

Between the Sheets

THE ANGLO ARABIAN INFUSED
ADVENTURE BEGINS...

BOOK ONE

Between the Sheets

*A STORY OF LIFE, LUST AND LOVE
AN ANGLO-ARABIAN INFUSED ADVENTURE*

BRITT HOLLAND

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*DM,
Thank you for your eternal encouragement and unwavering support. You are my rock.
With my love, always*

Introduction

Vivika no longer feels like her former bubbly self. She is stuck in a rut, overworked and exhausted. When a British naval ship docks in the port of Amsterdam, Vivika is compelled to attend a cocktail reception. She certainly isn't expecting to be swept off her feet by the Captain of Her Majesty's Ship *Carlington*, but a twenty-second kiss blows her mind and brings her back to living and savouring life again. When Vivika starts working for a luxury hotel chain with resorts in the Middle East, she soon realises she has joined a sinking ship. The owner, a prominent Arab businessman, at loggerheads with the management company, pins all his hopes and demands on Vivika. With an ego larger than the Burj Khalifa and a temperament more explosive than Vesuvius, His Excellency, General Salim, does not take "no" for an answer. And yet he manages to stir her in ways she had never thought could be possible. With her loyalties divided between company and owner, Vivika plots her course. Following her true north, she negotiates the waves of passion, pain, and loss. Vivika's journey of discovery brings her to encounter two very different men who capture her attention – and her heart.

Acknowledgement

Thank you to my beloved parents, Moody Blue and Daddy O', for your care, love, patience, time and encouragement always. Whether in heaven or on earth, I love you.

Thank you to my girlfriends in UAE, Jordan, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, for inspiring me, for your positive spirits, your input and experiences and insights.

To my two gorgeous children, and brother and sister. You are my permanent pillars in life.

Arabia

I had an up and down relationship with Arabia. All my experiences, good and bad, had one thing in common: they were intense and unpredictable. What you saw in the Middle East was a distorted reflection of reality, much like a Fata Morgana.

The Orient has the qualities of a female temptress and those of a male magician; both sexy and elusive. The Middle-East is a region of smoke and mirrors and cannot compare to anywhere in the Western World. In that lies its magic.

As a young woman growing up, I lived happily, in a familiar world and within a context I understood. My life was steady, apart from the usual emotional and hormonal changes that naturally occurred during my growing years. It gave peace of mind to have firm ground underfoot.

As I matured, I became interested in new possibilities and ways of looking at things. The concept of “comfort zone” became uncomfortable. I disliked routine and predictability.

As I developed, my love of travel grew. The Middle East in particular, drew me in. Like an oriental magnet, it attracted me into a thousand and one different dimensions and sensations, I had not encountered before. Some experiences were good, some bad.

To be able to have half a chance of surviving in the Arab world as a Western woman, you must have a sense of self. That self-knowledge comes with a certain level of maturity. In essence, you need to understand that if you want to take a Middle Eastern roller coaster ride, it can be scary, yet thrilling or killing.

Life in the Middle East is fast and furious, yet, at the same time, it exudes calm, mystery and seduction. If you are not yet able to handle the most challenging storms in the English Channel, then do not contemplate exploring the uncharted waters in the unpredictable high-rolling Arabian Seas. You may drown.

The Orient is complex. It is influenced by forceful factors including religion, loyalty, history, commodities, wealth, battles, greed, generosity, hospitality, hostility, magic, evil, love, killings, harsh conditions, poetic enchantment, and brutal inflictions. But the most powerful and dangerous of all is "Passion", with a capital P.

On arrival in Arabia, peace and serenity seem to envelop you. The balmy weather soothes you. The stark contrast between men dressed in white and women in black suggests clarity. The call to prayer evokes a sense of discipline.

In the Middle East, money rules, and family is untouchable. Should there be a perceived danger to either, you may have to pay, possibly with your life. Beware of thinking that you as foreigner may belong. You will never gain a place in the inner

trusted circle; This sanctum is hermetically sealed, protected from parasites and contamination. Both tribe and pride are to be preserved at all times and at all costs.

If you can, avoid falling for an Arab man. They are intense and seductive. These Alpha Males are a species that seems to have become extinct in the Western world and are, therefore, exciting and intriguing to some of us. These men make you feel like a woman in the most sensual ways, but inevitably with Alpha Males comes dominance and control.

Arabs are excellent hunters. They are predators and lie in wait, tempting their prey with patience and expertise. When you are at your weakest, they move and secure you.

Unless you are made from the very DNA that runs through generations of Pirates, Bedouins, Kings, Sultans, Emirs, Generals and Rulers, you will never be able to play them at their game.

If you do fall for an Arab man and survive to tell the tale, it will be tantalising.

And so now here is my story.

The Pussy Posse

Now, before we move on to “Men”, allow me to tell you about my “Girls”, my “Besties”, and founding members of The Pussy Posse.

Hélène was a Dutch friend who was my neighbour when I lived in Amsterdam.

Annie was British. I met her via my toy-boy, Ben, having moved to London from Amsterdam.

Within a year or two after I met Annie, the three of us, Annie, Hélène and I, joined by my brother Martin, went to Jordan. That was my first brush with the Middle East and the place where “The Pussy Posse” was born.

We did not have men in our lives; not as permanent fixtures or partners, anyway.

We were what you may describe as sassy, independent women. We all had a sense of riotous rebellion about us. We’d think nothing of jumping on a flight for a spontaneous adventure. We had positive spirits and can-do attitudes.

The Pussy Posse was our refuge, where we could share our

secrets and innermost dreams; here, we could cry and laugh. The Pussy Posse was our anchor.

Annie, H el ene and I solemnly swore to meet up twice a year. To manage our time, we agreed that one reunion should be over New Year, and the second, on or around the 21st of June, Midsummer Night.

I fondly remember our summer solstice and New Year escapades.

On one occasion, we gate-crashed the open-air opera at Glyndebourne, to watch *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Glyndebourne is an English country house, the site of an opera house which, since 1934, has been the venue for the annual Glyndebourne Festival Opera. None of us was into opera, but we stumbled across the great place in East Sussex and thought it would be "rude not to".

In Marbella, the three of us went skinny-dipping in bioluminescent waves. It was magical—sort of like the aurora borealis, but then in the sea, rather than in the sky. We lay down on the beach in the moonlight, without a stitch on, and made "sand angels" much like we used to do in the snow when we were young.

One year, the three of us went to Costa Rica. We went white-water rafting and had fresh *ceviche* for lunch, washed down with Margaritas. We swam in the waterfall on our friend Amilcar's coffee estate. I felt rejuvenated and alive. Not only was I with my best friends, but the power of nature also impacted me dramatically. I compared the experience of being energised, to having gently bubbling Prosecco running through my veins, making me feel terrific and radiant.

During that trip, Annie laughed so much that she literally fell over in a flower bed, in the butterfly enclosure at the eco-hotel.

That set me off. I collapsed, sniggering uncontrollably, next to her. Then it was Hélène who would suffer hilarity-induced loss of balance, as she joined us in hysterics between the flowers. With butterflies landing on us, we simply lay there for a while, gasping for breath and crying with laughter in the grubby soil.

One New Year, we decided we needed some Key Lime Pie. It is generally accepted that the pie comes from Key West in Florida. Whether it does or it doesn't, we decided we should go to Florida for a zesty fresh break and some of this iconic dessert. We booked our flights.

My dear boss upgraded us on the flight over to Miami. Annie had her legs crossed, sitting back on her business class seat, reading a magazine in her fully reclined position. Her foot was moving up and down. When I looked up, I saw that the guy from the seat in front of Annie had got up from his chair to put his briefcase in the overhead bin.

As he stood there, stretching up to place the case in the locker, Annie's foot was only a fraction away from his manhood. I was looking on in horror. What would happen if she were to kick him by accident? I wanted to warn her, but realised on time, that if I nudged her, she would likely spring up and move her foot to land in the middle of the chap's crotch. I decided to not say a thing. I held my breath, and thankfully, the blow was averted. As soon as the danger passed, I fell about. I told Annie what had happened. Of course, we thought it hilarious and hooted with laughter.

Hélène, who was a few seats down from us, never witnessed this sorry saga. We had not noticed, but she had slipped past us for a little "Mile-High" indulgence with the good-looking guy on the other side of the aisle from her. She was the smoothest operator between us in terms of men. Hélène always had us on

the edge of our seats with her riotous stories.

But let me tell you about the Midsummer Night in the Pre-Pussy-Posse Era.

Midsummer Night

Many moons ago, I was not at all in the mood for Midsummer Night. In fact, I was not up for anything.

I lived in Amsterdam. I already knew H el ene, but not Annie. I had been working my socks off and was utterly drained.

Desperate to have time to myself, I was aching to be free of any type of commitment. I was craving a bit of solitude.

That was not like me.

My friends said my energy was boundless. It wasn't, of course, but I was considered an energy junky, or instead, as I prefer to name myself, an energy aficionado.

If there was good energy around, I was drawn to it like a fish to water. But recently, I lacked my usual spark and *joie de vivre*. I used to bounce out of bed to get going with the day. But I had lost my mojo. Everything was just the same most days. Apart from my demanding work commitments, I also kept up with the constant "party routine", starting on Friday night and continuing until Sunday afternoon. The usual form was to go full out and then to crawl into bed early on Sunday night, allowing for recovery, before starting work again on Monday.

I increasingly wondered what I wanted from life. Naturally, I was grateful to be working, to be earning and to have a lovely pad to live in. I felt blessed with my friends.

I knew I did not have anything to complain about, and all to be thankful for.

Why, then, was I feeling this way? Whenever I had a rare moment of peace, my mind would wander. I sometimes, albeit rarely, thought about whether I would find a man who would hold my attention. I was very happy in my own company. I simply occasionally wondered whether there would ever be someone who I would not tire of. I always cringed when people introduced me to their other half as if they were not worthy of being whole by themselves. Why would you need someone to complete you? I believed in being bigger together, “the one and one is three” idea. What was the point, otherwise, of ever considering being a Tandem Team?

Until now, the boys I knew could not be considered men. All they wanted to do was play, impress, flirt, conquer, have their wicked way, and do it all over again the next weekend. Either with the same person or anyone else who happened to be good enough for the weekend’s seamen session. It was empty and superficial. Not that I personally indulged in gratuitous sex. In that, my friends considered me conservative.

Having just come home from work, I was due to go out again in an hour. I had made a commitment weeks ago that I could not get out of, at least not at this late stage.

I may have been able to wangle an excuse had I called Edward, the British Consul-General, but the real issue was with Larissa, whom I knew I could not let down.

I guess it is the way I was brought up.

“Even if you feel you don’t have it in you,” my mother used

to say, “then all you need to do is push yourself. Never give in to spinelessness. Show strength, Vivika.”

It was an honourable sentiment. I respected my mother, as well as my dear father, for instilling values and principles in my brother and me.

However, at this very moment, I wished I could ignore my mum’s words of wisdom and simply stay put and slip into my PJs. I relished the idea of a good glass of red and a relaxing movie. Instead, I went upstairs to the bathroom to freshen up. Having put my clothes into the laundry basket, I stepped into the shower cubicle and turned on the water. I moved my hand to adjust the tap, to increase the temperature as well as the water pressure. I changed the setting to massage mode and closed my eyes, standing head bowed, shoulders slumped, allowing myself to cry silently. My tears tasted salty as they rolled down my cheeks and landed on my lips. I raised the shower above my head. The water flowed over my face and washed the tears of tiredness away. Without a trace, along with the soapy foam from my body, they disappeared down the plughole. Realising that I must have nodded off, I steadied myself.

I was very impressed the first time a hand-written envelope arrived by special delivery. Edward, who my parents knew from their stint in India, had recently been appointed British Consul-General in Amsterdam. Edward did not have a wife or children. He lived in the large Amsterdam residence with his trusted housekeeper, Amelia, who had worked for him in Lagos. Amelia moved with him when Edward was posted to the Netherlands. He became like an uncle to me.

On occasions, Edward would pick me up with his chauffeur-driven limo to go to the theatre or take me out to dinner.

We enjoyed each other's company. It was an easy, comfortable friendship.

On one occasion, Edward invited me to have sushi in Okura, the Japanese hotel near to The Residence and not far from where I lived. Edward told me that, every so often, a British Navy ship would dock in the port of Amsterdam, sometimes a "mine-hunter" or a "mine-sweeper".

Edward, in his capacity as Consul-General, attended the cocktail receptions and invited several dignitaries as well as other specially selected guests.

Edward went on to ask whether I and a few of my single friends, would like to be on the "list of special invitees" when a ship was in town.

I said, "That sounds like a hoot. Yes, that would be my pleasure."

Edward replied, "Excellent, happy to hear it."

From that time onwards, I was frequently, "cordially invited" to attend the cocktail receptions, or Cocker P parties, as they called them in high society slang, onboard visiting British naval ships.

My girlfriends and I had a blast whenever we went. We were treated like ladies by gentlemen. We always had a ball, when they were in town.

That first invitation was quite something. I felt honoured and privileged. I cherished the great feeling of decadence that came over me as I RSVP'd in the third person, as protocol required.

I remembered my mother explaining what RSVP meant when I was very young. "*Répondez, s'il vous plaît*".

"It just means that you are expected to either confirm you are pleased to attend or regret and decline. But whatever your response is, protocol dictates that you do so in the third person. That may be outdated," my mother said, "but that is what is

required.”

I laughed. “I like things that are done in a certain way, but I also think it is very old-fashioned and weird at the same time.”

My mother smiled at me. I always questioned everything and never simply took matters for granted.

The bathroom filled with steam. The turquoise and green tiles which depicted an exotic garden, graced with dainty birds, could no longer be seen.

I fell in love with the bathroom when I first saw the flat. I immediately thought of the Beatles’ song that I loved, and forever associated with my very own bathroom.

I would catch myself humming the tune of “I’d like to be, under the sea, in an octopus’s garden, in the shade.” Situations often subconsciously prompted me to start singing or humming a song. Any little trigger would have that effect.

I eventually forced myself to turn off the shower. Dripping wet, I stepped out of the oversized cubicle.

Too tired to move, I closed my eyes and breathed deeply. With a sigh, I lifted my right leg up and placed my foot on the bidet, meticulously drying between every toe.

When I was little, my mother would always remind me;

“Dry your feet well, darling, to stop mushrooms from growing between your toes.”

The idea revolted me. As a result, I always paid close attention to drying between every digit. Having finished my right foot, I exchanged feet and repeated the ritual.

The thick cloud of steam was starting to clear. I could see the contour of my naked body in the large, heated mirror.

What a sorry sight I am . Like a drenched cat, I thought.

The make-up, which I had not taken off, streaked my cheeks. Mascara-smudged eyes looked back at me in the mirror. The

Alice Cooper association triggered the singer's famous song; "Here I go again."

I started humming it without gusto.

Forcing myself to get dressed, I applied some make-up and slipped into a comfortable skirt, a simple sleeveless top, a cropped jacket, and a pair of soft leather boots. It was not a particularly elegant look, but all I wanted was to feel at ease; to do what was expected of me. I would attend the cocktail reception and come back home as soon as politely possible.

I grabbed my bag and got into my car. I put my key in the ignition of my Golf and set off to pick up Larissa. We continued towards Amsterdam harbour, where the officers of HMS *Carlington* were ready to welcome us.

Had it not been for Larissa, I may well have decided to stay at home. But I forced myself, and I went.

The encounter that followed changed my life forever, on that Midsummer Night, when I met James.

London SW10

Both Annie and I lived in Southwest London. In Fulham, London SW10, to be specific. I had worked in the travel industry for quite some time now.

I was now employed by an airline in the UK. I had the good fortune to travel often to fantastic places. At that time in my life, jumping on a plane was like catching a bus.

I had reached a senior leadership position reasonably early on in life. It was a combination of clicking with my new boss, him seeing my potential and being in the right place at the right time.

One of the best things about my manager back then was that he let me get on with things. He trusted me to do the job. That sense of support made me fly higher than I could have imagined. If someone believes in you and says that the space outside the box is the area on which to concentrate, then I can relate and be my best. Paul didn't stifle me. He just constantly mentored, nurtured, encouraged, and humoured me. Paul was the person who gave me wings to fly and soar early on in my career.

He understood my sense of individuality. He enjoyed good repartee, and I rated him as a “proper person”—people with good energy and real stories to tell attracted me. I gravitated towards those individuals who had guts, determination, and a love of life. And Paul was one of those people.

All these and other qualities were found in one of my very best friends; Annie. She was an outrageously talented TV producer. With her mop of blond hair, bright blue eyes, quick wit and sharp humour, Annie was what you would call “good value”.

We both shared a love of travel and property investment. We both felt stifled by routine. Whenever either of us felt stuck in a rut, we would call each other and talk it through. We would do some scenario-planning and find a way to get the oxygen flowing again, no matter what change may be needed.

We delighted in our joyful and colourful existences. Our lives were uncomplicated in that we were “mostly single”, had good incomes, were young and bold and didn’t shy away from challenges or adventures. In fact, we embraced them wholeheartedly.

Annie was introduced to me when she returned from a long-term work gig in Australia. She was a close friend of Benedict’s older sister, Anya, or “Onions”, as Annie used to affectionately call her.

I met Benedict in London when I first moved to England from Amsterdam. Ben was four years younger than me. We got on like a house on fire, and we spent a lot of time together. Ben was a brilliant blessing and great fun. We went on camping trips, fishing expeditions, jaunts to Cornwall and day trips to France.

Not only did I hugely enjoy Ben’s company, but he also stopped me from thinking about James, whom I still desperately missed. Over a few months, Ben and I became Friends with Benefits, or Friends with Benedict. Basically, he was my toy-boy