



BALEFIRE

BARRETT

SUMMARY

Silke Dyson is a free-spirited artist and teacher struggling with a vision impairment as a result of a physical altercation. Kirin Foster is a pragmatic Type A writer for a travel magazine with great opportunities for travel, and a growing restlessness.

Their lives intersect at thirty-thousand feet during a tropical storm. With plans lost in the ensuing confusion, they form an unlikely friendship. The relationship strengthens in the warm tropical sunshine of the Belizean Cayes.

To their surprise, they discover a real connection with backgrounds in Milwaukee. Back home they continue an easy rapport with common interests and mutual friends.

Sometimes a random spark of kindness or caring can kindle a small flame. With patience and serendipity, a small flame can grow into a balefire—a beacon of hope to guide a pair of lost soul's home.

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SAPPHIRE BOOKS
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Balefire

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Early Praise for Balefire

“The story line is touching, hysterical, and just darn good. it is realistically frustrating in dealing with an abuse survivor who has not yet healed. It is a finding the “One” story. It is a beautiful romance and fun love story. it moves at just the right speed. The fact that the author can make you feel the affects of abusive relationships during such a beautiful tale is astonishingly brilliant!”

“Great read...and actually had a plot and story line. Not over dramatic...and looked into the real lives if women falling in and out of love...the joys if New friendships...and New loves...along with the loss of old loves I truly enjoyed this book.”

“This is a story of the resilience of the human spirit and however restored the hope we all have for a satisfying life. It is a great read. Can’t wait to read other works from Barrett.”

“Great book! Well written and wonderful characters. Definitely a recommendation for light reading and relaxing. Barrett is an author I would follow.”

“Wonderful book. Well developed characters, good plot. Excellent writing drawing you into the story and caring about the characters. Loved it!

“The setting is Belize and you will want to be or go there throughout the book. I plan to do so!

“The story line is touching, hysterical, and just darn good. it is realistically frustrating in dealing with an abuse survivor who has not yet healed. It is a finding the “One” story. It is a beautiful romance and fun love story. it moves at just the right speed. The fact that the author can make you feel the affects of abusive relationships during such a beautiful tale is astonishingly brilliant!”

“You never know when you might meet someone who deep down you know they are special. It can happen anywhere even at 30k feet in a plane headed for paradise. Two women on different paths with different past become fast friends One is handicapped caused by an act of violence. And the other you will just have to buy the book, because I’m not telling. What I will tell you is you will not be disappointed. Barrett delivers a winner.”

Acknowledgments

(Taken largely from the first addition of *Balefire* 2013 and embellished slightly)

Right out of the gate, I would like to thank my dear friend Mandy for sharing some excellent travel adventures. The story came about because of one of those “real life adventures” that was both terrifying and rewarding. We have laughed often about this adventure.

What you are holding now is a story that is very dear to me in many ways. The scenes in Wisconsin and Belize resonate deeply with the events from my life.

The path this novel has taken has been joyful and at times frustrating. I am always grateful for the strong arms and patience of my Lodge sisters at the vaunted F.O.W.H #251. Without them this book would not be a reality.

Most of all I am extremely grateful to Chris, Schileen, Lori, and the wonderful family at Sapphire Books. The re-release of one of my favorite stories has brought me great joy.

For the loyal readers I’ve met along the way — you continue to inspire me to write stories that resonate with women’s lives. Thank you for your continued support.

Gratefully, Barrett

P.S. be on the lookout for my next release: “Highland Dew”

*“Across storm tossed seas, the flickering glow
from the Balefire safely draws lost travelers.”*

Chapter One

“I can’t believe she did this to me.”

Brake lights.

“Crap.” Kirin Foster frantically glanced over her right shoulder, flicked the turn signal, and swerved into the next lane.

“Dammit, Melissa. There’s nothing I can do about that now,” she yelled into her Bluetooth. “No. Hey, just call the condo management and tell them the air conditioning is broken and get someone to fix it.”

Horns blared from cars behind her.

“Listen, I’m in traffic, I can’t deal with that right now. Just handle it. Fine. I’ll call you when I get there.”

She tossed the phone on the front seat and gripped the steering wheel with both hands.

“First Esther, now Melissa. Dammit to hell!”

Her editor at *Travel & Tour* had changed her assignment at the last minute. Instead of doing a lovely piece on the Oregon wine country, Kirin had to repack for Belize for a week to write a piece about the newest private resort that occupied a small island.

June in the Caribbean. What could be more idyllic—or more humid?

She abruptly veered right at the huge green General Mitchell Airport sign. Horns blared. Perspiration soaked her collar as she narrowly missed a half-a-dozen orange construction cones and the man frantically waving a flag. “Shit.”

She eased her car into the long-term parking area, slammed the shift into park, and collapsed back in her seat.

Her phone chirped, and she snatched it.

“Hi, Hon. Esther here. Just a quick reminder. I will text the hotel name, contact, and phone number as soon as I confirm the info.”

“Thanks, that’ll be fine.” Kirin closed her eyes and bit her lip.

“Look, I’m sorry about this switch...nothing I could do.”

“I understand. It’s just frustrating.”

“Try to enjoy yourself, and, Kirin, get some rest.”

“I will. Later.”

When her pulse normalized, she double-checked the doors and windows, retrieved her carry-on, and looped the leather messenger bag over her neck and shoulder. The shuttle moved slowly toward her, allowing just the briefest moment of regret.

“I shouldn’t have yelled at Melissa.” Kirin dictated a note into her cell phone to bring Melissa something nice from Belize.

Since the breakup months ago, they’d maintained a relatively comfortable friendship, and Kirin depended on Melissa to help whenever she traveled on assignment. She checked her watch again.



Silke Dyson flinched and gripped the armrest as Rachel Bates struck the steering wheel for the second time. Perspiration beaded on her forehead, and she sucked in another shallow breath. In front of them, traffic inched forward through the construction logjam at the Milwaukee airport entrance. The tension had

started building before they left the house. She prayed that they would reach the departure area without another fight.

Silke squinted at the air traffic control tower looming over the parking structure of the Milwaukee Airport and terminals. Without her peripheral vision, the traffic around the car was nothing more than fuzzy, noisy intrusions into her narrowed lens on the world.

Rachel drove cautiously and glanced at Silke.

“I can feel your anxiety over here, you know,” Silke said.

Silke leaned forward and felt for her phone on the floorboard as Rachel pulled her new Lexus to the curb at the airline departure entrance. She took a deep breath, forced a smile, and then swung her legs around while Rachel came to the passenger side with her red suitcase in tow and opened the door.

“Are you sure you’re going to be okay?” Rachel said and grabbed her elbow.

Silke exhaled. She’d be much better as soon as she could get out of town, out of Rachel’s grip for a while. She smiled. “I’ll be fine. I do this every year. You worry too much.”

Silke hoisted her backpack and hailed the skycap.

Rachel closed the car door and turned around. “Have a good time, babe.” She gave Silke a quick, cursory hug and hustled back in the car.

As the car moved away into the stream of traffic, Silke heaved a sigh of relief. It saddened her to think how contentious their relationship had become. She could barely remember when everything had started to go wrong. She watched the blurry brake lights disappear and swallowed hard. Suitcase in tow, she nearly bumped into the skycap.

“Where are you headed, Miss?”

Silke smoothed her hair back and adjusted her glasses and cane. “Belize City.”

“Yes, ma’am. Can I get you some help to the gate?”

She nodded, and within five minutes, an airline employee appeared with a wheelchair and escorted her through security and all the way to the gate. She tipped him well and thanked him as she remembered the character of Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* who said, “I’ve always depended on the kindness of strangers.” Since her vision loss, she had to depend on others for assistance, which was tedious and irritating especially for someone accustomed to being self-reliant.

The gate agent told her the flight would not begin boarding for at least half an hour, so Silke found a comfortable chair near the window and pulled a sandwich from her backpack. On Saturday morning at Milwaukee’s Mitchell field the air crackled with excitement, noise, and nervousness from all of the travelers. She could tell by the snippets of conversations that most were heading out on a vacation but there were some business travelers anxious to get home.

Silke enjoyed traveling but it became harder as her vision deteriorated. With each new hurdle, she tried to anticipate difficulties and avoid frustration. Her doctor had diagnosed the tunnel vision eight months ago after a particularly nasty fight with Rachel—one that turned physical. He explained how the increased pressure and impaired circulation had damaged blood vessels behind her eyes. He initially sounded hopeful when he told her that her vision could return to normal when the swelling went down. But there were no promises.

With luck, a week on the warm beach would do wonders. Ah yes, the beach. Happily, her dear friends Diane and Mark had purchased a rundown property nine years earlier on Ambergris Caye, just off the Belize mainland and adjacent to the second-longest barrier reef in the world. After years of tireless work, they turned it into a five star resort. Almost every year since, Silke had visited to hang out with her childhood best friend and support their efforts but also to recharge her creative batteries. Her art fed her

soul but teaching and the business end of running an art studio drained her. Rachel wasn't much help since she traveled two weeks a month for business. Tension drained from her body as she refocused on the thought of offshore breezes that awaited her in a few hours.



Kirin's temper escalated to a dangerous pitch. She opened her laptop for the TSA examiner for the second time just as her boarding call sounded over the loud speakers. She cursed the security people under her breath as she slipped on her shoes and hurried to the departure gate. It always amazed her how the tedious procedures could rile her, especially since she flew as a regular part of her job.

"Idiots." They seemed to get dumber every time she got on a plane. Fumbling for her boarding pass, she dropped the coffee she just bought. "Dammit to hell."

"Your flight attendant will be more than happy to give you a cup of coffee," the well-intentioned gate agent said as she handed back the boarding pass.

Kirin moved aboard and then was forced to stand in the aisle of the overcrowded plane while a woman in first class rearranged all her belongings including a small crate containing some kind of animal. Once in coach, she tripped over some woman's white cane and cracked her leg against an armrest. By the time she found her seat in the middle of the aircraft, she'd muttered every expletive in her literary repertoire and just wanted to scream. Her desire for that cup of coffee quickly became one for a Bloody Mary.

Chapter Two

Silke deplaned last in Dallas, and another airline employee greeted her. The talkative young woman guided her effortlessly through the maze of hallways and elevators to the TSA security checkpoint in the international concourse. She felt self-conscious using a wheelchair since her legs were fine, but without peripheral vision, crowded places created the constant threat of accident or injury. And not just to her.

Her vision only allowed her to see a small window directly in front of her and nothing on either side or above her or even below chest level. Tripping had become an ongoing occurrence. Her doctor had told her that seventy percent of patients with her condition improved, but there was also a chance it could lead to permanent blindness. She preferred the glass-half full approach and could still work because so much of her craft depended on the use of her hands. The evidence—her sculptures—were highly valued and sought after. If her vision continued to deteriorate, she hoped she'd still be able to teach.

Standing in the gate area near the window, she watched the preparations for the large jet that would carry her to her peaceful, tropical paradise. Her shoulders relaxed as worries about her studio, her students, her next project, and her deteriorating relationship faded. She rolled her head around to loosen her neck muscles and focused her limited sight on the distant horizon. Ominous dark clouds formed in the distance, sending a little shiver up her spine. *Another spring storm coming.*

She thought about the house and wondered whether Rachel would remember to cut the grass. Too late to worry now. As if in contrast to the seasonal changes in the Midwest, the perennial lush jungle landscape of Belize and Ambergris Caye beckoned her like a siren. The annual trip provided two heavenly weeks of tropical restoration. The friendly third world country she'd adopted always fed her soul and renewed her spirit.

She sat with her backpack and cane between her feet.

"Is this seat taken?" a woman asked.

The woman stood too close to see clearly, but Silke recognized her voice from the previous flight. It was the woman who had tripped over her cane. "No."

"Thanks, I sometimes forget how crowded the international flights are," the woman said. "Weren't you on the Milwaukee flight?"

"Yes, my cane tripped you—not intentionally, of course...sorry." Silke reached out her hand and smiled.

The woman waved her off. "My fault, I shouldn't have been in such a hurry. I didn't look where I was going. It seems like I do that a lot." Her carry-on tipped over and banged into a small table next to the seat. "Shit."

Silke listened carefully to the pleasant cadence of a Midwestern accent, but a voice tight with tension. "Are you going to Belize?"

"Yes, a last minute order from my editor changed my plans. She wants me to go down and review a new island resort." The woman slumped down in the seat with a grunt. "It was the last minute part that threw me off. I've been playing catch-up all day."

"That can be difficult to remedy. Have you been to Belize before?" Silke asked.

"No, actually I haven't. I've visited several places in Central America and a few in the eastern Caribbean. I've heard Belize is a hidden gem."

"Will you be staying on the mainland?" Silke felt the tension between them soften.

The woman audibly exhaled and fumbled with some papers. “No...I have a reservation at some place on one of the cayes, but I can’t remember the name. There’s a commuter flight from Belize City to a larger caye then I call for a boat or something. Where are you staying?”

Silke held her cane to her chest. “I have friends who own a resort on Ambergris Caye, and I visit every year.”

“You must really like it there.”

Silke smiled. “Yes, I look forward to this trip as my time to renew.”

“No family?”

“My partner travels most of the year so her idea of a vacation is staying at home. My idea is just the opposite. I work at home all year so my vacation is to get as far away from home as possible.”

Silke noticed that the woman stopped fidgeting and rustling papers.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” a loud crackled voice blared, “we will now begin boarding first class passengers for our nonstop service to Belize City, Belize.”

The people around them noisily gathered their belongings to board. In anticipation of the three-hour flight, Silke decided to delay boarding until the end. She had reserved a bulkhead seat in order to accommodate her long legs and her cane.

Her new acquaintance stood up. “Are you going to board now?”

“I think I’ll wait a few minutes, but thank you.” Silke shifted her backpack to her shoulder and the boarding pass to her vest pocket.



It didn’t take long for Kirin to snap back into her travel mode. She glanced over her shoulder at the soft-spoken stranger with the dazzling green eyes and pleasant manner. *Interesting*. When they called for coach boarding, she managed to be first in line and found room in the overhead compartment for her carry-on. Her window seat was on the narrow side of the 738. She pulled out her laptop and started reading some of the research she had downloaded when Esther, her editor, gave her the assignment.

After a few minutes, her mind wandered back to the stranger. Interesting to find another Wisconsinite going to Belize. *I should have asked where she’s staying. Might be worth an interview—a local angle. I’ll ask if I see her again.*

She looked up from her research as the flight attendant squeezed another bag into the overhead compartment. The attendant stepped back, revealing the woman she had met inside.

Kirin listened as the woman and the flight attendant chatted about the seat belt and safety provisions. The woman was much taller with broad shoulders and narrow hips than she had seemed when they were sitting down. Her reddish-blond hair hung just past her shoulders and framed a strong freckled face with those dazzling green eyes.

The woman looked at Kirin and smiled. The attendant helped her with a seat belt just as the captain began to announce their departure.

“I guess we meet again.” Kirin closed up her laptop and tossed a look out the window.

“So it seems.” The woman offered an enigmatic smile and leaned back on the headrest.

The speaker microphone clicked. “We’re ready for departure. Please be sure all your personal belongings are safely stowed under the seat or in the overhead compartment.”

Kirin pulled out her cell phone one more time and texted Melissa about the departure and turned it off. She glanced at her seatmate who was unrolling ear buds for her iPod. *Hmm*. Probably just as well. A

nap would be far more beneficial than small talk. Her anger about the new assignment had prevented a good night's sleep and as the adrenaline level dropped, the fatigue crept in. She glanced at her lovely seatmate. Maybe the assignment wouldn't be so bad after all.

Some turbulence woke Kirin for a second time. She passed on the in-flight snack as the fatigue from two weeks of hard work took over. Esther had been ruthless in her editorial comments. Because it had made the publisher angry, Kirin wondered if her paycheck would be late. As much as she revered her publisher and mentor, Nathan Silver, he could be a portentous porcupine that pricked her and everyone around her. Then she'd remind herself of the benefits of a regular paycheck and free travel to interesting and exotic places. Her interior walls were long and steeled from years of unexpressed frustration.

Outside the window, large banks of foreboding clouds loomed overhead and rain streamed horizontally across the window. That would explain the turbulence.

Her watch said two forty-five, which meant they'd been in the air for over two hours. *Wow, I must have been tired.* She guessed by the rhythmic foot bouncing that her seatmate was listening to music. "Did I miss anything?"

The woman turned, smiled, and removed one ear bud. "Pardon me?"

"I just wondered if I missed any news while I enjoyed my coma."

The woman rolled her shoulders and stretched a little. "Well, you did miss a fabulous three course luncheon complete with champagne. We also watched a hysterically funny film and a couple of jugglers."

"Gosh, why didn't you wake me?"

"I tried several times and so did the flight attendant, but we were forced to concede that you must be dead." Her green eyes twinkled.

Kirin liked the ribbing. "Oh, I see. You're just going to continue to abuse this poor overworked writer for your own enjoyment. My name is Kirin Foster, by the way." She offered her hand.

The woman chuckled. "I'm sorry. I must be a little bored. I'm Silke Dyson." She warmly clasped Kirin's hand.

"That's a lovely name. Silky, just like the fabric?"

"It's spelled with an E but pronounced like a Y. My mom named me after her classics professor. And your first name, how do you spell that?"

"Just like Karen—only with two i's." Kirin stared at Silke's fun-loving smile. "Sounds sort of Swedish. I guess we're a couple of odd-named ducks. Did you get a lot of heat in school for having the name?"

Silke adjusted herself in her seat as a passenger moved by. "Sure, but as one of those artsy-fartsy kids who didn't care too much, it didn't cause any permanent damage." She folded up her iPod cord and stuck it in the pocket of her vest. "I'm going to ask for some water. Do you want anything?" She pushed the button.

Kirin noticed the veins in her muscled hands. "Good idea, I'm parched. In fact, I'd like a Coke or Pepsi if they have it."

The attendant brought their beverages.

"Do you have any idea if this rain extends into Belize?" Kirin asked.

The attendant poured the drinks over ice. "I'll check with the cockpit, but I heard the co-pilot mention something about threatening weather."

Kirin stuck the water bottle in her bag for later and swallowed some Coke. "Rain is definitely something that could dampen my review of a tropical island. It's really hard to see a place in a positive light when everybody's hunkered down indoors and grouching about the weather." She felt her edginess creeping back at just the thought of bad weather.

Silke nodded. "I can understand that, although it makes very little difference to me. I've been down here in so many different kinds of weather that I appreciate them all."

"I meant to ask you earlier where you were staying." Kirin turned her attention away from the stormy weather outside.

"In San Pedro, right on Ambergris Caye. It's a narrow strip of land that runs all the way up to Mexico. San Pedro is really the only town and it's tiny, and quaint, with streets of sand. It's only about a mile long and four blocks wide, so it's easy to navigate. The vacation resort is located just a few miles north of San Pedro. So the best way to get to and from town is by boat because the one road that goes north and south can be impassable if it's rainy."

"So, what's there to do at the resort? Or do you come back to town for entertainment?"

Silke smiled. "Most of the activity on the cayes is connected to scuba diving, snorkeling, or fishing. There's not much in the way of nightlife. I'm content to hang around the resort with my friends and swim or listen to books on tape. Activities are planned every day so it's never boring and you can always take the boat into town or, weather permitting, rent a golf cart..."

The plane pitched forward.

The speaker crackled a few times. "Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain. There's a large storm moving inland, and we are going to change altitude to try to get above it. I don't expect this to last more than another ten minutes or so, but please return to your seats and fasten your seatbelts."

"Well, I guess that's the answer to my weather question," Kirin said as the plane rocked to the left, and the flight attendants hustled through picking up beverage glasses. She passed the empty can over and noticed Silke's pale face. "Are you okay?"

"I wished I hadn't left my Dramamine in my suitcase. I normally don't have trouble but I probably would've taken one if I'd known about the storm."

Kirin stared in amazement out the small window as the next ten minutes blurred by. The gigantic aluminum tube containing almost two hundred people bounced around like a toy boat in a bathtub with a hyperactive five year old.

No one talked.

Up and down like a bobble-head doll, Kirin tried to look around but could only see the bulkhead wall, the people across the aisle, and her seatmate who clutched the armrests with fisted white knuckles. The rain deluged the window like a fire hose. It grew dark, very dark. The plane seemed to be descending but without landmarks.

When someone behind them retched, Kirin took a deep breath. Once that started, others were sure to follow. Not normally prone to nausea and motion sickness, she now wished she hadn't consumed the can of Coke that sloshed around in her stomach.

"I don't feel well," Silke whispered. "Could you find one of those bags for me?"

Kirin rifled through the magazine rack in front of her until she found one stuck in the pages of the airline magazine. She almost handed it to Silke, then opened it first. She didn't know what else to do.

Silke's fair complexion had faded to a grayish green, and she was perspiring. The plane dropped again. Kirin suspected that everyone felt the same lurching sensation that left her stomach wedged beneath her ribs.

Silke grabbed her hand. A sudden and unexpected comfort. A reassuring connection.

Kirin looked out the window and saw shapes zooming past them, identifiable shapes—trees or buildings. Suddenly, the plane nosed upward again.

The captain tried to allay the palpable anxiety. “Ladies and gentlemen, we were unable to land on our first pass because of poor visibility. We’ll circle around and try a second time. If that doesn’t work we’ll need to fly to Cancun to refuel.”

Silke moaned, kept her eyes closed, and tightened her grip on Kirin’s hand.

It took several minutes to circle around but this time, as they descended, Kirin could actually see a small wooden building on the left side. Unfortunately, they were still too high and the captain pulled up through the blowing rain as the plane shuddered.

Kirin wasn’t the religious type, but she found herself squeezing a stranger’s hand and saying a silent prayer for everyone on the plane. *Might as well.* As they descended a third time, the plane vibrated wildly with the turbulence. She wanted to close her eyes but couldn’t resist peering through one eye as the plane leveled off, and she felt the wheels strike the ground hard. They weren’t out of danger yet.

Now the plane needs to stop.

The seconds ticked by, and she felt the plane losing momentum. Silke softened her grip and then re-gripped harder as the plane pitched several more times. Finally, the plane evened up and slowed. The passengers let out a cheer and applause that soared above the sound of the pelting rain.

About the Author

Barrett is a writer and Golden Crown Literary Society Award Finalist who published six novels in four years with Bedazzled Ink including: *Damaged in Service*, *Defying Gravity*, *Dispatched with Cause*, *Deliver Us From Evil*, *Balefire*, and *Flights of Fancy* before joining Sapphire Books. Her newest release entitled, *The Dreamcatcher* was released in January 2017. Her next novel, *Highland Dew* is close to completion.

She is a member of the Western Women Writers of New Mexico, the Land of Enchantment Romance Authors, Romance Writers of America, Golden Crown Literary Society, and the Petroglyph Guild.

Barrett enjoys mountain views from two acres of prairie in New Mexico's high desert with her three dogs.

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Check out Barrett's other book

The Dreamcatcher - ISBN - 978-1-943353-67-5

High school is rarely easy, especially for a tall, somewhat gangly Native American girl. Add a sprinkle of shyness, a dash of athletic prowess, an above-average IQ, and some bizarre history that places her in the guardianship of her aunt. Then normal high school life is only an illusion.

Kai Tiva faces an uphill struggle until she runs into Riley Beth James, the extroverted class cutie, at the principal's office. Riley shows up for a newspaper interview, while Kai is summoned for punching out a classmate.

Riley is the attractive girl-next-door-type whom everyone likes. Though a fairly good student, an emerging choral star, and wildly popular, she knows she'll never live up to her older sister. She makes up for it with bravery, kindness, and a brash can-do attitude.

Their odd matchup is strengthened by curiosity, compassion, humor, and all the drama of typical teenage life. But their experiences go beyond the normal teen angst; theirs is compounded by a curious attraction to each other, and an emerging, insidious danger related to mysterious death of Kai's father.

Their emerging friendship is tested as they navigate this risky challenge. But the powerful bond forged between them has existed through past lives. The outcome this time will affect the next generation of Kai's people.

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