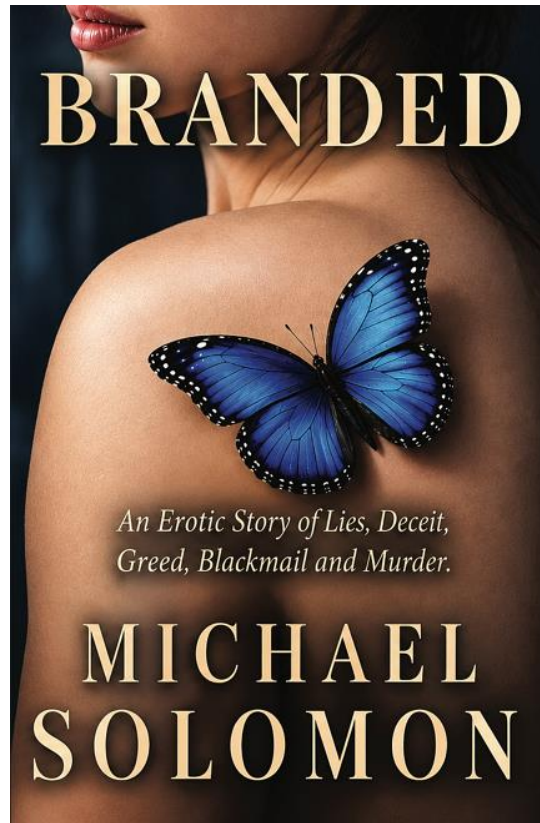




Branded is a provocative corporate thriller about an ambitious young woman who seduces her way to wealth and power. When a former lover threatens to expose her darkest secrets, she decides murder may be the only way to protect her empire.

BRANDED:

An Erotic Story of Lies, Deceit, Greed, Blackmail, and Murder
By Michael Solomon

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MICHAEL
SOLOMON

BRANDED

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A Novel

Michael Solomon



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PROLOGUE

The blades of the coffee grinder stopped as it finished pulverizing the exotic beans for his morning drink. He leaned in, his face hovering over the opening, and inhaled deeply, once, and then again, savoring the rich aroma of the freshly ground beans. The fragrance seeped into his senses, promising a delicious brew that awaited him and filling him with anticipation and pleasure.

In eight minutes, he would enjoy the fruits of his labor as his percolator finished brewing his favorite morning drink.

He didn't need to drink the brew; the chemicals that entered his body through his nose were enough to start the process. By sunset the next day, he would be lying on a cold, stainless-steel table in the morgue.

Chapter

1

Her scent filled the air as she passed the closet between the bedroom and bathroom. It drifted through the slotted louver doors into his hiding place.

She stood in her powder room, fine-tuning her hair and makeup. The only garments adorning her were a black lace bra, black thong panties, thigh-high black stockings, and a pair of black, four-inch-heeled, red-soled Christian Louboutin's. Her five-foot-seven-inch, one-hundred-thirty-pound frame carried her shoulder-length brunette hair and emerald-green eyes, eyes so piercing they could burn her image onto the cover of a glamor magazine. Eyes so captivating they could penetrate a man's soul if he were lucky enough to meet their gaze.

They were so striking they could have inspired the final lines of the first chorus of "Strangers in the Night." Her radiant smile could quicken a man's pulse, and something deep within him would know he had to have her.

She was unaware of the imminent danger as she stood before the mirror, making her final makeup adjustments. Thirty minutes earlier,

the intruder had slipped into her apartment and hidden while she was in the shower.

She turned and walked back to her bedroom. Passing the closet again, the scent of her freshly applied Shalimar drifted into his lair. His nostrils flared like a bull about to charge a matador.

She bent over and reached across the bed to retrieve the red dress she had chosen for the day. She was unaware of his silent steps across the carpeted floor as he approached her from behind.

Ellen suddenly felt his cold hands grasp her shoulders as his disguised, brusque voice told her not to move.

“Don’t turn around. If you cry out, it will be the last sound you ever make.”

She felt his hot breath on the nape of her neck as her body stiffened, and her heart pounded like the beat of a bass kettle drum, marking an interlude in a prolonged symphony.

“My God, I am about to be raped,” she thought.

Frozen in place, paralyzed, every muscle in her body went limp. Her attacker forced her legs apart with his foot. He held her down on the bed, his left hand pressing against the back of her neck as his right hand pulled her thong down.

“If you move, you are a dead woman,” the demanding voice insisted.

She felt his erect penis rub along the anal cleft between her buttocks, seeking her vaginal opening. When he found it, he abruptly thrust into her.

“Please don’t hurt me.” She cried out. “I’ll do anything you want. Just don’t hurt me.”

Her face pressed into her bed covering, feeling its coolness as fear gripped her.

“You asked for it, bitch. You’re going to get it.” His voice was harsh.

With those words, from a voice she thought she recognized but wasn’t sure of, her body began to react. Suddenly, she was wet with passion as her juices flowed, lubricating his penis. His pounding grew less cruel.

He unhooked her bra and let it fall as he reached around and cupped her thirty-six C supple breasts. His thumbs and index fingers began massaging her nipples. They grew erect.

She found herself pushing back, pressing her buttocks firmly against his abdomen like a rifle’s recoil. She kept going as their rhythm fell into sync. Each thrust sent pulses of passion through her nerves. The sensations were like waves hitting the shore. Suddenly, a massive wave of excitement washed over her, a tsunami. Her passion raged as her body trembled with shock waves. She was on the verge of an explosion.

“Give me all you’ve got!” she screamed. As the assailant pounded her one last time, their warm juices erupted, mixing like a shaken martini. She collapsed onto the bed, exhausted and drained, yet exhilarated. It was over in less than six minutes. She thought, *is this really what rape is?*

Chapter

2

She rolled over and pulled him by the neck toward her open mouth. Their lips met, and their tongues explored each other's mouths. When the kiss ended, she said to her attacker, "That was so hot and intense. I can't remember feeling an orgasm that strong before. That was a nice morning surprise." But she was lying. She had had many orgasms in the past that were just as intense, and there would be many more to come.

"You told me you liked surprises. I assumed there was no better way to get you ready for the day than to be raped, even if it was play-acting."

"You had me for a moment. I was scared out of my mind until I heard your voice. I still wasn't sure it was really you." She said, catching her breath.

"However, if you think you're going to get away without some payback, you're very mistaken. The quid pro quo is on my desk," she said, pointing to the contemporary glass desk in the corner of the room. "You will find the purchase order there. Sign it, take a shower, and let me get to work. It's bad enough you messed up my hair," she said with authority.

“Just like that. Not even a thank-you,” he said.

“You came, didn’t you? That was thanks enough. It was probably the best sex you’ve had in months,” she said, picking up a hairbrush. “I need to fix my hair and get to work. By the way, how did you get in here?” she asked.

“Through the garage. I made a copy of your key last time you lent it to me.”

Donald Justine, 46 years old and divorced after 15 years of a childless marriage, was the senior vice president of purchasing at Telerise Industries. He had complete control over equipment and inventory purchases and the final say on vendor selection. He had free rein to buy for one of the industry's largest manufacturers of cell phone circuit boards. The circuit boards were installed in the world's most advanced cell phones and tablets. The company's sales for the past year totaled \$42 billion. As a publicly traded company listed on the NASDAQ, Telerise has developed and beta-tested its latest device, which was scheduled to roll out in the next eight months. It was designed to revolutionize the industry. Donald was utterly irreproachable until he met Ellen.

At 34, Ellen Turner was the youngest senior sales and marketing executive at Corneal Industrial, a producer of communications and computer chips. Donald’s company was preparing to purchase the computer chips needed to start production.

Another company was courting Telerise. The decision came down to two suitors: Tom Flynn of Bradenel Technical and Corneal. Their chips were compatible. Ellen promised him they could match any reasonable offer and fulfill Telerise's orders without a backlog. Tom claimed his company could do the same. However, Ellen had something Tom couldn't offer, and she used it to her advantage.

"How about dinner tonight?"

"I can't. I have a late meeting. Maybe Friday. I'll let you know. Sign these and leave the key on the table on your way out. I have to be out of here in ten minutes," she said, handing him a pen and pushing two copies of the \$132 million contract toward him.

Ellen took both signed copies and put them in her briefcase. I'll have our compliance officer countersign them and provide you with a copy if we have dinner on Friday.

The word "if" stuck in his mind. —*"What does she mean by 'if we have dinner?'*

"When you leave, go out through the garage so nobody sees you."

By the time he finished showering, Ellen had already left. The only things she left behind were the lingering scent of her perfume and a small blue butterfly tattoo she had skillfully etched onto Donald's left shoulder a month earlier during a playful encounter.

As she rode the elevator down to the lobby, Ellen felt ecstatic. She smiled, knowing her commission from the sale would exceed \$6 million—a remarkable boost to her already substantial fortune.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Solomon is a former NYPD Detective. After his police career, he founded his own business. Within five years, Michael was nominated as operating the best company in America in his field by a national trade magazine. After becoming successful, he began helping the less fortunate. His work for various charities earned him the respect and admiration of his community.

He is quickly establishing himself as a compelling new voice in fiction. His previous books—including one nominated for the Pulitzer Prize—have earned growing recognition for their gripping storytelling and unforgettable characters.

Michael is the recipient of four national literary awards, including the John E. Weaver “Readers’ Choice Award.” The Books & Authors Award for best new fiction writer and was three times the recipient of the Next Generation Indie Book Award.

Two of his novels have been written for the Hollywood screen.

“Branded” is his seventh book and third novel; it won’t be his last.

To learn more about Michael Solomon, visit www.michaelsolomonbooks.com

OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

“Success By Default – The Depersonalization of Corporate America”

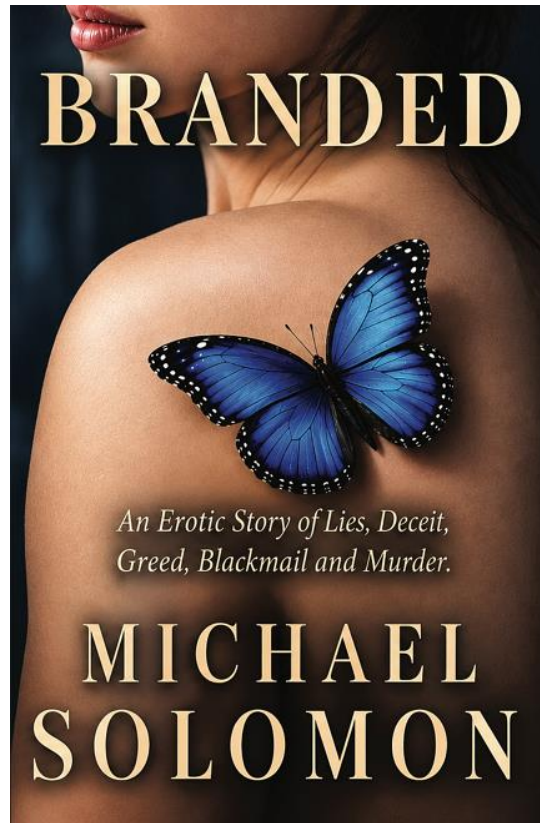
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