

JAY HARTLOVE



GODDESS
DAUGHTER

Winner: Best Thriller

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“Great action in this medical thriller!”

GABixlerReviews

This was a thrilling and compelling read for me.

Literary Litter

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Abyss & Apex Magazine

“Hartlove is a master of spellbinding suspense, mystical mayhem, and spiritual surrender.”

Library at The End of The Universe

GODDESS DAUGHTER

*Book Two
of the
“Goddess Rising”
Series*

JAY HARTLOVE

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SAMPLE CHAPTER

THE PLANE RIDE BACK, THE AIRPORT, the drive to the house — it was all a blur. It was as if his hands and feet just knew what they were supposed to do. Good thing, since Randolph's mind was busy — busy doubting and twisting and seething.

Was any of what he saw in Jakarta conclusive? How could he have missed such an affair? How long had they been seeing each other behind his back? How could Young Nae lie to him so boldly, even after her death? He had no answers. He didn't want answers. Answers weren't going to fix the rip in his heart.

It was only when he stopped the car in the driveway that he realized he was back. He sat there and blinked. He noticed for the first time that the radio was on. He must have lucked onto an oldies station without even noticing. Mick Jagger added his commentary to the jumble of thoughts and emotions that stormed in Randolph's mind.

But the song brought all the wrong images. Not being able to foresee this thing happening to you, seeing his heart had turned black,

painting his red door black, wanting to fade away and not face the facts. The song cast everything he had learned in the worst possible light.

Randy switched it off. The clouds, which had been threatening all morning, finally let loose a light rain. In the quiet stillness of the car, it all came crashing in on him. He closed his eyes and lowered his head. Cheri's death. Desiree's coma. The powerlessness of knowing so much about life and not being able to do anything for his family. His blackout. Young Nae's cloak and dagger half-truths. Each had shaken him. Now the affair. So many bad things had pierced him in such a short time, he felt like there was no part of him left unwounded.

He buried his face in his arms on the steering wheel and cried. Hope bled out of him. The love of his life was gone. His daughter was probably never going to wake up. He could no longer trust his best friend. With that friendship went the future of his business. He had nothing left.

He thought about how Sanantha was going to come that evening and try to talk him into believing there was still something worth living for. He wasn't going to believe her. He took out his cell phone and pulled up her number. Maybe he could call her and tell her not to come. He sighed and closed the phone. Let her come. She was probably the only resource he still had.

She said she had made some kind of breakthrough on the snakebite. Pursuing justice against Lo Cheung seemed so implausible and so irrelevant, he just couldn't make himself care.

There was something he still cared about. He needed to know what Dr. Kwon had found wrong with Dez. He wiped his tears with his sleeves, took a deep breath, and got out of the car.

He took many more deep breaths to compose himself as he walked to the upstairs back bedroom.

"Ah, Doctor Macklin," Vera greeted him as he walked in. "Welcome home."

He smiled weakly, but only grunted in response and did not make eye contact. He walked straight to his daughter's bedside. "Was Doctor Kwon able to diagnose her?"

The nurse blinked at the snub. "Yes, it's a viral infection of Hepatitis C. He has her on a course of antiviral drugs starting with Interferon-alpha."

“That’s a good broad spectrum start. How bad does he think it is?”

“He said it’s too soon to tell. He said we should see some improvement by the end of the week. He’s coming by every day after hours.”

“I see the lights are gone.”

She smiled sheepishly. “Yes, Doctor Kwon was rather amused by them. Indeed, they do nothing for this type of adult jaundice.”

He stepped up to Desiree’s face and opened a yellow tinted eye. His tone was non-committal, distant. “Fine.”

The nurse continued, more cheerfully. “He agreed with your use of the lactulose. He said it was exactly the right thing for the bile buildup in her intestines.”

“After all these years in the lab, it’s nice to see I haven’t completely lost my clinician’s touch.” He wasn’t talking to Vera. He hardly noticed her. He also did not notice her annoyance at his aloofness.

He stroked his daughter’s cheek with his fingertips as he quietly spoke to her. “Dez, it’s down to just you and me ... and you’re not all here. If I ever wanted a miracle, it would be that you could get up from there, and we could just go away and start a new life. Everything I’ve ever tried to build has crumbled to dust. If you die, I really will have nothing left. Stay with me. Please. Wake up and give your old man a reason to live again.”

He looked absently away, unable to focus on much of anything. He looked up and noticed Vera for the first time, looking very prim in her pink uniform. She was avoiding his gaze and seemed somehow annoyed. “Vera?”

She looked up from her clipboard. “Yes?”

“Thank you.”

She smiled and nodded. “You’re welcome.”

He wandered out of the room and back into his distracted haze. His feet went back on autopilot and he made his way down to the beach house.

He wondered how long this limbo would last. What could he do to change anything? Should he call Young Nae and confront him? To what end? Would an apology make any difference? It wouldn’t restore their friendship. He couldn’t stay in business with him. He could never

trust him again. No doubt he would have to confront him at some point. He just didn't have the energy to face a scene like that now.

He flopped down on the couch and stared up at the acoustic ceiling tiles. He looked at his watch. Sanantha would be arriving in a couple of hours. She would help him choose what he could do next. She would give him perspective.

Perspective. Now that he had seen more than he ever wanted to, where could he possibly stand to see a broader, more hopeful view?

He knew he had to start by not letting himself fall into despair. Feeling sorry for himself was just going to paint himself into a corner. He didn't want to paint all his doors black.

He needed to do something to reset his frame of mind. Alcohol? Jesus no. Alcohol wiped out his memory for four months. Travel? Hardly. He was already halfway around the world from home in one of the most exotic locales on the planet. He fleetingly wished he knew more about electro-shock therapy.

No, he needed to just calm down and let himself have time to sort it all out. He just needed to do something pleasant and relaxed, and removed from everything that was stressing him out.

His stomach, which had been grumbling for an hour, reminded him that he had skipped lunch and drove straight home from the airport in K-L. His stomach gave him his lead.

The aromas of soy sauce, steamed rice, and chili spices filled Randolph's head as he opened the door to the Japanese restaurant. He loved Japanese food, and the whole serene, ceremonious way it was served. He hadn't had it in months, that he could remember, not since before Young Nae had summoned him here. He was very hungry by the time he arrived, and he was taken by how strongly everything smelled when charged with hunger and anticipation.

"Party of one?" asked the tiny, very young-looking Japanese hostess.

"Yes, it's just me tonight," he said as he folded his umbrella and shook the rain from his coat. "I called ahead. The name's Macklin."

"Ah, we have a table open right now."

As she led him to a table toward the back of the restaurant, he thought her bright yellow blouse was a nice change from the grey weather outside.

Looking over the menu, he felt a chill and looked around to see if he was under an air vent. Though he couldn't see one, the A/C was definitely up too high for the cool, damp, winter June day outside. He smiled at himself. Was he actually chilly? Clearly, his blood had thinned in the months he had been here. He was lamenting a sixty-five-degree winter day, when back in Maryland he would have welcomed a winter day that got as high as thirty-five.

The chill reminded him of the warmth of the Bili-lights he had erroneously set up over Desiree. How could he have missed that protocol so badly? He must have looked like a fool to Dr. Kwon. Great. Stress was affecting his memory too.

He didn't have to peruse the menu for long, since he knew what he wanted: Yellowtail sashimi and a big bowl of *udon* noodles with shrimp.

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Sanantha's cell phone rang just as she was leaving the Pantai Timur Highway to enter Kuantan.

The young woman's voice was frantic through her Japanese accent. "Doctor Mauwad, Doctor Sam ... Sam—atha Mauwad?"

"Yes, it's me. Who is this?"

"This is Akuda Restaurant calling. Do you have a patient named Mr. Macklin?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Mr. Macklin is having medical emergency. We have called ambulance, but we found your card in his wallet, and we were hoping you are his doctor."

"He is under my care. What kind of emergency is he having?"

"He's all frozen up. He can't move."

"You mean he's paralyzed?"

"Yes."

"Where are you located?"

"On the north side of Kuantan. Your card says you are in K-L."

"I happen to be in Kuantan right now. Please give me directions to your restaurant and I'll drive there straight away."

• • •

The young Japanese hostess at the front counter already looked quite rattled even before she looked up and was startled by the black woman in a tall white turban. Sanantha had seen the ambulance parked out front, and she could see around the entrance partition that the red-uniformed paramedics were putting Randolph up onto a gurney. "I'm Doctor Sanantha Mauwad."

The hostess began to fluster, then waved her right in.

As she approached the two med techs, Sanantha asked, "Do either of you speak English?"

"Yes, we both do," the tall, thin Indian young man answered, while his shorter Malay partner checked the monitor leads.

A fat Japanese man in a black suit who was standing by stepped up. "So do I. I am the Manager."

"Good. I am his psychiatrist." She turned to the med techs. "I have him on Ambien, but that's all. What is his condition?"

Randy moaned and twitched.

Sanantha stepped up to him. "Are you in any pain?"

"He has whole body paralysis," the med tech explained. "His heart rate has slowed to 40, his blood pressure has dropped to 100 over 70, but is stable. His body temperature is also low, at 88 degrees Fahrenheit. We've seen this before, but this is an extreme case."

"I've seen it too. It's fugu poisoning, isn't it?"

"Yes, but the extraordinary thing is, he didn't have fugu."

Sanantha stepped to Randy's table and saw scraps of sashimi raw fish on the plate. "What's this?"

The manager answered. "It's Hamachi. Yellowtail."

Sanantha stepped over to Randy's head. "Randy, you're having a bad reaction to the fish you ate. We know what this is, and it is treatable. I know you can't move, and I know you are completely aware, and I know how scary this is. Try not to panic." She tried to appeal to his scientific side. She had seen him calm himself by taking a clinical view. "The poison can't get into your brain. It can't cross the blood-brain barrier. It interrupts the firing of nerves in the peripheral nervous system. Your body is paralyzed, but only until we can filter the poison out of your bloodstream. We'll keep your vitals up. We've got this under control. You're going to be all right."

The tall med tech touched her on the shoulder and gave her a raised eyebrow expression of doubt.

She turned to the manager. "Did this come on gradually, or all of a sudden?"

"Very suddenly."

"That's not the way this usually comes on, is it?" she asked the tall paramedic.

"No, it usually takes a while and the symptoms come up gradually."

"That's what I thought. Is he stable?"

"Yes, for the moment."

Sanantha took command. "His vitals might continue to drop, so be ready to hit him with stimulants. Also, watch his blinking. It could get so bad that he stops. If it does, then we need to hydrate his eyes and close them. I want you to hold him here for just a moment. There is a key piece of information we are going to need before we start treating him."

She turned to the manager. "I need to see your kitchen."

"There is nothing wrong in our kitchen."

"I didn't say there is." She picked up Randy's plate. "I need to see where and how this was prepared before I prescribe how we're going to treat him. I can't afford to make any assumptions, or I could give him the wrong treatment and it could kill him. Now please show me your kitchen."

He thought about it for a second and looked over at the paramedics. They both nodded. "All right. This way."

He led her to the cutting counter, which was in its own crowded alcove lined with coolers. Two older Japanese men in white jackets and headbands backed away from their work area with obvious worry on their faces. "Here is where the sashimi is prepared."

Sanantha noted the distinct smell of disinfectant in the air. "Now there is supposed to be a special knife reserved for cutting fugu. It's got a name. Is it the *'hiki'*?"

The manager waved to the chefs. One of them bowed curtly and stepped up. He reached up and pulled down a long thin knife from its own special block. "*Fugu hiki*," he said, showing it to Sanantha.

"This knife is only used on *fugu*, and nothing else?"

The old man nodded. "Hi."

"What about this cutting board? Is it cleaned off thoroughly after each time *fugu* is cut here?"

"Yes," supplied the manager.

"The same cutting board is used for all the fish, right?"

"Well, yes, but there is no poison contaminated between preparations. We don't sell *fugu* offal, which is where all the poison resides. The health inspectors come in here regularly and they have never complained about our cleanliness."

"No, again, I am not saying you did anything wrong. I just need to know what happened. Can you show me what the *fugu* fish looks like?"

The other chef reached behind Sanantha in the cramped working area and opened a cooler with filets wrapped in wax paper. He opened the paper to reveal a white, shiny, almost translucent flesh.

She held Randy's plate up alongside it, and the difference was obvious.

"That's Yellowtail," confirmed the manager.

"The most my patient would have been exposed to was a trace amount of puffer fish blood left on the cutting board that got onto his Yellowtail." She continued to think out loud. "The blood has almost none of the toxin to begin with."

She handed the plate to the manager. "Please wrap that up. We will need to test it to make sure I'm right. I don't think you did anything wrong. I think it was my patient having a freak reaction."

"Like an allergic reaction?" ventured the manager.

"Something like that, yes."

She returned to the paramedics who were ready to move Randy. "Here's the fish he ate," she said handing the package to one of them. "Let's go. We'll talk on the way."

The manager followed them out. Sanantha turned and shook his hand. "Thank you for your help."

"I hope he makes a full and speedy recovery."

"Do you mind if I ride along?" she asked as the med techs loaded the gurney up into the ambulance.

"Sure. Watch your step."

While they strapped the gurney into place and got underway, Sanantha buckled herself into a jump seat. The Malay fellow took the wheel while the Indian fellow strapped himself in next to Randy.

"It appears he was only exposed to the slightest trace of the tetrodotoxin," she explained. "That sample will verify it, but I don't think this is a classic case of *fugu* poisoning."

She leaned over and spoke to Randy. "I know you can hear what we are saying, even if you can't move to respond."

He blinked his understanding.

"Please try to remain calm as we talk about your condition in cold, clinical terms. The good news is: I have heard of this sort of thing before."

"Really?" the Indian med tech asked.

She continued, to both him and Randy. "The bad news is, the syndrome is shrouded in mystery and doubt. As you can tell from my accent, I am from Haiti. Although I grew up in a small rural village, I never saw for myself the kind of Black Magic people expect to be commonplace in Haiti. That having been said, I think what you are experiencing is a classic case of Voodoo zombification."

The Indian fellow blinked and raised his eyebrows. "In Malaysia?"

"The Zombie of Haitian tradition is someone who has been forced, by means of pharmaceutical torture, to act against their own will as a slave. It takes a deeply evil person to treat another person with such indignation. Since the formulae for making someone into a Zombie are very closely guarded, only someone who has dedicated their life to evil would know how to do it."

"How do you think it was done to Mr. Macklin here?"

"I suspect he was exposed to the tetrodotoxin poison over a long period of time, long enough that his body developed a complete chemistry of how to survive with this poison. Being exposed to even the slightest trace of this poison tonight set off a reaction where his body ..." She leaned over and gave Randy's arm a squeeze. "I'm sorry, *your* body went back into behaving like it was saturated again."

"How could he be exposed to this poison as you suggest, without showing any symptoms?"

"Oh, I didn't mean to say he didn't show symptoms. He looked like he was on a four-month alcoholic bender after his wife died. His

best friend, not knowing any better, just let him drink himself into a stupor. Now we know it wasn't just alcohol. Someone systematically poisoned you, Randy. This also explains, finally, your memory loss. Mere alcohol, even massive amounts of it, doesn't explain how your memory is a total blank for that period. Now I see that your body chemistry was forced into a completely different set of norms. This poison also saps your willpower, turns you into a complacent puppet, and drastically lowers your vital signs. When you seemed to drop dead when I made you walk into that blank space under hypnosis, your body was going back into Zombie mode."

The frown on the Indian tech's face just kept getting deeper and deeper.

She nodded and chuckled. "I know this all sounds insane. Doctor Macklin and I have been through quite a bit over the last few weeks."

She turned back to Randy. "The good news is, with only a trace amount of the poison in your system, a day or so on a charcoal filter will clean out your blood stream and you should come right back to normal."

She turned her hypothesis over in her mind, and it still didn't fit all the facts.

The tech apparently saw this on her face. "Excuse me, but you don't look as convinced as you sound."

She shot him her dimpled grin. "You're right."

She turned to Randy and laid her hand on his arm again. "You're probably thinking the same thing I am. My theory still doesn't explain how Lo Cheung did this to you. We assumed the chi system injections could have been inflicted in a single day kidnapping without Young Nae knowing what had been done to you. On the other hand, for you to have been zombified like this, your diet, maybe the booze, must have been laced with the puffer fish poison for the entire four-month period. Someone on Young Nae's staff must have been doing this right under everyone's nose."

She frowned again. "That makes no sense. He tried to kill Cheri with the snakebite, and when that failed, he used a car crash. Then he used a snake again on Desiree. He also tried to use a snake on me. All direct and to the point. So why the protracted torture for you? And

carefully, purposely not lethal. Why would he want to just incapacitate you? More to the point, why would he want to distance you chemically from your memories of that time? We're back to the original question. What did you see that makes Lo Cheung so nervous?"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jay Hartlove is the award-winning author of the urban fantasy “Goddess Rising” trilogy (*Goddess Chosen*, *Goddess Daughter*, and *Goddess Rising*) and the fantasy romance *Mermaid Steel*. He is also the playwright, director and producer of *The Mirror’s Revenge*, the musical sequel to the “Snow White” fable, which had its theatrical run in the San Francisco Bay Area in August 2018 to rave reviews.

His stories are filled with conspiracies and the supernatural, gods, dreams, angels, and hidden connections. His creative motto is “Dark Secrets Revealed”. He loves to take stories where the reader does not expect, with sympathetic villains, heroes with very dark pasts, and lots of plot twists. He was selected as one of the “50 Authors You Should Be Reading” by *The Authors Show*.

Jay is a former competitive costumer, having won Best in Show at both San Diego ComicCon and WorldCon. You can read more about Jay’s creative adventures, including much of the research he put into his books, at jaywrites.com.

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*How far can you genetically alter someone before
she becomes someone else ... before she loses her
soul?*



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“Hartlove is a man unafraid to present lofty subject matter and throw conventional thought to the wind with the writing that he does.”

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Jay Hartlove is an award-winning author, playwright, record producer, competition costumer, and theatrical director. Read about his exploits and future projects at jaywrites.com.