

In 2016, Author Donan Berg won the Gold 1st Place Award for Romance awarded by Feathered Quill. The novel is available today through major book retailers.

Ask your local librarian to reserve you a copy.

Here's a taste:

Excerpt of *One Paper Heart*

A seated Alicia kicked her left foot to elevate her dress hem. She stood and let the skirt drape her legs. She strode to reception's hallway door. "Thanks," Alicia said as she reached for the envelope offered by her editor.

"Engaging story. Call me if there's any question."

"I'll have to look at it tonight."

Alicia bade her editor good-bye and added her manuscript to the extra-large handbag she had carried to work for this very purpose.

Anxious to read her editor's suggestions, Alicia hurried to her apartment elevator after her seventy-year-old neighbor, stationed in the lobby, coaxed her to sign a protest petition. Upstairs, Alicia threw open her bedroom window. Pungent horse manure vapors, spiraled three stories from a foundation flowerbed, gagged her. Alicia slammed her window shut, comforted by the scent of fall mums. The bouquet was Vicky's gift to celebrate Alicia's novel completion.

As evening darkened into night, Alicia labored to accept and reject her editor's suggested revisions. Weary eyed, she put off the critical proofreading until the next evening.

Satisfied with her punctuation and story tweaks, she decided to mail her manuscript submission and have it appear like any other writer submission. She telephoned her adoptive parents to inform them she'd be using their suburban Minneapolis/St. Paul New Brighton, Minnesota, address. Alicia explained a publishing guidebook tip suggested the benefit of a residential street address to indicate the author's stability and maturity. Alicia also happy the address choice further disguised her authorship from Norma, Wanda, Carol, and Mr. Van Gilleran.

While Alicia didn't divulge her pen name, she explained to Mom and Dad that publishers often confuse and/or mangle author's names so if any letter or package arrived, no matter to whom addressed, they were to accept it and telephone her immediately. Alicia inhaled until her stomach pressed her spine. She crossed her fingers for luck that all her deception didn't confuse.

After she hung up, a steeped small fear grew into a dull headache. How would she easily identify her three-chapter submission from the other mailed envelopes received? Alicia dared not deviate from standard white or manila. A gaudy pastel would be a submission faux pas rewarded by immediate summary rejection.

She rummaged through a bedroom dresser drawer where she'd stockpiled classroom supplies should she ink a new teacher contract. A pad of leftover Valentine Day paper hearts hid under an eraser package. Alicia's fingers traced the round heart edges to their points.

The brilliant red color, shaded to imply depth, exuded cuteness, well, Alicia thought, cuteness for an eight-year-old.

Inspiration struck. Each heart's adhesive presented a definite plus.

One paper heart would be an inconspicuous corner addition to her envelope to identify her manuscript submission from the multitude.

With her rubber-banded story pages, a synopsis, and a SASE reply envelope tucked inside, she sealed her envelope after her umpteenth recheck. On the exterior, Alicia affixed a typed New Brighton return address and a completed mailing label. Onto the lower left front corner, her fingers pressed her one paper heart doubly hard.

With her submission mailed, she dared not leave her *New Romance Delights* reception desk even for a minute. When Aunt Agnes telephoned Tuesday morning with an offer to buy lunch, Alicia tried to put her off and failed. The best Alicia did was to get a persistent Aunt Agnes to agree to postpone lunch to Thursday.

Later than usual, the letter carrier dumped two huge envelope piles with an untypical groan. Alicia estimated three dozen. After a hand swipe into his leather pouch, he and Alicia traded good-bye waves. She quick-stepped letter-sized correspondence to the in-office mail center. Startled when a co-worker said hello from behind, a jumpy Alicia responded with a curt, "Hi, must get back to the phones."

When Alicia glimpsed her paper heart point peeking out from the left pile, third envelope from the bottom, she tried a normal breath. With both reception doors closed and no one waiting, Alicia leaned forward to separate her manuscript submission from the others. She considered it inane to be holding her breath. Her left hand lifted the envelopes above hers as her right hand tugged it free and laid it front and center on her desk. Her stuck fast red paper heart marred by a black streak.

Alicia maneuvered to tuck her knees and the desk chair's front casters beneath her desktop. Her red heart had admirably fulfilled its mission to easily identify her manuscript's arrival. Prepared to say good-bye, she reached her right hand index finger forward to slide its nail under the heart's right edge.

A male voice interrupted. "Let me take those slush pile novels."

Alicia froze, her right arm in midair six inches above her affixed paper heart.

The speaker, one Randall Van Gilleran, acquisitions editor for *New Romance Delights*, stood three feet from her arm, his manicured hands outstretched at the waist. The interior office door edged shut behind him.

Caught red-handed, Alicia's constricted throat blocked all larynx efforts to utter even a grunt.

"Oh, you saw it too." Van Gilleran chuckled. His intense and intelligent eyes bypassed her presence to scan reception's empty chairs.

Alicia's heart thumped to conquer her brain's suspended animation. "Saw what?"

"That paper heart." He advanced a step. "Some wannabe author is so foolish."

Alicia pressed her lips together to force her lungs to breathe slower. Why didn't her hand drop faster and hide her paper heart? No answer came to her. "Oh, that." The two words uttered whispery and hoarse. Yet, she wasn't ill, not yet anyway. Was she frightened by what Mr. Van Gilleran might do next, absolutely?

He lowered his hands to his sides. "He or she must think romance publishers are impressed by envelopes with cutesy red hearts." No compassion encircled his words.

Her paper heart became the electrical spark to race her chest's heart. Alicia prayed for a visitor or a telephone ring. No Luck. Her gaze darted to the ceiling and then to Mr. Van Gilleran.

"Don't you agree it's foolishness?" He charged on without giving Alicia a chance to respond. "It deserves to be tossed without reading."

Alicia's hands sunk faster than gravity's pull to squish the last remnants of trapped air out of her envelope. Her left shielded the return address from Mr. Van Gilleran's view; her right obscured her red paper heart. "What . . . what," she stuttered. She forced her voice to increase its

volume. “What if . . . what if there’s a postcard or reply envelope inside.”

Her left hand slid off the New Brighton return address. She twisted her face to Mr. Van Gilleran. The animated facial gayety of his first chuckle absent. His pressed together eyebrows and pursed lips forged horizontal parallel lines.

He snatched the heart manuscript from her desk.

Not until he’d completed his swiping action did she realize her right hand rested on his left forearm’s white shirt sleeve. Alicia pleaded. “We request submitters to send us a way to tell them we received their submission.” She glanced at her manuscript clamped in her boss’s hand. “Shouldn’t we honor that? Our website promises authors that courtesy.”

Alicia retracted her hand from his arm. She couldn’t bear to gaze at his face.

Mr. Van Gilleran walked to the front of her desk. With her white envelope still gripped by his left hand, his right pawed through both desk submission stacks.

In a moment of panic desperation, Alicia envisioned a dash around her desk, a grab of her manuscript, and a hallway run to catch the lobby elevator. If she were lucky, an Orange No. 34 bus awaited. If not, Plan B was a jog to disappear into one of the Nicollet Mall shops.

She dismissed the asinine Rambo exploit as foolish and impractical. To have her manuscript published remained her cherished goal. If she didn’t expose herself as Lady Victoria Dash, Alicia foresaw her flash drive backup copy reprinted and mailed under a second pen name.

That is, if an angered Mr. Van Gilleran didn’t mount a crusade to unearth Lady Dash’s identity. Alicia breathed easier. She’d built a firewall to hide her connection to Lady Dash. There existed no listed telephone, Facebook page or Google search listing. Alicia’s bliss dissipated in three seconds. Her *New Romance Delights* personnel file contained her parents’ New Brighton telephone number and address for emergency contact. He could easily check. Connect the dots. She needed to divert his attention.

In her three-week tenure, Alicia garnered one Mr. Van Gilleran habitual tidbit. He always planned his every move. He wouldn’t lower himself to walk into reception to collect and carry unprocessed manuscript submissions to his office. She crossed her two right hand fingers behind her back. *Be consistent, please, please, please.*

“Was there something else you came out here for?”

“Right.” He glanced at her desktop.

Alicia’s eyes followed his. His unwillingness to lift his head or speak provoked an impatience in her brain incapable of release.

“Wanda said she gave you a statistical report.” He tucked Alicia’s manuscript under his right arm. “You were to double-check her calculations. Have you completed that?”

“Yes.” The nerve-racking suspense that coursed her veins excised, for now.

Alicia reached to her left for a manila folder, transferred it between hands, and balanced the folder atop a manuscript pile. Wanda Swanson, Mr. Van Gilleran’s personal secretary, had been the first office person introduced to Alicia. An office friendship blossomed.

To support the opened calculations folder, Mr. Van Gilleran slid her manuscript envelope beneath it. While he read, Alicia’s hands in her lap fidgeted.

When he closed the folder. Alicia’s slightly relaxed body tensed. She gasped. *He’s taking the manuscript with him.* Her right hand stifled the sound of a second gasp.

Mr. Van Gilleran stopped two steps from reception’s interior employee-only exit door.

“Perhaps you’re right.” His right hand tossed her paper heart manuscript onto her desk corner. “Guess I’ll have to at least skim it. Process it along with all the others.”

Alicia quietly sighed. “I’ll do that.”

She gazed at the black-streak scarred red paper heart.

"Expect it'll be below our acceptance standards, although we're more liberal than the industry giants in New York City."

A light blinked on Alicia's phone. Intercom. She ignored it. *Please hurry, leave now.*

"Another thing, has a Mr. Jackson Grant stopped by?"

Alicia didn't recognize the name. Her fingers tapped her manuscript, but she didn't have the courage to slide it further from Mr. Van Gilleran. "Only morning visitor was the mailman."

"Jackson's a good friend, collaborated on a documentary that won an Oscar." Mr. Van Gilleran's facial features softened, especially his sharp, taut forehead lines.

"Impressive. I'll ring Wanda if he shows." Alicia rotated her chair a quarter turn.

"Thanks. I'm trying to enlist his help."

Alicia stretched her left arm to grab three envelopes to stack atop the paper heart. "What kind of drama does he write?" After the words emerged, she realized her question delayed his exit.

"Doesn't really. He's more involved in screenplay promotion."

Alicia sat quiet, hands folded in her lap. The connection between screenplays and novels seemed simple enough. A dozen seconds, each silently counted by Alicia, elapsed as Mr. Van Gilleran leafed a second time through the manila folder he carried.

"Later."

End of *One Paper Heart* excerpt

About the Author

Author Donan Berg won the 2016 Feathered Quill First Place Gold Award for Romance for his novel *One Paper Heart*. An excerpt is included above. Author Berg previously landed four times in the romance winner's circle of the 2014 Ninth Annual Dixie Kane Memorial Contest. In 2013 he garnered three awards in the Eighth Annual Dixie Kane Memorial Contest. His vibrant writing talents, honed as a journalist, corporate executive, and lawyer, are displayed in his three Skeleton Series Mystery novels entitled *A Body To Bones*, *The Bones Dance Foxtrot*, and *Baby Bones*. *Adolph's Gold*, a police procedural mystery, has many attributes of his Skeleton Series Mystery novels while *Abbey Burning Love* is a fast-paced, novel-length, small city murder mystery/romance e-book.

A native of Ireland transplanted to the United States Heartland, he's also authored a collection of short stories entitled, *Bubbling Conflict and Other Stories*, where the lead story highlights the never-ending sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.

His novels have earned the praise of entertaining mystery, heartwarming romance.