

Embattled

Darlene Jones

Copyright © Darlene Jones 2011

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without express written permission of the author.

All characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

ISBN reserved

For my family

Acknowledgements

Thank you to:

a most generous man, who also happens to
be a natural teacher – Robert J. Sawyer,

friend and writing partner extraordinaire,

Anneli Purchase,

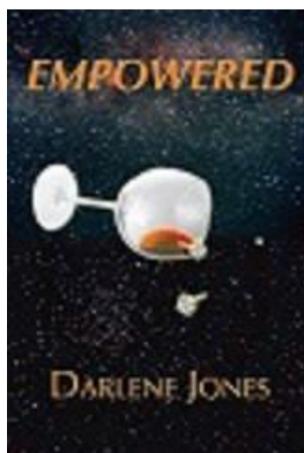
the kind friends who were my first readers,

Alida, Carole, Maria, Angie, and Rosalie,

the talented Cheryl Perez for her cover
design and formatting,

and my wonderfully supportive and
encouraging family.

!!!FREE DOWNLOAD!!!!



**Sign up for the author's mailing list and
receive book two, EMPOWERED free.**

www.darlenejonesauthor.com

Prologue

“But Yves, will she know what’s happening to her? Won’t she be terrified? What if she gets hurt? How will she cope with a double life?”

Elsbeth was asking too many questions and her no nonsense big sister tone demanded answers.

Questions that mirrored my fears.

I’d been ordered to find an agent and fix Earth. I’d found the woman and set to work, bouncing her from her everyday life to war zones, bouncing her from the safety of her family and friends to danger and fear, bouncing her back and forth and leaving her to puzzle it out on her own.

And there wasn't a damn thing I could do to make it easier for her.

Chapter 1

She turned her hands over and over. No sign of a wound. No pain. So, where had the blood come from?

At the light tap on the open door, she clenched her hands on her lap under her desk. A head popped around the corner. "Hey, Boss."

“Nee saida?” What the...?

“Sorry, I didn’t catch that.”

“Uh ... sorry Tom, nothing.”

“Sue says can you take a call? Line two.”

Touch the phone? She could feel the blood soaking through her skirt. “Ask Sue to take a message.”

“O-kay.” Tom backed out the door.

When she was sure he was gone, she wrapped her hands in wads of Kleenex and peered out the door. A couple of students chattered their way out of the general office, and Sue, hunched over her keyboard typing the message.

She scooted to the staff bathroom, locked the door, stuffed the tissues into the garbage can, and looked in the mirror. Good Lord, her face and neck had little splatters of blood too. Tom couldn’t have been paying close attention

or he would have seen them. She scrubbed until her skin felt raw.

If there were specks of blood on her jacket they didn't show. But the large blotch of blood on her gray skirt seemed to challenge her. *Explain me!* she could almost hear it say. She grabbed a towel from the staff kitchen and tucked it into the waistband of her skirt. If anyone asked, she'd say she'd been washing dishes.

She slid back into her office and closed the door. At her desk she checked her hands. Clean, smooth, unmarred. She took a little mirror out of her purse to examine her face and found a few flecks of blood in her hair. She combed them out.

Looking down, she grimaced and peeled the sticky mess of her bloody skirt away from her legs. *I've got to get out of these clothes.* "Sue," she called. "I'll be out of the office for a bit. Back as soon as I can."

Wait a sec. Anything urgent this afternoon? She turned to the computer to check her schedule. What she saw on the screen made her gasp. She grabbed the back of her chair to steady herself. A mass of red looked just like the blotch on her skirt. And swirls of jungle green... *What the hell?*

*

She struggled through the thick vegetation, swinging the machete awkwardly, working her way towards her destination. Vines wrapped themselves around her legs. She yanked at the long skirt of her dress to free herself. She swung the machete again, and pushed through the narrow opening she'd created, ignoring the thorns that scratched her bare arms and shoulders. "Suitably dressed, I am, I am." A monstrous spider web blocked her passage. The machete cut through it easily enough, but remnants clung to her skin.

Her heart pounded and caught in her throat with each pop of gunfire. “Oh Lord, what am I heading into?”

She plunged on and burst into a clearing with a final swing of the machete that nearly toppled her. She pulled the heavy knife back, scraping her shin, but pushed ahead yelling, “*Favór ida*, stop! Stop!” She waved the unwieldy machete and forced her way between the combatants. Cries of rage rose from them. She watched the arching swing of machetes above her head, cringed, and waited for the killing blows. “Stop, Stop.” She yelled. The men dropped their weapons, fell back, and let her through.

*

Too damn antsy to go back to work, she paced her living room, poured a shot of whisky, choked as it went down, and paced again. She kept looking at her hands, expecting to see them covered in blood. Her shin burned

from the scrape she had first noticed in the shower. Blood still seeped through the dressing.

The television droned in the background. She caught fragments only ... gunfire ... screams ... wails of grief ... screech of vultures ... extraordinary woman ... *la madame des miracles* ... natives are calling her ... effected a miracle village ... tribal leaders ... debating ... peace....

She sank to the sofa. *Could that have been me?* She squeezed her eyes shut. The jungle battle replayed on her eyelids. That was her, madly waving the machete. She held her face in her hands, inhaled deeply, smelled blood, and felt the jungle close around her.

“Oh, my God! What’s happening to me?”

*

Wednesday morning dawned clear and bright. The sun sparkling on the freshly fallen snow cheered her even

as she dreaded heading out into the cold. She contemplated calling in sick. But what would that accomplish other than give her too much time in an empty house to think about yesterday? Best to keep busy. A snow shovel scraped the sidewalk. Jimmy'd do hers today. She'd return the favor next time. Better hustle, she'd need extra time for the car to warm up.

“Hey, Boss.” Sue rapped on the open door.

She jumped and looked at the clock. Eleven already and she'd accomplished nothing, other than brooding.

“¿*Qué pasa?*”

“What? Oh, that's Spanish, right? You taking lessons or something?” Sue asked.

She shook her head. “No-o-o.”

“I need you to look at this.” Sue held budget documents in her hand. “I hate to interrupt. Looked like you were in deep thought.”

“I guess I was.” Liar, liar, pants on fire. Would you believe I was in Guatemala? Walked boldly into a courtroom populated with more guns than people, more malice than the air could hold?

The courtroom tension held her in its grip. A corrupt regime, an innocent on trial; a case he and his lawyer couldn't possibly win. A trial she had won with a few words. And, no, she didn't speak Spanish.

Sue cleared her throat. “Um, like I said, sorry to bug you, but there's a problem here that you're not going to like.”

About to reach for the file, she held back. What if her hands were covered in blood again?

“Leave it on the table, would you? I'll get to it later.”

She checked the minute Sue turned her back and let out a heavy sigh. Her hands were clean, thank God, but

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

