

Azure Apparition

The Azure Blackstone Series - Book 1



It's a cold, dark Halloween night in New Orleans.

Will Frank get a trick or a treat?

Blurb:

Hardnosed construction worker, Frank Hickman, has *got* to be hallucinating. Is the shimmering beauty in bed beside him a figment of his imagination? Or some warped Halloween prank pulled on him by his *boys*?

Azure Blackstone has been carjacked. Will Frank's realization come too late to save her?

Genre: African-American
Paranormal Romantic Suspense
Heat: Sweet/PG
Words: 3,182
Editor: Jan Carol
Cover: Mickie Sherwood

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Re-released 2013
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(Revised)

Mickie Sherwood

Loner Frank Hickman set out for the bar after his last walking tour of the evening. He slid the broken cell phone he had picked up out back in the dust into his pocket. Break-ins plagued the construction site, as recently as this morning, forcing him to make periodic rounds each day. Late material shipments and impossible deadlines filled his days. Nevertheless, he would rather suffer through those inconveniences than this evening's upcoming interactions.

He was out in New Orleans' cold October air almost as soon as he pulled his truck up on the lot. Children's chatter electrified the air, drawing him up short. He stopped to watch a group of chaperoned ghouls, goblins, princesses and superheroes scatter all over the sidewalk across the street. It was Halloween. And—they certainly dressed and acted the part.

Frank snorted.

His own kids were grown and seemed to be in no hurry to make him a grandfather. At that moment, he realized he didn't know whether to be happy or sad. He shook his head in a dismissive manner. An aloof swagger got him passed the front door of the lounge and his tall, muscular body belly up to the bar next to his cronies. For grown men, the other three reacted childishly to a photo one shared. It was Frank's turn to take possession of the iPhone for a look-see.

"Man, I know you haven't been with one in so long," his friend teased. "You don't know what you're looking at."

Boisterous laughter jumped from one man to another.

You're right, Frank thought. It had been a long time since his last real relationship. So long, in fact, her face was practically lost in obscurity. He silently admitted that she was a pearl. What he longed for, though, was a rare gem.

"I'm looking at the demise of your marriage if you don't control your urges," he warned.

Tyrone snatched his phone back. "See what I mean! A regular old fart."

They moved to a table.

Along with them came more laughs at his expense. It was uncomfortable to sit with the broken cell in his pocket. Therefore, he removed the bulge when he sat. He placed the cell in plain sight on the table. A waitress wandered over to take their drink orders. He signaled and

each man placed his own. "Put this round on my bill," Frank said as she walked away. He noticed they now ogled the waitress. "Y'all are pitiful."

"Frank, you got to let your hair down sometime, bro." It was Tyrone, again, with that bit of advice. "Let me see your phone."

"Why?" Frank asked.

Nooney jumped him, too. "Just do it."

Then, Bud. "You gotta try it, Frank. I guarantee you won't regret it."

Reluctantly, he obeyed the request. Frank's iPhone changed hands. He watched as "ole school" Tyrone exhibited his prowess with today's technology. He went through the menus so fast, before Frank knew it, their signals paired for the transfer.

"What did you just do?"

"I just unlocked your universe," Tyrone crowed. "Opened you up to a whole new world."

Talking stopped. The snickers started when the waitress appeared with their drinks.

Frank took a drink of his beer while giving Tyrone a distrusting look. He thumped the brown bottle to the table. "I'm going to pay for this later, I suspect."

More laughter.

"No, man," Tyrone countered. "You're gonna thank me."

Frank grabbed the other phone and his, the second Tyrone dropped it to the table. He looked it over to decipher what new Apps existed on his screen. There was nothing out of the ordinary. However, something was strangely different about the display. Instead of using his holster, he dropped each phone in a front pocket and forgot about them. The next few hours were spent in the company of his college buddies, and they flew by. Soon, all went their separate ways and Frank headed home.

It was late when he walked into his pitch-black apartment. He kept right on to his room where he sat on the side of his bed. Feeling a little tipsy, he fell backwards on the mattress with an arm over his eyes. He wasn't a drinker and knew his system would purge all he had drunk before morning.

That would be a good thing because he had to be capable of managing his crew all over again tomorrow.

He lay inert for a long time until an unusual warmth touched his skin. His hand traced the feeling to his pocket. The heat forced him to reposition farther across the bed. He also snatched the phones from their hiding places in favor of a spot next to his body. Contented now, Frank drifted off.

He slept for what seemed like hours before his system hauled him out of bed. It was just as expected when he raised his head from the commode. Why a man in his forties put himself through the punishment to fit in was beyond him. He knew his stomach would be roiling for days.

Frank stepped over to the sink to revive himself with a splash of cool water. Brushing and gargling got rid of the sour taste in his mouth. The water was so refreshing he lingered until he felt good enough to stumble back to bed. His rugged brown features reflected green around the gills when he looked in the mirror. Beyond that sight, he saw a glow from the bedroom behind him.

Knuckling his eyes didn't clear his vision.

Whirling around, he thought he was mistaken, for everything looked all right now. However, another look in the mirror had him doubting his eyes, again. The aura magnified until the entire room behind him glowed red. This confirmed for Frank that he had overdone it. He decided the best way to dissolve his drunken stupor was to enter the room on the attack.

What confronted him stopped him dead in his tracks.

The phones were the culprits. They looked red hot where they lay on his bed. Yet, the bedspread remained unsinged. He took cautious steps to within reaching distance as he eyed them. Then, as if on a dare, Frank scooped his cell up ready to feel the intense fiery pain.

It flared brightly in his hand without burning before changing to a cool azure color. The same hue as the one left on the bed. The phenomenon entranced him. He stared at it, determined to dispute the woman's face on his distorted screen. Huge round eyes seemed to ask his help. Her mouth worked soundlessly.

"What the—?" he declared aloud, hitting the END button.

That did the trick. The glow vanished as things returned to normal around him. Frank flopped on the bed fully clothed, too tired and confused to think about the event. He was just glad it was over.

He lapsed into a troubled sleep, one where he couldn't decipher real from unreal. Those soft brown eyes, lingering in his dream state, lured him deeper into the depths until she took full form beside him. Frank twitched to gain his freedom. But, he couldn't break loose from his semi-conscious state.

It was just no use.

He could only lay nose to nose with the seductress dressed in blue velvet now on his bed. She still talked to him. His rapidly batting eyes latched onto her luscious-looking lips. His attention jumped from her mouth to her eyes. Trying to disconnect was useless. So, his eyes finally closed, again, as he gave in to her will and lost himself in another realm.

Her mouth continued to work.

Frank's senses tuned in to her apparition. Although, he didn't understand her need, he knew she wanted something from him. Yet, his mind refuted what was happening. He fell into suspended animation where his psyche continued to play tricks on him. It was a fight simply to wake up.

His eyes hiked upwards in alarm to find the fiery mist replaced with a blue haze. To prove it was just a dream, he staggered from the bed to turn on the bright overhead light. The sight before him was surreal, nailing his

feet to the floor. She was stunning as she lay on her right side curled in a tight S ball, silky chestnut hair brushing the almond-toasted skin of her face. The position of her voluptuous body looked extremely uncomfortable. Especially the way her arms pressed into her abdomen because of her taped wrists.

A tear slid from her left eye to slide across the bridge of her nose as he watched in awe. Her condition became clearer to him at that point. The dress she wore bore evidence of foul-play. Black grime and dirt led his horrified eyes to her shredded stockings, all the way down to her bound ankles and bleeding bare feet.

Frank subjected himself to the *aftershave* approach by slapping both sides of his face. It hurt. He was awake. But, how could that be?

Again, her hologram image said something to him in the mist.

He dropped to his knee and her eyes followed. It was as if she was afraid to lose eye contact. Frank stretched out a tentative hand that entered on one side of her body, and exited on the other. "This is crazy!" He railed, jumping up to leave.

Help me!

Her silent plea—stopped him. The fact he read her lips—stumped him. His desire to calm her—floored him. His yearning to rescue her—astounded him.

A quick call and Tyrone answered. "What the hell did you do to my phone, asshole?"

"You like it, huh?"

"Just answer me, dumbass!"

"Whoa, Frank. It's just a joke. Some PlayDate website. You get to live out your fantasies."

"This isn't a fantasy. I'm in someone else's nightmare!" His look switched to her. She mouthed the same words again.

"Oh," Tyrone said.

Pissed, Frank asked, "That's it? Oh?"

"The disclaimer warned of a possible malfunction with the download. Guess we got some bad bytes."

"Hell! What you got was me stuck in limbo!" Frank disconnected in a huff with no idea of how to solve either of their dilemmas.

Back on his knee, he asked, "Are you real?" His answer came in the form of a positive headshake. He startled backward. "You can hear me?" Another 'yes'. "But, I can't hear you. Are you in danger?" Her eyes shut as her head bobbed up and down.

"How can this be?" he questioned in disbelief. "I don't know what I can do for you." Frank agonized. "I could go to the police. But...what would I tell them?" He stood and paced around the room, never getting out of her line-of-sight. "They'd throw me in the nuthouse. And...that wouldn't do you any good."

Her flickering image alarmed him.

"Why me?" he asked, puzzled, gazing into her compelling eyes. "I'm just plain old Frank."

TV.

"You want to watch television?" he marveled.

No. You.

He located the remote and pushed the button to follow her command. "What am I looking for?"

It became one long volley of button pushing until a news story overwhelmed him. Frank peered at the picture of the elegantly attired woman who was missing for nearly twenty-four hours. According to witnesses, pharmaceutical consultant Azure Blackstone was the victim of a car-jacking. The news report indicated she attended her promotion gala at a swanky well-known establishment in New Orleans' East prior to the incident. Her frightened parents pleaded for her safe return.

"Now that I know your situation, I still don't know your whereabouts."

Her lips moved, again. *You do.*

She faded in and out on him by this time, her glowing form sputtering. "Help me help you," he lamented.

You brought me here.

"That's a lie!" He stomped from the room, upset at the accusation. Suddenly, Frank realized the way he behaved probably affected her. He

gathered his wits, relented and returned to his bedroom. He saw undisguised terror in her expressive, wet eyes. Frank stooped in front of her. "I'm sorry for storming out, Azure."

I need you.

"I'm here," he confirmed. "Do you have any idea where you are?"

Trunk.

Stunned, "You're in the trunk of your car?"

Yes.

His skills at reading her lips improved. "Where?" Her shoulders hunched. "Can you tell me anything about *anything*?"

Noisy.

"Noisy?" he repeated. "What kinds of noises?"

Hammers. Drills. Generators. Her lips formed concise words.

"Do you hear the noises now?" Her image flickered as she gave a negative response. He felt her dire sense of hopelessness. "You've got to give me more, Azure," he pleaded. A grotesque muted scream transformed her pretty features. "Azure! Azure!"

Screamed all day.

"Save your strength." An obvious trickle of blood lingered as she bit her bottom lip to quell her despair. Her plight seduced him. "Let me think."

Dropped phone.

"Don't worry about it." All of a sudden, his brain clicked. "Naw."

That would be too big of a coincidence. Yet, he swiped the damaged phone from the bed where she hovered. The battery cover and battery were missing. Despite that, the face glowed—azure.

"Hammers? Drills? Generators?" Frank moved away from the bed. Flabbergasted, he realized he held in his hand the key to finding her location. "I know where you are!"

Hurry!

Frank faltered. "But...what if I'm wrong?" Her vision was hardly visible now. "You'll die!"

Dying anyway. She was gone. And—now, so was he.

Frank was out of the door and at his truck fast enough to make his head spin. Really spin. There was no stopping for anything to remedy his headache as he drove like a bat out of hell to the construction site. The padlock on the chain link gate hindered his progress once he arrived.

He bailed out and with nervous hands forced the gate open. He lurched to a stop as he surveyed the rows and rows of apartment complexes. The skeletal structures loomed in the inky night; a reminder of the destruction mother nature's wrath was capable of with a little help from manmade levees.

An idea sprang to his mind. "Grids!"

Frank eeled his way—section by section—until he was back at the front where he started. "Damn!" Determination wouldn't let him quit. Retracing his route had him in the rear where he first found the phone. He

drove with his foot off the gas, just slithering along when—miraculously—his headlights hit a glint of silver. Frank threw the truck in reverse, almost tearing up the transmission when he slung the shift in PARK. He leaped out, leaving the door open and motor running.

He raced in the ghostly black night, guided only by his headlights. The beams were bright but he still stumbled over unseen debris in his haste to reach the covered mound. He tore away the tarp that hid a vehicle from view. He wondered how he had missed such a conspicuous load. It was definitely out of place, jammed right up against the wall of the rear building.

"Azure!"

He banged the trunk. The reply was a deafening silence. A mad dash to his truck had him back with a crowbar. Scraping metal assailed his ears as he rammed the rod with all his might. At last, the lid popped up and the sweetest, throaty sound he ever heard eased his distress.

"Frank?" she muttered, slightly incoherent.

"Yes, Azure." He comforted as he lifted her cramped body into his arms. "It's me." Her arms raised up and over his head to circle his neck.

Frank wasted no time with questions or explanations once rescuing Azure. He rushed her to his purring vehicle, snatched the passenger door open and had to force her to release him before he sat her on the seat. His plan was to get her warmed up and freed. Her clutch gripped the front of

his shirt. He stopped. "I have to get the blanket from the back." He had to pry her bound hands away. "You're safe with me, Azure."

Frank kept tabs on her while searching the storage bin. He wrapped her securely in the rough, wool blanket once he returned to her side. He reached over her to dig in the glove compartment, noticing how she flinched at the sight of his pocketknife. "I'm just going to cut the tape. Okay?" She relaxed back in the seat with her eyes closed while he set her free, and a shaky groan escaped.

All procedures were followed from the preliminary police interrogations to the current hospital stay. At this moment, she studied the man who sat at her bedside—suddenly enamored with him—while fiddling with the hand she held hostage. What she wanted to hear was his soothing voice calling her name as he had earlier.

"You're even handsomer in person, Frank." She watched him flush. "We're connected, you know. I believe it's fate."

"I believe that, too." He touched her cheek in admiration. "I'd like to get to know you, Azure."

Azure responded quietly, "Me, too, Frank." In turn, she reached up to cup his strong jaw. "Talk to me. Tell me about yourself."

He shifted in his chair and began as if he was in an AA meeting. "My name is Frank Hickman. I'm divorced with two grown sons. And I own a construction company."

"And I'm very lucky you do," she admitted. Azure proceeded to give him insight about herself. "I've been there, too. Divorced, I mean. No kids." She sighed. "Married to a great career in sales that keeps me on the road quite a bit."

"I've got to be honest, Azure. If this *is* fate, it's a scary thing."

She was tickled pink when he directed her fingers to his lips.

"With fate, who needs PlayDate?" she uttered, more to herself than him and felt him freeze in his seat.

"PlayDate?" Now, he actually *didn't* know up from down. Or fact from fiction.

"Just some nonsense dating service I signed up for." In a startling move, Azure walked her hands up his arm to pull his face to her level. She saw him up-close and personal, loving the fascination seen in his beautiful brown eyes. "I've heard your calming voice; seen your decisive actions; smelled your manly fragrance." She caressed his cheek. "I'm not usually so forward, Frank. Now, I want to taste your alluring lips."

Azure seized the moment, rewarding Frank with a long, luxurious kiss. "Thank you for not giving up, Frank."

Meanwhile, an eerie sensation coursed the length of his rangy frame. The feeling enticed him even closer. A look into her smiling eyes and he

didn't care one iota about how they met. Magical phone or mystical website. It just didn't matter as Frank's lips captured hers once more in divine exploration. Apparently, destiny plotted their course. If that was the case, who was he to argue with fate when it delivered him a rare gem in the form of a lovely azure apparition.

The End

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Re-released 2013
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Bio:

I'm a cruise-loving, people-watching, picture-snapping baby boomer with time on her hands. So, I write sweet and spicy relationship-based mainstream contemporary romantic love stories.

Mickie Sherwood's other novels:

[Like Slow Sweet Molasses](#)

[Cutie and the Cowboy Trucker](#)

[BayouBabe99er](#)

[Nicked Hearts](#)

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