



*Heart of Stone*  
*Cathryn Cade*

A Samhain Publishing Freebie

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In another galaxy far away ...

Stone Masterson knew the small female standing on his doorstep was trouble, but he opened the door anyway. He was bored and he was lonely. Lonely, he could deal with, but he loathed being bored.

Sure enough, no sooner had the massive entry doors to his Frontiera stronghold groaned open than she pulled a weapon on him and he found himself being escorted back into his own home at laser gun point. That was a twist he hadn't expected.

When the huge studded door slammed shut against the frigid winter night, he stood looking down at her. She was just a little bit of a thing, wrapped in a cape of skrog leather. Visible over the weapon were two big eyes filled with a mixture of fear and determination, a pert nose and the prettiest, softest mouth he had seen in some time. Hell, he must be lonelier than he'd thought.

"You evidently have business with me," he said. "I usually respond more cordially without a weapon in my face."

His words, which he thought damned diplomatic, considering, seemed to incense his visitor. Her big eyes narrowed dangerously and her soft mouth firmed into a hard line. Actually it was more of a pout, but he could see it was meant to look mean, so he bit back the grin that threatened.

"You'll respond, all right," she said in a husky voice that quavered a little. "Or – or I'll put a hole in your hide that a skrog could tromp through!"

She peered past him. He watched her, interested to see what she thought of his haven. A warm fire burned in the hearth at the far end of the great room. Two armchairs were drawn up before it, one holding the holo-reader he had been perusing before his alarm signaled her approach.

But she waved the gun toward his dining area, visible through a wide arch.

"Sit down in there. And – and put your hands behind your back."

Ah, she wanted him on a hard wooden chair, where she could tie him up. In his experience, when an adversary wanted to bind you, they usually wanted to extract information, hold you, or both.

Well, if that was going to happen, it would be on his terms.

"Oh, I've a better idea than that." He motioned her to follow him through the wide double doors open on the left side of the big room. "Come along. You can tie me up in here."

Rose Thorne could not believe her eyes. Her prisoner, the man she was holding at gunpoint, was walking away from her! Inviting her to follow him as casually as if she were a guest dropping by, not an armed intruder.

As his lean, rangy form disappeared into another room, she bit her lip. The heavy weapon wobbled as her arms quivered from the strain of holding it steady. She wanted to drop it to the floor, plop into one of those huge, cozy chairs and sob with fear and nerves.

She had been fighting that impulse from the moment the tall, broad-shouldered man flung open the huge doors and looked down at her with eyes as golden and merciless as the fire flickering behind him. He had the face of a raptor – fierce as a Frontieran eagle, with high cheekbones, a blade of a nose and deep-set eyes. The long brown hair falling around his shoulders only added to his untamed appearance.

But crying would not get her brother back. Only force would work – that’s what men like Stone Masterson understood. He knew where Branch was and she was going to make him tell her. Neither man had responded to any of the com-link messages she had been sending for the last weeks and she just knew that Branch would reply to her if he was able, so in desperation she had finally come here to beard Masterson in his den.

And it was den-like, she noted, hurrying after him. Everything was built on a large scale, of solid stone, wood and leather. It was quite cozy, really, with the fire burning warmly in the hearth, and soft lamp light in every room.

But she stopped short in the open door. They were in his bedroom! And the man who was supposed to be her captive was lying back on the huge bed, relaxed as if they had come here to – well.

She had the surreal feeling that she was not in control, which was ridiculous, because she had the weapon.

“You can tie me up here,” he said a soft voice. Almost coaxing, as if she were the wild thing and he was worried about frightening her. Which was also ridiculous, because she was the one in charge here.

“I will, then,” she said, crossing the room with the weapon before her. “And don’t get any more creative ideas, Mr. Masterson, or I may start shooting.”

He lay back against the mounded pillows on the bed and arranged his hands helpfully on the massive wooden crosspieces of the huge headboard. Both he and the bed looked as though they had been hand-hewn.

His long brown hair fell back from his high cheekbones, revealing a small com-link in one ear. All Frontierans wore them, held on by a minor surgical procedure. A satellite communication system had been established by the first settlers on the planet. There were even rumors that technology had been purchased from the Indigons to take the sat-com system to a highly sophisticated level, tracking incoming and outgoing space traffic and establishing a security surveillance grid for the whole planet.

Masterson’s com-link was carved of polished horn, a small objet d’art. That figured – he was said to be very wealthy.

“Oh, I won’t get any ideas,” he assured her. “I can see that you’re a determined woman.”

Reaching under her cloak, she fumbled for the soft restraints she had brought. They stuck in the inner pocket and her attention wavered from her struggles to her weapon. At last they came free.

She approached the bed under his look of rapt interest. Rather like a large predator might look at his next meal, she realized and scowled darkly at him.

“I’m going to tie you up now,” she said. “And if you make another move, I’ll shoot.”

“Wouldn’t think of it. But what am I to call you?” He spoke with a slight, lilting accent. Rolling his consonants, and lengthening the vowels.

She was just realizing the impossibility of climbing onto the side of the bed clad in her enveloping cloak. And besides, she was beginning to perspire. Well, there was no help for it, it would have to come off.

“Miss Thorne to you,” she said, working the fastenings. Then she pushed the cloak off. His golden eyes heated.

Rose felt a blush surge upward from her low décolletage and blister its way across her cheeks. She knew very well what occasioned that look – the ridiculous costume she wore in her current job as hostess at the Yolvana Inn and Bar. Soft chamois leather, the brief halter dress made her look like a

Frontiera Girl Scout gone bad. Her long auburn hair was bound up and back with leather head bands, although she could feel tendrils escaping around her face and throat. She had come up the mountain straight from work tonight, afraid if she went home to change she would lose her nerve.

She knelt on the side of the bed and managed to wrap one of the restraints around his near wrist. He had very big hands and wrists, his arms knotted with sinewy muscle.

“Miss Thorne,” he repeated. “Don’t you think that’s a bit formal, considering where we are?”

The beast was laughing at her!

“Where we are,” she reminded him as she marched around the bed to lash his other arm, “Is this - I am going to ask you some questions, Mr. Masterson, and you are going to answer them.”

“Ah, I see. And what if you don’t like my answers? What are you going to do then?”

The expression of polite interest on his face made her want to hit him – hard.

“You’ll just have to wait and find out, won’t you?” Reasoning that he wasn’t going anywhere, she laid the heavy gun on the bedside table. He watched casually.

Rose crossed her arms, and glared down at him. “Now, where is my brother?”

He looked back at her. “Do I know your brother?”

“You know very well you do,” she shot back. “And you know where he is, because you sent him there. Or made him go.”

“Did I?”

She leaned over him, planting one knee and both hands on the bed in the hollow of his body and glared down at him.

“You know you did! I know Branch has been working for you. I want to know where he is, and I want to know how to get him back! So don’t play games with me, you – you big beast!”

He smiled slowly. “Oh, but I very much want to play games with you, lassie.”

She slapped him, hard. The thing was, she forgot about the heavy ring on her hand, Branch’s signet ring that she had been wearing since he disappeared. Her hand hit with a satisfying smack, Masterson’s head snapping a little to one side on the pillows. But when he turned back to her, blood welled from a cut on his prominent cheekbone.

She gasped in horror. “Oh, no. Oh, no – now see what you’ve made me do,” she mumbled, her stomach knotting with guilt. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to –”

She stopped short, realizing the irony of apologizing to him for doing exactly what she had set out to do – hurt him if necessary, to make him talk. And realizing those golden eyes were not missing an iota of her struggle.

Lifting her chin, she firmed her mouth, at the same time shoving the ring into the pocket of her dress. “You see to what lengths I’m willing to go. Now, will you tell me where he is?”

He moved his face experimentally. Blood trickled down his cheekbone, which was already beginning to swell a little.

“Well, as to that, darlin’,” he said softly. “I don’t like being hurt. But I can see that you like doing it even less, so I don’t think that line of questioning is going to take us very far. You haven’t the stomach for it.”

She blinked. He had just called her ‘darling’ and called her bluff. Now what was she supposed to do? She hadn’t thought this far ahead. Any man in his right mind would respond to a large weapon in

the hands of an angry woman. He was being very difficult. And every time she looked at the welt on his cheek, she wanted to cry.

She needed something to do, while she thought for a moment. She couldn't think while she looked at that blood on his face.

"Where are your handkerchiefs?"

"Haven't any."

Well, she always carried a clean one. She scooted off of the bed, scabbled in the pocket of her cloak for it and returned to kneel beside him again. Dabbing gingerly at the cut, she tried very hard to ignore the look of warm approval in the golden eyes watching her.

She applied gentle pressure to the small wound. "Stop smiling at me."

"But you see," he began, wincing as she pressed harder. "I've thought of the way you should deal with me."

"You have?"

He shifted slightly in the bed, the heat of his torso against her thigh.

"I have. I'm a very easy mark for a lovely woman. You could no doubt seduce me into telling you everything you want to know."

Rose thought numbly it was a good thing she was sitting down. There was a faint ringing in her ears and she felt breathless. She had the sensation she was falling into his eyes.

"Th-that's ridiculous. I – I certainly am not going to seduce you." He thought she was lovely?

His mouth quirked ruefully. His lips were thin, but beautifully shaped. She jerked her eyes back to his to find them smiling up at her. How did he do that, smile with his eyes?

"You wouldn't have to do much," he murmured, his voice almost tender. "Why, you'd be amazed at what I'll admit to for a kiss."

She swallowed. Fidgeted. Braced herself on his broad chest with one hand as the bed shifted beneath her. He was very warm, and his heart beat beneath her palm with a slow, steady thump.

"Come kiss me, and I'll tell you where he is," he whispered. Only it sounded like 'coom kess me', and it was the most beguiling offer she had ever had from any man, brigand or not.

She hesitated. It was just a kiss. Ever so much easier than hitting and waving guns, both of which she loathed. And then she could escape and set off after Thorne.

Slowly, warily, she bent over until they were only a breath apart. He lay very still, watching her. She leaned just that much further and brushed her lips across his.

Her breath hitched at the surge of sensation. His lips were warm and silky against hers, firm. And he lifted his head, prolonging the contact, deepening it. Kissing her back.

Until she suddenly recalled just why she had begun it and jerked her head up a few inches.

"Your brother is north of here," he coaxed. "Want to know how far away?"

She nodded and he lifted his face, eyes gleaming, making it clear how she would get the information. A little more confidently, Rose kissed him again. Why, this was easy. She wasn't sure what game he was playing, but he certainly couldn't ravish her while he was tied to the bed, so if he wanted to tell her what he knew for a few kisses, well, kissing him was quite pleasant, compared to some of the sloppy, wet attempts she had been subjected to.

He seemed to very much enjoy simply playing her lips with his, tasting her, sampling her breath while their faces brushed. He smelled good, a mixture of clean male and the outdoors. A lot of men who had come to Frontiera felt that personal hygiene was no part of the frontier experience.

She wished that she could taste him a little more. Maybe if he would tell her something else.

"How far away is he?" she asked, pulling back a little, just enough to see his eyes.

"A day's journey – by cruiser."

She pressed a kiss to the corner of his mouth. Oh, he liked that. "What settlement is he in?"

He stole another kiss himself, his lips parted enough to catch her full bottom one, and taste it. "Hmm?"

She let him kiss her again, feeling at once languorous and triumphant. She saw now how to get what she wanted. She would play him like a violin. And leave him here, wanting her.

She shifted over, planting one hand on his far shoulder. Then, with daring that she would not have thought possible a few moments ago, she straddled him, planting one knee on either side of his narrow hips with her hands on his chest.

"Tell me where," she asked again and eased herself down so that she rode him. The only thing separating them were her thin panties and his snug pants. What she had not counted on was the effect on her own body. As she settled lightly on his groin, his body stiffened under hers, reminding her that she was astride a powerful, virile male. A long, thick shape prodded her tender labia. Her pussy clenched and then melted and she fought a losing battle with a blush at the knowing glint in his eyes.

"Ah, siren," he approved, his voice a little hoarse now. "He's near Adamant. But ..."

She bent and kissed him again, letting her breasts lie against his chest. Pleasure and triumph fizzed through her like champagne. "But what?"

He kissed her harder this time, cocking his head to taste her, to coax her to snuggle in flatter on him, to run her fingers into his hair just to hold him so, where she could let him suck her tongue gently into his mouth and enjoy it.

"But you'll need me to guide you," he murmured, as his hips surged under hers, raking her with that concealed weapon. "I've a big cruiser, and a pilot. Let me take you there."

"You'd do that?" she asked, turning her head just enough to let him continue nuzzling her face with his own. Oh, he was headed for the side of her throat, that was bad. That was very ... oh, heavens, that was so good. She bit back the whimper that began in the back of her throat as he nipped her neck where it met her shoulder.

He kept calling her a siren, but this man was as dangerous as potent moon brandy.

"I'd do that for you, siren," he promised. "Say yes, and I will."

"Y-yes," she managed. "All right."

His shoulders rolled mightily under her and just like that his long arms closed around her bare back in two gentle but implacable bands of steel. He wrapped one big hand around the back of her neck, opened his mouth on her skin and sucked.

Rose whimpered, she couldn't help it. The fire lit room spun crazily and she found herself underneath her captive, his long, hard male body pressing her into the bed while he continued to employ all the weapons at his disposal. And he was now free to do so.

"I – tied you up," she managed. Somehow her arms had slid up around him. He was still between her parted legs, but now his superior weight was above her as he rubbed himself into the soft center of her body. It was delicious, it was maddening. She had to stop this ... soon.

He nibbled her ear and one of his big hands molded itself over her breast, caressing her through the thin chamois leather.

"I've a rather special skill set," he said apologetically. "I've gotten loose from many a crueller captor than you, darlin'."

He kissed her again, so tenderly that she could not object when the tie of her halter loosened. He lifted up on one elbow to watch as he bared her breasts. He sucked in his breath and his eyes flamed in the shadows. "My god, you're lovely."

She knew she had pretty breasts – they were full and round. At his words, she felt her nipples tighten, pointing up at him, begging for attention.

He smiled knowingly. "You like me looking at you. Let's see how you like this."

He caressed her, pushing up her bare breasts into tempting mounds for his delectation as he teased her with gentle grazes of his lips, little stinging nips of his strong white teeth. When she could bear it no more and told him so, he gave her what she wanted, needed and suckled her, drawing one nipple into his mouth with a strong, steady suction while he pinched and rolled the other.

He enjoyed both of her breasts at length. It was so wonderful that she objected not at all, even helped as he unfastened her little skirt, pushing it off of her hips along with her panties, leaving her naked and open under him. And she loved that, too.

He kissed her as he cupped one hand between her legs, holding her, possessing her while he teased her mouth with those knowing lips of his.

"I'm going to have you first with my hand, and then with my mouth," he told her, watching her closely as he traced the swollen, wet seam of her labia with his hard, rough fingertips. "All right?"

"Yes – oh, please," she agreed, clutching at him as he stroked her gently, back and forth, his fingers slipping a little further inside her each time, until she trembled under his hand and dug her nails demandingly into his shoulders.

"That's right, leave your mark on me," he said, watching her. Two of his long fingers slid right inside her, gently plumbing her tight, sleek channel. In and out, in and out he stroked her while he watched her mercilessly as an eagle. "Open up a little more for me, love. Move with me – show me what you like."

And she did. Her knee drew up and she arched in his tender grasp, reaching down to place her small hand over his and guide him.

"Like this?" He curled those wicked fingers inside her, finding that magical place up behind her mons and pressing firmly, while his big thumb found the tiny, swollen knot of her clitoris, and began to work it.

Rose felt herself begin to pulse around his invading touch. She gave in with a whimper of delight, coming more quickly than she ever had before.

"We'll leave at first light," he told her, even as he shifted down so that he could press a soft kiss to her bare belly, his fingers still inside her. "Ah, siren, I love the way you smell. And such a pretty little pussy. You knew a man would be seeing this trim job, didn't you? Just a trail of sweet red curls, leading straight to heaven."

When she felt his tongue on her, Rose cried out, she couldn't help it. He knew exactly what to do, where to lavish it like a silken whip, how to delve it deep between his fingers, holding her spread open for his delectation.

"Don't stop," she begged him, delving her fingers into his hair so he would not stop that velvet caress. "I'm ... oh, I'm coming again, oh, I am!"

And she did, even though she never had more than once before. Somehow, it did not surprise her, because it was he.

He waited until she was finished, languorous and breathless, lying there with her arms and legs open for him to look at as he sat back on his heels, and stripped off his shirt and pants.

"Now," he said. "You've my promise. Will you have me as well?"

She looked up at him, kneeling between her thighs, one hand stroking his cock, which thrust out from his lean hips as huge and dangerous as the laser gun on the bed stand.

He would probably hurt her, as big as he was and she would certainly not come again. But she wanted to please him as he had her. She held up her arms to him.

"You've your vaccinations?" he asked urgently. "All of them?"

Rose nodded. She had been vaccinated against unwanted pregnancy and STD's, and she made sure she had her yearly booster shots.

"Clever girl," he praised, and came down to her.

Holding him in her arms was the best of all, she discovered with delight. He was hot, hard and smooth. He weighed her into the bed like a downed tree and she loved it. A deep shudder ran through him as she pulled him close, sliding her hands around his sleek flanks to stroke his hard ass. He leaned up on his elbows and framed her face with his big hands.

"Now, you'll take me, won't you? You'll let me fuck you the way I want to."

She opened her eyes, and let him see her surrender was complete, that this was no longer a game, no pretending this was about getting information. That she wanted to be his.

"Yes."

"I'll go slow," he promised.

And he did, although she could feel how it cost him. His taut muscles trembled, his skin dampened even more as he forged carefully into her. She sucked in her breath as his true size became apparent, stretching her tight channel to the utmost. But when he was deep inside her, she realized that being filled so tightly, so completely was the most wonderful sensation she had ever experienced. And that he was ruining her for all other men.

She didn't realize that she was mumbling aloud until he threw back his head and laughed.

"Ah, siren, you undo me."

He began to move inside her, inexorably, ruthlessly, pulling out to thrust back in again and again ... and Rose realized that her two earlier orgasms were only the prelude to this – to being the receptacle of a weapon more potent than any invented for war. Sensation surged through her, taking her as surely as the crashing tide takes the shore.

"Wrap your legs around me." He showed her how and then proceeded to take her with progressively longer, harder strokes, until he was slamming his cock into her and she was loving it more the harder he took her.

This time her whimpers rose to a crescendo that drove him, praised him, pleaded with him not to stop as she surrendered completely and found pleasure greater than she had ever known.

Stone could not believe that his curvy little siren could take the fucking he was giving her and still keep moaning for more. Her sweet, escalating cries drove him mad, as did the incredibly tight, hot suction of her little pussy, and the way she bucked in his arms, meeting his thrusts and loving every one. When he felt her coming for the third time, he knew he could hold his own ecstasy back no longer.

He threw back his head, a deep guttural cry tearing from his chest, coming in long pulses of savage joy.

He was locked tight in his own hot little heaven, all on a cold winters night. He let his head fall beside hers on the pillows, and laughed deep in his chest. On Frontiera, a man never knew what the winter storms might blow in, but they had never brought him anything this sweet before.

When he finally moved off of her, he braced himself for the chat she was going to expect. Women did, unless they were paid companions. And this one had come to talk – or at least to make him talk. Having resigned himself, he was astounded to find that his tempting captor mumbled something as he pulled out of her, yawned hugely and then let her thick dark lashes fall shut without a peep. Her auburn hair streamed across his pillows, baring the tender line of her throat, the shell of her ear, decorated with a pretty little emerald green com-link. He could just see her initials picked out in tiny diamonds.

He stared down at her, astonished by her complete relaxation. Then his mouth twitched – apparently his legend was not quite as fearsome as he had been given to understand. She had been frightened of him at first, but now Thorne's sister seemed to find him about as menacing as a big house pet. Of course he had offered to help her, so she hadn't that to worry about any longer.

He got up, used the bathroom and checked the security system as he did each night. Returning to his bedroom, he looked down at his unexpected bed companion, then lifted her up enough to pull the down comforter from under her and lay down beside her.

She rolled onto her side, reaching out until she touched him. Then, to his amused astonishment, she burrowed into the hollow of his body, not stopping until she was snuggled against him. He lay awake for a long time, her warm, silken weight draped half over him, her slow breath puffing gently against his throat. Damn, she was not only extraordinarily trusting, she was a cuddler. Her hand lay over his heart. He had the oddest feeling that she was guarding it – like a pert mouse trying to shelter a mountain eagle.

He was not a romantic – he was a cynic, honed by a life of cruel circumstance to a hard toughness. But he liked his creature comforts, including a pretty woman in his bed. He enjoyed an amusing companion, too. This one made him want to laugh even when she was not trying.

She wasn't stupid, but Thorne's little sister did seem to be certifiably naïve. That was a rare commodity that Frontiera usually knocked out of its residents soon after they landed. He found he wanted to protect this one from losing it the hard way.

Of course he had tricked her into having sex with him, which women found reprehensible, but he was definitely the lesser of evils. If she had managed to make it to Adamant by herself she would probably have suffered some degrading, if not fatal experience. He, on the other hand, would take very good care of her.

... to be continued.

### **About the Author**

Cathryn Cade grew up in Montana riding a stick horse and later real ones. I love to write frontier romances, whether on Earth or in another galaxy. With a wonderful husband, two active sons and a career as an elementary school librarian, I write whenever I can – all those characters want out of my imagination!

To read the conclusion of **Heart of Stone**, please visit me at [www.cathryncade.com](http://www.cathryncade.com) . I'll post a link to the rest of Rose and Stone's romance, and you can learn about my books.

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