



Among the Thorns

Aubrey Kyle

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Among the Thorns is a supernatural romance that keeps its secrets until just the right moment.

Aubrey Kyle's *Among the Thorns* is the first novel in a planned trilogy. At its center is a love story: supernatural forces bring a couple together, but others wish to drive them apart.

Katie's parents pack her up and send her off to a job in Colorado, where her mother's old friend manages a themed hotel. Katie has had troubles in the past; she's looking to start a new life. But everything at the hotel seems too good to be true, even if the place is haunted.

In Colorado, Katie also meets Will, an affluent and handsome young man who runs the company that owns the hotel and is the town's mayor. Will is traditional and Katie is a vivacious modern woman, but their friendship grows despite their differences, with romance as the next step. Supernatural occurrences in the town become more frequent and disconcerting as their relationship develops, and they start to wonder if it's safe to be together.

The characters follow familiar tropes: Katie is young but troubled, gorgeous but uncertain, and bold except when it comes to the man of her dreams. Will is young but accomplished, handsome and sought after, and the picture of masculinity, even when it prompts problematic behavior. Supporting characters fill particular roles, from an overworked single mother to Native American spirit guides and shrewish old women.

Much of the early novel is focused on Katie and Will spending time together. Within their relationship, Will is prone to ignoring Katie's requests for information about their dates, which leaves her hiking in a fancy dress at one point. He doesn't seem to hear what she says; later, he is irritated with her for not telling him the hotel is haunted, though she did so the first time she met him. Conversations shift between being old fashioned into contemporary speech, and these changes can be disruptive.

A lot happens within the novel's short space, and its pace is frenetic but rewarding. The story jumps between scenes and events, underscoring that time is passing quickly for the characters and evoking the whirlwind feeling of Katie and Will's romance. After the depth of the hotel's hauntings is revealed, the action increases; the focus is still Will and Katie's relationship, but the stakes are higher and the cost more dear.

The themed hotel—where employees must dress in period attire—is a quirky and standout setting, adding to the novel's romantic air. It's also a useful background when it comes to the novel's great climatic twist: if close attention is paid, the reward of solving the puzzle is great.

Ending on a cliffhanger, *Among the Thorns* is a supernatural romance that uses its setting to its advantage and keeps its secrets and twists hidden until just the right moment.

SHANA CREANEY (November 27, 2019)

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