



Frost Burned (Mercy Thompson)

By Patricia Briggs

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Patricia Briggs “has reached perfection”* in this #1 *New York Times* bestseller, as Mercy Thompson faces a shapeshifter’s biggest fear...

Mercy’s life has undergone a seismic change. Becoming the mate of Alpha werewolf Adam Hauptman has made her a stepmother to his daughter Jesse, a relationship that brings moments of blissful normalcy to Mercy’s life. But on the edges of humanity, what passes for a minor mishap on an ordinary day can turn into so much more...

After a traffic accident in bumper-to-bumper traffic, Mercy and Jesse can’t reach Adam—or anyone else in the pack. They’ve all been abducted. Mercy fears Adam’s disappearance may be related to the political battle the werewolves have been fighting to gain acceptance from the public—and that he and the pack are in serious danger. Outmatched and on her own, Mercy may be forced to seek assistance from any ally she can get, no matter how unlikely.

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Editorial Review

Review

“The characters and events in this world just keep getting better and better...A fantastic book!”—Fresh Fiction

“There’s a great story here of family, friendship, and love.”—SFRevu

“The arc of the Mercy Thompson series has showcased Briggs’s incredible gift for delivering character development alongside intriguing plots filled with thrills and chills. This latest installment is worth every penny and moment of your time!”—*RT Book Reviews*

More Praise for the Mercy Thompson Novels

“I love these books.”—Charlaine Harris, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“An excellent read with plenty of twists and turns...It left me wanting more.”—Kim Harrison, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“The best new urban fantasy series I’ve read in years.”—Kelley Armstrong, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“In the increasingly crowded field of kick-ass supernatural heroines, Mercy stands out as one of the best.”—*Locus*

“Action-packed and with more than a few satisfying emotional payoffs...Patricia Briggs at the top of her game.”—*The Speculative Herald*

“The characters are all realistic and vibrant.”—*The Independent*

“These are fantastic adventures, and Mercy reigns.”—SFRevu

“The world building is incredibly lush and subsuming...a fantastic urban fantasy adventure.”—Fresh Fiction

“Outstanding.”—Charles de Lint, *Fantasy & Science Fiction*

About the Author

Patricia Briggs is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the Mercy Thompson urban fantasy series and the Alpha and Omega novels.

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“You should have brought the van,” said my stepdaughter. She sounded like herself, though the expression on her face was still a little tight.

“I shouldn’t have brought anything, including us,” I muttered, shoving harder on the hatch. My Rabbit had a lot of cargo space for a little car. We’d only been here twenty minutes. I shop at Walmart all the time, and I never come out with this much stuff. We’d even left before the big midnight reveal. And still—I had all this *stuff*. Most of which had not been on sale. Who does that?

“Oh, come on,” she scoffed, determinedly cheerful. “It’s Black Friday. Everyone shops Black Friday.”

I looked up from the stubborn lid of my poor beleaguered car and glanced around the parking lot of Home Depot. “Obviously,” I muttered.

Home Depot wasn’t open at midnight on Black Friday, but the parking lot was huge and was doing a good job of absorbing the overflow from Walmart. A bicycle couldn’t have parked in the Walmart lot. I wouldn’t have believed there were this many people in the Tri-Cities—and this was only one of three Walmarts, the one we’d decided would be the least busy.

“We should go to Target next,” Jesse said, her thoughtful voice sending chills down my spine. “They have the new Instant Spoils: The Dread Pirate’s Booty Four game on sale for half off the usual price, and it was set for release tonight at midnight. There were rumors that problems in production meant before-Christmas shortages.”

Codpieces and Golden Corsets: The Dread Pirate’s Booty Three, better known as CAGCTDPBT—I kid you not; if you couldn’t say the letters ten times in a row without stumbling, you weren’t a Real Player—was the game of choice for the pack. Twice a month, they brought their laptops and a few desktops and set them up in the meeting room and played until dawn. Vicious, nasty werewolves playing pirate games on the Internet—it was pretty intense, and I was a little surprised that we hadn’t had any bodies. Yet.

“Shortage rumors carefully leaked to the press just in time for Black Friday,” I groused.

She grinned, her cheeks flushed with the cold November wind and her good cheer not as forced as it had been since her mother called to cancel Christmas plans during Thanksgiving dinner earlier this evening. “Cynic. You’ve been hanging around Dad too much.”

So, in search of pirate booty, we drove across the street to the Target parking lot, which looked a lot like the Walmart parking lot had. Unlike Walmart, Target hadn’t stayed open. There was a line four people deep waiting for the doors to be unlocked at midnight, which, according to my watch, was about two minutes from now. The line started at Target, wrapped around the shoe store and giant pet store, and disappeared around the corner of the strip mall into darkness.

“They’re not open yet.” I did not want to go where that line of people was going. I wondered if this was how Civil War soldiers felt, looking over a ridge and seeing the other side’s combatants, grim and poised for battle. This line of people was pushing baby strollers instead of cannons, but they still looked dangerous to me.

Jesse looked at my face and snickered.

I pointed at her. “You can just stop that right now, missy. This is all your fault.”

She blinked innocently at me. “My fault? All I said was it might be fun to go out and hit the Black Friday sales.”

I’d thought it would be a good way to distract her from her mother’s patented brand of guilt trip leavened with broken promises. I hadn’t realized that going shopping on Black Friday (Thursday still, according to my watch, for the next minute) was akin to throwing myself on a grenade. I’d still have done it—I love Jesse, and the diversion was starting to work—but it might have been nice to know how bad it was going to be.

We drove slowly behind a host of cars also looking for parking places, eventually drifting right by the front of the store where the shoppers lurked, hunched and ready to attack the sales. Inside the store, a young man

in the sadly appropriate red Target shirt walked very slowly to the locked door that was all that protected him from the horde.

“He’s going to die.” Jesse sounded a little worried.

The crowd started undulating, like a Chinese New Year dragon, as he reached up slowly to turn the key.

“I wouldn’t want to be in his shoes,” I agreed, as the boy, mission completed, turned to run back into the store, the crowd of salivating shoppers hot on his trail.

“I’m not going in there,” I stated firmly, as an old woman elbowed another old woman who had tried to slip in through the doors ahead of her.

“We could always go to the mall,” Jesse said after a moment.

“The mall?” I raised my eyebrows at her incredulously. “You want to go to the mall?” There are a herd of strip malls in the Tri-Cities as well as a Factory Outlet Mall, but when one speaks of “the Mall,” they mean the big one in Kennewick. The one that everyone shopping on Black Friday was planning to hit first.

Jesse laughed. “Seriously, though, Mercy. Five-quart kitchen mixers are on sale, a hundred dollars off. Darryl’s broke when my friends and I made brownies with it. With babysitting money, I have just enough to replace it for Christmas if I can find it for a hundred dollars off. If we get the mixer, I’m okay with calling this experiment finished.” She gave me a rueful look. “I really am okay, Mercy. I know my mother; I was expecting her to cancel. Anyway, it’ll be more fun spending Christmas with Dad and you.”

“Well, if that’s the case,” I said, “why don’t I give you a hundred dollars, and we can skip the mall?”

She shook her head. “Nope. I know you haven’t been part of this family long, so you don’t know all the rules. When you break someone else’s toy, you have to pay for it yourself. To the mall.”

I sighed loudly and pulled out of the frying pan of the Target parking lot and headed toward the fire of the Columbia Center Mall. “Into the breach, then. Against mobs of middle-aged moms and frightening harridans we shall prevail.”

She nodded sharply, raising an invisible sword. “And damned be he—she—who cries, ‘Hold, enough!’”

“Misquote Shakespeare in front of Samuel, I dare you,” I told her, and she laughed.

I was new at being a stepmother. It was like walking a tightrope sometimes—a greased tightrope. As much as Jesse and I liked each other, we’d had our moments. Hearing her laugh with genuine cheer made me optimistic about our chances.

The car in front of me stopped suddenly, and I locked up the Rabbit’s brakes. The Rabbit was a relic from my college years (long past) that I kept running because I loved it—and because I was a mechanic, and keeping an old, cheap car like the Rabbit running was the best form of advertisement. The brakes worked just fine, and she stopped with room to spare—about four inches of room.

“I’m not the first person to misuse *Macbeth*,” Jesse said, sounding a bit breathless—but then, she didn’t know I’d just redone the brakes last week when I had some time.

I blew out air between my teeth to make a chiding sound as we waited for some cowardly driver a few cars ahead to take the left turn onto the interstate. “The Scottish Play. It’s ‘the Scottish Play.’ You should know

better. There are some things you never name out loud, like *Macbeth*, the IRS, and Voldemort. Not if you want to make it to the mall tonight.”

“Oh,” she said, smirking at me. “I only think about that when I’m looking into a mirror and not saying ‘Candyman’ or ‘Bloody Mary.’”

“Does your father know what kind of movies you watch?” I asked.

“My father bought me *Psycho* for my thirteenth birthday. I notice you didn’t ask me who the Candyman was. What kind of movies are *you* watching, Mercy?” Her voice was a little smug, so I stuck my tongue out at her. I’m a mature stepmom like that.

Traffic near the Kennewick Mall actually wasn’t too bad. All the lanes were bumper-to-bumper, but the speed was pretty normal. I knew from experience that once the silly season got fully under way, a snail would make better time than a car anywhere near the mall.

“Mercy?” Jesse asked.

“Uhm?” I answered, swerving into the next lane over to avoid being hit by a minivan.

“When are you and Dad going to have a baby?”

Chills broke out all over my body. I couldn’t breathe, couldn’t speak, couldn’t move—and I hit the SUV in front of me at about thirty miles an hour. I’m pretty sure that the Scottish Play had nothing to do with it.

“It’s my fault,” Jesse said, sitting beside me on the sidewalk next to the mall parking lot shortly thereafter. The flashing lights of various emergency vehicles did interesting things to her canary yellow and orange hair. She was bumping her feet up and down with excess nervous energy—or maybe just to keep warm. It was, maybe, thirty degrees, and the wind was cutting.

I was still trying to figure out what had happened—though one thing I was sure of was that it hadn’t been Jesse’s fault. I leaned my head against the cement at the base of one of the big light poles and put the ice pack back on my left cheekbone and my nose—which had finally quit bleeding. “Captain’s in charge of the ship. My fault.”

Panic attack, I thought. Jesse’s question had taken me by surprise—but I hadn’t thought the idea of a baby scared me that much.

I kind of liked the thought of a baby, actually. So why the panic attack? I could feel the remnants of it clogging my thoughts and lingering like the edges of an ice-cream headache—or maybe that was the effect of my face colliding with the steering column.

The Rabbit was an old car, and that meant no air bags. However, it was a good German car, so it collapsed around the passenger compartment, leaving Jesse and me with bruises and bumps and a bloody nose and

black eye. I was pretty tired of black eyes. With my coloring, bruises didn't stand out like they did on Jesse. Given a week or two, no one would ever know we'd been in a car wreck.

Even with the bag of ice between me and the rest of the world, I could tell that the passenger in the SUV I'd hit was still talking to the police because her voice was raised. The energy she was expending made me pretty sure she wasn't hurt much, either. The driver hadn't said anything, but he seemed okay to me. He stood a few steps back from his car and stared at it.

The younger policeman said something to the woman, and it hit her like a cattle prod. The man who'd driven the car glanced over at Jesse and me, while the woman went off like a teakettle.

"She *hit* us," the woman shrieked. That was the gist of it anyway. There were a lot of unladylike words that began with "F," with various "C" words thrown in for leavening. She had an alcohol slur that did nothing to moderate the shivery high pitch that she reached. I winced as her voice cut right through my aching skull and increased the pressure against my throbbing cheekbone.

I understood the sentiment. Even if the accident isn't your fault, there is hell to follow when talking to insurance companies, taking the car to a body shop, and dealing with the time the car is in the shop. Worse, if it's totaled, you have to argue with the other guy's insurance about how much it was worth. I was feeling pretty guilty, but Jesse's flinch made me set that aside and pay attention to her.

"Ben's better," I murmured. "He's more creative when he swears."

"He does it in that English accent, which is too cool." Jesse relaxed a little and started listening with more interest and less worry.

The woman began batting at the younger policeman and swearing. I didn't bother to listen to the details, but apparently she was mad at him now, and not us.

"*And* Ben is too smart to swear at cops," Jesse said with a sincere but misguided belief in Ben's wisdom. She had turned to look at me and got a good view over my shoulder of the only real fatality of the incident. "Jeez, Mercy. Look at the Rabbit."

I'd been avoiding it, but I had to look sometime.

The little rust-colored car was connected to the SUV in front of it and somehow had managed to ride up on something so that the front wheels, the nearest one no longer round, were about six inches up in the air. Its nose was also about two feet closer to the windshield than it had been.

"It's dead," I told her.

Maybe if Zee were still around to help, he could have done something with the Rabbit. Zee had taught me most of what I know about fixing cars, but there were some things that couldn't be fixed without an iron-kissed fae to put them to rights. And Zee was holed up in the fae reservation in Walla Walla and had been since one of the Gray Lords killed a US senator's son and declared the fae to be a separate and sovereign nation.

Within minutes of the declaration, all of the fae had disappeared—and so had a few of the reservations. The ten-mile loop of road that used to lead to the local reservation near Walla Walla was now eight miles long, and from nowhere along that route could you even see the reservation. I'd heard that one of the reservations had grown a thicket of blackberry bushes and disappeared inside.

There was a rumor that the government had tried to bomb a reservation, but the entire flight of planes had disappeared—reappearing minutes later flying over Australia. Australian bloggers posted photos, and the US president issued a formal apology, so that part of the rumor seemed to be true.

For me personally, the whole thing meant I had no one to call on when I needed help in the shop or needed some time off. I hadn't even gotten a chance to talk to Zee before he was gone. I missed him, and not just because my poor Rabbit looked to be headed to that big VW rally in the sky.

“At least we weren't driving the Vanagon,” I said.

The teenager I'd been—the one who had worked fast-food jobs to pay for the car, the insurance, and the fuel and upkeep—would have cried for the poor Rabbit, but that would have made Jesse feel bad, and I wasn't a teenager anymore.

“Harder to find a Syncro Vanagon than a Rabbit?” Jesse half asked, half speculated. I'd taught her how to change her own oil, and she'd helped out at the shop now and then. Mostly she flirted with Gabriel, my teenager Friday who was back from college for Thanksgiving break, but even a little bit of help was useful now that I was my only employee. I didn't have enough business to hire another full-time mechanic, and I didn't have time to train another teenager to take Gabriel's place. Especially since I thought it might be a waste of time.

I didn't want to think about closing the shop, but I was afraid it might be coming.

“Mostly, it is a lot easier to get hurt in a Vanagon,” I said to Jesse. Losing the Rabbit and lack of sleep were making me melancholy, but I wasn't going to share that with her, so I kept my voice light and cheerful. “No crumple zone. That's one of the reasons they don't make them anymore. Neither of us would have walked out of an accident like this in the van—and I am very tired of being in a stupid wheelchair.”

Jesse let out a huff of laughter. “Mercy, *all* of us are tired of you being in a wheelchair.”

I'd broken both my legs on my honeymoon (don't ask) this past summer. I'd also managed to hurt my hands, too, which meant I hadn't been able to push myself around. Yes, I had been pretty crabby about it.

The woman was still arguing with the police, but the driver was walking toward us. He might have been coming over to check that I had proper insurance or something, but I had a little warning zing down my spine. I pulled the ice bag away from my face and stood up just in case.

“Still,” said Jesse, staring at the car. She didn't react to my change in position; maybe she hadn't noticed. “I loved your little Rabbit. It was my fault we had the wreck. I am so sorry.”

And the driver of the other car went for Jesse like a junkyard dog, dripping words for which my mother would have washed his mouth out with soap as he barreled toward us.

Jesse's eyes got wide, and she jerked to her feet, stumbling. I stepped between them and said, with power I borrowed from the Alpha of the local werewolf pack who was also my husband, “*Enough.*”
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jean Smith:

Information is provisions for people to get better life, information presently can get by anyone with everywhere. The information can be a expertise or any news even an issue. What people must be consider any time those information which is within the former life are challenging to be find than now could be taking seriously which one would work to believe or which one the particular resource are convinced. If you receive the unstable resource then you get it as your main information we will see huge disadvantage for you. All those possibilities will not happen throughout you if you take Frost Burned (Mercy Thompson) as your daily resource information.

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Christopher Jaeger:

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Nathaniel Mitchell:

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