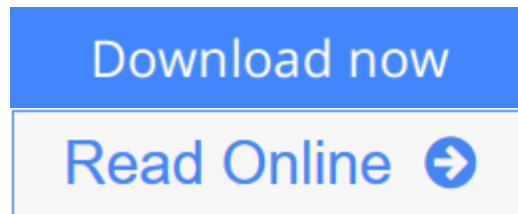


The Other Side of the Pillow: A Novel

By Zane



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The *New York Times* bestselling Queen of Erotica, Zane is back with a new novel about a testy love affair that emerges between a woman who's had enough and a man who's had it all.

Jemistry Daniels is a bitter woman and not trying to hide it. Even though she is beautiful, intelligent, and makes six figures a year as a high school principal in Washington, DC, one man after another has failed her. So she decides to give up and join the party by adapting the entire “friends with benefits” mentality with a couple of men that she beds on the regular but refuses to hold any kind of real conversation with, in fear that she might actually catch feelings.

Everything is going according to plan until she meets Dr. Tevin Harris, a prominent vascular surgeon, one night at a poetry slam. Tevin listens to her deliver her male-bashing poem and instead of steering away from her like most men with any common sense would do, he asks her out. Tevin has been casually dating for years, ever since his failed marriage to Estella. They had suffered several miscarriages and the emotional pain had become too much for either one of them to bear and still wake up with each other every morning.

Opening up, gaining trust, tearing down barriers, and ultimately, having the audacity to love again is not easy for either Jemistry or Tevin. It takes a lot of transparency, emotional honesty, and patience to even begin to build a life together by helping each other rebuild what has been broken. *The Other Side of the Pillow* examines, explores, and exposes what it means to truly fall in love. It proves that true love stories do not have a happy ending. True love stories never end at all.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Zane is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Afterburn*, *The Heat Seekers*, *Dear G-Spot*, *Gettin' Buck Wild*, *The Hot Box*, *Total Eclipse of the Heart*, *Nervous*, *Skyscraper*, *Love is Never Painless*, *Shame on It All*, and *The Sisters of APF*; the ebook short stories "I'll be Home for Christmas" and "Everything Fades Away"; and editor for the Flava anthology series, including *Z-Rated* and *Busy Bodies*. Her TV series, *Zane's Sex Chronicles*, and *The Jump Off* are featured on Cinemax, and her bestselling novel *Addicted* is a major motion picture with Lionsgate Films. She is the publisher of Strebor Books, an imprint of Atria Books/Simon & Schuster. Visit her online at EroticaNoir.com.

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The Other Side of the Pillow

Chapter One

"People put up walls. Not to keep others out, but to see who cares enough to break them down."

—Socrates

2013

Poetry night at The Carolina Kitchen near the Rhode Island Metro station was packed. There were a handful of people there that I recognized from Howard, but most were strangers. That gave me a feeling of relief. I had never recited my poetry live before. Actually, I was not a poet at all; I was a venter.

I had placed my name on the list to read a piece that I had appropriately titled "Bitter." It was the way that I felt, so it made all the sense in the world to select it for my first—and probably last—time reading in public. I was nervous, but sipping on a chocolate martini was helping.

There was a young Rastafarian up at bat reciting something about women with big booties who believed that their sex was their best asset. He was going on and on about how women need to stop acting like a THOT—That Ho Over There—and needed to demand respect for themselves. I was feeling him and wished that my roommate were there to hear it. I was far from celibate, but Winsome was straight wilding out the majority of the time.

He finished up his piece to mass applause and finger snapping. I was hoping that they would call at least two or three other names before mine so I could finish my drink. Even though I spoke in front of my students and faculty all the time, this was different. My words would be personal and from the heart.

Queen Aishah, the comedic host for the evening, came back on stage working her fabulous hips, rocking her attention-getting hairstyle, and grabbed the microphone. "That was hot, Brother Hakeem. I hope some of the young ladies in this joint tonight take heed of your words." She shielded her eyes and glanced out at the audience like she was trying to find someone in particular. "Yeah, I see some chicks dressed like THOTs tonight. Ya'll advertising, and that's all I have to say about that."

Most of the audience laughed but I noticed some of the scantily clad chicks were offended. I could barely

keep up with all the terminology meant solely to degrade women. THOT was a new one. Ho, chickenhead, bird, and the good old-fashioned whore were tossed around on the regular. The sad part was that a lot of women had started to embrace the monikers and often called one another those names.

Thank goodness that I had chosen a simple outfit: black jeans, black boots, a black sweater, and a black beanie studded with little silver stars. I was in a militant mood so my clothes reflected my attitude.

“All right, we’re going to move on.” Queen Aishah looked down at the tablet in her free hand. “Next up is Jemistry. Damn, love that name.”

So much for finishing my martini. I sighed and navigated my way to the front as people looked at me strangely, as if to say, “You’d better bring it after Brother Hakeem put it down!” No doubt he was a tough act to follow.

I took the stage and Queen Aishah handed me the microphone, grinned, and sashayed off. She was so confident in herself; I wish I could have said the same.

I cleared my throat and tried to imagine that the room was empty, that I was simply practicing like I had done several times at home earlier that day.

“This piece is called ‘Bitter.’ It’s for all the sisters out there who have been hurt, despite giving their all and being all that they can be for men who do not appreciate them.”

Several women yelled out things like, “That’s right!” “Amen, Sister!” and “Preach!”

Several men hissed and booed and acted like I had called them out by their government names.

I cleared my throat again and then start spitting out the words—slowly, concisely, and from the pit of my soul where all of my own personal pain and bitterness collided.

Hurt

Pain

Anguish

Bitter

That is how I feel as a woman

A woman who has been

Deceived

Betrayed

Disrespected

Humiliated

Dismissed

Used

Demeaned

Abused

Mistreated

It makes no sense . . .

No sense at all

I am a good woman

A brilliant woman

A compassionate woman

A loving woman

An educated woman

A beautiful woman

A romantic woman

A unique and special woman

So why do men overlook me?

Or come into my life and play games?

Use Jedi mind tricks?

Spit out bullshit lies?

Expect me to share dick?

Expect me to tolerate their shit?

Say one thing and do another?

Call me names and expect me to be their lover?

Hit on me and then try to kiss me?

Talk shit behind my back?

Hurt

Pain

Anguish

Bitter

Those are the words that describe me

Those are the terms that define me

Now it is time for me to find me

Before it is too late

And my heart can no longer participate

In what people call love

In a true relationship

Bitter . . . that's me

I opened my eyes, which I had clamped shut at some point halfway through, and there was an eerie silence over the entire place for a few seconds. Then there was mass applause and cheers . . . from the women. A few men clapped and many were shaking their heads and crossing their arms in defiance. Their egos were bruised, but they knew that I had spoken nothing but the truth. They were going to learn that day.

As I walked off the stage, Queen Aishah came up to announce the next poet. She grinned at me and whispered, "You said that! That was some real shit right there!"

When I returned to my seat at the bar, there was a man sitting on the stool next to mine. I hadn't noticed him before. I wondered if he had come in while I was performing. He was almost like a giant—at least six five compared to my five-two height. Even though he was sitting, I could tell that he was like a tree. He had a smooth, dark-chocolate complexion, eyes the shade of almonds, a polished fade, and he wore rimless eyeglasses.

The bartender came over to me. "Need anything else?"

"Can I have another chocolate martini, please?"

The guy kept staring at me and I wondered if he was about to go off on me about what I had said onstage.

After another minute or two, once my fresh drink was in front of me, I could not take the stares anymore. There was an older woman onstage reciting a poem about the joys of menopause and moving on to the next stage of life. He was not paying attention to her at all. He was too busy watching my every move.

"The entertainment is that way." I pointed toward the stage. "I'm finished with my performance."

He grinned and exposed a beautiful smile and straight teeth. "I enjoyed your piece. 'Bitter,' wasn't it?"

I rolled me eyes. Here it comes! "Yes, it was called 'Bitter.' That's what I am."

"I kind of figured that, and it's such a shame."

He looked me up and down like I was on display. I was hoping that my face wasn't shiny from having been underneath the hot lights, even momentarily.

"You're too beautiful, sassy, and intriguing to be bitter over a man from your past."

"Actually, you stand corrected. I am bitter regarding several men from my past. All of the men from my past. Not a single one of them appreciated any of the goodness in me until after I was gone."

"So now the rest of us men can forget it, huh?"

I took a sip of my drink and analyzed what he was implying with his question. The Virgo in me kicked in. One thing is a definite trait among Virgos—we overthink and overanalyze like crazy. On the one hand, I was sick of men to a degree. At least the whimsical fantasy that one man could make a commitment to one woman and do the right thing by her. On the other hand, I loved sex and the specimen sitting beside me was most certainly a candidate for some freaky sex.

He kept looking at me as the menopausal broad left the stage. "Well?"

"I never said that no man has a chance with me. All I'm saying is that I'm not going to be so quick to throw my heart on the line again, unless a man presents himself correctly and is done with playing games. You feel me?"

"Somewhat." He took a long guzzle from his draft beer. "But you have to realize that not all men have to be done with playing games. Some of us have never played them."

I smirked. "That's what you all say. All of you proclaim to be honest, trustworthy, and interested in settling down, up and until you get into a woman's panties and move on to the next one."

"Wow, someone has really hurt you!"

"Several someones have trampled all over me. They've treated me like a piece of disposable pussy or a deer that has already been hit in the road. Instead of picking me up and trying to resuscitate me, or better yet, leaving me the hell alone to suffer in silence, they run over me again and try to finish the job that the previous dude started."

He shook his head and frowned. "It would probably be in my best interest to move to the other side of the bar and wish you a good evening."

I shrugged. "Probably would be."

He sat there for a few more seconds, still staring.

"Probably would be," I repeated.

"Yes, probably." He chuckled. "But instead, I'd like to pay for your drinks and ask if you'd like to head someplace quieter so we can continue this fascinating discussion." He reached out his hand. "I'm Tevin Harris."

I shook his hand. "Jemistry Daniels. I'm not so convinced this is a fascinating discussion, though."

"I'm fascinated!"

I smirked and continued drinking. Another brother had taken the stage but I was really drowning him out. He was talking about some kind of impending “race war.” That always amused me when people said things like that, as if we were still in the 1800s. I had always wanted to ask at least one person spouting that foolishness whom they planned to start a race war with, considering that most families were mixed with several different ones.

“So, Jemistry, would you like to take me up on my offer?”

He is not giving up!

I hesitated to respond. He seemed harmless enough, but so do most serial killers. Most are also charming as all get-out.

“Um, tell you what. I’m not trying to hurt your feelings or anything, but I’m not the most trusting person, as you might suspect.”

He chuckled. “Yeah, that’s kind of evident.”

“I prefer to close out my own tab. I ordered the drinks, so I’ll pay for them. It is kind of noisy in here to talk so I can meet you somewhere else.” I held my index finger up in his face. “But I’m not getting in a car with you. Nor are you getting into mine.”

I already had it in my head that the only thing that talking could possibly lead to was fucking. I would make “arrangements” with him as I had with two other men at the time to come over and have some “drive-by sex” when the urge hit me. I was attracted to him. He was tall and had big feet, so I was guessing that he had a big dick.

What the hell!

“Fair enough.” He threw a twenty on the bar for his beers. “Do you have a place in mind?”

“How about Oya over on Ninth and H?”

“Never heard of it, but I’ll meet you there in a few.”

He stood up. Yeah, he was a giant, but a fine one. I could not help but drop my eyes to see his dick imprint in his slacks. I suppressed a smile.

“Would you allow me to walk you to your car, Jemistry?”

“No, no thank you. I’ll be fine. I’m going to pay for my drinks and then head that way.”

He walked off as he said, “I hope you show.”

I watched him leave out and wondered to myself if I would show up. The key to the entire thing would be to make sure I didn’t catch any feelings. That was always the hard part: having a big heart, desiring to be loved, and trying to avoid falling too hard for a man, especially a man like him. People always said that you have to judge each person by their own character, but it was not easy to keep tossing my heart on the line all the time. Most men I could brush off without a second thought, but there was something different about this one.

Heaven help me!

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