



Nor Iron Bars a Cage

Kaje Harper

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First I was a sorcerer. Then I was a hermit. For so long—for years that seemed to go on forever—I couldn't bear to be touched. I put up not just walls but whole stone bunkers to keep everyone out, emotionally, and physically as well. I was protected from people, from ghosts, from specters real and imagined. Sure, I was alone. But I felt safe. Only, after a while, I wasn't sure any longer whether a totally "safe" empty life was really worth living.

Then Tobin came along. Out of the blue, out of my past, with a summons from the king that he wouldn't let me ignore. I tried to cling to my isolation, but he wouldn't give up on me. Tobin never believed in walls.

This story was written as a part of the M/M Romance Group's "**Love Has No Boundaries**" event. Group members were asked to write a story prompt inspired by a photo of their choice. Authors of the group selected a photo and prompt that spoke to them and wrote a short story.

<http://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/1...>

Nor Iron Bars a Cage Details

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From Reader Review Nor Iron Bars a Cage for online ebook

Eric Westfall says

I think I'm going to have to sacrifice my principles for Kaje Harper.

[sigh]

You see, I try to get the most "bang for the buck" when buying books and I think far too many ebooks are overpriced. Way overpriced. I figure that an average "mainstream" paperback, selling for \$7.99, is about 300 pages. I have some quick math, based on the ebook price and page numbers (or word count) that tells me if my \$3.99 ebook is the equivalent of a 350 page paperback at \$7.99, or the equivalent of a \$25 paperback. If the latter, I don't buy.

When Ms. Harper was kind enough to offer assistance about finding a designer for a cover of my eventually-to-be-posted LHNB story, and others I'm finally working on, I figured I'd check her books out. They sounded intriguing, but unfortunately, the math didn't work for most. Then along came "Nor Iron Bars a Cage" at the of course perfect price...free!

And the novel...and please don't call it a "novel-length story" because that's kind of redundant...is extraordinary. I've been reading fantasy/scifi since I was 5 (just short of 65 years now) and it is truly wonderful.

Why? Because the book meets my most fundamental criterion for good writing: She creates people I care about. And I cared about these two men deeply. The world they live in is fascinating. The story is powerful. I read it in one sitting.

Run, do not walk, to the nearest mouse and clickety-click away so you can download. Get comfy. Prepare to be moved and enthralled.

As a local men's clothing store commercial (national maybe?) used to say, "I gare-on-tee it!"

Thanks, Ms. Harper.

Eric

Lisa Henry says

Love this one to bits. The world building is fantastic: rich, and dark, and wonderful. Lyon was a wonderful character -- crippled by his own past, and tormented by his memories of dark magic. And Tobin was a perfect hero: honourable, steadfast, and loving.

And Xan...wow. Just wow. I think his emotional journey was even more satisfying than Lyon's. Just so full of sadness, and regret, and just beautifully realised.

Pjm12 says

God, this fits into almost all the shelves. There are so many elements to the long-short-story. This involved and intricate world-building fits perfectly with Harper's attention-to-detail style.

The care that has been taken with developing Lyon's backstory reaps rewards for readers when we see him work through his psychological issues with Tobin.

I love how Tobin never gives up on his lion-boy. So patient, so steady, so integral to Lyon's recovery.

The quest aspect was a lovely parallel to the romance and rescue.

Gosh, I pretty much loved this.

M'rella says

4.5 stars.

I would love to know more about pretty much everyone in this book (other than Lyon and Xen). More about Tobin and the king. More about that annoying captain, who drove Lyon crazy in the second part of the story. There is So. Much! Loved it :)

Mark says

...and now for something completely different. A different read for me as this was my first foray into fantasy and a different kind of story for Kaje Harper compared to her previous works to date.

I was a little sceptical about this story first as I haven't tried fantasy in the M/M genre to date. I LOVED it. Kaje's writing soon drew me into her fantasy world and didn't let me go for the whole visit to this faraway place with sorcerers, kings, ghosts, mages and magic.

Lyon is a recluse, possessed by demons after his time as a sorcerer's apprentice after his old master Meldov calling forth a wraith and its taking control. Although Lyon manages to stop the happening before it possesses him totally a part still remains within him.

One day Tobin a messenger from the king turns up out of the blue and commands that the king wishes the presence of Lyon. Tobin is an old childhood friend of Lyon's and was delighted to find him after many years thinking he was dead. Lyon is obviously reticent but gives in to Tobin's tenacity and they start out for Riverrun. The king needs someone to translate an ancient language no longer spoken and this is Lyon's speciality. The king's mages have summoned a very old ghost who can give them a vital tactical advantage over the R'gin, a folk that is preparing to attack Riverrun. There he takes the brave step and lets himself be fused with the ghost from the past in order to communicate with him.

Obvioulsy I could write more about the plot, but I think that will suffice now to give you a taste of things to come. I loved the character Lyon, alone and fighting with his past and demons. For him this is a journey

where he will learn he is stronger than he thinks. With the support and love that Tobin gives he grows stronger everyday, doing things he never would have done until now. Everyday being a small triumph. Tobin is strong but gentle and never forces Lyon to do things he is not comfortable with. This thread runs through the book where he supports and encourages Lyon.

In this world it is OK to be gay, or as it is called in Riverrun "fay" I loved this term and smiled when it was first coined. This creates again the feeling that you are in a fantasy world. A little bit like Lord of The Rings meets M/M romance. Kaje creates a whole fantasy world full of vivid characters and an adventure that keeps you on your toes.

This is a well rounded fantasy story with the amazing fact that it is free under the banner of the M/M Romance Group's LHNB series. It is novel length and written in what must be an incredibly tight deadline. Unbelievable.

Ami says

Lyon was a sorcerer; started as an apprentice for Meldov. But for the past fifteen years he closed himself from the world. A tragic event with a wraith that took over his teacher's body and mind, and tortured Lyon, had forced Lyon to kill in order to survive. His right hand crippled and he suffered from nightmares. Until Tobin, one time Lyon's best friend, came to his front door, asking him to help the King.

Honestly, I don't know how Kaje Harper did it. The fact that she wrote 104k story alone, within short amount of time, with quality that was on par with published story was already something I appreciated. Even more so, this story was well-written, well thought-off, and well-told.

First thing I noticed, the world building was slightly similar to that I usually experience from Megan Derr's novels. Nothing wrong with that. It was a world with fantasy/historical sense where being with men wasn't a crime (people might raise their eyebrows but there wasn't one of those abomination preachings) which reduce the homophobic angst. Since I read MM romance to get my escape, that kind of world build can be refreshing.

Second, I just loved the characters, even the secondary ones. Like Xan, a thousand years old ghost that played a significant role in the story. Although the story was purely from Lyon's perspective but every other characters were well-written. Tobin was amazing, finally found Lyon again, he was determined to help Lyon. Tobin was so patient with him.

At the same time, I appreciated how Kaje didn't take the path of "*love heals everything*". The trauma that Lyon experienced ran deep. So he still struggled with nightmares. He still wasn't sure that he could have sex even if he was the one doing penetration. It would be a long journey for him to completely healed, and that felt real.

So, yes, I LOVED the story very much. Wizard and Mages are my choices of paranormal/fantasy trope (I have so many of great series with wizard/mages, Harry Dresden and Harry Potter came to mind). This one

was a fine telling.

I didn't have anything that I could complain about (not a single one, well, maybe one insignificant question of (view spoiler))

... and in the end, all of this for FREE? Well, I can only give this my 5-stars. God knows I've paid MORE for LESS.

PS: There was a *Lady Ami*. She wasn't on screen, and only mentioned three times. But I was really giddy to read characters sharing my name. Since my name is not popular in Western world. Another "Ami" I read in MM was in Andrea Speed's story, and she was a Japanese waiter.

ttg says

4.5 stars – Really enjoyable fantasy novel with very likeable and appealing characters. (And has the extra fantastic bonus of being free to download.)

I'm a fan of Harper's mysteries and shifter books. I find her style excessively readable, and I always dig her characters and their relationships. This is her first "high fantasy" work, and I found it just as readable and enjoyable as her more "modern" world works.

The story focuses on Lyon, a sorcerer "in hiding," from his past and from the world, who lives on his own in his stone cottage, and is so introverted, it takes a lot of energy to muster up a conversation with the boy who delivers his food. But Lyon is hiding for a reason, and that reason comes out as the story progresses, especially when his childhood friend Tobin comes knocking, and asks Lyon to leave the safety of his stone walls for a request by the king. It is Tobin's reappearance and his steadfast nature to coax Lyon back with him that propels the story (and Lyon) forward.

Really enjoyed the story and its progression as Lyon struggled to take in these changes and his feelings for Tobin. I also found that struggle very resonating—Lyon's battle against his fears, the disability with his scarred hand, his feelings of self-worth, his ability to interact with others. It was very easy for me to feel his struggle and sympathize with him.

And I loved Tobin's patience and willingness to bend and alter in order to either find a way that would work with Lyon's disability or traumas or would give Lyon the space to move forward on his own. Very supportive and loving character, and totally won me over. (I also dug that Tobin realized that this was something he could have only done because he was older and more experienced. He mentions at one point that if he came upon Lyon when he was 20, and Lyon was just coming out of surviving his ordeal, that Tobin probably wouldn't have handled it well, and not been able to provide the same thoughtfulness. I thought that was nicely realistic.)

I thought the romance was handled great—it was a nice slow burn that seemed to always be bubbling. The slow burn also worked well and felt consistent with a character that was so touch-phobic and had to slowly learn how to open up and be okay with contact.

Overall, I really dug it. It's a long novel, at over 100,000 words, which is pretty amazing since it was written for a prompt for the MM Romance Group's Love Has No Boundaries summer story event, and was

completed in less than a month and a half. Probably with more timing, some parts could have been tightened more, some typos caught, but those are small complaints for a story that I thought was actually pretty awesome.

And it's FREE. Seriously, what a great gift, and a wonderful read. Recommended for anyone who likes m/m fantasy stories. The whole thing can be downloaded here.

Kaje Harper says

Available to read online on the Goodreads M/M group today (June first) and now, thanks to Jen taking pity on peoples' eyesight, also available for download. The download link is in the first post of the thread, after the picture and letter request, and also now in the url for the book listing here on GR. That link works even if you're not a group member.

Nina says

First class romance, high quality light fantasy and top-notch writing.

I know, right? There's got to be a catch. Well, the worst thing I can say about this book is that it took a while for it to hit its stride, which is why it took me a week to read it.

As soon as it did, though, I was hooked. It's an intriguing, suspenseful and masterfully told story. The world that the author created is atmospheric and wholly satisfying, despite having as a basis the classic fantasy realm of kings, foreign tribes, sorcery and travel by horse.

To top it all off, the romance is simply wonderful: the character and relationship development are realistic, complex and at just the right speed, the hot moments are *hot* and the sweet, tender moments made me feel as if my heart were being squeezed by an unseen hand.

Just one thing: who the hell gives a full-length novel this good away for free? (Someone who loves to write, you'll say. True. But that's not the point now.) That's simply a wonderful thing to do. This author just got herself a new reader.

Breann says

3.5 stars

This was especially hard for me to rate - and to review, I might add. I *adored* Lyon and Tobin. They were wonderful together, so sweet and loving. While I loved them, I was just so bored through parts of this book.

Lyon, who is a hermit, barely speaks to anyone and can't bear to be touched, is contacted by the King to do some translating for him. The man sent to find Lyon is his childhood friend, Tobin. Tobin, not knowing that Lyon was even alive still, was ecstatic to see his old friend again. He wishes to reestablish their friendship and maybe something more. Obviously, Lyon's hermit-like tendencies get in the way of this.

Lyon is a hot mess, but with good reason. He was severely abused by his mentor who was possessed by a wraith. His many hang ups were portrayed very realistically and I could feel his internal struggles. I loved

that he didn't do the king's bidding willingly. He fought Tobin at every turn. Who is the king to take Lyon away from his comfy little home and life? But being forced out of that was the best thing that could have happened to him. So, likewise, Tobin didn't give up either and wouldn't take no for an answer. He was determined to see Lyon through this. Tobin was awesome. He knew what his friend needed in order to survive leaving his secure home and he delivered. He totally delivered. He waited (and waited and waited) for Lyon and was willing to take whatever Lyon was ready to give. I think my lovely friend, Heather K, said this about another book, I loved that there wasn't a magical dick that solved all of the PTSD. Lyon made progress but not everything was solved, especially not sexually. No matter how much he grew, he still struggled and had his freak-out moments. Which Tobin was there every second for, caring for him. So, basically, they were perfect for each other and I loved every moment they were together.

This is where my issues arose. The whole translate for the king, let's summon a ghost and go to war plot? I didn't care. At all. Not even a little. Every time there was a scene with some of my favorite guys with the king and sorcerers? I dozed into skimsville. Which is why, no matter how much I wanted to love this, I can't rate it a solid four stars.

Lori says

Up until I started reading the, oh so addictive, M/M genre, fantasy was my bag. So imagine my delight when I found a book by one of my favourite authors that combines the two.

Nor Iron Bars a Cage by Kaje Harper was a delight to read. Lyon and Tobin were fantastic characters. Written in the first person from Lyon's POV we see how he struggles with events from his past and how, with Tobin's help, he is able to conquer his fears.

I loved the fantasy element details, they really kept the story moving along as did the developing friends to lovers relationship between Lyon and Tobin. I do love how Kaje Harper writes romantic story lines, her style never fails to make my heart beat faster.

The added bonus, the ~~cream~~ no cherry on top of the bun - this is free. Yep, you heard me, it's a free read - yet full length novel sized. I know. Really - check the calendar, it's not April 1st - I'm not kidding, it's a free, full length, fantasy novel from the fantastic Kaje Harper. Well, what you still reading this for....download it now!

<https://www.allromanceebooks.com/stor...>

Vivian says

Strong fantasy adventure read with magic, mayhem, and true love.

When you get the second chance you never thought was possible--you hold on tight. Tobin and Lyon's friendship is beautiful; finding someone who can be strong for you when you need it, being able to relax. Love their journey and there are some great secondary characters--Xan, he stole my heart.

Favorite quote:

"He was my safety and my wall, the mirror in whose eyes I somehow looked brave and desirable."

Julio Genao says

Harper is so damned good at those action scenes.

I found the occasional anachronism frustrating, and one or two nits to pick in the plot, but for god's sake—100k words in a month and a half?

Bravo.

??? Michaëlle ✨?? says

5 Stars

Every single thing about this book was perfect. Every. Thing. It's one of those books that I'll probably read again and never really mark it as such here at GR. But only because I'll likely use it as a balm to my soul, to make me feel better about how even the most fearful, scarred and damaged among us can be loved, can overcome even the worst of circumstances...and I wouldn't want to draw attention to how often I'll need that.

The quality of work that comes out of those DRitC events will never cease to amaze me, and that they are offered *for free* is nothing short of heroic. I don't think we appreciate the hard work those mods do to coordinate everything to make the whole endeavor work so well. I certainly hope we'll get another event, soon.

Thank you to the MMRomance DRitC mods and to the authors like Kaje that contribute their work, asking nothing of the reader but to enjoy it.

(Stupid face leaking right now.)

Vivian ?????? says

Truly, utterly and deeply romantic; the best thing about this book would have to be their relationship. Such genuine and delightfully real and endearing characters with a romance that charmed me right down to My toes. Tobin was absolutely amazing with his unending devotion, patience and love. One of the most memorable and amazing characters though would have to be Xan. It takes immense courage to overcome your own hatred and prejudices, and to go further than even that is simply amazing.

Other than that, the world building was solid, if so-so in creativity, and the plot held my attention nicely, but nothing special. Watching Lyon's growth, however, was particularly heart warming and splendid!

This was a good read, and I especially enjoyed the romantic nature of it, even as the plot, writing and world building did not enthrall me (though they were by no means *bad*).

Rating: 3.75 - 4

