

BOOKISH MAGAZINE

MAY 2022





Sponsored by GBBPub, a small publisher and assistance provider to self-published authors. We offer editing, book formatting, cover design, marketing tools, and much more.

<https://www.goldenboxbooks.com>



Magazine design by Author Erika M Szabo

www.authorerikamszabo.com

The contest is open until June 1st

[ENTER](#) your books



We'd like to share some happy news!

Evil Will Out, a new mystery
by Erika M Szabo & Lorraine Carey,
is available for pre-order.

Books received the 5-star seal from Readers'
Favorite.

Enjoy some of Erika M Szabo's short stories

Read free online magazines:

<https://fliphtml5.com/bookcase/uuhfw>



Golden Box Books Publishing

INDIE BOOKS WORTH READING

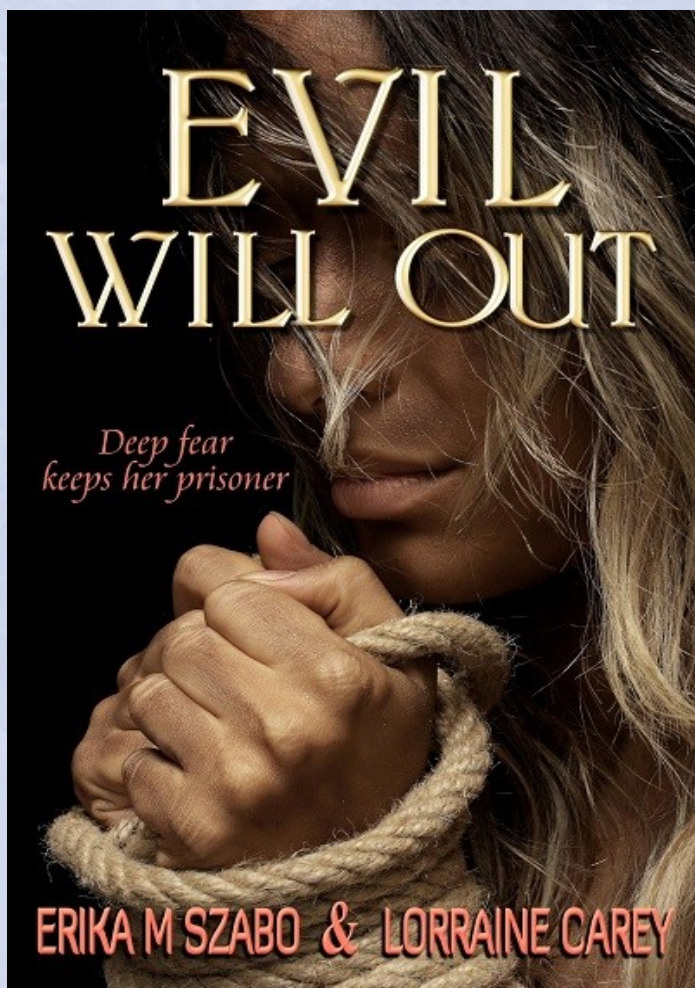


2022

CATALOG

Click to enjoy our 2022 Catalog

[HERE](#)



Kidnapping, sins of the past, love, jealousy, entrapment, tragedy, revenge, betrayal, secrets of a serial killer

99 cents pre-order:

[ON AMAZON](#)

The icy fingers of the unsettled past seem to follow bitter rivals from childhood.

An accomplished pianist disappears from her home in the middle of the night, wearing only her nightgown as her children and husband sleep soundly. As with several young women before her, it seems as if she had vanished into thin air, leaving no trace behind.

There are no clues as to what happened, and no evidence has been found during the thorough police investigation. Her distraught family is ready to do whatever it takes to bring the loving wife and mother home, alive.

Will the secrets of the past ever be revealed... or stay hidden forever? Are private investigators capable of accomplishing what the police cannot?

The Cellar

As the young woman opened her eyes in total darkness, she felt dazed and disoriented. She tried to move her hand to find her comforter to cover up but couldn't move. Fear froze her insides as she felt her hands tied behind her back and feet tightly bound as well. *Where am I? How did I get here? Am I dreaming?* As she tugged at the ropes, the realization hit her hard when she felt the thin plastic cord cutting into her flesh. She wanted to scream but her mouth was chalk dry, she could only utter a whimpering sound.

She shifted her body. It feels like I'm lying on a damp concrete floor. *How did I get here from my house, from my bed?* Frantic thoughts were racing through her mind. She swallowed hard and tried to scream again. "Help!" she managed to croak out. "Somebody! Help me, please!" she sobbed.

"She's up," a man's raspy whisper sounded as if he was behind a door. "Lemme see her," he spoke and she heard a low, squeaky sound as the doorknob was turned.

"Hands off, old man!" a deep, younger-sounding voice growled. "She's not yours. He wants her. El maldito viejo Bastardo." (*the damned old bastard*) He continued in Spanish.

"Solo puedo estar de acuerdo con esa afirmación, (*I can only agree with that statement*)" the man with the raspy voice replied in Spanish and switched to English. "Just a little peek. He doesn't have to know." He chuckled.

"I said, no!" the younger voice firmly replied. "The old man has a particular plan for this one. Hey, I didn't know you speak Spanish!"

"You don't know a thing about me, son. What does he want with her?" the other man inquired in a hushed tone.

"If you need to know, he'll tell you. If not, keep your piehole shut. Let's go! He'll be here soon."

The terrified woman lay on the cold floor, in the dark, afraid to move or make a sound. *Please, God! What are they going to do to me?*

16 days ago

The sun barely rose when Luke Castleberry woke up with a wicked headache and groggily checked if his wife, Ava, was awake. *She must have woken earlier, her side of the bed is cold. She probably couldn't sleep and is making breakfast already. Good. I could use a strong cup of coffee.* He shuffled to the bathroom and thought, I feel like I've been through a wash cycle. After splashing water on his face, he raked his fingers through his thick blond hair. He brushed his teeth, grabbed his robe, and headed down to the kitchen.

Ava wasn't there and the entire Wilbert mansion was eerily quiet. *Where is she? I hope she didn't go out for a walk alone.* As he searched the house, his anxiety grew, and he had a foreboding feeling that something terrible might have happened. He checked on the children; they were still asleep. He closed their doors and knocked on the nanny's door. Maria, a petite, Hispanic woman opened the door a crack, holding her nightgown close to her neck, covering her breasts. "What's wrong? The children..." she cried out with a horrified expression on her face.

"The children are fine," Luke assured her. "But I can't seem to find Ava anywhere."

"I'll get dressed," Maria turned and rushed back into her room.

"I'll call Matilda and John to help with the search. Let the children sleep, and I don't want to wake my father-in-law either," Luke took the phone from his pocket as he headed downstairs.

Within minutes, Matilda, the plump housekeeper, adjusting her silver hair into a bun, hurried through the entrance, wearing a flowery dress and apron. The tall, bony man in overalls and boots she followed was her husband, John. Matilda whispered with disapproval, "You should've changed your boots. And look at you! Didn't shave either."

The groundskeeper had a sheepish look on his face, “I should have, but I was about to feed the chickens when Master Luke called,” he whispered his excuse.

Maria joined them in the main hall. “We must find her!” Luke yelled, wringing his hands. “I’ve been looking everywhere, but let’s search the house again and the garden too,” he instructed. “Something terrible happened, I can feel it. She might be lying somewhere, injured. Or worse!”

The group split up and searched every room in the mansion. Matilda methodically searched every room with Maria and Luke as John checked the garden and outbuildings.

They couldn’t find Ava anywhere. The noisy commotion woke Michael, Ava’s father. What’s going on? As fast as his arthritic hands allowed, he dressed and shuffled downstairs. He found Luke in the hall. “What’s happening? Is something wrong?” he asked, imagining the worst, feeling the sinking sensation in his stomach.

“I didn’t want to wake you so early, but it’s Ava—she’s missing. She wasn’t in bed when I woke up and we can’t find her anywhere,” Luke answered in a trembling voice.

“Did she say anything last night? Did you two have a fight?”

“No! We went to bed as usual. As a matter of fact, she had some good news that made me happy. The concert she’d been invited to in Vienna next month, had been canceled. She wasn’t too happy about it, but I was.”

“Did she take one of the cars? Maybe she drove to town to pick up something?” Michael speculated.

“No, the cars are in the garage. The odd thing is that she didn’t seem to get dressed, just disappeared in her nightgown, barefoot. Her robe is in the bathroom and slippers by the bed, phone on her bedside table, and Matilda checked her closet and said that none of her clothes or shoes are missing as far as she can tell.”

“Okay, let’s not lose our heads here. There must be a reasonable explanation. Let’s search the house and grounds again. I’m calling the police.”

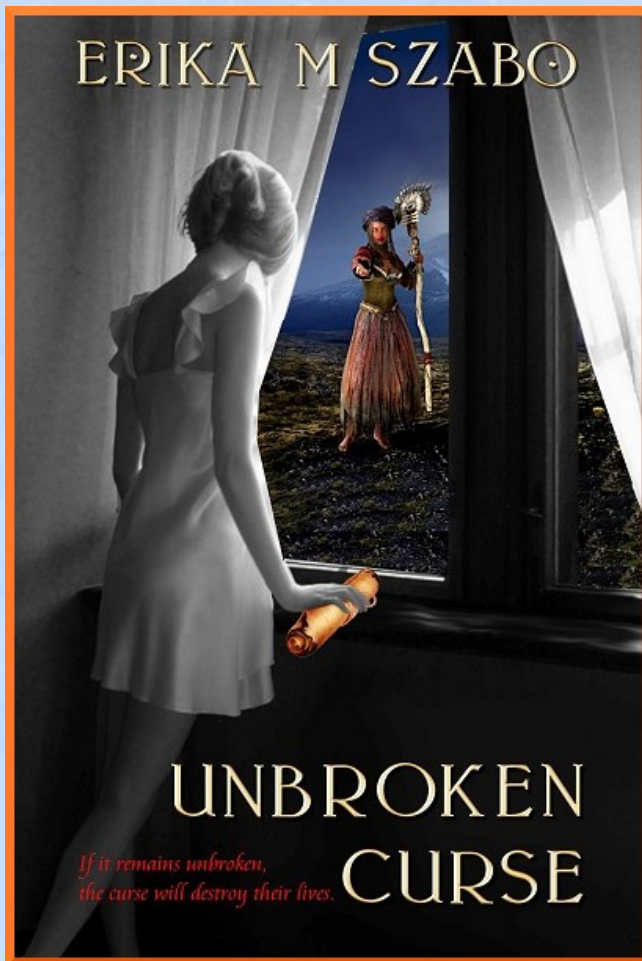
“I doubt they could do anything yet. It hasn’t even been 24 hours,” Luke worried. This isn’t not like her. She wouldn’t just leave in a nightgown leaving everything and the children behind. Something is very wrong, dad. She must’ve been kidnapped,” Luke said to his father-in-law as he focused his gaze outside through the large side window.

“I must admit, you might be right. I’ll call Steve. He’s the Chief Superintendent, he might make an exception for us,” the old man hurried to his study.

Luke nodded. I’ll check Ava’s phone,” he said and headed upstairs. He couldn’t see anything out of the ordinary other than a call the night before, which he didn’t recognize. He pressed the number and a pleasant voice answered. The woman had not much to report and said she had spoken to Ava about an upcoming rehearsal. She also told Luke to let her know when he heard anything.

Michael’s conversation with the superintendent had been successful. Half a dozen officers and a detective arrived within minutes. The detective, a middle-aged, lanky man with a prominent nose and thinning hair, had begun his barrage of the usual questions, then stated what the next steps would be involving their investigation. They’d first do a dusting in the bedroom and bathroom for fingerprints, along with taking a DNA sample from Ava’s hairbrush. After that they’d begin questioning all the members who lived in the home, extending out into the neighborhood. They’d requested a list of names of friends and acquaintances as well as the last place she’d been prior to her disappearance.

After the officers and forensic team received their instructions, Luke led them upstairs and Michael followed them to the couple’s bedroom. The detective asked if Ava had any enemies or anyone who was out to hurt her. Luke was shocked by the possibility. “Not at all. She has no enemies and being such a sweet-natured soul, she would never even hurt a fly.



**Review Rating:
5 Stars**

**Reviewed By Keith Mbuya
for Readers' Favorite**

EBOOK PAPERBACK

Alternative history suspense novella.

A curse of evil deed incites an unbroken chain of evil.

A powerful curse cast sixteen hundred years ago destroyed the lives of their ancestors for centuries. If it remains unbroken, the curse will ruin the lives of future generations as well.

Jayden's life is in danger. When he finds a crude leather book in his grandmother's secret room that was written in 426 by a Shaman, his sister, Sofia, deciphers the ancient runes.

They learn about their **family curse** and dark memories of their childhood start to surface.

Is it possible to break the ancient curse and save Jayden?



Readers' Favorite®
Book Reviews and Award Contest

Review Rating: 5 Stars

Reviewed By Keith Mbuya for Readers' Favorite

Nothing stays hidden forever, or so Jayden and Sofia's parents would soon find out. It all started with the demise of their younger siblings, Amelia and Aiden, whose deaths neither Jayden nor Sofia had fully comprehended, leave alone come to terms with. What followed next was Sofia surviving a series of near-fatal attacks from her mother. This saw Sofia being put under the guardianship of her brother Jayden, who was an archeology student. Jayden and Sofia were confused by all the happenings, and their parents giving them sketchy explanations did not help the situation a bit. Perhaps what triggered their search for answers was Jayden's encounter with an assailant (who looked exactly like his sister Sophia) while he was out in the fields digging up artifacts. Why would a stranger attack Jayden and why did the assailant look exactly like Jayden's sister? What happened to their siblings and is there something their parents have been hiding from them? Find out more about Sophia and Jayden in Erika M Szabo's *Unbroken Curse*.



Readers' Favorite® **Book Reviews and Award Contest**

Erika M Szabo whisked me away from reality and into a wonderland. She forged her engrossing plot with simple sentences, which she loads with a sophisticated vocabulary. Her choice of words gives an edge of mystery, suspense, adventure, and romance in her narration. There are secrets, agony, old history, premonitions, dark powers, a story within a story, and much more. She gives vivid depictions of her scenes and characters. This served to add color to her narration. The characters are exciting and fully developed. I found it easy to connect with their thoughts and emotions, which gave me insight into their actions during the next scenes. It also made me empathize with the characters, and love as well as loathe some of them. Sofia is portrayed as a young girl whose inquisitive nature is capped with a sharp mind and an ability to learn quickly. Some of the conversations were witty and this spiced up the reading experience. A young adult audience with a yearning for fantasy novels laced with a supernatural tale will love Unbroken Curse.

Chapter 1

The old stone mill quarry in the mountains on the Northeast side of Hungary had been buzzing with activity for days. Archaeologists found 16th century artifacts the year before, but when they restarted the site in the spring and dug deeper, they'd unearthed an ancient burial site in the six-foot-deep layer. As the initial assessment estimated, this layer had been buried since the 5th century.

The excited murmurs of a group of archeology students at the bottom of the large, six feet deep hole sounded muffled. But when a lanky young man in dusty overalls ascended the stepladder and yelled out to the lead archeologist standing by the tent, his voice boomed, "Helen, you have to see this!"

A middle-aged plump woman with salt and pepper hair pulled into a tight bun froze for a second, and then started running toward the student. "What did you find?" she wheezed, her chest tightening by the sudden excitement and anticipation.

"Come down and see!" The student hurried down the stepladder giving space to Helen to descend into the deep, large space.

"Damn!" she exclaimed when her shaky legs missed a step, but the young man broke her fall and steadied her on her feet. "Thanks," she mumbled.

"Look!" One of the female students pointed at the white horse skull poking halfway out of the soil. "Look at that beautiful bridle!" She looked up at Helen beaming with joy.

"It's magnificent!" Helen whispered. "The finest craftsmanship I've even seen." She carefully ran her fingers through dry, hardened leather. "The usage of gold and alloy of copper and zinc proves that this warrior had a funeral fit for a noble leader." She knelt by the skull and took the brush from her student. "I got this. You three start unearthing the rest of the skeleton," she pointed and added with a stern look on her face. "Be careful!"

The other two holes they dug days ago were occupied by students kneeling in the dirt, brushes and fine chisels in their hands. They carefully scraped away the dirt layer by layer. Next to them laid out on a weathered tarp were weapons, jewelry, and everyday items from around the beginning of the 5th century. They had been working in the hole since dawn knowing it would be too hot to work close to midday when they would be forced to take a break until around mid-afternoon.

What are they buzzing about? A gangly, middle-aged man in a security guard uniform peeked into the deep pit planting his feet firmly to the ground. *Good! Them keep finding stuff is my job security.* He straightened up with a grunt and turned to find his partner. *That fool is sleeping again!* He walked over to the tent and punched his stocky partner's shoulder who was softly snoring in a fold-up chair under the shade of the tall oak tree by the tent. "Hey, sleeping beauty!"

"Uh, what? Jesus! I ain't sleeping. Just restin' me eyes," the balding man sat up straight and wiped spittle from the corner of his mouth with the back of his hand.

"If they catch you snoozing, you can say goodbye to this well-paying cushy job," the lanky man warned his friend.

"Yeah, yeah," the heavysset man mumbled. "They're in the holes busy brushing dirt off of old stuff. And who would come up to this place to steal anything, anyway?" He stretched his hands over his head and let out a loud yawn before reclining once more on the fold-up chair with obvious intent to resume his slumber.

"Just keep your eyes open! I'm gonna drive down to town to pick up the breakfast from the coffee shop."

"Okay, hurry up. I'm starving."

The tall man walked down the path between the thick bushes to the clearing where the archeological team parked their cars.

Despite his promise, his porky partner's chin dropped to his chest as soon as he was out of sight. *I'll just close me eyes for a moment*, he thought. His breathing slowed as he fell asleep.

Jayden, a young American archeologist worked in the fourth pit alone. Although Helen wanted everyone to concentrate on the three holes they'd found the artifacts, Jayden convinced her to let him try the abandoned pit again. He pulled a crumpled handkerchief from his dusty overall's pocket to wipe the sweat off his forehead. "Phew! It's already hotter in this hole than in the witch's oven." He mumbled under his breath while he pulled a hairband off his wrist and tied his shoulder-length auburn hair into a man bun. "I should get a haircut."

A few minutes later his chisel made a welcomed sound as it touched metal in the ground. Energized by the excitement of his discovery, he began the painstaking work of carefully scraping the packed dirt off the rusty handle of an ancient sword. "Come on, beautiful! Show me your glorious body," he whispered.

As he changed position and kneeled back down, a small black snake wiggled toward him from the dark corner of the ten feet wide hole. "Geeze!" he exclaimed and threw himself backward, not sure if the snake was poisonous or just an innocent garter snake that had fallen into the pit by accident. The moment his elbows hit the dirt and feet still up in the air, an arrow hit the exact spot he was kneeling a second ago with such force that the wide obsidian arrowhead nearly disappeared into the dirt with the shaft violently vibrating.

"What the hell!?" he cried out in fright and looked up. Six feet up at the mouth of the hole he saw his sister staring down at him holding a recurve bow. She let out a furious scream and disappeared. "Sofia? When did you... how did you get here? Wait!" He yelled and scrambled to get to the stepladder as fast as he could. "Sofia! Wait!" he shouted as he climbed out of the dig hole.

The stocky security guard woke to the high-pitched scream, jumped to his feet feeling confused and dumbfounded. “Hey! What are you doing there?” he yelled at the young girl running from the pit. She glared at the guard with a murderous expression on her face. Clenching her fists, she growled and ran toward the path between the thick bushes and soon disappeared from sight. The guard grunted and stomped after her as fast as his heavy body could move.

Jayden finally out of the hole looked around frantically but didn’t see his sister anywhere. His teammates climbing out of the larger pit ran toward him and looked at him questioningly. “What happened?” one asked. “What’s going on?” others shouted.

“A woman just tried to kill me! She fired an arrow into my hole,” Jayden said running toward the narrow path. He couldn’t tell them his suspicions without proof about the woman being his sister.

His teammates followed, and they saw the small red car speeding down the dirt road and disappearing behind the bushes at the curve. Jayden fished out his keys from his pocket and jumped into his beat-up jeep.

“I’m coming with you!” the guard yelled and stuffed his large behind into the passenger seat.

“When did that woman get here?” Jayden questioned the guard.

“Uhm... I... I was in the tent putting away some tools when I heard the scream. By the time I got out of the tent, she was running toward the cars. I chased after her, but she was running so fast that I could only get a glimpse at her.” His eyes shifted from Jayden to the side mirror as he wiped the perspiration off his forehead.

“Where is your partner?”

“He drove to town to pick up the breakfast.”

“Oh, right!” Jayden shook his head. “But you shouldn’t have gone into the tent when everyone was in the holes.”

“I’m sorry, I apologize,” the guard mumbled feeling relieved that nobody saw him sleeping on the job. “I couldn’t go after her because my partner gave me a ride this morning. I don’t have a car,” he added his excuse.

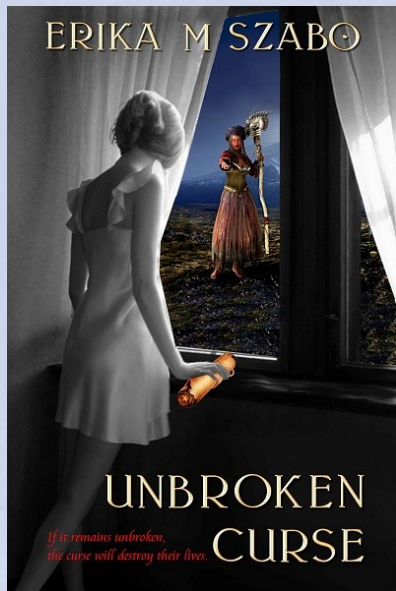
The jeep accelerated as Jayden pressed the gas pedal harder. *What the hell is going on? Did my sister just try to kill me? But how did she get here? She’s supposed to be in New York!* Frantic thoughts chased each other in his mind while driving downhill like a madman. “Did you see her firing the arrow into the hole?” he asked the guard.

“No... as I said I was in the tent, but she carried a bow and had a leather quiver on her back,” the guard speculated, holding onto dear life as his body was violently shaken by the speeding jeep on the bumpy dirt road. “Man, you’re driving like a devil. Slow down!”

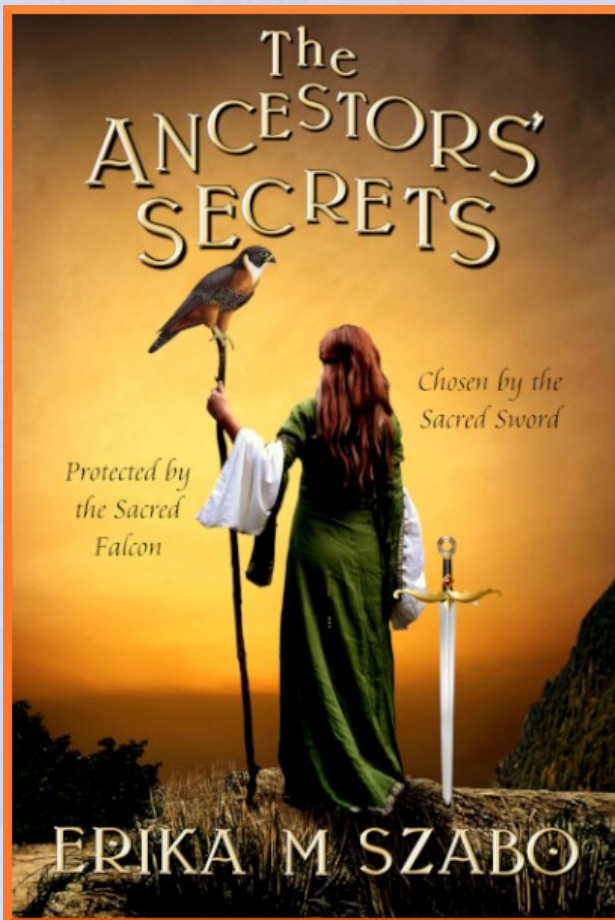
Jayden ignoring the guard’s protest asked, “Did you see anyone else?”

“There was nobody else.” The guard braced himself holding onto the dashboard.

Suddenly, the jeep jerked to the side, and it took all Jayden’s strength to hold onto the steering wheel. He stepped on the break slaloming between trees and bushes for a minute, finally, he could stop before crushing into a large tree. “Crap!” he cried out, stepping out of the jeep examining the blown tire. He pulled his phone from his back pocket and pressed his sister’s number in his contacts.



[EBOOK PAPERBACK](#)



**Review Rating:
5 Stars**

**Reviewed
By Jamie Michele
for Readers' Favorite**

Ilona resigns to live the simple life of a small-town doctor, but her life goes into a tailspin on her birthday. She finds out she was born into a secretive, ancient clan still hidden among us. She starts to develop unusual powers which she finds exciting as well as frightening. She can slow time and heal with her touch, but how and why?

She struggles to find answers, but those who try to reveal the clan secrets are severely punished.

A menacing man is following her and wants to kill her. Who is he?

More life struggles continue to plague her. After being thrust into a world of clan mysteries, obscure traditions, and beliefs, her life is drastically changing.

She must seek out and stop Mora's evil plan. Punished by the ancestors long ago, Mora has waited centuries for the chance to reunite with her beloved Joland and to gain power over the Hunor clan. Revenge has kept her alive for over 1600 years.



Readers' Favorite®
Book Reviews and Award Contest

Review Rating: 5 Stars

Reviewed By Jamie Michele for Readers' Favorite

The Ancestors' Secrets by Erika M Szabo is an epic fantasy time travel novel that shifts between two women who hail from the same ancient Hunor Clan. Mora is a woman who has been on a 1600-year-long path for retribution, plotting and stewing in anger and malevolence. Her goal is crystal clear: power and control as head of the clan. However, it is Ilona who was prophesied long before her modern arrival and it is Ilona alone who is destined for the sacrosanct role in the face of threats from within the clan. Brought back centuries, Ilona is embedded in a time and place she neither knows nor fully understands, fraught with danger as her powers are honed. The narrative is almost entirely in the first-person through the points of view of both the primary characters, Mora, and Ilona, and supporting cast who are integral to each woman and their clan, for better or for worse.



Readers' Favorite[®] **Book Reviews and Award Contest**

I was keen to read *The Ancestors' Secrets* by Erika M Szabo for a couple of reasons. The first is that I was impressed by the premise and the promise of two strong female leads, and Mora and Ilona are worthy in this regard. Neither are perfect and even though we are not meant to like Mora, we do sort of understand her motive. It's deeper than the power and the revenge she seeks; we get that. She is not a cookie-cutter antagonist, and because Ilona is far from perfect herself, we are able to read through the eyes of women who are authentic. This is refreshing. The second part that piqued my interest is a modern female thrust back into the 1300s. This is something of an origin story, not just for Ilona but the entirety of the Hunor Clan. The magic is fun, but the tension and the settings are Szabo's best work. As for the writing, it's simple and easy to read creating a good story overall. Fans of YA and coming-of-age fantasy will enjoy this wonderful little gem.

Prologue By Loran

I'm Loran, the Táltos (shaman) of the Hunor clan that still exists hidden in every country with its strict hierarchy, deadly rules and traditions. Although every event and everything is written by Hunors with the ancient writing, called Rovasiras, is registered in the Collective Memory, my job is to create a detailed file of every gifted clan member whose fate is to preserve the traditions and keep the clan intact.

The Ancestors' Secrets file is an important historical document and now available to every clan member who reached adulthood. This file contains diary entries by the *Chosen One* and by those who are close to her as well as those who chose to oppose her and try to stop her.

When I started putting the file together, there were gaps in the events, and I had to talk to people in order to place the puzzles pieces together. It's amazing how some of their time bending ability could bring the present and past together. Reading the diaries, I felt like I was walking on the lush steppes with the ancestors, traveled with the gypsy caravan in the fourteenth century or visited a long dead King.

The Ancestors' Secrets file includes three parts. *Prelude* is a glimpse into what will come in *Turmoil* and *Destiny*, as the present and past events are interwoven in the complex story of the most important members of a secret society. A lot of ancient tribal secrets must be unveiled, and the puzzle pieces must find their place before the Chosen One discovers what fate has in store for her.

Mora's Fury

Mora closed her eyes and began searching the complicated network of the Collective Memory, in her mind. She murmured under her breath, “The Elders took everything I valued in life from me, but they never found out I could read every word that is written by every gifted Hunor after they reach maturity. When they use the ancient letters given to them by the Ancestors and they mention the meaning of the flowers, their lives are open books for me.”

Mora’s prune-like face lit up, “Good girl, Adel. You are the servant of the Leaders and can’t talk to anyone about this, but you just wrote in your diary that the Elders are planning a meeting. Oh, I see. One of them is about to take her last breath, and they need to choose her successor. Hmm... could I use it to my advantage? We’ll see. There is another interesting sentence here; you are worried about your mistress, Csenge. She seems distant and unhappy. Let’s see what our Leader has been writing...” she scoured Csenge’s desk in her mind.

“What?!” Mora shouted angrily when she read Csenge’s note in her calendar, “The Chosen One, Ilona, is coming of age today.” Mora was furious, “I can get into the minds of those who are related to me, but I can’t get into the Elders’ meeting or see the Chosen One. I curse you Ancestors for taking away my powers, and I curse you for tearing me away from the arms of my beloved, Joland. We’ll be together again one day, my love. I’ll find a way, somehow...”

In her fury, Mora clawed a hole in her soft comforter, but then, she started seeing an unfamiliar handwriting in her mind. Someone, unknown to her was writing a diary with the ancient Hunor letters. Mora’s rage calmed instantly as she rejoiced, “Ilona’s diary! She must be the Chosen One that Csenge wrote about.”

In her mind’s eye, the ancient Hunor letters appeared as Ilona wrote them in her diary. *Dear diary, I’m supposed to keep a detailed journal from now on...* Mora grinned, “Write my little princess and keep writing. I want to know everything about you.”



**Review Rating:
5 Stars**

**Reviewed By Emily-Jane
Hills Orford
for Readers' Favorite**

EBOOK PRINT AUDIOBOOK

Bedtime stories for grownups

“We all remember cozying up in our warm comfortable beds and settling while a bedtime story was read to us. The fun of the stories centered on the variety - not even a single book was the same, but they all represented a vivid imagination and a memorable tale. Erika M Szabo refers to her imagination as her 'superpower' - I can't think of a better description of her creation of stories that span many different genres, yet they all have that touch of magic that resonates with us from those old-time fairy tales. These however are adult tales with adult themes such as rising to find your dreams following loss and suffering and rising up despite hardship and fear.” ~Sandy C



Readers' Favorite®
Book Reviews and Award Contest

Review Rating: 5 Stars

Reviewed By Emily-Jane Hills Orford for Readers' Favorite

Imagine a love so powerful it can stand the test of time – a time that stretches across many centuries. How about a love that began in ancient Egypt between a Prince and a slave girl. Murdered and cursed the prince's sarcophagus finds its way to a museum in the twenty-first century and the only one who could break the curse and set the love story in motion again. A riveting tale? How about a mystery about a seemingly worthless painting that causes so much furor that one begins to suspect its true value? Or an omen that threaten a woman's life? A bedtime story for every night of the week that will probably set your dreams astray as your mind unravels the complexities of life itself.



Readers' Favorite®
Book Reviews and Award Contest

Erika M Szabo's *The Seven Cozy Shorts* is a collection of seven bedtime stories for grownups. Romance, mystery, intrigue and the totally weird and bizarre – just what adults need to wind down after a busy day. Each story, almost a novella in length, has a unique and intriguing plot which manifests in multiple directions, holding the reader's attention to the very end. The descriptive narrative is thorough and engaging, the dialogue well constructed and believable and the characters are well developed. The author confronts all manner of human issues in her stories, from love, murder, family ties, a child given up for adoption and lost in the foster care system, forgiveness and so much more. Her stories span a wide range of genres, from historical romance and alternate histories to fantasy and the supernatural, to name but a few. With each genre, the author excels with the gift of creating a compelling story that will enrapture the readers from beginning to end.

Egypt, 1198 BC

The scorching sun was high in the sky, but Tanakhmet relaxed in the shade fanned by his servants. He watched the builder slaves trudging along in the hot sun, carrying rocks upon their backs, building the pharaoh's final resting place.

Tanakhmet was the closest to the pharaoh, who was on his sickbed, and there was no question that he would be the Grand Vizier of the next pharaoh. The pharaoh's son had been groomed from birth to take his father's place, but he was too young to rule. The pharaoh's younger brother, Prince Akhmose, would be his regent until he'd come of age. But because Akhmose cared more about art and sports than learning how to rule, Tanakhmet made sure that the prince needed him and couldn't rule without him.

Tanakhmet gazed upon the land that would be under his rule. His soon to be wife would elevate his and his future children's status, being of royal blood. She was a princess of a land Egypt had conquered, and she was sent to appease him and secure the alliance. Although he was the second most powerful man of Egypt, the thorn of resentment burrowed deeper and deeper into his heart every time he was reminded that royal blood didn't flow in his veins.

When his future wife arrived and Tanakhmet gazed upon her the first time, he didn't hide his disappointment. The princess was petite and average looking. Breasts barely lifting the light tunic and hips narrow as that of a young boy's, she lacked the beauty he so desired. She was nothing but an obligation, a means to an alliance. Tanakhmet assigned her a luxurious living quarters in the palace with a beautiful lotus pond in the courtyard, far away from his quarters, and he provided an adequate number of servants to fit her high status. He would see her again on their wedding day.

Glancing at the beautiful young slave kneeling at his feet, his loins immediately stirred with desire.

Her skin had a sun-kissed glow and a pleasantly round body, which was soft in just the right places. Her shaved head downcast as she held out a cup of wine. He loved to see the look of defiance in her eyes, wondering what words would tumble from her lips if she was allowed to speak. She would be killed on the spot for her insolence if those words that clearly showed in her eyes ever left her lips. She was but a slave, a possession. She obeyed him, yet her gaze only held hate and disgust.

Why can't she accept her fate? He often questioned, but deep down, he enjoyed the absolute power he had over her. Even after she bore his child, she remained obedient, but cold and distant toward him.

"I want you in my room tonight. It's time to give your meowing pup to the wet nurse and return to my bed," he said, watching the daggers in her eyes that clearly reflected her feelings.

She bowed her head in submission at his sharp gaze, stood up, and quietly retreated. Tanakhmet reserved a forced, kind expression only to royals, but those of lower status knew his true, savage nature. Having been born to a servant out of wedlock and greedily watching the privileged life of the royal family, he swore he would reach a high status one day. When the old Grand Vizier noticed his eagerness to learn, the aging man began teaching him all he knew. Soon, Tanakhmet made himself indispensable to the pharaoh and the entire court by creating healing potions and casting spells. When there was nothing more he could learn from the Vizier, Tanakhmet added a few deadly herbs to his master's wine. He didn't even feel a twinge of guilt or sorrow. In his mind, the Vizier had served his purpose by elevating his status and became disposable.

A servant approached holding a piece of papyrus. Tanakhmet's eyes narrowed as he read the urgent message. The pharaoh was sending him to negotiate a treaty with not a minute delay. He glanced once more at the retreating slave, stood up and strolled out without another word. He hated that he had to obey the order of the pharaoh, but he knew the time will come when he would give the orders, and everyone will obey—including the pharaoh's successor.



Muffin

Charlie and Mary got a Labrador puppy from their friend. They never had a dog before, so they were very excited. They treated the puppy like he was their own baby. They chose the best puppy food for the little guy, and they bought lots of toys for him to play with.

Naturally, the puppy preferred to chew their slippers to shreds and ignored the squeaky toys. Mary was knitting doggy sweaters for the winter, and Charlie bought three different doggy beds for him to choose the one he liked the best.

Of course, the puppy chose to sleep on the bathroom rug.

One afternoon Charlie called me and said, “I took Muffin to the vet because he was scratching his ear and cried. The vet said that he has ear mites in his right ear and they gave him ear drops.”

“Okay...” I answered wearily because knowing Charlie, I never knew what to expect when he called. A childhood illness left him with a mild cognitive disability and Mary wasn’t the sharpest tool in the shed either. “Did you put the ear drops in his ear?” I asked.

“I can’t decide which one is his right ear!” Charlie replied.

“Umm... what do you mean” I asked feeling confused. “There is only right ear and left ear. Why is it confusing?”

“Well, when I’m facing Muffin, I touch his right ear with my right hand, so it must be his right ear. But when I stand behind him, I get confused because the ear I touched is now on the left.”

Oh, boy! - I thought - How on Earth am I going to explain this to him over the phone?

“Well, stand behind the dog and touch his right ear with your right hand.” I prompted him.

“Got it!” he answered.

“Now put the phone down and put the ear drops in his right ear.”

“Okay, but don’t hang up!”

“Don’t worry; I’ll stay on the phone.”

I heard rustling, whispering then muffled cursing, and then Charlie picked up the phone and said, “I don’t get it! I can’t put the drops in staying behind Muffin because he keeps turning his head to look me. But when I face him, I’m confused again about which ear is the right, and which ear is the left.”

Not knowing what to say or how to explain without further confusing him, I had a brilliant idea. “You know what Charlie? Just put the drops in both ears!”

“Are you sure it’s okay? The doctor said his left ear doesn’t have mites.”

“Yes, I am sure. Just put the drops in both of his ears, it wouldn’t hurt him. My friend, Marie is coming up the driveway, Charlie. I must go now, but good luck. I’ll call you later.”

“Okay, I’ll do as you said.” He promised.

I thought the problem was solved and Muffin got his medicine until my phone rang an hour later. When I saw the number on the caller idea I sighed and said to Marie, “I might have to go over to Charlie’s, do you want to come with me?”

“Better not,” Marie replied. “I want to beat the traffic back to the City, so I’m going to leave soon.”

I picked up the phone and heard Charlie’s excited voice, “I still wasn’t sure and decided to call the vet. He tried to explain, but then he told me exactly what you did. He said ‘put the bloody drops in both ears’. I did, and Muffin was a very good boy, he let me do it.” He announced happily.

“Fantastic!” I replied feeling happy that Charlie took the vet’s advice and saved me a half an hour ride.

Copyright © [Erika M Szabo](#) 2021



Writing is easy

A few months ago, a friend came for a visit. I was in the middle of writing a novelette and didn't want to lose my thoughts on a crucial dialog, so I told her to make herself comfortable and give me a few minutes to finish it.

"Sure, no problem," she said. "I'll make coffee and I have a few calls to make, anyway. Take your time."

She sat on the couch and by the time I finished about two pages, she took care of a few calls.

"Let me see what you wrote." She came over to my desk and looked at my screen.

I opened the document and told her, "I only have about ten pages written but if you want to read it, here it is."

She sat down, read the pages and she said, "It sounds great! You know, I should write a book too. I have a gazillion ideas and writing can't be that hard. How does it feel when your book is finished and published?"

“Writing a book is one of the most challenging and rewarding things I’ve ever done. When I hold the finished book... it’s like...”

“That’s it then! I’m going to write one and you will help me publish it.”

Knowing her flighty nature, starting ten projects at the same time and never finishing any, I said, “Well, anyone can write a book, but I have to tell you that it takes serious determination, patience, as well as hard work to actually finish it.”

“So how do you start writing a book?”

“Every writer develops their own way of writing a book. Some writers, like me, write a rough draft and go with the flow of thoughts and ideas and then rewrite, cut out parts or add new parts, and then edit the story. Others take it slow and think about each and every word and sentence before they write it down, so their story is finished when they write ‘The End.’”

“What do I do first?”

“Well, pick a genre to start with. Don’t base this choice on what genres sell best but write what you like to read. Write a story as if you’re writing it for yourself.”

“I want to write romance. I love romance stories. How do I start?”

“First, create a biography for each of your characters.”

“What do you mean biography? They’re not real.”

“If you want your readers to enjoy the story, you need to create characters that seem real.”

“Oh, right! How do I do that?”

“Let’s say your main character is a woman. What does she look like? How old is she? What is her name? Where does she live? Is her personality easy going, shy or self-assured? Questions like these will help you to deepen her character and make her seem real.”

“Cool! I can do that.”

“Then you need to think about the sub-characters and plot. Who are they, how do they meet and interact with each other, what do they want, what do they do, what or who stands in their way of reaching their goal, and how the story will end.”

“Oh, it’s like you have the story outline in your head and then you start writing.”

“Yes, and as you write, you might change your characters and the plot, and you might even discard the outlines you originally wrote. This is when you push yourself creatively and go with it as the ideas flow in your mind and eventually, this rough patchwork of thoughts, ideas, and plotlines will come together to make a story.”

“I have an idea... it’s like my favorite fantasy but, of course, the guy in my fantasy is constantly changing. I’m going to write the story about my favorite fantasy guy who meets a shy girl when vacationing at a ski resort. He might sprain his ankle and she keeps him company and then they will make passionate love by the crackling fire.”

“Sounds great!”

She stayed a few hours and excitedly chattered on and on about her ideas. “No, they will meet on a cruise because she can show off her perfect curves in a bikini and he... No, wait! He would be a painter and she commissions him to paint her portrait. Better yet, she would be a doctor and saves his life...”

By the time she left, she came up with about ten different scenes and plots. “I’ll call you and let you know how it’s going,” she said and started the two-hour drive to get home before dark.

She called a few times a day for about two weeks. She developed her characters nicely but every time she called, she had a different idea for the plot.

She will work it out, I thought. If she gets stuck, she will ask for help. Months went by and I finished and published the novelette I was working on. I sent it to her and she called. "I love it! Wow! What a great story and I love the ending the most."

She didn't mention her book anymore when we talked and when I asked about it, she changed the subject. I didn't mention it for a long time but after a few conversations about everything else, I asked her how the story was going.

She said, "I'm done. I'm finished!"

"Great!" I replied, thinking that she had finished the book. "Send it to me, let me read it, and then I'll help you to publish it."

"Right! Let me send you what I have. Check your email in a few minutes."

She hung up, but what she said and how she said it didn't sound like a happy writer who just finished a book, so I was anxiously waiting for the bling of my email alert.

When the email arrived, instead of a manuscript, she sent me a screenshot picture as an attachment. On the screenshot was the beginning of a novel:

"Chapter 1.

It was a dark, gloomy night. Nathan leaned back in his comfy chair by the crackling fire enjoying his coffee and listening to the sounds of the night.

Coyotes fought over scraps in the distance and the neighbor's dog down the road barked furiously. He heard an owl's hoot close by and the eerie sound sent chills down his spine."

This is great, I thought, but then I read the next line.

*"What a f*** am I doing? Why am I even trying? I'm never gonna write a story!!!! F*** this shit!!!"*

Then I got a text message from her: *"Got it? That's ALL I HAVE!!! I wasted six ***** months to write THAT!!!"*

Oh, boy! I thought, and I called her. "What happened? The beginning sounds great. Why don't you continue writing?"

"Why?" she shouted. "Why? Because I wrote three pages and then I changed my mind about the plot and deleted it. Then I wrote five pages, but I had another idea and deleted that one too. I've been doing that for six bloody months, nonstop. Write, delete. Write again, don't like it, delete again."

"I'm so sorry to hear that. Is there anything I can help you with?"

"Yeah, just... write your stories and let me read them. And never, ever mention it again that I should write a book. Okay? I saved this on my computer as a reminder to never, ever attempt to write a book, again. And don't you tell me that writing is easy, okay?"

"Well, I never said that writing is easy. All I said was that writing a book is one of the most challenging and rewarding things I've ever done."

Copyright © [Erika M Szabo](#) 2021

Read free online magazines:

<https://fliphtml5.com/bookcase/uuhfw>