



A free Yuletide Story

*The
Redemption*

Ana Manwaring

THE REDEMPTION

Praise for Ana Manwaring's JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures

Nothing Comes After Z

Recipient of the Literary Titan Silver Award for Fiction 2022

Literary Titan Review

Nothing Comes After Z is a riveting crime thriller with a strong female protagonist. I appreciated the grounded nature of the crime and how it relates to some headlines we see in the news today. Before she can safely leave Mexico and return to her life, she has to uncover some hard truths and catch the perpetrators. I enjoyed how well the emotion is weaved into this action novel because it ensures we're invested in the protagonist and we're biting our nails when the action intensifies. Author Ana Manwaring knows how to create a storyline that easily sets up the hard-hitting action.

M.M. Chouinard, USA Today bestseller of the Jo Fournier Mystery series

"A well-written, engaging story with a bad-ass protagonist I loved spending time with. Bring on more JadeAnne!"

The Hydra Effect

Lisa Towles, Bestselling and multi-award-winning author of *Hot House*, *Ninety-Five*, *The Unseen* and *Choke*

"*The Hydra Effect* sizzles with action, tension, and peril. Great writing combined with regional flare and international intrigue make this sequel a delightful ride!"

Jan M Flynn, award winning author

"JadeAnne heads to Mexico City for a break from her partner and now ex-boyfriend. But her sharp intelligence, curiosity and inability to stay in her own lane land her in a snarl of trouble. In short order she's evading cartel thugs, uncovering a human trafficking network and confronting high-level Mexican politicians with questionable connections, all in a lushly realized setting one can just about smell. And taste—JadeAnne might be in the middle of a gunfight, but she's never immune to the temptation of a good plate of tacos al pastor. She and her loyal dog Pepper are a team you can't but cheer for."

Set Up

Heather Haven, multi-award-winning author of the Alvarez Family Murder Mysteries

"This is a blowout of a story. It starts on the backroads of Mexico in the middle of the night—just a woman, a dog, and Mexican Banditos—and escalates from there. If you are looking for a fast-paced, action-filled thriller about the adventures of a young PI and her lethal but well-trained dog, this will be your cup of tea. Or should I say Margarita? Jack Reacher step aside. You have met your match in JadeAnne Stone.

Judy Penz Sheluk, Amazon international bestselling author

In her debut mystery novel, Author Ana Manwaring offers up more twists and turns than a Mexican rattlesnake. Fast paced, with well-crafted characters and a strong female lead, there's plenty to like about this world of power, politics, and Mexican money laundering. I especially enjoyed the strong sense of place, which Manwaring uses to great effect. Well worth adding to you TBR pile.

Kirkus Reviews

“With a likeable duo and a vivid, appealing setting, this adventure series is off to a promising start”

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Books in the JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures

Set Up (2018)

The Hydra Effect (2019)

Nothing Comes After Z (2022)

Coming 2023

Saints and Skeletons

A Memoir of Living in Mexico

The Redemption

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The Redemption

In the tiny clearing surrounding a crude cottage shadows grew long. Wolves, restless with hunger, howled from within the forest, perhaps calling for mistress moon to hasten her journey up the darkening horizon to light the earth. The crystal air was sharp with fir and cedar, but bitter as the evening seeped down the mountains and filled the valley with blackness. The four Colombe sisters flocked around the hearth where bluish flames tasted the smoking coal.

“Will it light?” Éleine asked of the ash log their uncle had cut, dried, and doused in strong ale and flour. It sat decorated atop the coals of last year’s log ready to usher in the light.

“What if it doesn’t? Will the sun never be reborn?” little Félicie voiced the question they all feared, their eyes turned to Uncle Nick’s ruddy face. No one knew what would happen if the log failed to ignite and burn through the next twelve days. Not even wise old Nicholas Heartie.

It was a dark time in the world. Mother Earth was sick. Men had poisoned her, pillaged her, and killed her bounty in the name of profits. Her cauldron could no longer provide for her children. She burned in anger. She quaked in fury. She cried storms and her tears washed humankind away.

And so it passed that the Colombe sisters had been forced to leave their farm in the bottomlands after the great storm. Their parents had been washed away; it was a miracle the girls had survived, perched on the roof beam of the family’s weathered barn. They drifted for days under pelting rain then burning sun on a sea of devastation. They clung to each other, parched and disoriented until rescue came.

The girls huddled closer together, holding hands. They had spent the day readying Uncle Nick’s home for the celebration. The rafters hung with mistletoe, ivy garlanded the mantle, and holly, red berries gleaming, ringed the candles on the heavy oak table behind them. Spiced cider simmered on the stove and baskets of cut greens and clove studded oranges awaited the midnight celebration on the village green. Everything was in readiness for the rebirth of the Sun King—the Giver of Life—when the dark part of the year would give way to the light and

Mother Earth would be warmed and healed, bearing forth once again in beauty and bounty.

The coal spit and sputtered as the tiny flames licked upwards toward the log. Little explosions of flour sent sparks onto the hearth. The sisters held their breath. The wolves' songs sounded nearer as they blew through the front door with the freezing draft and Uncle, who carried more kindling. The cold draft chased away the fresh scents of citrus and pine, which had entwined with the warm sweet steam of cinnamon and apples. The girls shivered.

Uncle dropped the twigs into the wood box and selected a handful of the driest and began to feed into the thin flames. The fire brightened. Blue was replaced by orange and yellow and the girls could see bright points of burning in the rough edges of the coals.

"Uncle," Marvelle implored, "let me feed the kindling to the flame. Warm your hands around a cup of wassail. Olive, dip a cup for Uncle."

"Thank ye, niece. I might at that," he answered and lumbered slowly to his feet as Olive scurried to the stove to prepare her Uncle's drink, setting it at his chair by the warming fire.

The flames danced higher through Marvelle's ministrations and soon the room was warm and cheerful. The Yule would light.

"Sisters, draw your chairs to the fire. Olive, pour us all a cup of cider and come sit. Félicie, help her. Hurry!" Éleine directed, since she was oldest. "Let us remember Mother and Father." She held up her cup.

"Let us show gratitude to our uncle," added Marvelle.

"And let us be thankful we have our lives!" Félicie's voice sang.

The sisters and their uncle tipped their cups and drank.

"One more toast! Let us toast the Yule, and the Star of Peace!" Olive jumped up to refill the cups from the steaming kettle as all eyes turned to Polaris ascending the sky outside the frosty window. "To Mother Earth for healing and to peace for all upon her!" she cried.

At that moment the Yule log flamed high and the distant star flashed across the night in jewel colors, growing larger and more brilliant. It filled the tiny room with silver rays and rainbow lights, surrounding them. It shimmered and dimmed to a golden glow and slowly began to shape into a pale woman with sapphire eyes and shining black curls cascading to the floor. She wore a pearl grey cloak over a white satin gown embroidered in yellow gold. Her boots were diamonds that struck sparks on the hearthstones.

"I am PaxPaloma, come to lead you to your destiny." She paused. The log crackled cheerily in the grate. "I spared you Colombe sisters from Mother's anger because you are true and pure of heart. Now you must join me in taking my message to the world. You were born to serve." PaxPaloma pulled four scrolls from the folds of her cloak and handed one to each girl.

Éleine opened hers first. "You are Éleine, the light," it read. "You will take the light of Peace to the dark north and warm the hearts of men and beast."

“Listen to mine!” Marvelle called out. “Marvelle, second daughter, the miracle. You will fly west with the setting sun and spread love across the land until you meet with...”

“Me! Me, Olive,” Olive interrupted, reading from her parchment. “Olive, the bearer of the olive branch of peace. East you shall fly to mountaintops and deserts, to cities and farms, to rivers and seas so that all may see you and their hearts be gladdened and filled with neighborly love and cooperation.”

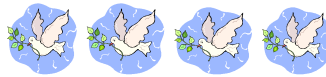
The room went silent and Uncle turned to his youngest niece, his voice husky and tears gleaming in his eyes, “And what does yours say my little dove?”

“Félicie, of success.” she whispered. Her hand trembled as she read on, “you will wing south with the migrating birds, and sing the message of Mother’s stewardship for all to hear.”

PaxPaloma began to blur. Her voice sounded distant, as though blown on soft breezes, “You will each carry your message around the world once and with the second passing you shall come together. Light shall illuminate the earth, the miracle of peace shall cloak her, and, in cooperation and love, all shall heal her.”

PaxPaloma smiled as her form shimmered into silvery light. And with her smile, all fear in the hearts of the Colombe sisters vanished. Each smiled back, warm and content in the service of peace. With a soft popping and a nod, PaxPaloma vanished into the starlit sky and the four sisters changed into white doves. Uncle Nick opened the window and his doves fluttered into the night.

It is told that if you look to the sky on the longest night of the year with an open heart, you, too, will receive the redemption of the four doves—the gift of peace.



By Ana Manasing

About Ana Manwaring



Ana Manwaring is the award winning author of the JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures and three volumes of poetry as well as many essays, short stories and flash memoirs.

Ana teaches creative writing and autobiographical writing in California's wine country. She is the founder of JAM Manuscript Consulting where she coaches writers, assists in developing projects and copyedits.

When Ana isn't helping other writers, she posts book reviews and tips on writing craft and the business of writing at www.anamanwaring.com/blogs/Building a Better Story, and produces the FUNdaMentalists, a monthly poetry event.

She's branded cattle in Hollister, lived on houseboats, consulted brujos, visited every California mission, worked for a PI, swum with dolphins, and out-run gun totin' maniacs on lonely Mexican highways—the inspiration for The JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures. Read about her transformative experiences living in Mexico at www.saintsandskeletons.com.

With a B.A. in English and Education and an M.A. in Linguistics, Ana is finally able to answer her mother's question, "What are you planning to do with that expensive education?" Be a paperback writer.

If you had as much fun reading Nothing Comes After Z as I did writing it, please consider going to your favorite online bookseller and leaving a review. Reviews help authors continue to write their books for your enjoyment.

To find out about new books and upcoming events, please take a moment to sign up on my mailing list at www.anamanwaring.com.