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& SOPHIA NASH**

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**SELF PUBLISHING & SMALL PRESS MANIA
FLEETING TREND OR FICTION'S FUTURE?**

MOVE OVER THELMA & LOUISE!

This month's wild ride belongs to Kathryn Caskie & Sophia Nash

By Renee Bernard

A VINTAGE BABY-BLUE convertible revs its engines and two women sit in the front seat braced for what lies ahead.... Two ordinary women have stepped out of the routine of their daily lives to seek adventure and excitement—and when they floor it, there's no telling how far they'll go!

Thelma & Louise?

Almost. Two new debut authors, Sophia Nash (left) and Kathryn Caskie (right), are setting out on a promotional book tour—in a style that is all about having fun. In a '57 Thunderbird, they'll take to the road this spring, and leave husbands, children and suburbia behind. They'll make a little noise about their first books and discover first-hand what it takes to get noticed.

"We're both fairly normal suburban wives and mothers, and while we're lucky to have such supportive husbands, there was just something appealing about the idea of running away and breaking all the rules," Nash confesses. "A road trip was perfect for us! Just like *Thelma & Louise*."

"As long as we don't hold hands and drive over a cliff!" Caskie amends gleefully. "After all, we're romance writers, so I'm leaning toward a much happier ending."



The chemistry between them is one of a kind, and it's clear that they are genuinely thrilled at the possibilities ahead. They'll be promoting Nash's February Regency novel, *A Secret Passion*, during the first leg of their tour, while Caskie's historical romance, *Rules of Engagement*, a May 2004 release, will be in the spotlight for the second leg.

The authors met at a Washington Romance Writers retreat when everyone kept mistaking them for each other. Both are tall, svelte blondes and they spent the weekend dodging misdirected hails. "We were aware of each other at that point but didn't really get to know each other," says Nash.

Then in 2002, the Romance Writers of America's Golden Heart Awards changed everything. Both found themselves

thrown together as finalists, though in different categories, and discovered that they had more in common than a passion for writing. As the winners were about to be announced, Nash sat next to Caskie and they held hands. When Caskie's name was read aloud, it was Nash who screamed in celebration.

"My ears are still ringing!" Caskie jokes. It's that genuine support for each other that

strikes you when you first meet them. No rivalry—they are each other's biggest fans. Nash got the call to publication first from Signet and Caskie was thrilled for her. "I knew Kathryn was a special person when she was as excited as I was when I sold," Nash says.

"It only proved to me that it can be done," Caskie interjects. "I took it as the best possible sign that a happy ending was possible."

They planned an elaborate dinner out with their husbands to celebrate Nash's triumph. But Nash was so sure that Caskie's call was also coming that she kept delaying the occasion until they could do it together. Sure enough, Warner called Caskie a couple of months later and sealed their partnership.

"We both felt so lucky to find ourselves in the same space, able to share our experiences and then to be published so close together," Caskie says. "I never felt like I was trying to get through the publishing maze alone."

Spurring each other on to meet deadlines and make things happen, the two are in daily contact for jokes and chats and for a serious push to write and stay on schedule when necessary. They even came up with a writing exercise called the "half-hour sprint" for lull times. They agree to write for a solid half hour, phoning each other at the start and finish of the timed sprint to check on each other's progress.

"I'm a huge procrastinator, but the sprints really get me going," Caskie says. "It's about accountability and this awareness that I'm not sitting in a vacuum. Sophia is right there."

"I love those 30-minute sprints," Nash concurs. "We can cheer each other on and it keeps you motivated."

Promoting a first book can be a daunting task for many new authors, but these two are taking it in stride and tackling the challenges in their own energetic and upbeat way. With the Chevy's tank full and ready to go, their primary goal seems to be to just relax and enjoy the ride. "We're ready for anything and wherever the road takes us: I'm just looking forward to being with my best friend," Nash says. "It's just not intimidating to get out there when you have someone at your elbow."

"We're going to have a lot of fun," Caskie proclaims. "Together, we can really break loose—besides, it's easier to promote someone else rather than yourself. This way, we can talk about each other's books, laugh and simply enjoy being out there."

Their advice to other writers setting out on similar adventures? "Don't be afraid to open yourself up to others," Nash says. "Most writers are very protective of their work and have an attitude of going it alone. But having a friend next to you can make the process less fearful and intimidating. Better yet, it enriches the experience."

"Definitely," Caskie echoes. "But the best advice I ever received was from Mary Jo Putney, who told me that there's a certain arrogance to being a writer because you have to trust your own voice. You're open to advice, and you'll probably get more advice than you ever bargained for sometimes, but the bottom line is learning when to stand your ground and write your own story. When I did that, I sold."

There is a small point of contention between them, however: When asked who would end up with Brad Pitt, the conversation took a lively turn. Sophia noted that their husbands had agreed to

Continued on page 126



ALL-POINTS BULLETIN!

IF YOU SEE these two characters, last spotted in a '57 baby-blue Thunderbird convertible with a trunk full of books and one small suitcase, follow them to the nearest bookstore and join in the fun! We suspect you'll find them in the following areas during these dates. Approach without caution—they are unarmed, outgoing and extremely friendly.

- FEB. 6-8:** The Chocolate Affair Mega-Book Signing Weekend, Glendale, AZ
- FEB. 14:** Turn the Page Bookstore and Café, Boonsboro, MD
- FEB. 15:** Barnes & Noble, Bethesda, MD
- FEB. 21-22:** Southern Maryland (TBA)
- FEB. 28-29:** Northern Virginia (TBA)
- MAR. 14-16:** London Bookfair, Olympia Exhibition Centre, London, UK
- APR. 30:** Turn the Page Bookstore and Café, Boonsboro, MD
- MAY 1-2:** Washington Romance Writers Retreat, Harper's Ferry, WV
- MAY 15-16:** Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill, NC
- MAY 21-23:** Miami, Orlando and Tampa, FL
- JUN. 11-13:** Los Angeles and San Francisco, CA
- JUL. 28:** "Readers for Life" Literacy book signing at the RWA Conference, Dallas, TX

So you see, they are covering a lot of miles and are an extremely unpredictable and wild pair. Dates and locations are subject to the "rules of the road," especially if sidetracked for "research purposes." (Mr. Pitt, you have been warned!)

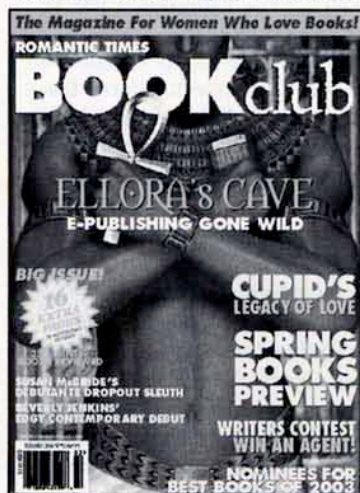
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Downtown Press

In *Clearing the Aisle* [C] by **Karen Schwartz**, everyone but the bride and groom comes down with pre-wedding jitters. 0-7434-7110-5.

Paperback release: *Maneater* [C] by **Gigi Levangie Grazer**. 0-7434-6400-1.

Scribner

Three survivors of a boat wreck reexamine their lives in *The Summer I Dared* [C] by **Barbara Delinsky**. Hardcover. 0-7432-4643-8.

ST. MARTIN'S

Four tales of brides-to-be by **Christina Dodd, Stephanie Laurens, Celeste Bradley & Leslie LaFoy** comprise *My Scandalous Bride* [H]. 0-312-99522-9.

Someone is trying to deprive newlywed Nicole of her newfound fortune and her husband's love in *The Daughter-in-Law* [S] by **Diana Diamond**. 0-312-98771-4.

Vampire huntress Damali is stalked by her seductive prey in *Minion* [P] by **L.A. Banks**. 0-312-98701-3.

Brock returns from exile to claim the woman whose husband he fatally wounded in *Tempting the Heiress* [H] by **Barbara Pierce**. 0-312-98621-1.

Paperback release: *Judgment Calls* [S] by **Alafair Burke**. 0-312-99720-5.
Full Blast [M] by **Janet Evanovich & Charlotte Hughes**. 0-312-98330-1.

Minotaur

Paperback releases: *Perdition House* [M] by **Kathryn R. Wall**. *Murder Off Mike* [M] by **Joyce Krieg**. 0-312-98760-9. *Snobbery With Violence* [M] by **Marion Chesney**. 0-312-99716-7. *Conspiracy Theory* [M] by **Jane Haddam**. 0-312-99000-6.

WARNER

Paperback release: *Hope's Highway* [C] by **Dorothy Garlock**. 0-446-61169-7.

Warner Forever

A professor poses as a playboy's fiancée in *Man Trouble* [C] by **Melanie Craft**. 0-446-61284-7.

Eliza's aunts mistake a military manual for a marriage how-to book, with comic results in *Rules of Engagement* [H] by **Kathryn Caskie**. 0-446-61423-8.

Thelma & Louise, Continued from page 9

a set of rules: "No guns, no drinking, no honky-tonk bars, but yes to any Brad Pitt encounters—for 'research purposes' only, of course!"

Caskie just laughs: "Sophia thinks he's up for grabs, but I say, she's wearing the scarf and driving—that means I'm Geena Davis. And that means, he's all mine!"

One thing you can count on—wherever these friends appear, success will likely be hot on their trail. And their readers will be the lucky beneficiaries of every wonderful twist and turn. ✧

Renee Bernard, www.renee-bernard.com, is an aspiring author and the editor of RT founder *Kathryn Falk's* forthcoming erotica anthology.

ABOUT NASH AND CASKIE'S NEW RELEASES



In Nash's *A Secret Passion*, released last month, a beautiful young widow, Jane Lovering, struggles to maintain her independence and control over her heart after she inadvertently crosses paths with a noble widower, the Earl of Graystock, a man equally determined to hold his own despite the wounds of his past. Honor and pride set these two at odds, but passion, desire and love rein them in for an adventurous, temptation-filled journey.



Caskie's *The Rules of Engagement*, due from Warner this May, introduces two elderly aunts who mistake a military strategy text called *Rules of Engagement* for a how-to manual on getting engaged. London's ballrooms become the battleground in a madcap war of wits when their outspoken niece snares a newly belted earl in need of a fast fortune. It's a grand game that truly explores the axiom, "All's fair in love and war."