

# UNDER THE VEIL

A NOVEL

by

**WEST MICHELL**

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# EXCERPT

# UNDER THE VEIL

## CHAPTER 1

### The Viper

“Oh no! Lazy Linda is working your table!” Louis teased. “Keep moving Sacs, it's going to be a long night for you!” He smirked, then dashed out the swinging door with a large tray of plated desserts in the palm of his hand.

“Let's move it people. We're on schedule and I plan on keeping it that way. Go! Go! Go!” Maria said.

I grabbed my tray and glided into the huge ballroom. The room was filled with designer dresses, expensive scotch, and underhanded conversation. This event wasn't your average affair, way beyond wedding caliber anyway. It was a birthday bash thrown for a dignitary, or diplomat, or some political figure from a country I had never heard of. Everyone on the floor and in the kitchen had to go through background checks to work the event, so I guess they were pretty important. For me, it was just another night in the incredibly expensive, grand ballroom filled with billowing tulle and fresh flowers.

Louis was right, Linda had a knack for not being around when guests needed her but the first one to pick up her paycheck, which meant it would take me longer to close up our section.

I presented my desserts to an abandoned table. The only remnants of its guests were a few shimmering designer clutches, a spilled drink, and half empty glasses.

I placed my desserts at each setting with the fancy chocolate artwork swirled at the top and the cake at the bottom, just as the chef instructed.

Once the desserts were served, Louis came over grinning again. We stood shoulder to shoulder surveying our tables and lying in wait in case one of our guests needed attention. The empty table in front of me allowed for a quick reprieve from the hustle and bustle of the evening.

“Just stop,” I said, rolling my eyes and trying to hold back the laugh in my stomach. He was always teasing me to distraction. He was a good friend and one of the main reasons I took on the banquet jobs. Louis always made it fun.

“Look,” he said, his eyes motioning to the bar across the room. “Over there. The fillies are sugaring up the stallion.”

I glanced over to see about twenty or so young, beautiful women, smiling and chatting. In the center of it all was a dark haired man in a tux. I couldn't see his face or most of his body because the fillies were at least four deep.

“He's a popular one,” I said, playing into Louis's investigative drama.

“Sure is. I hope he looks over here,” Louis said, straightening up.

“I'm not sure Clark would approve of that.”

“Oh Sacs, I won't touch but it can't hurt to look and... wonder.” He strained to look. “Shoo, you silly girls. Let me see the goods.”

Louis had always the wandering eye. I knew he meant nothing by wanting to “see the goods” because for all the big talk and cute winks, he was completely devoted to Clark.

Louis was the first person I met in New York City. He brought Ashley and I along to any and every event New York City had to offer. Parks, parties, street festivals, grand openings, tourist traps, you name it, we were there. Louis loved Manhattan. He embraced every stinky street, crowded sidewalk, demonstration, and live event like it was his own personal celebration of humanity. He was the perfect person to meet when Ashley and I moved here.

I had come to New York City first. Ashley and I had planned to arrive on the same day but her grandmother passed away two days before she was supposed to leave. I did what I could with our apartment and then started my first job at the hotel's restaurant. I was thrilled to have landed a job in a place as elegant as The Belleza. Nestled next to the Waldorf Astoria, it had only opened a few years before we arrived. The décor was an elegant revival of historic New York City with a flair of old world Barcelona charm. I had only worked two shifts at the restaurant when one of the banquet managers asked me to work a banquet that Friday night. That was the night I met Louis.

It was love at first sight. He could tease me and I could take it then give it back. I spent the next two weeks with him and Clark tooling around New York City. By day, Louis worked at a senior citizen day care center and by night, when duty called, he worked in the hotel's banquet hall. Clark, the stoic, calm part of the duo, was a financial analyst down on Wall Street. They were two of the nicest people I had ever met.

After a night on the town and a few too many drinks, we stumbled our way back to Louis and Clark's apartment. It was there, flipping through TV channels, that we saw a show on The History Channel about the historical Lewis and Clark.

It was game on. The historical and adventure laden innuendos flew. Our alcohol induced hysterics gave way to snorts, contracted stomachs, and gasps for air, until Louis jumped up in a frenzy and ran from the room. Clark and I just looked at each other perplexed.

Louis reentered the room with the elegance of a prince. Then dropped to one knee, bowed his head, and presented me with a small box.

“Lauren Elizabeth Wells,” he began.

My eyebrow arched.

“Will you do us the honor of being our,” dramatic pause, clearing of throat, “our Sacagawea?” he said.

Dramatic pause on my part.

“I'm honored,” I said throwing my hand across my heart. “Will you have me Clark?”

He nodded in approval.

“Then, yes. Yes, I'll be your Sacagawea,” I said.

“Oh, Sacs!” Louis roared. “You've made me so happy!”

Louis was so proud of himself. It was like a scientific, historical, and spiritual revelation all rolled into one. From then on, I was Sacs.

“Sacs, look!” Louis said again. “He's bucking his way out of the herd.”

I watched laughing at Louis's dedication to the scene. Every event had a menagerie of animals, a stallion or two, fillies on the prowl or fillies being pursued, a few old goats, and even some jackasses.

The stallion walked away from the group toward a table where he shook hands and nodded to an older couple. It seemed he may have used them as his escape from the very crowded bar. Lucky for the stallion, the fillies remained at the bar drinking, giggling, and watching him.

“I wonder who he is? I haven't seen anyone get that much attention since Prince Harry was here,” Louis said.

I quickly brought my attention back to the table when one of the guests arrived to eat her dessert. I filled her coffee cup on cue from the beautiful silver carafe placed on the table next to me then went back into position next to Louis.

Louis suddenly smacked my arm then stiffened up. The stallion walked by just as I looked up.

Our eyes met for a split second. I quickly dropped my eyes to the floor letting his beautiful blues go. Strangely enough, in that split second when our eyes found each other, my heart dropped into my stomach and my lungs filled with air. I could feel my heart race.

Then I laughed at myself. Silly me for finding the very wealthy and very handsome guest completely and utterly attractive. There was nothing I could do about it anyway. Even if the handsome stranger did find my black, food coated skirt, white, yet now stained serving top, and hair bun attractive, our banquet managers forbid flirting with guests. I needed the money, not the date.

He passed close enough to me that the scent of his cologne caused my heart to skip. I shook my head then thought of Louis who, I knew at this point, must be beside himself. I glanced over to see him red faced and about to burst. Once the stallion was far enough away, Louis turned to me.

“Sacs, I can't take it! Oh my, Him!” he said panting.

“Louis, go get some water before you hyperventilate and Maria sees you,” I said.

I understood his feelings, I just had better control. Louis pranced into the kitchen fanning his hand in front of his face. He had me laughing out loud by the time he got to the swinging door.

As a matter of reflex and not by intent, I glanced over in the direction the stallion had traveled. Again, our eyes connected. This time I was a little braver and let our eyes linger for a moment. His expression was confusing. He smiled at me. I smiled back then he dropped his head and quickly looked away. I assumed he was forbidden to flirt with the help.

“Miss,” the woman at the table called to me.

“Yes, ma'am,” I said as her diamond necklace, earrings, and ring threw brilliant bursts of light across the table.

“Could I have a spot of tea for my husband? He is on his way back to our table and does not drink coffee,” she said.

“Yes, ma'am,” I said again.

I turned to the exquisitely carved wooden box placed next to the coffee carafe and presented her with a selection of high end teas. As she searched, my eyes popped up looking in the direction of the blue-eyed stallion. He was no longer where I had last seen him. I scanned the huge ballroom as the woman took her time picking up and reading each tea bag. The stallion was gone.

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It was all a blur – the cold hands grabbing me in the dark, the voices fading in and out, the sound of car engines, car doors shutting, then silence.

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The night was cool, but comfortable, nature's signal that summer was definitely over and fall was in full swing. It was the perfect setting to get out of our apartment, grab some dinner and enjoy the cool New York City night before fall ushered in the freezing temperatures and stinging winds of winter. Dinner was at a sidewalk cafe under a warm heater, watching the cabs bustle by and the people lingering, rushing, or strolling past us. The sun had gone down and the city was alive with electric sunshine.

After college, Ashley and I decided that an adventure was in store for the next phase of our lives. My family was from New Jersey and Ashley's from Colorado. Since we were great college roommates, it was a no-brainer to get an apartment together. We flipped a coin – New York City was heads and Los Angeles was tails. New York City won.

Our parents often called worrying over every sensationalized news story about New York City that came across their televisions. For Ashley and I, it was just business as usual in an amazing city living, learning, and loving. Well, not so much the loving part. We were both single, and aside from a few dates here and there, neither of us had met Prince Charming yet. Although, we were pretty sure he didn't exist anyway.

Ashley and I were walking back to the apartment joking about the drunk guy at the restaurant bar who bought us drinks. His frizzy hair, silly hat, and drunken “How you doin’?” smile were funny at first but quickly became a little creepy. Luckily, we weren't special. He bought a few other ladies drinks as well. We finished our dinner and headed out to a less crowded bar where we could sit and catch up. We were inseparable in college and even the first few years in New York City but now our work schedules left little time for us to hang out. Although we missed spending time together, there was a wonderful simplicity to our lives and we were grateful.

We were almost at our apartment when the hands grabbed us from behind. Ashley's face turned to horror. I think she saw them first, before I felt them. She must have known what was happening. She

was alongside me one second, then flailing and kicking the next with two large arms holding her, one hand over her mouth, the other around her arms. I would imagine that was how I looked to her.

The smell of cheap cologne and body odor permeated from the hand covering my mouth. There was a sudden prick to my arm, a feeling of warmth, and then darkness.

\*\*\*\*\*

Sounds came from a distance – faded and garbled then strong and clear—then they were gone. Voices, running water, and maybe an engine of some kind, all sounds drifting softly through the air and eventually leaving me, again, in silent darkness.

I fought to open my eyes but it was a losing battle. I wanted to see someone or something, anything that would tell me what was happening and who these people were. I could only hear men speaking, never a woman's voice and never Ashley's. Their words were incoherent and ghost like – never speaking to me, only around me.

I tried desperately to open my eyes and get a glimpse of my surroundings but I could only keep them open for a few seconds at most, then the weight of my eyelids closed out the blurred world in front of me. I think I was given a drink and a little bit of food but I could have been dreaming.

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The warm sun soaked into the skin around my eyes and on top of my hands. Feeling the heat on my face meant I was alive. I felt no pain only sleepiness. There was an arm under my shoulders and another over my lap, cradling me. I was very confused and could not figure out where I was or what I was hearing. There were no voices only the rhythmic sound of footsteps on an unidentifiable surface. A fog of confusion and fatigue clouded my thoughts each time I tried to piece together what had happened or where I was.

My mouth opened to take a breath of air, pulling a light piece of fabric into my lips and then pushing it away with an exhale. Odd images of kidnappings from the news or movies began flashing in my head but whatever lay across my mouth and nose was too light to be a gag.

I felt as though someone had injected me with a very strong Benadryl. My body was so heavy and my brain just wanted to sleep despite my advances to wake up. The weight of sleepiness pulled on me like an anchor slowly dragging me under water.

When I finally managed to open my eyes, the sun exploded in bright, white flashes of heat and light. Fuzzy images and blotches of color swirled around me, my weighted body still limp.

After blinking and squinting for what seemed like forever, my eyes were finally able to adjust. I was in the arms of a man. His chest and shoulders were wrapped in bright colored clothes that moved in waves, in and out of focus. Slowly, I raised my eyes. The man was looking straight ahead. His focus was intense, angry. His face was covered with cloth that came down from his head covering. He looked like a person I had seen on the news, someone who lives far away from New York.

Anxiety rushed from my heart to my stomach and limbs. I could feel my breath come faster and stronger, pulsing as my mind raced. The anxiety quickly changed to panic. Where was I? How did I get here? Where was Ashley?

I must have jerked or flinched because his head turned suddenly and his eyes came down to mine. I couldn't see any other part of his face except his crystal blue eyes.

I wanted to reach out and strip the cloth away from my face so I could breathe freely but my body remained immobile. His eyes locked on mine. For a moment, his eyes seemed panicked, then angry again. My brain was screaming for me to get up but my body would not respond. The sun was getting hotter on my skin and my breathing felt desperate. I tried to sit up or move myself away from him but my efforts were futile. The whole process was exhausting. My mind quieted as my head fell back and the world around me started to spin. My ears buzzed and darkness engulfed me.

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I have no idea if I slept for hours or days. To me, it was mere moments from having seen Ashley last to being here, wherever here was. The air around me was cooler now. My legs and arms no longer felt as heavy and the wooziness that had been with me was slowly leaving my body. I opened my eyes and looked around trying to bring the fuzzy images into focus.

My tail bone hurt. Whatever I was sitting on offered little comfort and bruised my tail bone and lower back. Male voices bellowed and shouted around me, pounding through my head like a hammer, though the one who carried me here was still silent. I could feel his arm under my shoulders as he squeezed me closer to his body. I watched him, nodding his head and motioning to people with his free hand. He was giving orders without saying a word.

Again, hands were grabbing me. This time, they were warm. I knew I was being handed down from something. As my eyes focused, I saw that it was a horse we had been traveling on and my

battered back the result of the saddle. My feet touched the ground and I stood wearily next to two men who were holding me up. I could not understand the words being spoken. They sounded French but I wasn't sure. One man seemed annoyed and starting yelling at me while I tried to balance on my wobbly legs. The blue-eyed traveler said something softly to the man and he immediately silenced.

Beneath my feet was sand – warm, soft sand. My bare feet struggled to find balance. The light clothing draped on my body floated and waved in the breeze. It was a stark contrast to the blue jeans and sweatshirt I had worn to the restaurant.

Two women came over and escorted me into a large tent. They took me inside and gently lay me down on a large bed at the opposite end of the entrance. I could hear them speaking to each other and bustling around. I thought for a moment I was going to be sick but instead, I shut my eyes and fell asleep.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## BADASS WOMEN PULL THE TRIGGER!

There's no swooning in this power romance!

Boonton, N.J. – West Michell releases her first romance novel, UNDER THE VEIL.

Lauren is forced to live in a King's world but it could be the women who hold the real power. Can Lauren go beyond survival and find the freedom to live?

“Captivates you from page one! It enlightened and inspired me.”

Kiki Melendez - Actor, Writer, Producer

“What a page turner! I didn't want to put it down as I needed to know what would happen next. Such a unique and interesting plot line with an inspiring female lead.”

Goodreads - Jillian

“I read this book in one weekend. I could not put it down. Very gripping, inventive, well written story.”

Goodreads - Bronagh

UNDER THE VEIL is a 248 page romance novel that captivates the reader within the first few pages. This page turner will keep you guessing and keep you thinking. Read it as a romance or read between the lines to discover what UNDER THE VEIL is really saying.

Excerpt from UNDER THE VEIL:

“He bought her! I wasn't sure I really processed anything past “he bought her.” My stomach wretched. So this is my fate? I swallowed hard forcing everything I just ate to stay in my stomach. I get to share the same fate as his grandmothers. Any hopes and dreams that I have go out the window so I can be a part of their backward, selfish tradition? What were my options? Try to escape when we get to his “kingdom” or be a face on their totem pole of broken lives?”

UNDER THE VEIL is published by Balancing Planet Pictures, LLC and can be purchased at [www.westmichell.com](http://www.westmichell.com). or on Amazon Kindle. The book is ideal for women and men ages 18 and up.

West Michell is an author and screenwriter. She currently resides in New Jersey with her husband and son.

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For more information about the book please visit [www.westmichell.com](http://www.westmichell.com). To contact West Michell for interviews please contact Kathryn Lancioni at [kathryn@presentingperfection.com](mailto:kathryn@presentingperfection.com).

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# REVIEWS

## From GOODREADS and KINDLE

**Jillian (Goodreads):** What a page turner! I didn't want to put it down as I needed to know what would happen next. Such a unique and interesting plot line with an inspiring female lead. Highly recommend - and I hope there's more to come after this this!

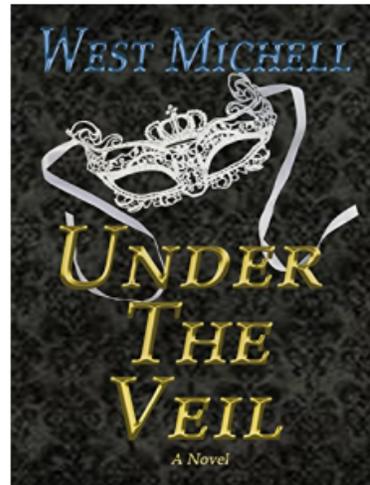
**MLRH (Kindle):** This is a real page turner. As with lots of lusty bodice ripping romance adventures (Shades of Gray or Twilight...) you must read it with some willful suspension of disbelief. I don't want to ruin the plot at all for you by mentioning why but once you get past what YOU might do in the same situations it is a blast! Totally fun, romance, chemistry, attractive protagonists, likeable secondary characters, and a gorgeous evocative setting.

**Nancy (Goodreads):** Disclaimer: I know the author. However, that does not change the fact that I loved this book. It's fast-paced and full of action and romance, and also makes you think. Lauren is a heroine you can root for. I couldn't put it down and had to stop from flipping ahead.

**Teri Mc (Goodreads):** What a fantastic story!! Full disclosure...I am acquainted with the author and have been anticipating this first novel. That being said, I wanted to remain truthful in my review. I guard my 5-stars very carefully for those books that affect me deeply, such as The Red Tent. My 4-stars go to those books that I cannot put down, but when I have to, I continue to think about the characters throughout the day and upon ending the book -I crave for more. That is exactly how this book left me! As other reviewers stated, this is action-packed and quite the different story line! The writing is fast paced and to the point - told from the viewpoint of a strong main character. It is definitely a story that will leave you begging for more! Highly recommended!!

**Bronagh (Goodreads):** I read this book in one weekend, I could not put it down. Very gripping, inventive, well written story. I highly recommend it and look forward to the author's next book. I bought it from the author's website [www.westmichell.com](http://www.westmichell.com).

## Under the Veil



**As a book reviewer, I received a copy of this book for free from the publisher or author to facilitate this review. I received no other compensation, and all opinions are always 100% my own.**

Lauren Wells is living the dream of a twenty-something with an apartment in NYC with her best friend and a job at a banquet hall when she's suddenly abducted from the street, waking up in the desert on the back of a horse with a man she vaguely recognizes.

Prince Adi's father, the king of Cacher, a small nation on the edge of the Western Sahara, has taken Lauren to marry his son, without Adi's knowledge or permission. Lauren wants to hate the prince, but finds he's a kind man who wants to be out from under his father's thumb. King Silas is dying, but there are others who want to take over the kingdom, putting Adi's and Lauren's lives in jeopardy.

Will Lauren give in to her feelings for the prince? Will she ever see her family again?

**Under the Veil** is full of romance, mystery, and intrigue, and I couldn't put it down. The fact that I've known the author for several years did not at all change my opinion of the story. Lauren is a strong heroine, caught between her desire to be free and her desire for Adi. The prince is strong and handsome, as the hero of a romance should be, trying to protect her at all costs, even when she doesn't want to be protected. They are surrounded by people who want to help and hurt them, and Lauren doesn't know who she can trust.

This is author West Michell's first adult novel, though she's published children's books with her son, and I look forward to the next one, currently in progress.

# INTERVIEW RESOURCES

1. *Is it true this book can be read two ways?*

A: Yes, it is. If you want a good romance, an escape story, then you can read the book that way but it is much more. The book is also social commentary, a woman's view of a world that hasn't changed in a thousand years.

2. *Lauren is a strong character but you don't regard her as the heroine. Why not?*

A: The true heroine of the story is Stella. If Stella hadn't been the woman she was, hadn't affected the world around her the way she had, despite the horror she was facing, Lauren's story would be completely different, as would many of the other characters in the book.

3. *Why animals for the chapter titles?*

A: I think animals are often a reflection of who we are. Most people can relate to one kind of animal or another. The animals in the chapters are metaphors for emotion and who the main character is at that moment. They also offer a foreshadowing of what is to come.

4. *You came up with the idea for this book when you were in middle school?*

A: I came up with the idea of a woman being kidnapped and taken to a foreign land after watching an eighties police show. It just stuck with me - the horror of it. I've revisited it many times over the years and finally worked it all out to get it where I wanted it to be, where it needed to be.

5. *Where's Ashley?*

A: Can't tell you... yet.

6. *What are you working on now?*

A: I have an online book on my website called *West of Winsor*. It takes place in a fictional college town in New Jersey and focuses on a family that just moved to town and is boarding two college students. The students come from different walks of life and are trying to make their lives work despite their pasts and the digital world we live in. Each chapter is tied to a work of literature that the families high school freshman daughter is reading at the time. *West of Winsor* is a TV show that I developed a few years ago. I decided to turn it into an ongoing book. Each chapter has 2 – 3 parts and is released weekly or biweekly just like a TV show. Readers have to stay tuned to see what happens next!

7. *Do you prefer writing novels or screenplays?*

A: Screenplays, which is why I talk about my novels in movie genres terms. I love writing dialogue. Coming up with ideas and writing dialogue comes naturally to me. I also like to keep things short and sweet and leave the visual up to the reader. Most of my books will be screenplays I've written turned into novels. That being said, I have enjoyed writing the novels, more so than I thought I would. It's just a lot more time consuming and, of course, there is the editing. That in itself is a ton of work and there's always that one rogue word you find after reading through it a hundred times. Makes me crazy! Although I do love holding the book in my hands, screenplays are my first love.

8. *When is your next book release?*

A: My second novel is in the works and will hopefully be out before the end of the year. As soon as *West of Winsor* goes into "hiatus", I'll get back to working on it. It's a romantic comedy. It's fun and definitely a great escape. My third novel will come on the heels of that one. The third one is dark, a drama, and one of my favorite story lines. Looking forward to releasing them as soon as possible!

**An innocent walk in NYC** turns to tragedy when Lauren Wells is kidnapped and whisked away to the Sahara Desert to marry Prince Adi of Cacher. Escape is not an option, leaving Lauren to figure out who the true monsters are and who can protect her. The handsome Prince Adi may just be her knight in shining armor. However, Cacher's violent past and its dark secrets spin happily ever after into a fight to the death between the man Lauren loves and Cacher's historical foe. In a twist of fairy tale fate, Lauren discovers unlikely heroes hiding in plain sight and that true power doesn't come from an army. UNDER THE VEIL takes the reader out of the regal fantasy and into a cold, dark reality as seen through a princess's eyes.

**Excerpt from UNDER THE VEIL**

"He bought her! I wasn't sure I really processed anything past "he bought her." My stomach wretched. So this is my fate? I swallowed hard forcing everything I just ate to stay in my stomach. I get to share the same fate as his grandmothers. Any hopes and dreams that I have go out the window so I can be a part of their backward, selfish tradition? What were my options? Try to escape when we get to his "kingdom" or be a face on their totem pole of broken lives?"

West Michell is an author and screenwriter. She currently resides in New Jersey with her husband and son.

WEST MICHELL



UNDER THE VEIL MICHELL

UNDER  
THE  
VEIL

A Novel



**Title: UNDER THE VEIL**

**Author: WEST MICHELL**

**Cover: VICTORIA HESS**

**Publication Date: DECEMBER 2016**

**Available at: [www.WestMichell.com](http://www.WestMichell.com)**

**ISBN: 978-0-9982780-0-1**

**Retail Price: \$12.99**

**Page Count: 248**

**Genre/Sub-Genre: ROMANCE/FEMINIST LIT**



## BIO

West Michell is a graduate of University of Maryland, College Park. Following college, she began her career in video production at MTV Networks in New York City, working as a production clerk, then rising through the ranks to production coordinator and unit manager. She became a freelance writer and production coordinator for various production companies and studios in New York and New Jersey. She is the co-writer of a feature length docu-comedy, has written and published two children's books, and writes for an online publication. She runs her own business, is an adjunct professor and volunteers her time for local charities and organizations.

West Michell has been a vegan for over ten years. She is an advocate for self-reflection as the catalyst to a healthier and more understanding world. West Michell writes books to empower individuals and help them to understand and recognize the amazing strengths and abilities they already possess.

She is currently working on her second novel and has a screenplay, which she co-wrote, being shopped in Hollywood. She is also launching an online book series on her website in May 2017.

West Michell resides in New Jersey with her husband and son.

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