



The Cougar

Lisa Marie Gabriel

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Beautiful woman by day, blood lusting cougar by night, Berenice is the guardian of an ancient knowledge. She has lived through many ages of man, a solitary creature who yearns for a love lost long ago. The Canadian forest provides a last safe refuge for Berenice and here she meets a tourist couple hoping to renew their fading marriage on a wilderness camping adventure. All is not as it seems when her desire to protect is aroused by a sense of great danger lurking for the woman. "The Cougar" is an erotic, Gothic romance about the need for love that drives us all and the many forms love can take. This story contains explicit love scenes.

Synopsis:

The artist Michelangelo, creator of the sculpture David, signed only the Pieta and a white Carrera marble effigy of his best friend Raffaello - a shapeshifter and a vampire. A victim of persecution, Raffaello flees Florence with his wife and one true love, Berenice. In a desperate attempt to save Berenice from the Black Death, Raffaello makes her a vampire too. Their life together sadly ends in tragedy in Golden Ears Provincial Park and Berenice is left alone to mourn in the forest.

Many years later Owen and Angela come to British Columbia. Angela finds herself irresistibly attracted to Berenice as they explore the forest and the Lower Falls. The stories of the protagonists unfold as time present and time past seem to coexist in the magical hemlock forest.

The Cougar Details

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P.M.F. Johnson says

For those who like their shapeshifting lesbian vampire romances mixed with explicit transgender sex scenes mixed with expository lumps about the ecological concerns of British Columbia, this is going to be the book for you. You got your jerk who turns noble at the end, your eternal love story blossoming, and various sources of conflict and suspense. Oh, and cougars and bears and a big ending. The author says she was aiming for a rollicking read and one could surely agree she attained that. If the above description sounds intriguing, you very well may find this book quite fun. I received a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

A.A. Bavar says

Writing a novel is an accomplishment and I would like to congratulate Ms. Gabriel for her efforts. The Cougar is a story of vampires, shape-shifters, and transcendental love that spans centuries. However, although the author's approach brings a different twist to this old theme, Ms. Gabriel's writing is in dire need of professional editing.

The biggest challenge in reading The Cougar, which didn't allow me to get fully immersed and ultimately enjoy the story, is structure. The unending descriptive paragraphs about vegetation, wildlife eating habits, etc., that are written in a camping-tourist-guide style, are completely unnecessary and brake the continuity/tension of the main arc.

I also found myself wanting more detail in the development of the story. Many of the interesting plot points were resolved very simplistically and I was never allowed to imagine, grow, and feel with the characters. Furthermore, the narrative is all tell and no show and needs deeper character exploration and plot development.

Lastly, basic punctuation rules are completely ignored, thus detracting from the flow of the story and causing confusion as to which character is talking. The dialogue is at times too simplistic and wooden, with an overuse of exclamation points.

In summary, although I believe that Ms. Gabriel has an innate talent for story telling, her debut novel The Cougar falls very short. In its current state, I cannot recommend this book.

I received a free copy of this book in exchange for a fair and honest non-reciprocal review.

Marcia says

I received this book as a first read. It was a quick read and nothing like I expected from the description.

Woody says

Thoroughly enjoyed reading this book.

Very intriguing fascinating story about a vampire/shapeshifter. The story tells the tale of Berenice and Raffaello in Florence in the Renaissance period. and Angela and Berenice in present day British Columbia. I loved the scenes in Florence in the 1400's, especially with Michelangelo, and thought that the scenes between Berenice and Raffaello were touching and lovely. The story also goes to British Columbia where we see Owen and Angela go on a last-ditch attempt to save their marriage trip, here Angela meets the mysterious Berenice in British Columbia. Wonderful descriptive scenes of the camping in the forest, the depth of knowledge of BC came over very clearly. I loved the scenes of Berenice and Angela fishing. Excellent writing style by Lisa Marie Gabriel that blends the two stories together so effortless and makes an enchanting read. This is the second book that I have read by the author and have loved both of them. Thoroughly enjoyed reading the book. I recommend this book.

Colin Edward says

Written in an easy conversational style, *The Cougar* displays an unusual tenderness and at times profoundly rare beauty in what is essentially a tale of Gothic horror. It is obvious that Lisa Gabriel has traveled extensively and her detailed descriptions of the Canadian forest have a vivid reality which makes the supernatural entirely credible.

The narrative reads like a screen play and sometimes quite ordinary sequences involve the reader almost as participant invoking a sense of something actually happening to them! The author draws on an apparent experience of survival training which will be familiar to those who share this experience and useful to others who might plan to explore potentially dangerous regions.

Lisa Gabriel's visual imagination is striking and clear so that there are passages that the reader will find memorable and beautiful - even in a sinister context. Love scenes, both lesbian and straight, are integral to the story and are written from the female perspective which provides interesting insight from this male's point of view! Also the author uses observations predicated on what is known about the relationship between Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci and comes up with a fascinating and amusing sub plot in Renaissance Italy!

Last but not least the author provides penetrating insights into human nature. The analysis and description of the incident where Owen disdainfully screws his wife's note into a ball and throws it onto the fire - "that was his marriage going up in smoke" - is like being there actually watching the paper turn black and glow. It has the immediacy of first hand experience and particularly moved me.

M. Patterson says

Lisa Gabriel crafts an original version of an old tale; the eternal life and love of a vampire. It's the wild retelling of this classic storyline that is *The Cougar's* greatest strength. But Gabriel's extensive knowledge and some stylistic choices detract from the pace of her debut novel.

The Cougar is at its best in Gabriel's fantastic imagination: a story spanning centuries, vampires shape-shifting into predatory cats, tentative first loves and vampire initiate-bondage. And with her character Ingrid, Gabriel does something rare in gothic literature; she creates space for social comment. Transformation is no longer reserved for vampires. Instead, Gabriel draws the real world comparison to transgendered people. While her comment may be obvious, it's still a bold statement, one seldom made in literature to date.

Gabriel knows her subject matter. Whether it's the omnivorous diet of the black bear, late blooming skunk cabbage or the haunting scenery of Golden Ears Provincial Park, the author has a keen grasp of her novel's setting. But while Gabriel's imaginative story propels this novel, her description gets in the way, slowing the pace and detracting from the plot. The extensive use of exclamation points can also distract the reader's attention.

Ultimately, Gabriel's debut novel weaves an imaginative tale that unifies many aspects of traditional and untraditional narratives. It's this strength that keeps The Cougar pouncing until the end.

Julie says

A delightfully imaginative book with a slightly gothic twist. Descriptions of BC scenery are highly accurate and bring forth the beauty of the West Coast as can only be done by one who has seen it. The weaving of Renaissance Italy with modern day BC locations was very creative. Combining the historical information and the current world created a dream like quality to the narrative while exploring the connection the characters had between the two eras. The adult themes were incorporated well in that they were there to illustrate the passionate personalities of the parties involved and not just for gratuitous purposes. Over all an entertaining and engaging novel for anyone interested in Coastal BC, vampires, were creatures, LGBT, Renaissance Italy or any combination there of.

K.T. McColl says

At its core, "The Cougar" tells the story of the mysterious Berenice and Angela, a British tourist visiting coastal BC with her lout of a husband on a trip designed to rekindle their fading marriage. As the novel progresses, the author unwraps the mystery of Berenice while pressing Angela into her orbit. There are some F/F fireworks between the two, which are treated with refreshing delicacy.

In the process, "The Cougar" provides a creative twist on the vampire/shape-shifting theme as the narrative moves seamlessly between Renaissance Italy and modern-day British Columbia.

One of the most engaging aspects of the novel is the description of BC. The history of the province and its indigenous population are well researched and deftly woven into the narrative. As other reviewers have indicated, the descriptions of the landscape are spot-on.

Similarly engaging are the flashbacks to Renaissance Italy, where Berenice's history gradually emerges. Again, the history is well researched and the flights of imagination that connect history and fiction are compelling and believable.

While the narrative takes a little while to get rolling (there are, after all, a lot of moving parts to synchronize), the second half of the novel moves along at a breathtaking clip.

One minor quibble is that a certain key moment towards the end of the novel seems to resolve itself rather too quickly. At this point, the reader might have expected more sober second thought on the part of Angela.

That said, "The cougar" is a compelling and well-written novel. Recommended.

Lisa Marie Gabriel says

I rated my book because I honestly didn't know you were not supposed to. For this I apologise. I rated it 5 because I have faith in the story it tells and I wanted to honour my characters as well as the work put into this by myself and others who freely gave of their time to beta read and edit.

The Cougar takes the normally dark themes of vampires and shapeshifters and adds an element of romance. I would therefore classify it as a dark fantasy or paranormal romance. Two stories run side by side in this; firstly, the developing relationship between Angela, an unhappily married librarian, and Berenice, an ancient shapeshifter vampire; secondly a romance in the Renaissance between Raffaello, a vampire "master", and Berenice his wife. These are vampires who have learned to control the urge to kill through strict discipline and a respect for life. In life, love happens in many forms; indeed, as the heroine Berenice says, "Love just is..." I am inclined to agree with her there so please read this novel with an open mind. Readers can expect some violence and explicit love scenes.

Jayne Blue says

The author takes a very takes two very popular genres (vampires and shapeshifters) and blends them in a way I haven't quite seen. It's a refreshing twist on an old theme. The book is very well paced for the most part and it's clear that the author is also a poet. Her prose is rich and descriptive.

The book itself tells two main stories which I'll touch on briefly as I don't want to spoil one of the major plot threads. There is the present day relationship between Angela and Berenice, a mysterious and exotic woman she meets in the lush woods of British Columbia. Then there is Berenice's origin story which is told in flashback and spans 500 hundred years back to the Italian Renaissance. You might recognize a few historical figures making a cameo. For me, it was the flashback story I found most compelling and almost wish more of the narrative was devoted to it.

The author has very thoroughly researched her setting, lore, and historical events. If I have a criticism it is the presentation of that. Many chapters begin with an almost encyclopedic description of the time, event or setting for the rest of the scenes.

Overall, this was an enjoyable read if you're looking for a fresh twist on a vampire/shape shifter romance.

Barbara Land says

In her debut novel, *The Cougar*, Lisa Gabriel provides her readers with a portrait of love in many different forms. The book intertwines the tale of two lovers from Renaissance Italy with two contemporary romances. The author enhances the depth of her story by the addition of gender twisting and paranormal occurrences.

Ms Gabriel's narrative is lovely – its lyrically descriptive quality allows the reader to feel as if they are literally standing next to the characters and experiencing their reality. The characters are well drawn and developed, are generally believable and able to elicit our surprise. In spite of her exalted role, Berenice shows us what it is to be human and Angela's experiences exemplify the idea that every day is a new one and life is full of unanticipated possibilities. Ingrid and Owen's relationship brings out qualities in them that one would not suspect they possess. The plot is well paced, except as noted below.

In contrast, the dialogue is plagued by punctuation problems, as sentences run together without a period to separate them and commas are missing at the end of spoken words (inside the end quote and before the speech tag). This issue, combined with overused exclamation points and some typographical errors, served to repeatedly remove me from the story and remind me that I was reading a book.

The other matter relates to information dumping. Stephen King explained it quite nicely so I'll use his words (more or less). He said that stories get boring when the writer becomes too enchanted with their powers of description and then they lose sight of their priority, which is to keep the ball rolling. When the ball stops rolling, so does the story. The parts of the book that read like a highly detailed wilderness survival manual once again brought me out of the story. Less information in these areas would make the narrative much more effective.

The problems in this book are technical in nature and can be repaired. It's said that writing can be learned and while that's true, Ms Gabriel has a powerful innate voice that creates a colorful, vivid narrative. She has a talent that can't be picked up by taking a writing course in college and it is for that reason that I'm looking forward to reading her next novel.

A free copy of this book was provided for a fair and honest non-reciprocal review.

Gabe says

The book *Cougars Ghost of the Rockies* was a great book. I didn't know that there were that much facts about cougars they are very detailed creatures and have very many layers and different ways of doing things. I learned that cougars love rocks and like the mountains. And they are very strong. They can be very dangerous only when you piss them off if you leave them alone they will leave you alone. They are very beautiful creature.

Kshitij says

This book gets better and better, once the characters settle in their role. It took me a while to get involved,

but when that happened the story was very easy to follow and pretty hard to leave. Three stories are put in parallel, one with the budding love between Angela and Berenice(our beautiful Cougar), other with Owen(Angela's man-whore husband) and his new found girlfriend, and finally the one taking place during Renaissance, with Michelangelo in it(you heard it right!).

This talented author has crafted the tale of vampire in the middle Europe time and connected it with folklore of shape shifter- all done flawlessly. It's been evident that a lot of research has been put in and author's love for nature has played an important role in stimulating the scenes of British Columbia. The description of Lower Falls is breath taking and makes me want to visit the place right now!

What Cougar offered me apart from a great story, is the knowledge of different bears & cats (felt I was in some kind of BEAR CAFE, attending a Wildlife program) which is all very good and enjoyable. American Black Bears, Bobcat, Lynx it has all.

I think the ending demanded a bit more action, but it was satisfactory and consistent the way story was shaping up. I found transition of chapters a bit abrupt- like you don't get an idea which characters you'll read in next chapter... it's just an opinion and in no way hinders the flow of story.

The rich stance of Renaissance era and blending it with modern story is not an easy feat. Besides creativity, it demands a lot of research and experience, which this author seems to have in plenty. Cougar is an interesting and dramatic read, which serves to cater variety of genre and people interested in folklores, Gothic Romance, wildlife etcetera.

Claire says

Fabulous story of discovering love with all it's many twists & turns. The author takes you on an imaginative journey that easily draws you along for the ride. A wonderful read.

Cara Charles says

If you have ever been in an ancient forest on any continent, you have sensed the presence of an old knowledge. It will engulf you and speak to you and re-awaken the old knowledge that lies dormant within, if... you are open to receiving it.

Lisa Marie Gabriel's "The Cougar" is a beautifully written erotic, Gothic romance about the knowing and the need that drives us all. Lisa's beautiful, poetic and lyrical prose, has us deeply feeling the loss and loneliness of this solitary creature. We feel the crisp forest air in our lungs, we see the beautiful forest, the crystal mountain lake and run off streams, we hear our footfall on the hiking path, we feel the pull of the paddle through crystal waters and the sweat on our backs, the streams trickle through the stream bed, and we smell the ancient cedars that perfume this paradise.

All thanks to Lisa's clear eloquent imagery, we softly pad through the forest with the cougar and yearn right along with her. We too, feel the desire to protect, we too feel the desire to connect through her delicious writing.

While we're on the unknown trail of the story, the path disappears around an ancient cedar only to surprise us with the unexpected. Superb plotting keeps you turning the page. The story like a path in a forest has many delicious unexpected surprises.

Within the Cougar lies an ancient knowledge. She lives alone in the ancient forests of eastern British Columbia, an area visited seasonally by humans. Within her lies an ancient secret. Cougar by night, human by day, she has lived through many ages of man. This Canadian forest is her last refuge.

Within all carnivores lies a hunger and a need for companionship. The Cougar is no different than any human animal.

A chance meeting of a tourist couple who have just arrived from England to tent camp to renew the fading spark in their marriage, the Cougar senses more between them... a danger is lurking for the woman.

The Cougar follows the natural instincts and desires of this shape-shifting ancient being and the hungry humans in this well executed story to a very satisfying finale.

An eloquent, heart-felt must read!

Google -- Golden Ears Provincial Park and Maple Ridge, BC, Canada images to get a sense of this extraordinary country that Lisa writes so beautifully about. You will fall in love and understand why the humans and the cougar must continue to be nourished by their home. You will have to visit their backyard!

I am lucky enough to live 110 miles south. Reading Lisa's delicious book placed me right there in the surroundings and in the hearts of the characters. It transported me to walking in the forest that surrounds my beautiful Northwest coast home, and now Lisa has me listening for and hoping to catch a glimpse of the Cougar!
