



Becoming Dante

By Day LeClaire

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BECOMING DANTE All his life, Gabe Moretti has denied his Dante heritage - but when he meets Kat Malloy, his late wife's cousin, the Dante Inferno cannot be ignored. He tells himself it's only business - her hand in exchange for his mother's precious necklace. But when one touch leads to another - and a kiss to more - Gabe realises he's in over his head. the deeper the passion...To find an heirloom lost for centuries, Vicki St. Cyr must enlist the help of her former flame, treasure hunter Jack Drummond. But by bedding the man who broke her heart, she's in danger of losing the plot. Their nights together are hot and passionate. But if Vicki recovers her heirloom, will the flames die out once more...?

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Becoming Dante By Day Leclaire Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1108613 in Books
- Published on: 2012-11-27
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.62" h x .50" w x 4.21" l, .30 pounds
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 192 pages

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Editorial Review

About the Author

USA Today bestselling author, Day Leclaire is described by Harlequin as “one of our most popular writers ever!” Day’s passionate stories warm the heart, which may explain the impressive 10 nominations she’s received for the prestigious Romance Writers of America RITA Award. “There’s no better way to spend each day than writing romances.” Visit www.dayleclaire.com.

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Gabe Moretti's office door slammed open and one of the most beautiful women he'd ever seen swept in. At her appearance, an odd sizzle raced through him, something he'd never experienced before, something that jarred him from complacency and threw all his senses on high alert.

She's yours, came an insidious whisper. Take the woman!

Gabe shoved aside the bizarre thought and focused on her, his brows drawing together. She was tall, or rather her three inch heels gave the illusion of height, and emphasized her delicate, almost fragile bone structure. Despite her slender frame, womanly curves filled out a charcoal-and-white suit that could only be Christian Dior. A black wool coat framed the outfit. Hair the color of banked embers fell away from a sculpted face and formed a heavy twist at her nape. But there was more to her than mere beauty. Character and sheer force of will melded with her appearance, while intelligence glittered in eyes a pale, startling green, eyes that were haunting...and haunted. They gave her an almost painful vulnerability, one Gabe reacted to with unsettling intensity. *Get. The. Woman.*

The primal demand overcame thought and reason, the visceral tug almost more than he could withstand. Time slowed, stilled, stealing his intellect, his icy control, all that drove him and made him the man he'd fought to become. Desire honed into one imperative...this woman, in this place, captured within this moment. And all the while, the insidious whisper lashed at him. *Take her. Make her yours. Brand her with your touch. Your possession.* Heat crackled, unbearable in its intensity, ungovernable in its strength. It slipped deep inside, infiltrated his veins with each beat of his heart. It took root, sending out endless tendrils that blossomed within his soul. And then time sped up, thrusting him back into the here and now.

The woman checked her forward motion as though sensing some disturbance. She hesitated, her gaze locking with his. Clearly, he wasn't what she'd anticipated and his curiosity grew. Who or what had she been expecting? Or was she simply reacting to him in the same way he reacted to her?

"Gabe Moretti?" she asked in a deep, husky voice that threatened to fry sense and sensibility.

She's the one!

"I'm sorry, Mr. Moretti." His assistant, Sarah, hurried into the office. "She refused to make an appointment and demanded to see you immediately."

Gabe flipped closed the file he'd been reviewing and stood. He pinned the mystery woman with the sort of steely look that had earned him the nickname "Iceman" among both competitors and adversaries. Maybe he reacted so strongly because of the inner voice hammering at him—one he'd never heard before and hoped never to hear again. Or maybe it was to hold instinct at bay, one that insisted he ignore civilized behavior and take what he wanted, regardless of consequence. She simply returned his look with one of her own, the

expression in her crystalline eyes as brilliant and fierce as Dante fire diamonds.

Ice versus fire, an intriguing combination.

"Why don't we start at the beginning?" he suggested. It impressed the hell out of him that he could speak so calmly while desire fomented within, splashing through him in hot, messy waves. "Such as, who are you?"

"Don't you recognize me? You should." Amusement filtered through the statement. "I'm Kat Malloy."

The simple statement impacted like a punch to the gut. So much for some fool, intuitive voice. Not only was this woman not *the one*, she could *never* be *the one*. No matter how badly he wanted her on a physical level, she was the last woman in existence he would take to his bed—or ever want in his bed. He'd seen her only once before in his entire life. Even then, he'd felt a similar reaction, though nowhere near this strong. Perhaps his earlier reaction had been mitigated by the fact that she'd been in another man's bed—her cousin's fiance's, no less.

Gabe glanced at his assistant and gave a subtle jerk of his head.

The instant he and Kat were alone, he approached and delivered the first salvo. "Maybe if you weren't wearing clothes, I'd have an easier time remembering you."

Irritation flashed through her gaze like emerald lightning. "How kind of you to bring that up. Ever the gentleman."

"I wouldn't advise going down that road," he said, very, very gently. "Otherwise I'll be forced to discuss how well you fit the definition of a lady."

She dismissed his warning with a casual shrug, though based on the sweep of color darkening her cheekbones, his comment hit home. Good. So long as he kept their relationship adversarial, it wouldn't allow for any other emotions to creep in—like lust. Or passion. Or the need to rip her clothes off and imprint himself on her, body and soul.

"You've refused every attempt to make an appointment," she said. "The very least you could do is have the courtesy to hear my proposition before throwing me out."

He simply stared at her. Something in his demeanor must have penetrated her annoyance and she stilled, eyeing him warily...a succulent doe scenting a hungry predator. About damn time. He maintained his silence, allowing it to grow until cold, raw bitterness settled between them. And all the while that hideous voice hammered at him, making demands about Kat Malloy he had zero intention of listening to, let alone following.

"I owe you nothing. Maybe my late wife did. After all, you were Jessa's cousin," he said at last. He paused a beat before adding in a conversational tone, "Did you know she loved you like a sister? Even after what you did, even after your little fling with Benson Winters, she still spent the last two years of her life grieving over her lost relationship with you."

"Did she?" Kat raised a sleek eyebrow. "She certainly had a peculiar way of showing it, especially considering she turned our grandmother against me and vilified me in the press. For some reason that just doesn't strike me as very sisterly."

He saw red. "Maybe because you slept with her fiance. And though I ultimately benefited since she turned to me for consolation, it was a despicable thing to do."

The Malloy woman rallied with impressive speed. "So everyone keeps telling me. For some strange reason, I have a slightly different take on what happened that night."

She gave his office a cursory glance, noting the generous sitting area where he often entertained clients. Ignoring the chairs, she chose the couch. She shrugged off her coat, tossed it over one of the arms and made herself at home, crossing her legs—gorgeous, shapely legs, he couldn't help but notice. Legs he would give almost anything to have wrapped around him. Of course, even a viper had a sinuous shape. That didn't mean he'd get close enough to feel the sting of her fangs or be infected by her poison. Not that his inner voice gave him any peace on that front. Apparently, it didn't care about fangs or poison, only about those legs, and how tight they could hold him.

Regarding him with remarkable self-possession, she said, "Before you throw me out, you should be aware of one vital detail." She smiled her siren's smile. "I have something you want."

He waved that aside. "You have nothing I want, now or ever."

She folded her hands in her lap. So proper. So decorous. So bloody classy. And every bit of it a lie. "Actually, the detail I'm referring to is Heart's Desire."

He froze. *Son of a bitch!* He'd spent years attempting to purchase his mother's fire diamond necklace from Matilda Chatsworth, without success. Kat's grandmother knew damn well how badly he wanted it, that he'd literally do anything necessary to get it back. Granted, not the best negotiating tactics for someone with his skill and experience. But he'd been far younger then, and lacked the ability to maintain a poker face, especially when it came to something that carried so much emotional baggage.

The necklace had been created by his mother, Cara, when she first started working for Dantes as one of their jewelry designers. During those early, heady days, she'd met and fallen in love with Dominic Dante, the owner's son. Their affair had been passionate and all-consuming, teetering on the brink of marriage. But instead of choosing his mother, Dominic had taken a wife with a bank account balance that would assist Dantes' bottom line, no doubt at the urging of his parents. After his betrayal, his mother had accepted a position at Dantes, New York, and moved on with her life—until Dominic had swooped in years afterward and, unable to resist, she'd indulged in a one-night stand with him. That one night resulted in Gabe's and his twin sister, Lucia's, conception, causing Cara to leave Dantes permanently.

According to Dominic, he'd never forgotten Cara, his love never dying. He spent years attempting to find her, frustrated by how successfully she'd fallen off the grid. Eventually, fifteen years later, he tracked her down, and discovered she'd borne his twins. This time he proposed to her, despite still being married to his wife, Laura. He gave Cara a necklace she'd created for the firm, one he named Heart's Desire in her honor, along with a ring as a promise that he'd come to her after his divorce, marry her and legitimize his bastard twins by adopting them and bestowing the Dante name on them. Of course, that had never happened and all Cara Moretti had been left with were empty promises and the dying flames of the fire diamonds Dominic had given her.

Gabe had been twenty when his mother became ill and, desperate for money to care for her, he'd sold the fire diamond necklace to Matilda Chatsworth. The money had also provided him with a start in life. Despite knowing he'd h...

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