

FURY SCORNED

BY NICOLA R. WHITE

Tattoos? *Check.*

Stripper heels? *Check.*

Ancient Greek Fury living in her head? *Check.*

Born on the wrong side of the tracks, Alex Hughes has always known what people think of her—and working as an exotic dancer hasn't exactly helped her image. But since bonding with a Greek goddess of vengeance six months ago, Alex has had bigger problems. Like dealing with the Spartans, the outlaw biker gang with supernatural connections terrorizing Boston.

And then there's Tyler Kelly...

Tall, dark, and sexy, the ex-Navy SEAL is a deadly fighter and a potential lover. But Alex is more comfortable kicking ass than facing her feelings, and none of the men or women she's dated in the past have made her feel the way Ty does. As if her life wasn't complicated enough, she discovers there's no wound like a bruised ego when she takes on the goddess behind the Spartans' reign of terror—and loses. Alex's faith in herself is shaken as enemies turn out to be allies and friends offer betrayal. But as the saying goes...

Hell has no Fury like a woman scorned.

CHAPTER ONE

I arched my back and tossed my mane of hair as I spun around the pole mounted at the centre of the circular stage. Tonight I was a purple-haired, punk rock goddess, my own shoulder length, dyed-black hair tucked up beneath a wig. Purple light shone down from above, highlighting my curves as the men seated at the rail gazed up hungrily.

Tonight I wasn't Alex Hughes, a white trash nobody from Hawthorne, Massachusetts. I was Alexis Diamond, star of Boston's premiere adult entertainment destination. I blew a kiss to my audience. Tonight I was queen of the Xanadu, 'where all your pleasure dreams come true'. That was the slogan, anyway.

And whether I was Alexis or Alex, I was sure of one thing—I would never be that white trash nobody ever again. The ancient Greek Fury living inside my head was proof of that.

I dropped to my knees to crawl seductively to the edge of the stage. I prowled like a cat along the row of

men waving bills at me, tucking money into my G-string as I went, but the cash wasn't my motivation. Not tonight. Once out of the spotlight's glare, I was able to glance out onto the floor of the club and track the movements of Tara and Rachel, my best friends and cocktail waitresses for the evening.

This grows tedious, Megaera complained in my head, voicing her frustration with the night's activities. Usually the Fury enjoyed the nights when I—we—worked at the club. After spending thousands of years in dark oblivion, the pounding music, bright lights, and wild sights of a high-end strip club were like a drug to her. Total sensory overload, in the best way possible. But tonight we had things to focus on that were more important than shaking my moneymaker.

Like catching whoever had been supplying drugs to the girls, then pimping them out once they were hooked.

Morgan, the manager of the club, had a strict no-tolerance policy for violence and drugs, but since being promoted to oversee the opening of another location, he hadn't been around as much as usual. Which had left the door open for the Spartans, an outlaw biker gang that had set up shop in town.

I flicked my fingers restlessly. Or so they thought.

After finding Bitsy, Xanadu's newest and youngest dancer, crying in the washroom one night, I'd dragged the truth out of her one sniffle at a time. Then I'd gone to Morgan with news of what the gang was up to. As expected, he lost his shit. His first instinct was to go all

Rambo on the bikers, but I'd convinced him to let me take a crack at handling it first, before he got himself killed.

Not that I told him that. He thought I planned for Tara's fiancé to scare them off. Jackson was a big, bad, ex-Navy SEAL, far more intimidating than little ol' me and my two best girlfriends.

What Morgan didn't know, wouldn't kill him.

So here I was, shaking my ass and scanning the club for anyone wearing leathers. A raucous chorus of male laughter directed my attention to the VIP section, and I looked over to see four huge guys giving the shooter girl a hard time. I jerked my head in their direction to signal Tara and Rachel, just as one of them reached up under the poor girl's skirt. The club's owner had appointed his nephew as Morgan's stand-in, but the little shit was too cowardly to do anything, and pretended not to notice.

The way I saw it, that left me to look out for the other girls.

I gestured at the DJ to wrap up my set and finished my song with one eye on the table of bikers. As soon as I got down off the stage, I strode over to the VIP section and took the tray from the girl they'd been terrorizing. She had tears in her eyes as she hurried away, and the look of gratitude she shot me had my pulse pounding in my throat. Megaera growled, ready for a fight.

"Is there a problem here?" I looked down on the four men as they sized me up appreciatively. At six-feet-even, I'm built just like the song says—36-24-36.

I'm a brick house, and with a pair of platform stripper heels on, I look positively Amazonian.

The youngest and by far the best looking of the group—ZZ Top had nothing on the other guys—gazed up at me appreciatively, hands behind his head like he didn't have a care in the world.

The others looked a tad more resentful.

“We won’t have a problem if you shut your mouth and get your ass back onstage,” their leader warned me.

I opened my mouth to say something that probably would have resulted in me kicking their asses, but Tara and Rachel appeared to save me from myself.

“Who are your friends?” Rachel asked, pretending interest in the men. She pouted appealingly.

“You boys look like you know how to party,” Tara added. The dialogue was straight out of central casting for ‘easy blonde stripper’, but the guys ate it up.

“Well, now.” The lead asshole grinned. “This is more like it. You tell your girl to relax and we can all get to know each other better.”

“Come on, Alexis,” Tara cajoled, playing her part. “Don’t be a bitch.”

I was so going to get her for that later.

“I guess I can hang for a minute.” I sat down on the edge of the white leather-upholstered banquette, feigning reluctance. What I actually felt was revulsion.

“Does anyone have some blow, at least?” I had zero interest in snorting cocaine, but I needed to lure the dealer somewhere private so I could let him know just how unwelcome he and his friends were on my turf.

When we got through with them, they'd be in no shape to move product at the Xanadu.

Or anywhere else.

"I might have a little something to share." He leered. "If the price is right."

Ugh. Could these guys get any more disgusting?

Repulsive, Megaera agreed. She sent me a wave of contempt so strong I had to grit my teeth to avoid visibly shuddering.

"Why don't you all follow me backstage?" I suggested. I gestured down at my barely-there ensemble. "I obviously don't mind an audience, but my friends are a little shyer."

On cue, Tara and Rachel giggled vacantly. The Spartans leered harder.

As I led my entourage through the club to the dressing room, I shot a hard glare at the weaselly stand-in manager. *I'm the baddest bitch in here*, it said. *So don't get in my way*. Wisely, he didn't lift a finger to stop me as I blew past the 'staff only' sign on the dressing room door.

The room was a mess, with clothing and makeup scattered everywhere. Sequin-studded Lycra draped over the edge of a chair and glittery, bronze body powder dusted one of the makeup tables. A hair straightener had been left out, cord snaking along the floor, and an unmated Lucite heel lay on its side in one corner. The clear plastic shoe looked like a leftover prop from a slutty production of Cinderella.

I stopped just inside the doorway. "Beat it," I snapped at Venus Love, unsurprised to see her

lounging with her feet up and a magazine in her hand while the other girls hustled to make ends meet out on the floor. Venus had spun a sob story to convince some of the others she had back problems that prevented her from performing too many private dances. She even had them splitting tips with her.

“Morgan won’t be happy to hear you had guests back here.”

“So don’t tell him, *Venus*.” Her insistence on going by her stage name always pissed me off. As if she was too good to grace the rest of us with her real name.

She huffed angrily, but got to her feet and headed for the door. As I watched her go, I had to admit there was good reason she was a top earner—when she bothered to work. Even the unnatural glow of the fluorescent lights couldn’t hide the fact that she had smooth, golden-brown skin and wide, chocolate eyes.

Megaera bristled at the challenge. The ancient Greeks hadn’t called her the ‘jealous one’ for nothing.

Eyes on the prize, I reminded the Fury. Compared to the Spartans, Venus Love was a minor annoyance.

Once we were alone, I flipped the lock on the dressing room door, then strolled over to turn on the boom box sitting on one of the makeup tables. A pulsing beat filled the room and I turned the volume up even louder.

The music would cover any screams that might otherwise escape the room.

The men pulled up chairs and one of the bikers pulled out a plastic baggie filled with white powder. I passed him a hand mirror to use as a surface for cutting

lines. He used a credit card to push the powder into thin rows on the glass, then handed it to Tara with a predatory gleam in his eyes.

“Ladies first.”

I suspected any of us could have taken the hit without feeling much—alcohol and over-the-counter medication had little effect on us, and there was no reason to think illegal drugs wouldn’t be the same. But I was getting tired of the game.

I stepped forward, planted my stripper heel squarely against the man’s chest, and shoved hard. He let out a surprised, painful grunt as his chair toppled over backward and skidded across the concrete floor. I smiled. Yeah, he’d feel that in the morning.

“Bitch!” He lumbered to his feet. “You’re going to be sorry you did that, you stupid whore.”

One of his boys took a step toward me, but stopped when he got a good look at my eyes. Now that we were behind closed doors, I’d let the cat out of the bag—literally. My eyes glowed an unnatural green as Megaera’s feline nature took over. Hunting instincts rose to the fore and I felt the urge to hunt and roar. To let my prey know there was no chance for escape.

“What the fuck?” The biker backed away slowly, eyes darting from me to his boss. Then his face paled completely and I knew he’d realized I wasn’t the only thing he had to worry about.

Tara and Rachel stepped forward to flank me and I glanced over to see that both of them looked just as scary as I did. While dusky leopard spots had risen on my skin under the designs I’d already inked into it, it

tended to be Tara's red eyes and tears of blood that got people's attention. That, and the way her long, blonde hair danced around her head like a nest of snakes.

On the other side of me, Rachel's eyes glowed a deep, burnished orange, burning with the desire to tear flesh from limb. Ordinarily the gentlest of our trio, she had become distinctly bloodthirsty since bonding with her Fury. In ancient times, Tisiphone had been known as 'vengeful destruction'. I knew without looking down that Rachel's short, manicured nails had lengthened and sharpened into talons that would have suited a bird of prey.

"I hear you've been pushing drugs at the Xanadu," I told the man I'd shoved across the room as I advanced on him. "And that you've been taking it out in trade when the girls can't pay."

As I drew closer, he tensed up in anticipation, but I didn't flinch when his two older friends came at me from behind. Tara and Rachel had my back.

Wisely, the young guy stayed where he was.

I leaned down to grab the man by the collar of his leather vest and hauled him in close to get his scent. I couldn't see people's memories, like Tara, but the scent of crime and dishonesty clung to him as palpably as the odor of grease and sweat.

"What should we do with them?" I glanced back over my shoulder at my sisters-in-arms. Each of them held a biker captive by the scruff of his neck.

One of them let out a strangled cry and I saw that Rachel had raked open the side of his face with her

nails. She grinned wickedly. “I say we take them apart. Piece by piece.”

“That’s enough,” Tara ordered as we shared a quick, disturbed glance. As the first of us to turn Fury, she was our *de facto* leader. “We agreed not to kill.”

Rachel sighed, but settled down. “The usual, then?”

I nodded. We would turn their crimes around on them; give them a taste of what it felt like to be forced to do things they didn’t want to.

I addressed the bikers. “Here’s what gonna happen—one, you will immediately give up any association with the Spartans. Two, you will surrender your bikes to the nearest junkyard for scrap metal.”

“Yeah, right. You freaks will be sorry you picked a fight with the Spartans,” the man Tara held sneered. Brave words for a man held hostage by a woman half his size.

“Three,” Rachel picked up where I’d left off. “If you even think of going back to your gang or coming after us, you’ll suffer the worst addiction withdrawal symptoms you could imagine.”

I grinned. Nice. Rachel could get pretty creative when she wasn’t using her powers to terrorize people.

Finally, Tara added her own spin on the curse. “As soon as you leave here, you will turn yourselves in to police and make a full confession. If you try to resist the urge...” She shrugged. “Have you ever seen someone trying to quit heroin cold turkey? I hear it’s not pretty.”

“Yeah, right.” The biker who’d spoken up a moment ago shifted his weight like he was going to try

something. “You think you ’roided-out bitches can scare us with colored contacts and a few threats?”

I rolled my eyes. “Tara, show him, will you?”

She grinned. “With pleasure.”

She took a deep breath, pulled him closer, and breathed out toward the man. He struggled in her grip, resisting the power of the curse that rushed into him with Tara’s breath, but it was pointless. When Tara released him, he tried to take a swing at her and immediately fell back, retching and heaving uncontrollably as shivers tremored through him.

“Oh, God.” He groaned around the pain. “Make it stop.”

Megaera laughed delightedly in my head and I took several deep breaths, marking the scent of magic in the air. I was physically stronger than Tara, but she had better mastery of her powers. I still couldn’t successfully deliver the Fury’s Kiss that could bend a bad guy to my will.

Tara repeated her trick on the other two men in our clutches before I noticed that the youngest of the gang, silent until now, had managed to slip over to a fire exit at the back of the room. He yanked the door open and escaped into the alley behind the club.

“Shit!” I leaped after him, but by the time I got to the door, he’d shoved something up against it to keep it from opening. I growled in frustration as I rattled the doorknob, then wheeled around. I’d have to run through the club to the main entrance.

I was halfway across the room when the jammed door suddenly burst open behind me to slam against

the wall. I turned back to it with a snarl as the runaway was shoved forward into the room. He was followed by all kinds of mocha-skinned sexy—a tall, lean man with muscles bulging in the forearm that had just sent the Spartan sprawling. Stubble covered a strong jaw line and when he spoke, his voice was hot nights, and New Orleans blues.

“Evening, ladies.” Dark eyes glinted. “Y’all lose something?”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Author photo by Stefan Davidson

Nicola R. White is no stranger to the fantastic. Although there are no Furies in her family tree (that she knows of), she comes from a small city on the east coast of Canada where ghost stories and superstitions abound. She has worked on movie sets, as a bartender, in a lighthouse, and as a lawyer. Though she's never been an exotic dancer like her character, Alex Hughes, she does know how to pole dance.

She has always been fascinated by the strange and morbid, and often stays up too late reading books that give her nightmares. She believes truth is stranger than fiction, and just a few of her heroes are Buffy, Dana Scully, and Xena.

Nicola is a member of Romance Writers of America and Romance Writers of Atlantic Canada, and is an active member and supporter of the award-winning Romance Divas website and online forum.

