

Formal Complaint: Part 1

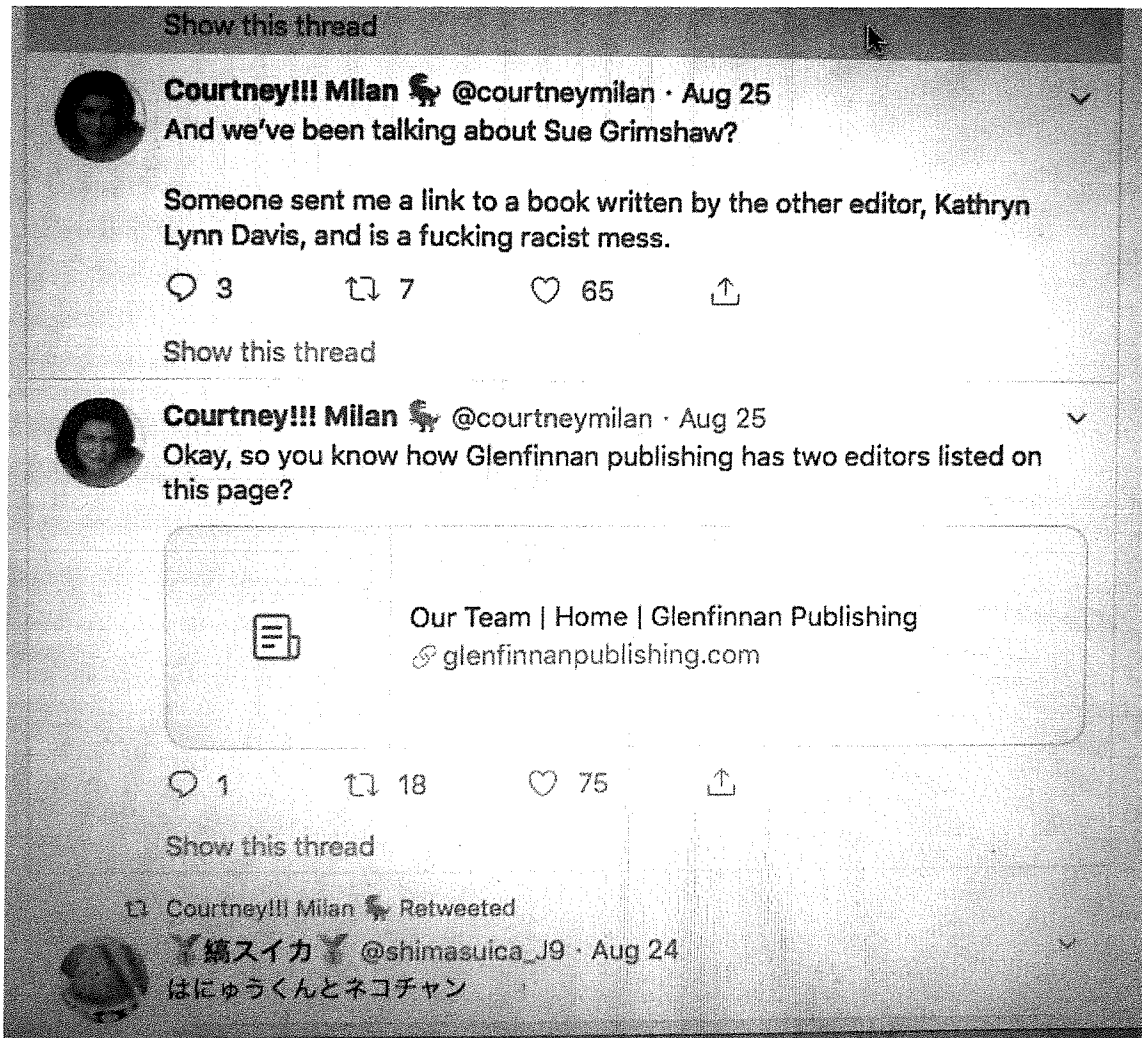
Dear RWA Board Members and Ethics Committee,

My name is Kathryn Lynn Davis and I am writing to make a formal complaint against Courtney Milan, who drew me into a disturbing, one-sided diatribe about racism against Sue Grimshaw, Suzan Tisdale, her company, Glenfinnan Publishing, and myself, simply because I am listed as an editor for Glenfinnan.

I am a charter member of the RWA and a founding member of the OCC. I have been a published author since 1983, when my first book came out from Pinnacle Books, which later became Kensington. My novel *Too Deep for Tears* was on the New York Times bestseller list, where it rose as high as #5. It was also a Washington Post and DoubleDay Book Club bestseller. I am a multiple award-winning author and an honorary lifetime RWA member.

Because Ms. Milan attacked me in what can only be described as cyber-bullying, I lost a three-book contract that had been promised to me. The goal of Romance Writers of America® (RWA) is to advance the professional and common business interests of career-focused romance writers through networking and advocacy and by increasing public awareness of the romance genre. RWA works to support the efforts of its members to earn a living, to make a full-time career out of writing romance. Courtney Milan is doing the opposite; she is a well-known voice for RWA, particularly for the Ethics Committee, and in regard to the question of diversity. Through cyber attacks such as this one, she is increasing public awareness in a very negative way, harming me and many others and making it more difficult for us to earn a living as full-time writers.

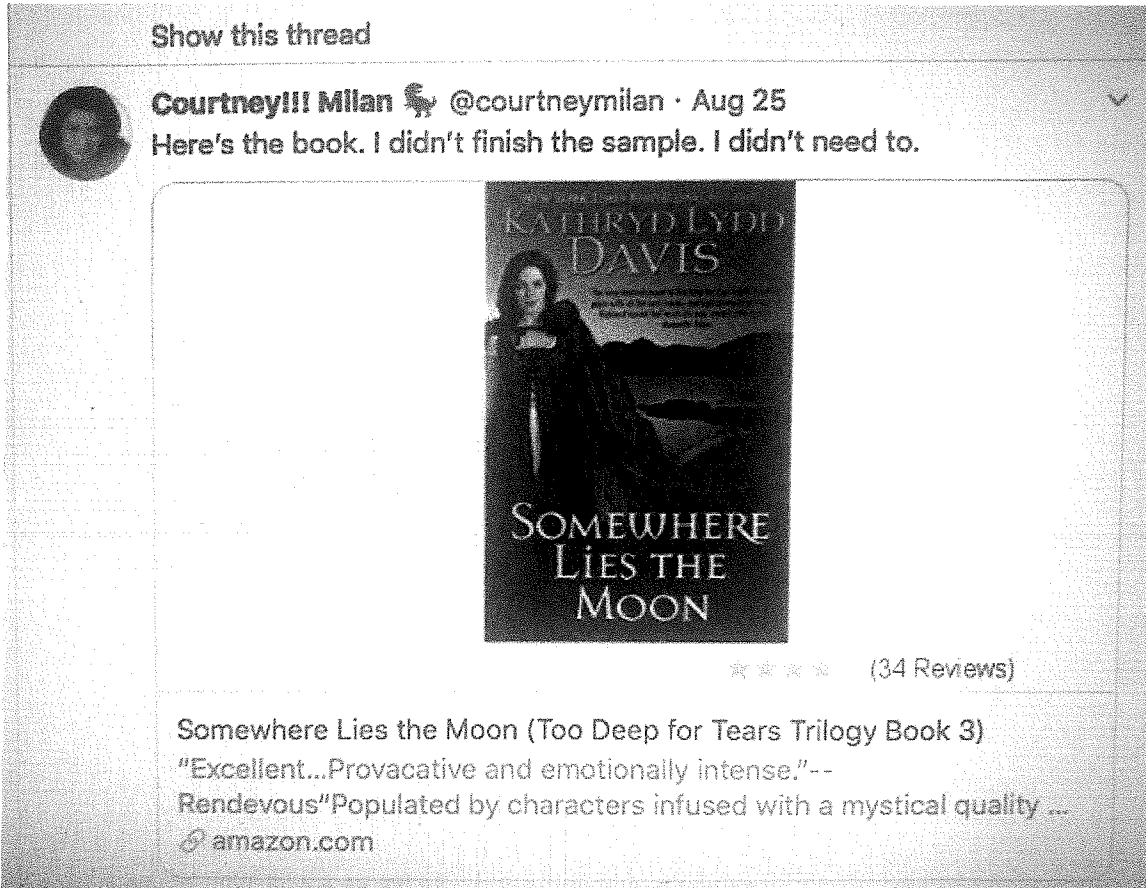
[[Each individual screen shot reads from bottom to top.]]



She begins by calling my book “a f***ing racist mess” after admittedly reading only part of the sample. Her foul language and hostile approach, and her favorite attack word—“racist”—make it clear that she is out to damage my reputation, and my future. According to RWA’s internal core values, the association belongs to its members. In addition, it fosters an environment of creative and professional growth. RWA thrives through the free exchange of ideas, knowledge, and diverse career experiences. And finally – united -- romance writers are a powerful group.

Ms. Milan appears to disagree with every one of these values. From her behavior on Twitter, she seems to believe that the question of diversity belongs only to her, to defend in the most divisive, vicious, and unprofessional way possible. Rather than fostering an environment of creative and professional growth, she inspires fear in her audience, who know how many writers she has already destroyed. She quashes creativity and growth through the use of terror tactics. She seems determined to stop the free exchange of ideas, knowledge and diverse career experiences by aggressively

and violently (through word choice) assaulting those who disagree with her. Or even those, like me, who have never had any interaction with her at all.



Had she read further, she would have discovered themes and plot points that establish precisely the opposite of what she claims. Instead she picked and chose passages that supported her extreme beliefs. The book to which she refers, and which she trashes in an unprofessional way, was written in the 1990s and is historically accurate, which makes it both immune from and irrelevant to current judgments of racist literature.

Here are some of the responses to Ms. Milan's Tweets.

3 12



Violet Bilbao [On Semi-Hiatus] @violetheart08 · Aug 25

WTF.

1



Rhonda Deal @RJDeal · Aug 25

Replying to @courtneymilan

I guess blue American eyes must not be as genetically potent as blue English eyes because my half-Chinese nephews have brown eyes, too.

1



Maia the 99 @semirose · Aug 25

Replying to @courtneymilan

Like!!! The only mixed person I know with something other than brown eyes is my one cousin who is super white-passing and even she has hazel eyes

1



Nikki Prince @AuthorNPrince · Aug 25

Replying to @courtneymilan

I have a brother and two sisters that were adopted from the Philippines and their eyes are indeed brown and beautiful.

1



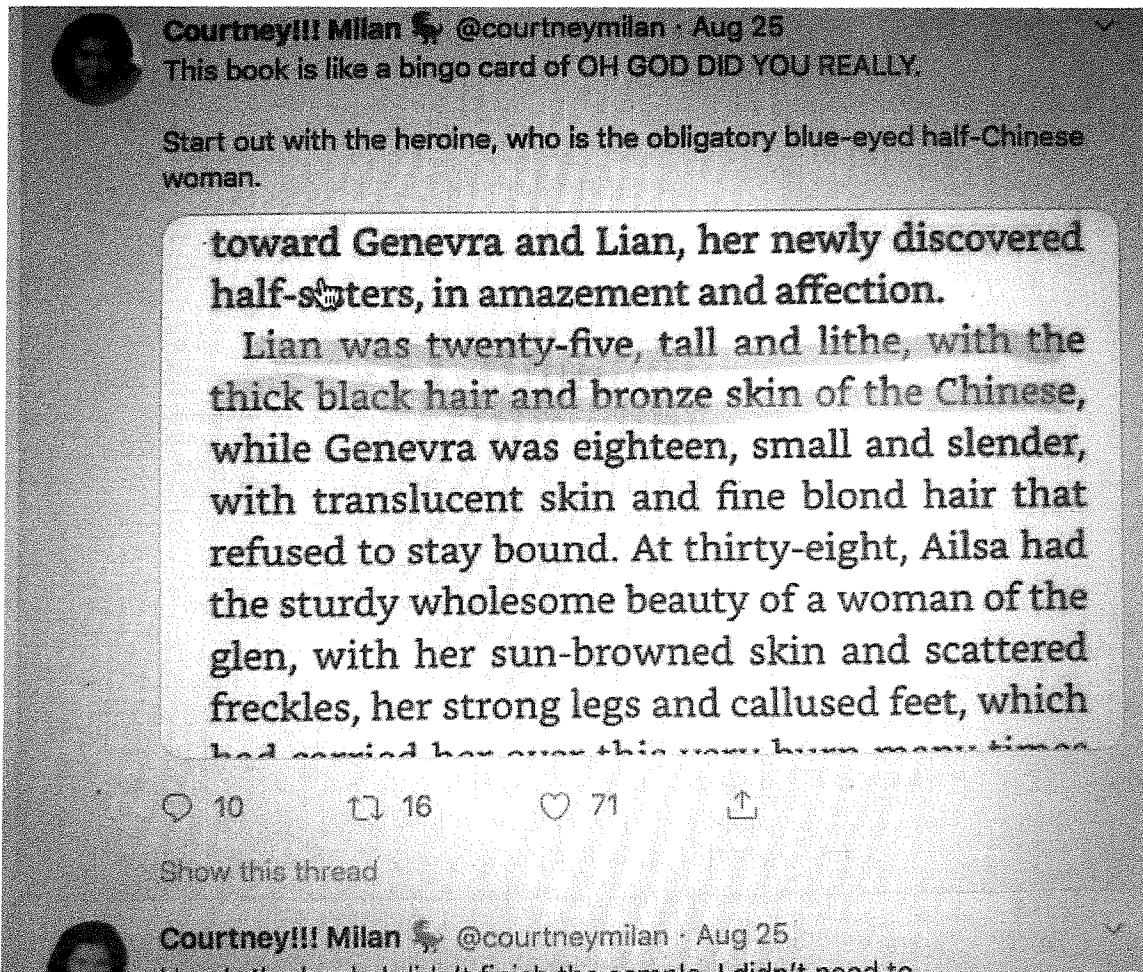
wtfknhell- @flutterfli007 · Aug 25

Replying to @courtneymilan

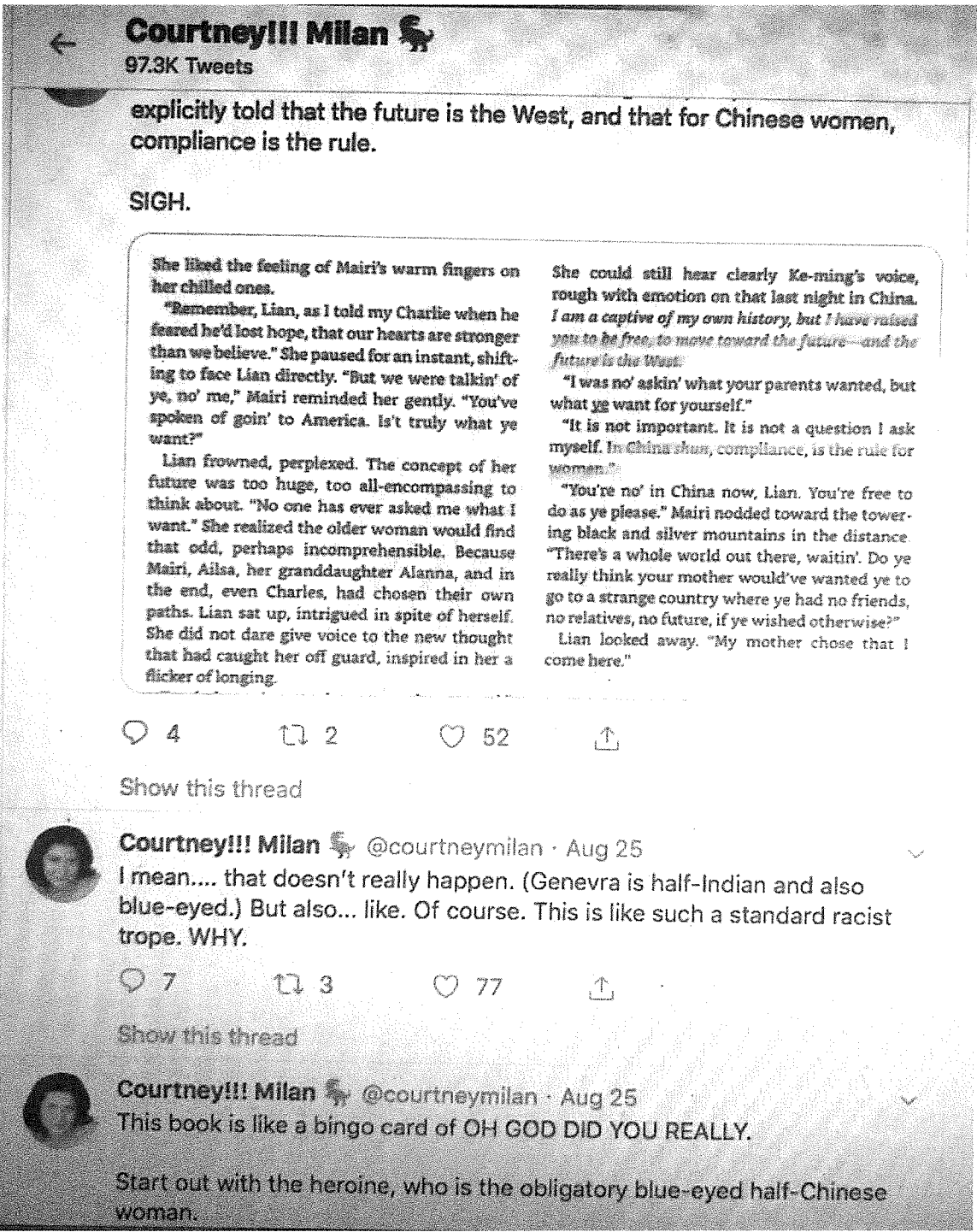
Yeahhhh. Anything with an 'exotic' lover is cringe worthy, especially in historical romance. Just keep it European please, thanks. Even then, the Spanish and Italian character tropes can be quite offensive.


1

I am not and never have been a racist. Rather, I am a scholar dedicated to factual history (though I admit to the genetic error of having a brown-eyed parent and a blue-eyed parent conceive a blue-eyed child. I did not learn of this error until years later, and my reasons for the blue eyes have nothing to do with race [[see below]]). I earned a BA in English and history (Phi Beta Kappa, Magna Cum Laude) and a Masters in History (Suma Cum Laude) at the University of California, Riverside. My major fields of study were the British Empire and China. To sum up a number of the accusations Ms. Milan makes against me, I studied Chinese history intensely for over seven years. Its culture was indeed oppressive and restrictive to women (bound feet being the most obvious example and, thankfully, the only one of its kind). To say that women were not oppressed in China in the 1870s is absurd, though, as in any culture, exceptional women often rose to prominence and great power throughout the Chinese dynasties. *All* women were oppressed in the 1870s; across Europe, Asia, the Turkish Empire, in America, and most assuredly in England.



It is also historical fact that a group of Chinese businessmen, educated women and young students came to believe that the future was in the West for reasons too numerous to mention. None of this comes from a clash of races or racist perspectives. It comes from historical research. I feel a deep connection with China, as did my mother. I have always marveled at how far advanced their culture was intellectually, creatively, and scientifically long before the rest of the world had barely begun to open its eyes.



Courtney!!! Milan 
97.3K Tweets

explicitly told that the future is the West, and that for Chinese women, compliance is the rule.

SIGH.

She liked the feeling of Mairi's warm fingers on her chilled ones.

"Remember, Lian, as I told my Charlie when he feared he'd lost hope, that our hearts are stronger than we believe." She paused for an instant, shifting to face Lian directly. "But we were talkin' of ye, no' me," Mairi reminded her gently. "You've spoken of goin' to America. Is't truly what ye want?"

Lian frowned, perplexed. The concept of her future was too huge, too all-encompassing to think about. "No one has ever asked me what I want." She realized the older woman would find that odd, perhaps incomprehensible. Because Mairi, Ailsa, her granddaughter Alanna, and in the end, even Charles, had chosen their own paths. Lian sat up, intrigued in spite of herself. She did not dare give voice to the new thought that had caught her off guard, inspired in her a flicker of longing.

She could still hear clearly Ke-ming's voice, rough with emotion on that last night in China. *I am a captive of my own history, but I have raised you to be free, to move toward the future—and the future is the West.*

"I was no' askin' what your parents wanted, but what ye want for yourself."

"It is not important. It is not a question I ask myself. In China *shun*, compliance, is the rule for women."

"You're no' in China now, Lian. You're free to do as ye please." Mairi nodded toward the towering black and silver mountains in the distance. "There's a whole world out there, waitin'. Do ye really think your mother would've wanted ye to go to a strange country where ye had no friends, no relatives, no future, if ye wished otherwise?"

Lian looked away. "My mother chose that I come here."

4 replies 2 retweets 52 likes

Show this thread



Courtney!!! Milan  @courtneymilan · Aug 25

I mean.... that doesn't really happen. (Genevra is half-Indian and also blue-eyed.) But also... like. Of course. This is like such a standard racist trope. WHY.

7 replies 3 retweets 77 likes

Show this thread



Courtney!!! Milan  @courtneymilan · Aug 25

This book is like a bingo card of OH GOD DID YOU REALLY.

Start out with the heroine, who is the obligatory blue-eyed half-Chinese woman.

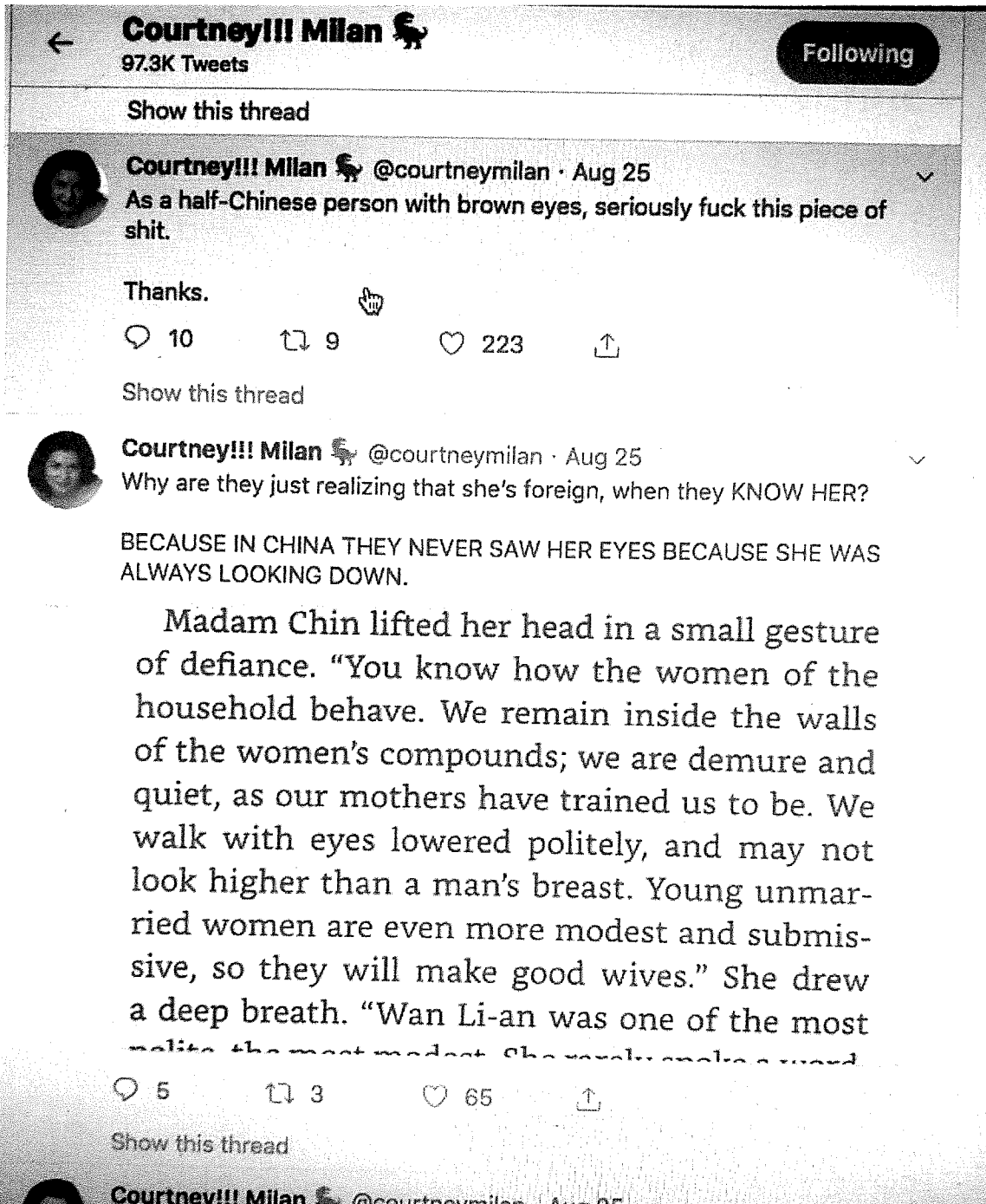
[Genevra has two blue-eyed British parents.]

The RWA Member Code of Ethics serves as a code of professional conduct for RWA members. It is designed to cause RWA members to exhibit integrity, honesty, and other good professional practices, thereby enhancing the romance writing profession.

Formal Complaint: Part 2

Ms. Milan exhibits none of this professional conduct, nor does she seem interested in integrity, honesty and other good professional practices. By calling out authors, editors, and publishers on her twitter account, and then cursing at them, name-calling and attempting to destroy their reputations (including Sue Grimshaw's, Suzan Tisdale's, Suzan Tisdale's authors at Glenfinnan, as well as mine, she behaves in a way injurious to the RWA and the writing profession in general. These attacks on me resulted in my losing a three-book contract with a publisher whom I cannot name because they fear having their own name linked to Ms. Milan's. Many writers share this fear.

I want to explain the blue eyes Ms. Milan is so fixated on. Lian is blue-eyed because of a theme I used throughout the book (a trilogy, to be more accurate) in which the father of the three girls mentioned represents the British Empire as a whole. He is charming, attractive, thinks he means well, but leaves disaster in his wake. All three of his daughters are "marked" by his blue eyes, and to Lian, those eyes are a curse. They are not intended to indicate that the West is better than the East, but rather, the reverse. In fact, they are a metaphorical trope, not a racist one.

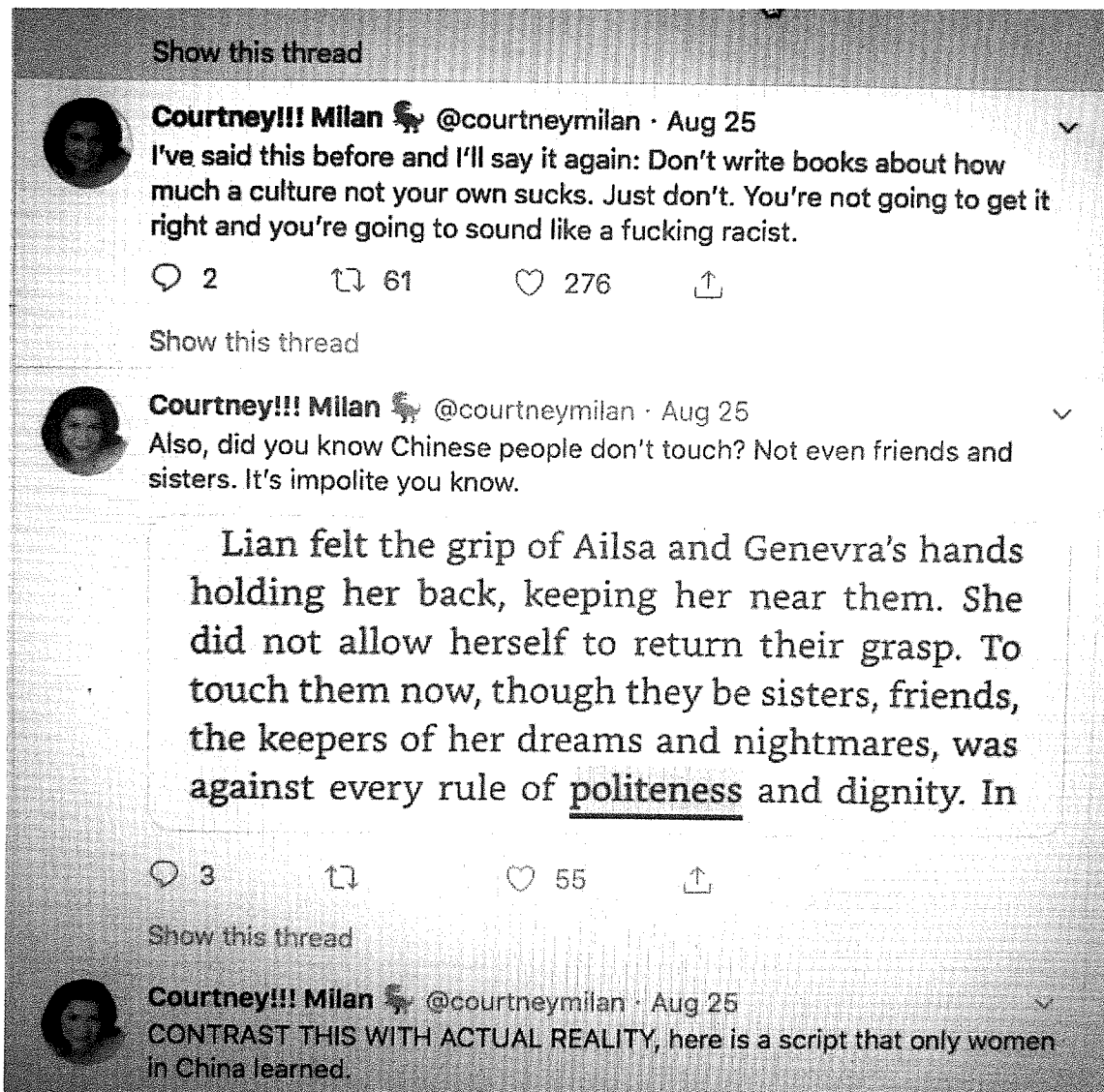


[Lian is always looking down in order to protect herself by hiding her eyes.]

RWA members support the preservation of authorial and intellectual property rights. This is one of the RWA goals, and yet, Ms. Milan does not seem to care about the intellectual property rights of others at all. If she did, she would not quote large passages, for the single purpose of obliterating them with her cruel assaults on both the words and the author. RWA members strive to treat fellow members, RWA staff, and others with respect. Are these tweets respectful in any way? RWA members observe

and adhere to all of RWA's Bylaws, policies and other rules. Ms. Milan doesn't seem to feel it necessary to follow even the broadest statements of intent, descriptions, rules and policies of the RWA. She is therefore behaving in direct opposition to the best purposes of the RWA, no matter the cause she is supporting.

Ms. Milan seems to be searching for victims to cyber-bully, as if that helps to further her crusade to lift up and bring attention to the talents and virtues of People of Color. It doesn't. You do not bring a diverse group together by casting people out and putting them down; you bring a diverse group together by making it all-inclusive, by embracing everyone.



- RWA members strive for excellence and integrity in the profession of romance writing.

She speaks without authority, without thought, without actually *reading*, her only goal to tear down those with whom she does not agree. For example, in this tweet, she states that Chinese people don't touch, and then quotes a passage in which Lian points out that very thing. But Ms. Milan chooses to interpret it in reverse.

Worse than that, she violates the RWA Code of Ethics 6.1 (and its human behavior equivalent), which states: In order to create a safe and respectful environment, invidious discrimination is prohibited in RWA.

Ms. Milan is demanding that I not write about cultures other than my own, which is clear discrimination, and she is doing it with vitriol, while cyber-bullying—against which laws have been passed at several state and local levels. Once again she is assuming that my portrayal of China is entirely negative, which is not the case. I refer you back to my study of history. I portray what was happening in Scotland, London, India and China—the good and the bad. The British come off particularly poorly. But she doesn't bother to learn that. She doesn't care.

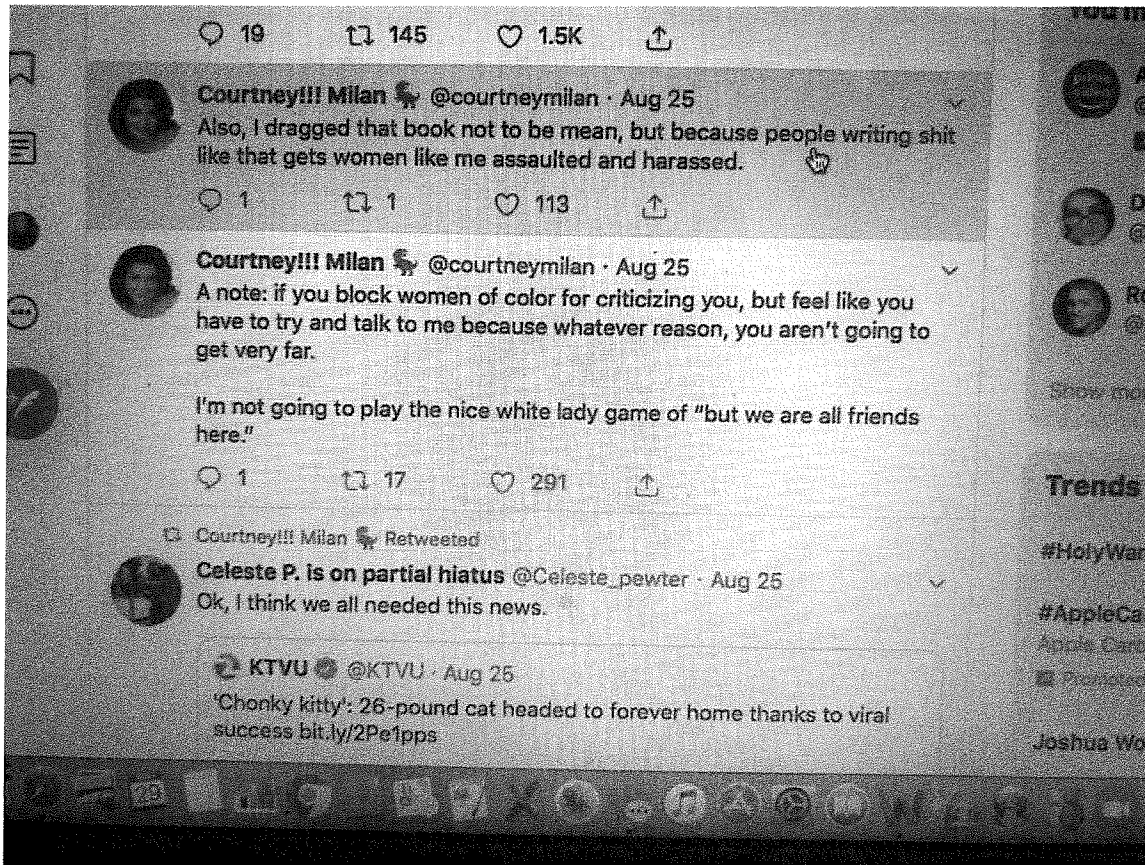
She is telling me, and through me, all writers, that 1) we can only write about our own races and, 2) if we do write about another culture, we must only record the good and happy things therein. That is not only discrimination, it is censorship, neither of which is part of the RWA's stated goals—or any good writer's goals. We seek a free exchange of ideas, to encourage new ideas not by suppressing the old, but by expressing both openly—especially when the new are expressed so viciously. This is the equivalent of cyber-bookburning.

She has, without question violated RWA's social media policy (15.9.4.1).

RWA Directors, chapter officers, committee members and task force members should understand that by virtue of their leadership positions, their communications might be perceived by third parties as being made on behalf of RWA. While RWA embraces freedom of communication, that freedom must be balanced against one's duties to RWA.



It seems that for her, innumerable things reinforce racist tropes. In addition to encouraging authors of color, holding them up as examples of success, she is searching with great energy for white writers to destroy with her rage, her disgust and her foul language.



This final Tweet leaves me speechless. Almost. Ms. Milan is responding to a request from Suzan Tisdale to sit down and talk the situation over: the tossing about of the word racist and applying it to Sue Grimshaw, Suzan Tisdale, Suzan Tisdale's authors at Glenfinnan Publishing, and Glenfinnan Publishing itself, in addition to me. Ms. Milan's response, as you can see here, is: "I'm not going to play the nice white lady game of "but we are all friends here." And then: 'A note: If you block women of color for criticizing you, but feel like you have to try and talk to me because whatever reason, you aren't going to get very far.' [a note from me: Suzan Tisdale never blocked a single person.] And finally, 'I dragged that book not to be mean, but because people writing shit like that gets women like me assaulted and harassed.'

Really? A book written in 1996? This edges very close to libel. And how, I would like to know, does one follow naturally upon the other? My book has no male characters who attack the female characters. I am appalled by rape and never use it in my books. Is she honestly saying that a fictional book describing Chinese society in the 1870s would inspire a contemporary man to assault her (as if a contemporary man would even read this particular book)? Or anyone? When no one assaults anyone in the entire book? I cannot believe she has taken her hatred and maliciousness this far. And yet I can. It seems Courtney Milan has no boundaries. She cannot be allowed to hold a position of authority, or to use her voice to urge others to follow her lead. Below I have listed just a few of the specific numbers of the code of ethics she has violated. I believe I have

pointed out how many rules and beliefs of the RWA she has ignored or outright destroyed.

3. Unauthorized use of another member's intellectual property, including but not limited to such other member's name, logo, trademarks or service marks, and/or copyrighted information.
6. Repeatedly or intentionally engaging in conduct injurious to RWA or its purposes.
7. Repeatedly or intentionally engaging in any other acts of a violent, harassing (as defined in Section 16.10.2.1.) or intimidating conduct that objectively threaten a member's career, reputation, safety or wellbeing.
12. A violation of the anti-discrimination policy as set out in Section 6.1.

Thank you for your attention. I know this was a long letter, but I feel that all the points are essential to my position.

Kathryn Lynn Davis