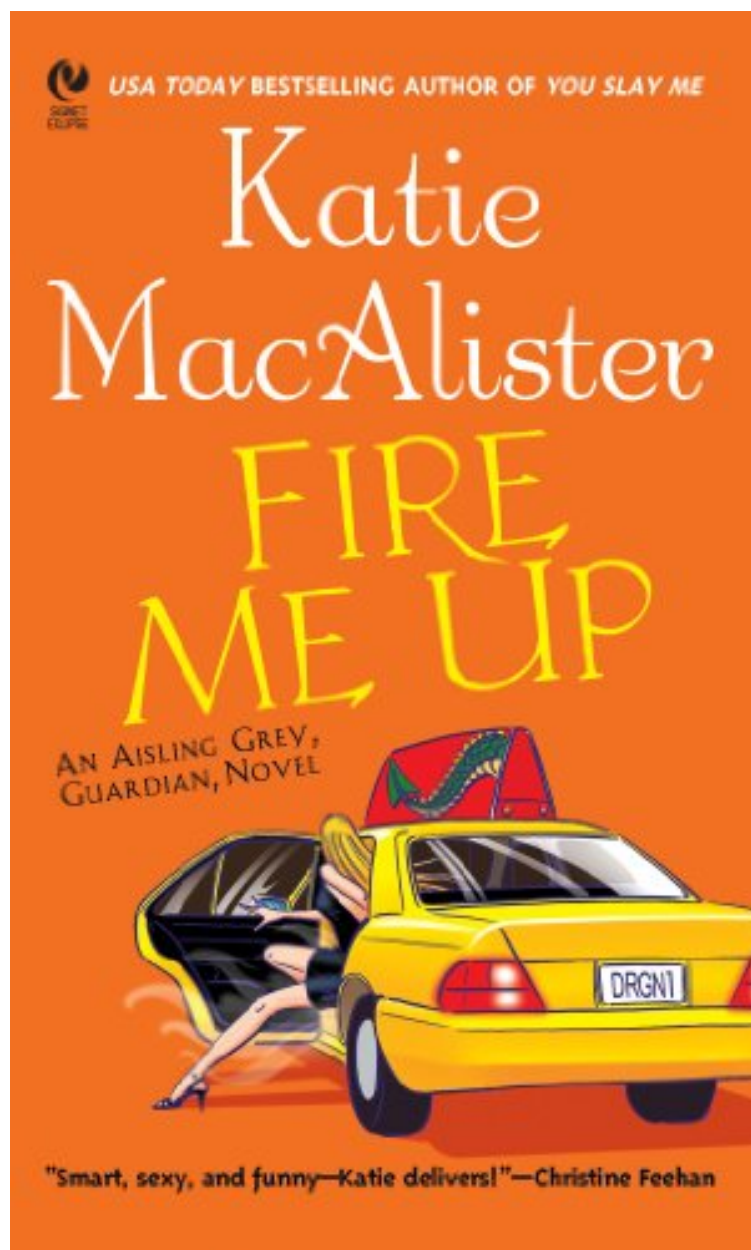


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# Fire Me Up: An Aisling Grey, Guardian, Novel



Par Katie Macalister  
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**Description :** Description du produitAisling Grey is back-and in more trouble than ever. She thought being a courier would be easy. It's not. She thought being a Guardian would come naturally. It doesn't. She thought she could get out of being a wyvern's mate. She can't. And she never thought she'd be irresistible to men. But she is.

Prsentation de l'diteurAisling Grey is back-and in more trouble than ever. She thought being a courier would be easy. It's not. She thought being a Guardian would come naturally. It doesn't. She thought she could get out of being a wyvern's mate. She can't. And she never thought she'd be irresistible to men. But she

is. Extrait You'd think that Hungary would see the light as far as secondhand smoke is concerned, wouldn't you? I probably lost at least thirty percent of my lung capacity on the trip from the airport. I didn't even glance at the massive hairy black form at my side as we disembarked from the train on a cloud of cigarette smoke. Instead, I said through my teeth, Language! Two big brown eyes opened wide with surprise. Stop it, I hissed, glancing quickly around us to see if anyone had overheard. We were elbow to elbow with what appeared to be half the population of Hungary, all intent on going to the same place at the same time as us. Luckily, no one seemed to be paying attention to a huge black dog and its unexceptional owner. I took a firm grip on Jim's leather leash, wrapping it around the wrist on my left hand as I used my right to tug on the big suitcase on wheels that kept clipping my heels. Oh, right, I forgot. Ixnay on the alkintay. Bowwow. Arf. Bark bark. Hummina hummina hummina. I glared at the demon in Newfoundland dog form that stood beside me as we struggled through the huge crowds at Budapest's main train station. We moved slowly forward with the rest of the lemmings, part of the shuffle, stop, shuffle, stop pattern of movement that characterized a large number of people trying to pass through a narrow opening. Jim's eyebrows rose at my look. What? You are talking, I answered, more or less grinding the words. Dogs don't talk, so just shut...up! Well! Jim sniffed in an injured manner as we shuffle-stopped our way forward a few more feet. I knew from the experience of having lived with Jim for the past month that my furry little demon would have an expression of profound martyrdom on its face, an expression not at all common to most Newfies but one that Jim had perfected during our relatively short time together. That wasn't a direct order, was it? Because you didn't say, Dammit, Jim, I said shut the farking haitch up! which, of course, is what you normally say when you want me to shut up. And I know that's a command, because you only say farking haitch when you're really P.O.d. So I thought I'd better check whether or not that last shut up was a direct order or just a hopeful desire on your part. I stood in the center of the Keleti train station surrounded by hundreds of people, nice, normal people, people who never once thought about things like demons, and demon lords, and Guardians, and all of the strange beings that populated the Lau-del, the Otherworld and I wondered for the hundredth time whether if I tried really hard I could send Jim back to the fiery depths of Hell. No, it answered my unasked question before I could do so much as level another squinty-eyed glare at it. You tried three times to send me back. The last time cost me a toe. My favorite one, too. How you can make a toe disappear right off my foot is beyond me, but the point is that I'm not going to risk another unbalanced paw just so you can play Junior Guardian. I'm staying put until you get yourself a mentor and figure out that whole sending-me-back thing. Will you stop answering questions before I ask them, stop telling me what to do, and above all, stop talking? As crowded as the platforms were, the air filled with fumes from the fast-food restaurants that lined the main section of the station, not to mention the ripe odor of a couple of hundred people who'd been crushed into a busy train on a hot August day, as well as the noise those very same hot, sweaty people made as they tried to escape the station despite all that, my words managed to penetrate the miasma of sound and echo with a strange piercing quality off the tiled walls. Several heads swiveled to look back at us. I smiled somewhat grimly at all of them. A hurt look filled Jim's brown eyes as it sniffed, with studied indifference, the butts of the man and woman in front of us. We shuffled forward another few feet. So, that was an order? I sighed, my shoulders slumping in defeat. I was hot, tired, jet-lagged from the flight from Portland to Amsterdam to Budapest, and to be honest, Jim's presence although annoying in many ways was more than a little reassuring considering just who else was occupying the same continent on which I now found myself. The memory of glittering green eyes filled with smoky desire rose with no difficulty to dance before me but was squelched with a much greater effort. No, it's not an order, I said softly. At least not until we're through this crowd. I doubt if anyone can even see you, let alone notice that your mouth is moving. I told you to get me that ventriloquist tape I saw on TV. The mass of humanity rippled forward, then halted again. I stood on my tiptoes and peered around the big sun hat of the woman in front of me and caught sight of what was holding us up. At the far end of the platform, where the passage narrowed to one open exit to the taxi ranks and passenger pickup areas, several men in security uniforms had stopped the crowd as a couple of VIPs were escorted off the train. What is it? Jim asked. Dead body? Someone throw himself in front of the train? Are there splattered body parts everywhere? Did you remember to bring your digital camera? You are a sick, sick demon. There are no body parts, splattered or otherwise. It's just I craned my neck just a woman and a couple of guys in really expensive-looking designer clothes. They're probably movie stars or politicians or something. The crowd shimmered as a second exit was opened up, the mass of travelers undergoing mitosis as one part of the crowd headed for the new exit. Sweat trickled down my back, dampening the tendrils of hair that had escaped my ponytail until they clung to my neck. I was starting to get light-headed from the heat, the

pressure of so many bodies, and the lack of sleep during the twelve hours it had taken to get from Portland to Budapest. I had to get out of there. Come on. I think I see a break. I pushed Jim toward the slight opening next to a couple of kids decked out in Goth gear who were sucking the tongues out of each others head, jerking the suitcase behind me, apologizing under my breath as I jostled elbows, backs, and sides and squished forward. Why I thought coming here was such a good idea is beyond me. Makes sense to me, Jim answered a bit distractedly as it smelled people, luggage, and the litter on the ground with the same unbiased interest. The crowd thinned dramatically as people scattered once they made it past the bottleneck of the exit. You need training. Budapest is where its happening. Hey, when are we going to eat? I could have had a nice vacation in the Bahamas, but oh, no, I had to come. My feet stopped moving. They simply stopped moving as my eyes bugged out of my head, my heart ceased beating, and my brain, usually a reliable and trustworthy organ, came to an abrupt and grinding halt. With no obstructing crowd remaining, the group of people standing just outside the floor-to-ceiling glass windows on the west side of the train station was perfectly visible to me. Jim stopped and looked back at me, one furry black eyebrow cocked in question at my abbreviated statement. You arent using crude sexual slang, are you? No, you cant be, because I know for a fact you havent been gettin any since we left Paris. Slowly, I blinked to make sure I wasnt seeing things, my stomach turning somersaults, my whole being riveted on the scene just outside the station. Jim turned to see what held me in such thrall. Wow. Talk about speaking of the great horned one. I must be psychic or something. Whats he doing in Budapest? It hurt to breathe. It hurt to think. It just hurt, period. I felt like someone had used me as a punching bag for a few hours, every atom of my body pulled so tight I thought I was going to explode into a million little pieces. Outside the window a small clutch of people stood before a long, glistening black limousine, evidently there to welcome the VIPs from the train. They consisted of three men and one woman all Asian, all dressed in red and black. The men wore black slacks with open-necked shirts in different shades of red, while the woman looked as if shed just stepped from the cover of Beijing Vogue. She was tall and willowy, had long, straight glossy black hair that reached to her waist, wore a black miniskirt and a red leather bustier, all carried off with an effortless grace that spoke of years spent in expensive Swiss finishing schools. But it was one of the men greeting the VIPs who caught and held my attention. The wind rippled the dark forest green silk of his shirt so that it outlined the lovely curves of his muscular chest and arms. That same wind was responsible for his dark hair, longer than I had remembered it, ruffling back off a brow graced by two ebony slashes that were his eyebrows. Despite the heat of the August afternoon, he wore leather pants tight leather pants the garment glistening in the sun as if it had been painted on his long legs and adorable derriere as he made a courtly bow to the VIPs. Drake, I said on a breath, my body suddenly tingling as if it was coming to life after a long, long sleep. Even his name left my lips sensitized, the sound of that one word strange after its banishment from my life four weeks ago. Four weeks? It seemed more like a lifetime. Jim gave me a long, appraising look. Youre not going to go all Buffy/Angel on me, are you? Mooning around bemoaning the forbidden love that cannot be? Because if you are, Im finding myself a new demon lord. Love I can take, but mooning is not in my contract. I started toward the window, unable to help myself, my body suddenly a mass of erogenous zones that wanted more than anything on this earth to place itself in Drakes hands. His lovely long-fingered, extremely talented hands. Aisling Grey. The sound of my name brought me out of the trance. I swallowed hard and looked around, my mind a muddle of desire and lust and erotic memories that damn near brought me to my knees. Names, as I have had opportunity to point out, have power, and Jims invoking my name had the ability to snap me out of something I had spent every night praying for strength against. Thanks, Jim. Slowly I gathered my wits and determination, thankful that in the hustle and bustle of the train station no one had noticed a deranged, lust-crazed woman and her demon in talking-dog form. I dont quite know what came over me. It raised an expressive eyebrow. I know. I dragged my eyes from the sight of Drake and his men waving the VIPs toward the limo. I hauled my wheeled suitcase forward and out the doors, purposely turning my back to the scene that had held such interest, Jim pacing silently beside me. Im OK now. It was just a little aberration. I told you when we left Paris that things between Drake and me were over. It just took me by surprise seeing him here, in Budapest. I had assumed hed still be in France. Safe. Several hundreds of miles away. In a completely different country, living out his life without me. Uh-huh. Right. Tell it to the tail, Aisling. I ignored my smart-mouthed demon as we joined the end of a queue for taxis. The handful of people ahead of us laughed and chatted gaily, just as if their world hadnt come to a grinding halt, whereas mine... I glanced back at the limo. Drake was overseeing Pl, one of his men, loading the matched set of luggage in the back of the glossy car. Bustier Woman was speaking to one of her contingent, suddenly calling for Drake. I

narrowed my eyes as he strolled toward her with the same fluid, coiled power that sent shivers of delight down my back. Had. Once. Now, of course, it did nothing for me. Nothing at all. I sighed. Jim stuck its snout in the bag of the elderly couple in front of us, saying softly, That was a pretty pathetic sigh. It had a lot of meat to it. I know, I answered, trying not to grind my teeth as the woman put her hand on Drake's silk-clad arm, no doubt caressing his wonderful steely bicep. Its really bad when you cant even lie convincingly to yourself. Jim pulled its head from the bag to look at me, its eyes opening wide suddenly as it made an odd combination of a bark and a warning. Behind you! I dropped its leash and spun around in a crouch, half expecting an attack of some sort, but finding instead that my suitcase had attracted the attention of three street gypsies, all of whom obviously had the intention of lightening the load of my possessions. The amulet! I screeched, throwing myself on top of the half-opened bag. The biggest of the thieves, a young man who looked to be about nineteen, jerked the bag out from underneath me, his accomplices pulling on the outer flap so that it peeled back like a ripe banana. I lunged toward the small brown leather amulet bag that was stuffed into my underwear. Hey! Let go! Police! My fingers closed around the bag just as the youngest thief, a girl of about fifteen or so, grabbed it, but I had not survived my Uncle Damians wrath concerning the loss of a valuable antiquity for nothing. I had to save this one at all costs. I jerked the amulet free just as someone behind me shouted. The street gypsies snatched up handfuls of my thingspants, shoes, and my cosmetic case before racing off in three different directions. The wind, coming off the nearby Danube, flirted with the opened suitcase, decided it liked the look of my newly purchased satin undies, and scooped up several pairs, sending them skittering down the sidewalk. The elderly couple who had been in front of us helped me gather the remaining clothes that had been knocked out as the gypsies made their snatch and grab, repeating soft assurances that I didnt understand. I left Jim to guard the luggage as I ran down the sidewalk, the amulet still in my hand. I plucked my underwear from a phone booth, a magazine stand, and a newspaper box. One last pair, trembling next to a garbage bin, suddenly spun upward in a gust and flew a few feet down the sidewalk, their flight coming to a swift end as the pink satin and lace material wrapped itself in a soft caress around a mans leg. A mans leather-clad leg. Oh, god, I moaned, closing my eyes for a second, knowing exactly who owned that leg. Why me? Why did this sort of thing have to happen to me? Why couldnt anything in my life ever be simple? When I looked again, Drake was holding my panties in his hand, his head slowly turning as he scanned the crowd until he saw me clutching a handful of underwear. Any thoughts of escaping undetected died in that moment. The woman who had been about to get into the limo paused and raised a beautifully arched eyebrow at him, her dark eyes sliding over me in cool consideration. She was perfect in every way: flawless complexion, hair glossy and straight, her assets displayed with a confidence I would never be able to match. Beside her, Drake stood in smoldering sensuality (his natural state), all hard lines and rugged planes and extremely droolworthy masculinity. And then there was me, the third person in the tableau. I knew exactly what Drake and the woman were seeing: a hot, sweaty woman in her early thirties dressed in a loose T-shirt and worn jeans, hair coming loose from the scrunchie used in an attempt to tame wild curls, without so much as a single eyelash having seen the benefit of cosmetics. It was no good. I couldnt compete. I was outclassed and I knew it, but I still had my dignity: what was left of it after my underwear was spread out along the front of the Keleti station ten minutes after my arrival. Raising my chin, I marched forward to Drake, firmly squelching the cheers of delight that several unmentionable parts of my body were sending up. I believe those are mine, I told him, holding out my hand for the underwear. Heat flared deep in his emerald eyes, but I looked down at his hand, refusing to be drawn into that trap. I knew well the power of his desire. You have excellent taste in undergarments, he said, his voice a little rough around the edges as he placed the item in my hand. Victorias Secret? No, I said, allowing my eyes to meet his for a moment. I swear a tiny little wisp of smoke curled out of one of his nostrils. Naughty Nellies House of Knickers. Portland, Oregon. Thank you. Good-bye. He inclined his head as I spun around, ignoring the disdainful arched brows of the woman and marching back to where Jim sat next to my ravaged suitcase. The taxi rank was empty, the elderly couple evidently having snagged a taxi while I was retrieving my undies. Dont say it, I warned Jim as I squatted next to the suitcase, transferring to it my collected lingerie and the amulet. A taxi pulled up beside me as I double-checked the zipper, wondering what the street gypsies had done with the evidently useless lock I'd used to secure the bag. Just dont say it, OK? Me? Im not saying anything. I waited. I'd lived with Jim for a little over a month now. It was virtually impossible for the demon to let something as mortifyingly embarrassing as having my underwear scattered on my former lover go without comment. But if I was going to say something, it would be something along the lines of Smooth move, Ex-Lax! The limo passed us with a gentle, expensive purr of its engine, the tinted windows thankfully

keeping the sight of Drakes no doubt politely amused face from my view. I didn't have to see him to know he was looking at me, though. I could feel it. There was just something about being the object of a dragon's regard that left the hair on the back of my neck standing on end. Booklist The last person Aisling Grey wants to see when she arrives in Budapest is Drake Vireo. A part-time courier and new Guardian (as in to the portals of Hell), all she wants to do is deliver an amulet to a hermit and, hopefully, find herself a mentor at the GODTAM (Guardians, Oracles, Diviners, Theurgists, and Mages) conference, but now she must also deal with Drake, her former lover and current wyvern of the green-dragon sept. While he innocently insists he is only in Budapest for a peace summit, Aisling finds it suspiciously coincidental that this gathering of dragons is taking place at the same hotel as her conference. MacAlister introduced Aisling in *You Slay Me* [BKL S1 04], and now takes her deliciously original heroine; Aisling's sinfully sexy, sometimes boyfriend Drake; and her smart-mouthed demon sidekick, Jim, off on another wickedly witty, wildly inventive, and fiendishly fun adventure in the paranormal world. John Charles Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved