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Blue Diablo: A Corine Solomon Novel



Par Ann Aguirre

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurRead Ann Aguirre's posts on the Penguin BlogGritty, steamy and altogether wonderful urban fantasy.New York Times Bestselling Author Patricia BriggsView our feature on Ann Aguirres Blue Diablo. "Right now, Im a redhead. Ive been blonde and brunette as the situation requires, though an unscheduled color change usually means relocating in the middle of the night. So far, Im doing well here. Nobody knows what Im running from. And Id like to keep it that way" Eighteen months ago, Corine Solomon crossed the border and wound up in Mexico City, fleeing her past, her lover, and her gift. Corine, a handler, can touch something and know its historyand sometimes, its future. Using her ability, she can find

the missing and that's why people never stop trying to find her. People like her ex, Chance Chance, whose uncanny luck has led him to her doorstep, needs her help. Someone dear to them both has gone missing in Laredo, Texas, and the only hope of finding her is through Corine's gift. But their search may prove dangerous as the trail leads them into a strange dark world of demons and sorcerers, ghosts and witchcraft, zombies and black magic.

Extrait: Chance Met Right now, I'm a redhead. I've been blond and brunette as the situation requires, though an unscheduled color change usually means I need to relocate in the middle of the night or face people burning crosses on my lawn. I've set a new record, going on eighteen months in the same city. No consequences, no demonstrations, and for the last year, I've been a respectable business owner to boot. Maybe I should knock wood. So I do. But right now, a redhead. I tell myself it goes with the blue eyes, even if my skin is a little too olive for the carpet to match the drapes. And sure, I get a few looks because it's a true red, Garnier Nutrisse 46R to be exact, not the plum that most women here favor, but I may as well please myself because I will never, ever blend in entirely. The best I can do is to make sure nobody reckons me any crazier than anyone else. Around here they call me *la Americana loca*, but I figure it's affectionate, as it doesn't stop them from coming to my shop. Unlike many of the open-air *tiendas*, I have a front door and a bell that chimes softly when anyone enters my domain, a dim and shady store piled high with junk or treasure, depending on your definition. I have handmade pots and broken radios, alleged religious artifacts and rare books in sixteen languages. A ceiling fan stirs sluggishly overhead, but it never gets hot inside. The buildings are heavy, solid rock covered with plaster, so it's cool and shady when the mercury rises and even the lizards are too lazy to move. Sometimes people step in wanting a break from the sun or to get out of the deluge during rainy season, but they never leave without buying something. That's part of my unique gift (and why I always work in retail). At one point I sold furniture on commission but it just wasn't fair fish in a barrel. Ostensibly, I run a pawn shop marked by a simple red and white sign that reads *casa de empeo*, but anyone who lives in Los Remedios along the road to Atizapán will tell you it's more.

They'll also offer you a fuchsia candy tortilla at the stoplight just before you come to my store; it's the intersection where a man with a mime's face juggles fire and a monkeyless organ-grinder plies his trade dispiritedly (how he lost the monkey is another story). Don't eat the tortilla, don't tip more than twenty pesos, and make a left turn. You'll find me, if you really need to. I'm an expert at staying hidden. More than once, it's been the difference between life and death, so I live lean and keep my head down. So far as I know, I'm doing well here. Nobody knows what I'm running from. And I'd like to keep it that way. Unfortunately, our pasts have a way of coming back, time and again, just like our shadows. Oh, there are ways to sever your shadow, and I know a guy who did, but it was a really bad idea. He took sick afterward, died the slow death of a consumptive, and last I heard, his shadow was making a killing in Atlantic City. Literally. These are dark times, and I just want a quiet place to ride them out. Unfortunately, things never seem to work out the way I want them to.

My first inkling that I hadn't covered my tracks completely came on a sunny Monday afternoon. I was sitting behind the glass case in my shop, eyeballing a pair of hand-painted porcelain miniatures I'd bought for two hundred pesos maybe twenty minutes before. Nice, they looked Dutch, and some tourist would buy them by next Friday. Foretelling isn't really my thing well, only as an adjunct to my real gift and only as it relates to the object I'm handling. When I touch something, I know what's happened to an item, who's owned it, and to a lesser extent, what will happen to it in the future, although that's less sure, as any diviner could tell you. Such prediction isn't much use, unless you're breathless with wondering about the fate of hand-painted Dutch miniatures. Most people aren't. History, though . . . yeah, therein lies the magic. And the reason folks never stop trying to find me. If this could talk, people say dreamily, peering at a piece of antique jewelry. In truth it's generally pretty boring; the item gets worn, and then it goes in a box.

Repeat. But once in a while, once in a while an item passes across my palms with a real story to tell. And that's where the trouble starts. Trouble smells like singed horsehair. I'll never get past that. When I was ten, my pony died when our barn was burned down, and I'll never forget the way Sugar screamed. That was my first look at an angry mob, but not my last. If you think they don't burn witches anymore, you never lived in Kilmer, Georgia. And that's the damndest thing; those same folks will come creeping after dark to your back door, one by one, begging for the moon, but get them together, talking, and they start lighting torches. Not the whole town, of course, but a select few who come in midnight's dark to do their devil's work. They said it was for the greater good, but I saw their eyes before I ran. To this day, when life is about to get rocky, I smell the burning all over again, one of two legacies my mama left me. And on that Wednesday, the shop stunk to high heaven as someone pushed through the door, jingling the bell. I put down the miniatures, already braced to make a break for the door off the alley. But I didn't want to leave, dammit. Thanks to the

second gift my mama gave me, I made a good living here and sometimes I even went out on Saturday nights. Nobody brought me tiny pierced earrings from dead babies or soiled mittens from missing children. Nobody expected me to do anything at all, and that was exactly how I liked it. I don't know my ex's real name. He first introduced himself as Chance; he claims he came by the tag from the silver coin he likes to toy with, rolling it across his knuckles, tossing it for a hundred and coming up tails every time. I'd pumped his mother for information, more than once, but she had a way of changing the subject that was downright uncanny. The most I ever got out of her was, "It would be dangerous if you knew his true name, Corine." Regardless, his presence in my humble shop in Los Remedios, two thousand miles from where I'd seen him last, could mean nothing good. "You're a hard woman to find," he said, leaning up on my counter as if he thought I'd be glad to see him. "I could almost be hurt by that, Corine." Well, I couldn't really argue, as I'd left him sleeping in my bed when I took flight. "What're you doing here?" "I need you to handle something for me, just one job. I wouldn't have come if it wasn't important." Pleading, he fixed striated amber eyes on me, knowing I was a sucker for that look. Or I used to be. I wasn't anymore. Chance wasn't my manager any longer. Or my lover, for that matter. I didn't want to handle charged objects, didn't want to tell people their loved one had been strangled while wearing that sweater. I didn't want to do that anymore. We had a hell of a run, him and me. For as many bereaved families as we helped, we encountered neo-pagan witches, truck-driving mediums, guys who sold genuine lucky charms out of the trunks of their cars, and folks who simply defied description with what they could do and why they did it. Sometimes I felt like we might've even brushed up against angels and demons, slipping by beneath the hot velvet of a summer night. Chance had a way of ferreting out the weird and the improbable as if his inner compass focused on such things, quivered with unseen divinations. And he looked beautiful while doing it. My heart gave a little kick. After all this time, he still had the power to make my pulse skip. Some genius genetics had gone into Chance's making: long and lean, a chiseled face with a vaguely Asian look, capped by uncanny tiger eyes and a mouth that could tempt a holy sister to sin. I wondered if he'd felt the last kiss I brushed against that mouth, eighteen months ago. I wondered whether he'd missed me or just the revenue. To make matters worse, he knew how to dress, and today he wore Kenneth Cole extremely well: crinkle-washed shirt in Italian cotton, jet with a muted silver stripe, dusty black button-fly jeans, polished shoes, and a black velvet blazer. I didn't need his sartorial elegance to remind me I'd gone native, a sheer gauze blouse with crimson embroidery around the neck and a parti-colored skirt. I was even wearing flip-flops. They had a big red silk hibiscus on each toe, but were flip-flops nonetheless. It was amazing he could look at me with a straight face. But then, he'd been raised well. His mom, Yi Min-chin, was a nice lady who made great kimchi, but he'd never say who his daddy was, claiming such knowledge granted too much power over him. And his mother went along with it. I figured it was just more of his bullshit, but with Chance, you never could be sure. He had the devil's own luck, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Lucifer himself someday came to claim him. "It's never just one job with you," I said with a trace of bitterness. "I'm a show pony to you, and you never get tired of putting me through my paces. I am out of the life now. Retired. Get it? Now get out, and if you ever felt anything for me, don't tell anybody where I am." I hated the way my tone turned pleading at the end. I'd built this life. I didn't want to have to parlay to keep it. Without a word, he flattened his palm on the top of the glass case that housed my rare treasures. When he lifted his hand, I expected to see his coin because the item glinted silver. But as I leaned in, I saw something that sent snakes disco dancing in my belly. Because it meant I had to help him. *Revue de presse* An authentic Southwestern-flavored feast, filled with magic, revenge and romance, spiced with memorable characters and page-turning action. *Muy caliente!* Rachel Caine, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Gale Force*