an ivory skin that made a man want to touch, and touch gently. Her hair fell in clouds of misty black, swept back from her face, spilling onto her shoulders. Hair made for a man to dive his fingers into, bury his face in. Her eyes were the color of emeralds, dark and rich.

It was the face of a nineteenth-century belle whose life revolved around gracious indolence and quiet gentility. And her voice was just as feminine, Matt mused. It turned vowels into liquid and smoothed consonants. It never flattened, never twanged, but flowed like a leisurely stream.

The voice, he reflected as his smile widened, was just as deceptive as the face. The lady was a sharp, ambitious reporter with a stubborn streak and a flaring temper. One of his favorite pastimes was setting a match to it.

Her brows were drawn together as she finished the last line of her copy. Satisfied, Laurel whipped the sheet from her typewriter, called for a copy boy, then focused on the man across from her. Automatically, her spine straightened. She already knew he was going to bait her, and that—damn it—she would bite.

“Do you have a problem, Matthew?” Her tone was soft and faintly bored.

“No problem, Laurellie.” He watched the annoyance flare into her eyes at his use of her full name.

“Don’t you have a murder or armed robbery to go play with?”

His mouth curved, charmingly, deepening the creases in his face. “Not at the moment. Off your soapbox for the day?”

She gritted her teeth on a spate of furious words. He never failed to dig for the emotion that seeped into her work, and she never failed to defend it. Not this time, Laurel told herself as she balled her hands into fists under her desk. “I leave the

cynicism to you, Matthew," she returned with a sweetness belied by the daggers in her eyes. "You're so good at it."

"Yeah. How about a bet on whose story makes page one?"

She lifted one fragile, arched brow—a gesture he particularly admired. "I wouldn't want to take your money, Matthew."

"I don't mind taking yours." Grinning, he rose to walk around their desk and bend down to her ear. "Five bucks, magnolia blossom. Even though your papa owns the paper, our editors know the difference between reporting and crusading."

He felt the heat rise, heard the soft hiss of breath. It was tempting, very tempting, to crush his mouth onto those soft, pouting lips and taste the fury. Even as the need worked into him, Matt reminded himself that wasn't the way to outwit her.

"You're on, Bates, but make it ten." Laurel stood. It infuriated her that she had to tilt her head back to meet his eyes. It infuriated her more that the eyes were confident, amused and beautiful. Laurel fell back on the habit of imagining him short, rotund and balding. "Unless that's too rich for your blood," she added.

"Anything to oblige, love." He curled the tips of her hair around his finger. "And to prove even Yankees have chivalry, I'll buy you lunch with my winnings."

She smiled at him, leaning a bit closer so that their bodies just brushed. Matt felt the surprising jolt of heat shoot straight through his system. "When hell freezes over," Laurel told him, then shoved him aside.

Matt watched her storm away; then, dipping his hands into his pockets, he laughed. In the confusion of the city room, no one noticed.

"Damn!" Laurel swore as she maneuvered her car through the choking downtown traffic. Matthew Bates was the most irritating man she'd ever known. Squeezing through on an amber light, she cursed fate. If her brother Curt hadn't met him in college, Matthew would never have accepted the position on the *Herald*. Then he'd be insufferable in New York