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No Regrets

Jenna Byrnes

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No Regrets

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Book Blurb

Denise Crawford attends her twenty-year class reunion in hopes of rekindling old friendships but truthfully, has one thing in mind. *Finding out if the most popular guy in school is still as hot -- and single, as she's been told.* It's been a long, dry spell since her husband, Michael, came out of the closet and announced he was gay. With a job and two kids, Denise has little time to meet people, and is interested in touching base with someone she's already met.

Ignoring the chuckles and murmured whisperings about Michael, Denise wants to find the object of her desire and enjoy a steamy, one night stand. But will Jerrod Stone be the man she remembers? Will he remember her at all? And who else is sporting fond memories of those long-ago days?

No Regrets

Jenna Byrnes

Denise Crawford's breath caught as she entered the ballroom of the Realms Hotel. Streamers and balloons in the Grover Cleveland High School colors of green and gold decorated the room, but the place looked stylish, not garish or gaudy. Someone had shelled out big bucks for this reunion.

Collages of pictures graced walls everywhere. Upon closer inspection, Denise saw some of the photos were recent, and some were from their school days, twenty years ago.

Twenty years. Had it really been that long since she'd walked the halls of GCHS? She glanced down and smoothed her straight, black skirt. Of course it had. She and Michael had started dating when they were juniors. They'd gone to the same college and gotten married the year before graduation. Four years of college were followed by two years as a legal assistant with the firm of Smith and Barney. She quit working when their first child arrived, and spent twelve years as a stay-at-home-mom. Denise loved every minute of those days. Raising Conner and Renee proved to be the most fulfilling part of her life. In fact, she often felt she had a fairytale existence, before Michael pulled the rug out from under her feet. When he announced he'd "found himself" and came out of the closet as gay, she felt more shocked and hurt than she'd ever imagined.

The last two years, precipitated by stages of anger and denial, progressed into something much easier to live with. Denise went back to university and now worked as a paralegal, on her way to becoming a lawyer. Her kids were thriving in school and had adjusted well to their father's new lifestyle. They saw him twice a week and every other weekend, without fail. Once Denise got used to the fact Lucas was now Michael's significant other, the three of them got along just fine.

She glanced around the crowded room, wondering if Michael and Lucas were there yet. She knew they were coming; they'd discussed the arrangements and decided to leave Conner and Renee with grandparents for the weekend. Lucas had been kind enough to offer not to come if his being there would upset Denise. She wasn't exactly looking forward to the questions and looks they were sure to receive,

but the reactions weren't her problem. Her therapist assured her she was a smart, attractive, and appealing woman. If the only man she'd ever been with turned out to be gay, it should be no reflection on her.

With two teenagers, a job, and school, she hadn't found much time for dating. Meeting people was the hardest part. When she received the reunion invitation, she thought about some of the people she'd already met. One in particular came to mind: Jerrod Stone. Handsome in high school, according to Denise's friend, Belinda, Jerrod looked even hotter now. He worked as a TV newscaster in New York, but planned to come back to Chicago for the reunion. And the best part? He was single. Exactly what she had in mind. She might not forge a lasting relationship over the weekend, but even a fling would be better than the dry spell she'd been suffering. She smiled and stepped up to the registration table.

"Denise Crawford," she told the matronly-looking woman behind the table. "Er, Lipton. I used to be Denise Lipton."

"Denise Lipton!" The woman squealed—literally, squealed. "How great to see you. I'm Connie Turner née Roberts."

Née . . . who says that? Denise studied the silver-haired, double-chinned woman for a moment before her gaze found the nametag hanging from Connie's gold-sequined blouse. She scanned the identification, searching for proof that the lady who appeared to be about fifty was indeed the same age as her. Yup. Gulp. "Hello, Connie."

"How are you?" The woman scanned the table full of nametags and snagging one, handed it to Denise. Lowering her voice, she added in a conspiratorial tone, "We were all so sorry to hear about Michael."

Denise blinked, surprised. "What? He didn't die. In fact, he should be on your list. He'll be here tonight."

"Oh, I know. Michael Crawford plus one. Everyone is anxious to see if he'll really show up here with a man."

From her tone, the hostess might as well have said "alien" instead of "man." Denise frowned. "Of course he will, and why shouldn't he? Lots of people in our class were gay."

Lots might have been an exaggeration, but in a class of five hundred, Denise figured some of them would swing in that direction. Names escaped her, but she finally came up with one. "Will anyone think it's odd when John Marcus shows up with a man? I doubt it."

"Of course not." Connie backtracked. "It's just, after all that time, we were surprised to find out about Michael. The revelation must have been really shocking to you." Her eyes sparkled as she relished in the gossip. "I mean, I'm sure you regret the way things worked out."

Denise was surprised. Of all the emotions she'd experienced, regret had never been one of them. Her marriage to Michael had given her Conner and Renee, and even knowing how the relationship turned out, she never regretted marrying him. "No regrets," she told Connie with stone-cold seriousness. She bit her tongue to hold back another comment. Several thoughts flitted through her mind, but she was saved from herself when another classmate approached the table to check in.

She slipped away as Connie turned her attention to the newcomer. Denise looked at her nametag and saw her senior picture along with the name "Denise Crawford née Lipton." She winced, but clipped the thing to her silky black and gold blouse anyway. The pictures were a good idea. She hadn't looked that closely at Connie's. She'd have to try harder to read the nametags without squinting.

Will I recognize anybody? She glanced around, fervently wishing Belinda hadn't chosen a business trip to Brazil over the reunion. They'd been friends since third grade, and Denise relied on the thrice-divorced woman more than ever since she'd joined the "first wives club." But she'd chosen to attend this event, knowing full well she'd be on her own. She never imagined her first conversation would have her defending Michael's sexuality, but she felt glad she had. It'd been the right thing to do.

The next right thing to do? Finding Jerrod Stone. Damn, I hope I recognize him. She strolled through the ballroom, scanning faces for anyone familiar. At the refreshment table, she picked up a glass of bright red punch and downed it out of nervousness.

Her thirst quenched, she continued to travel amidst the guests.

"Finally, a friendly face." A woman spoke from behind her.

Denise turned around and smiled when she recognized her old chemistry lab partner, Shelly Garth. "Shelly!" She hugged the pretty, trim blonde. "It's nice to see someone I don't need a nametag to place."

They pulled apart and she glanced at Shelly's tag surreptitiously. If she didn't want people commenting on her marital status, she shouldn't remark on theirs. But she did wonder if her old friend had ever married.

Shelly must have noticed the peek. "Yes, it's still Garth. You probably heard I got married." She smiled. "I did. Twice. The first guy turned out to be such a jerk; I took my maiden name back. The second guy's name was Rosenpfeffer. You might remember, my given name is Rochelle. Not going there. I kept my name. Good thing. It didn't last, anyway."

Denise laughed. "I'm sorry, Shelly. It's not funny. I'm just picturing the signature, Rochelle Rosenpfeffer."

The blonde rolled her clear green eyes. "He wanted a whole gaggle of kids, too. I couldn't imagine saddling anyone with that name, but mainly, with him as a father. He was nutty."

"I'm sorry." Denise quelled her last chuckle. "At least you have a better defined list of what you want when it comes to picking number three."

"I'm in no hurry to get married again. I'm taking life easy, having fun. I date a little, and I love my job. I'm a booking agent with Sunshine and Blue Skies Travel Agency. How about you?"

Denise filled Shelly in on her career, pleased the woman either didn't know about Michael or was tactful enough not to mention him. She'd just finished speaking when a tall man, at least six-three, stepped behind Shelly with two glasses of the fruity red punch.

"Pardon the interruption." He handed a glass to Shelly.

"Hey, Tyler. Thanks." Shelly accepted the glass and nodded at Denise. "This is my former chem lab partner, Denise. Denise, this is Tyler."

Denise tried not to stare. Her old friend must indeed be having fun if her date tonight, Tyler, was any indication. His dark eyes sparkled with an ornery gleam.

Unkempt brown hair curled around his collar in little-boy fashion, but nothing else said "boy" about the man. Even through his stylish blue suit, Denise could spot muscles in all the right places. "Pleased to meet you."

He smiled. "You, too, Denise. Here, have some punch."

"Thanks." Their fingers touched as she accepted the glass and a tiny shock sizzled through her. *Snap out of it!* Tyler was there with Shelly. Denise would not be one of *those* women. She'd find her own date. "I, uh" — she turned back to Shelly — "wonder if Jerrod Stone is here yet?"

From the corner of her eye, she saw Tyler shift from one foot to the other, apparently irritated. What's up with that? Did he think he could hit on her, right there in front of his date? Not going to happen.

"Oh, Jerrod Stone." Shelly smiled. "I haven't thought of him in ages. He was such a jock. Never gave a second glance to a nerd like me."

"I hear he works on TV now." Denise gazed around the room, then remembered her manners. "You were not a nerd."

"Let's put it this way, I liked chemistry. Jerrod Stone liked blondes with less in their heads and more in their sweaters."

Denise realized Shelly was correct. Maybe Jerrod wouldn't be the perfect guy she'd twisted her memory into. Oh, for fuck's sake! She wasn't looking for husband number two, just a hot hook up for the weekend.

"Didn't think you were into jocks," Tyler said to Shelly, then focused his gaze on Denise.

"I'm not." Shelly sipped her punch. "But Denise attracted a wider audience than me. I mean, look at her. Thick, gorgeous brown hair, spotless complexion, a killer smile, and that figure! Sheesh. Please tell me you don't have kids."

Denise's face grew hot and she smiled. "Two teenagers. Can you believe it?"

"I can't." Tyler's gaze roamed over her.

She shifted uncomfortably. Could Shelly see him ogling her? The woman was being so sweet. Denise wanted to move on before she unintentionally caused any trouble for the couple. "Hey, it was really great seeing you. I'm going to wander around a bit."

Tyler ran the back of one finger over her arm. "Save me a dance?"

Denise forced her jaw to remain closed. "I don't think so. I'm sure your date would love to dance with you."

He started to speak, but she hurried off, amazed at his chutzpah.

She mingled and encountered a number of familiar faces, stopping each time to make small talk. The people she used to think of as normal all seemed so phony now. Everyone acted deliriously happy, with great jobs and wonderful families. When she ran into Michael, it was a relief.

"Hey." She smiled at him genuinely. He looked great in black slacks and a grey cashmere sweater. His neatly trimmed black hair had the slightest touch of silver at the temples. Despite what they'd been through, she still thought he looked wonderful.

"Oh, hi." He fidgeted, glancing around. "Look, just so you know, Lucas is getting some drinks. He'll be back any minute."

She waved a hand. "I don't care. God, Michael, have you talked to anybody? Who are these people?"

He chuckled. "A group of really happy saps without problems, it would seem. I know people want to put their best face forward at events like this, but Christ! I just want to say, 'Damn, my retirement account took a hit last year. How about you?'"

She nodded. "You should. Oh, and just so you don't feel alone, I'll tell you my account tanked, too."

He rolled his eyes. "You think? Suppose that has anything to do with half of my account being your account?" He nudged her arm jovially.

"Oh, maybe." Denise felt comfortable for the first time that evening. She spotted Lucas approaching, and a twinge of jealousy struck her.

"Hey." The thin, handsome blond passed a clear drink to Michael. "Hello, Denise. Can I get you anything?"

She held up her glass, still half full. "Thanks anyway. Hi, Lucas." She gave him a resigned smile. He really was cute, and nice from what her children said. He and Michael made a handsome couple.

"You look great tonight." Lucas nodded at her and sipped his drink.

Michael quickly agreed. "Yes, you do. I'm sorry. I should have mentioned that earlier."

She waved a hand. "You're both just being kind. I probably look as pathetic as I feel. At least you know you'll be going home with someone tonight." She inspected each of their glasses closer. "Is that a real drink? Someone handed me this God-awful fruit punch." She tossed back the last of the liquid in her glass.

"They have a bar." Lucas nodded toward her drink. "What would you like? I could get—"

Michael raised a hand. "I'm not sure you should be drinking in this state of mind. I've never heard you describe yourself as 'pathetic' before."

"I didn't really mean that. It's just—everyone here paints such rosy pictures of their lives. Don't get me wrong, my life is pretty good. But we all know it ain't all sunshine and roses. Hell, my old chem lab partner even works at a place called fucking Blue Skies and Daisies Travel Agency." Her mind grew fuzzy and she blinked. "Or something like that."

Michael removed the punch glass from her hand and sniffed it. "Grain alcohol. Good lord, Denise. How many of these have you had?"

"Only a couple. I'm fine." Her voice sounded slurred, but she felt okay. Good, even. She smiled.

"Probably should tread lightly around the punch," Michael advised.

"You may be right." She brushed a strand of hair from her face and gawked when she spotted the person she'd been looking for all evening. "Hey! There he is! Jerrod Stone."

The men turned to look.

"Oh, he's nice," Lucas agreed. "An old friend?"

Denise hiked up the sides of her bra so she showed more cleavage. "Let's say a new friend. For tonight, anyway."

Michael eyed her skeptically. "Really, Denise? Are you sure about this?"

"Take it easy, Michael. I'm not moving in with the guy. I just want to say hello." She nudged him with an elbow as she passed, and smiled back at Lucas. "See you, boys."

"Have fun," Lucas called after her.

Denise could hear Michael reprimand his lover, and she chuckled. She approached two men talking and laughing, her eyes on Jerrod the whole time.

His teeth gleamed pearly white when he smiled. Wavy black hair, trimmed perfectly just above his ears, showed not one speck of grey. He wore an expensive-looking sport jacket over a neat, black striped shirt and tailored dark slacks, and he wore the monochrome outfit well. The stylish getup had him looking hot and sexy, like a TV star rather than a newscaster. He also looked young, but Denise knew him to be her age.

Plastic surgery? Whatever, the man obviously cared about his appearance and did a fine job keeping himself up. Self-consciously, Denise sucked in her gut and stepped forward. "Hello."

Jerrod's companion, shorter and with slightly less hair than her target, aimed a friendly smile at her and reached for her hand. "Denise Lipton. As I live and breathe. How are you?"

She shook his hand, trying to focus on his nametag.

He must have seen her less than subtle glance, and added, "John Sturges. You probably don't remember me. We were in a play in eighth grade together."

"Paul Bunyan and his blue ox." She grinned and they said the ox's name together, "Babe."

John laughed. "You remember! I can't believe it."

"It was a pretty big deal back then. I worried I'd forget my lines in front of everybody."

"If I recall, you did beautifully." He squeezed her hand before letting go.

Denise pulled away. One of the other things she remembered about the play was John trying to kiss her backstage when the last act ended. His breath smelled like corn chips and she hadn't been interested, then or now. "It was nice to see you again." She focused her attention on Jerrod.

A plastic smile lined his face, but his eyes were vacant. He held out a hand politely. "I don't believe we've met. I'm Jerrod Stone. Denise Lipton, you said?"

She tried to tamp down her disappointment. "Crawford, now. We had some classes together. Do you recall English Literature, with Miss Bloodworth?"

He scowled. "Old Bloodsucker? Hell, yeah. She was one tough old bird, the only teacher who wouldn't give a break to the basketball team. She made us pass the tests."

Denise couldn't help but chuckle, and John joined her.

"What an old bat!" John teased.

"Awful." Jerrod deadpanned.

She realized he was joking, and smiled. "Poor thing!"

"I barely squeaked by. I had to cheat off some brainy brunette sitting next to me in class."

She stared at him for a moment, then blinked, waiting for him to catch on.

"Oh, my God!" A wide grin split Jerrod's face. "Was that you?"

Feeling a little gutsier, Denise poked his chest lightly. "I studied Poe for two weeks before that test."

Jerrod caught her hand in his. "Then I truly do owe you. How about a dance? We can discuss Poe in all his glory, see how much I remember."

She smiled. "I'd love to."

As he led her to the dance floor, she spoke to John once again. "Lovely to see you."

"You, too," he replied, his eyes looking slightly sad.

The music playing had a slow beat, and Jerrod pulled her into his arms. "I'm afraid I dashed dear old Paul Bunyan's hopes back there."

Denise snuggled next to his hard body. "He's a nice guy, but thanks. I've got a few memories there, and I'd rather not go backward tonight. I prefer to move forward." She shifted one thigh to rest between his legs. To her pleasure, an erection greeted her.

"Mmm," Jerrod held her waist tighter. "Me too. And I don't remember a thing about Poe. That was a ruse to get you over here, into my arms."

"Good." Denise rested her head on his chest. "English Literature is the last thing I want to talk about."

He brushed the hair off her neck and planted a light kiss there. "Why talk at all?"

A pleasant jolt of electricity zipped down her spine and tingled all the way to her pussy. *Jerrod's as horny as I am.* Maybe they'd both get a little relief tonight. If only . . . she hated to spoil the magic, but had to ask. "You're not married or seeing someone, I hope."

"Nope. I've been hitched a couple times, but it didn't work out for one reason or another. Right now I'm free as a bird."

"Good." Relief washed through her, along with more sparks of sexual energy. *This is exactly what I'm looking for.*

He continued to nibble her neck and murmured, "What about you, Denise Crawford née Lipton? Is there a Mr. Crawford who might suddenly appear and deck me if he catches us with our pants down?"

She chuckled and bent her head to give him better access. "It doesn't sound like that would stop you."

Jerrod shrugged and traced a wet path to her earlobe. "Not sure it would. I just like to know what I'm getting into."

"No worries. Michael and I have been divorced for two years. Two long years." She bucked her hips against his, enjoying the hard ridge of his erection.

He froze, pulled back and looked closely at her. "Michael? You married Michael Crawford?"

"Yes," she answered impatiently. "I thought we'd agreed not to talk." Michael was the last thing she cared to discuss at the moment, but perhaps she owed Jerrod that much. "We got hitched in college. The marriage lasted fifteen years."

Low laughter rumbled from his chest. "And then he realized he preferred 'outies' over 'innies'? Oh, my God, you poor woman. I can't imagine how that made you feel!"

His laughter gave her a pretty good indication of how *he* felt.

She chose her words carefully. "Things were tough at the time, but everything has worked out. We have two wonderful kids together — "

"Kids? Ugh." Jerrod shuddered. "Never saw the need for that, myself. Whiny, needy, and they're always spilling stuff. I live in a very expensive penthouse in TriBeCa. No kids or pets allowed." He resumed sucking a spot at the base of her neck.

Denise squirmed, partially from arousal and the rest from a nugget of discomfort forming from Jerrod's words. This man obviously wasn't someone she could relate to on any basis other than sex. TriBeCa ranked as one of the most expensive neighborhoods in New York City. The "no kids" comment stung, but she tried to remain level headed, even through the grain alcohol fog.

I didn't come here looking for a husband. She was hot to trot and interested in a one-night rendezvous. Jerrod seemed to fill the bill perfectly. Maybe it was time to suggest going to her room. "Jerrod, I—"

One of his hands slid inside her blouse, cupped her breast, and squeezed.

She muffled her surprise and squirmed again, this time from pure lust. "I, uh, have a room upstairs. Would you like to go there?"

He glanced around quickly. "A room? And leave the party? I'd rather stay down here." He pinched her nipple, then pulled his hand from her shirt, grabbing her fingers. "Come with me. I know just the place."

"What? Where?" Denise let him drag her off the dance floor and through the crowded room. Just past the concession table, she spotted a storage closet.

Jerrod looked around, then drew her inside the small, dark room. "Here we go." He smiled and pulled her ass close to him again.

Denise tried to get her bearings in the dusty, dim space. She made out a row of boxes on one wall and a large bunch of unused tables, folded and stacked, along the other. "This is horrible."

"This is perfect." Jerrod shoved her up against the pile of tables. "We can still hear the music, get our groove on, and be back at the party before anyone realizes we're gone."

"Jerrod" She pressed her hands against his chest. The one-night fling had been her idea, but she'd envisioned champagne and a bathtub, maybe some roses and a large, welcoming bed. Not a stack of cold, brown tables. "This is ridiculous."

"Come 'ere, baby." He tried to yank her skirt up and her seamed, black stockings down.

"What are you doing?" She struggled against him. "This is insane!"

"I am insane" — he murmured into her ear — "with lust. I'm going to fuck you, Diane, better and harder than you've ever been fucked before." He reached between them and fumbled with his zipper.

Her alcohol buzz had worn off, and Denise was firmly in control of her senses. Pushing hard against his chest, she shoved Jerrod away and hurried to fix her clothing. "It's Denise, you jackass. The least you could do, and I mean the very least, is to get my name right."

Jerrod got his footing and stood, surprise on his face. "I said Denise! Maybe you should check your hearing."

She frowned. "My hearing is perfect. It's my judgment that needs checked. I can't believe you thought we were going to do anything in here."

He straightened his trousers. "I see now why Crawford left you. Frigid bitch."

"Hey!" Denise bristled under his words. "I suggested we go to my room. I was all prepared to spend the night with you. I wasn't prepared for a five minute quickie in a closet."

His handsome face curled into an ugly scowl. "Five minutes was probably more than you deserved, cock tease." He made a move to shove her.

Denise raised her hands in self-defense, and when Jerrod ducked his head, she grasped a handful of hair. To her shock and horror, when he straightened, the hair stayed in her hand.

"Oh my God!" She squealed, dropping the black pelt.

Jerrod's eyes widened and he scrambled for the hairpiece. He slapped it back on his head, but the image of his balding pate covered with toupee tape was one she'd never forget.

He replaced the wig and shook a finger at her. "My secret better not leave this room."

She forced down her amusement and nodded. "Nothing that happened here leaves this room. Agreed?"

"Agreed." With one last, angry scowl, he peered out of the closet.

When the coast was clear, Denise followed without another word. Jerrod disappeared into a men's room, and she went in search of more red punch to drown her sorrows.

The fruity brew tasted as bad as before, so she set the glass aside. The night was still young, but Denise felt exhausted. She didn't want to make small talk with anyone new and did not want to run into Michael again and have to explain anything. She smoothed her skirt and headed for the lobby and the elevator to her room.

"Hey!" Shelly Garth approached her. "Having fun?"

"Not really," Denise admitted. "I was thinking of calling it a night."

Shelly nodded sadly. "Everyone has changed, haven't they? No one seems genuine anymore. I'm a bit disappointed myself."

Denise looked around. "Where's your date? I wouldn't think you'd be having a lousy time with him on your arm."

"My date?" She blinked. "Oh, you mean Tyler? He's not my date, Denise. He's my brother. You remember him, don't you? When you used to come to my house and do homework, we always had to kick him out of the basement family room because he was so annoying."

"Your brother? Tyler?" Denise remembered visiting Shelly's home, but her brother had been an incorrigible little kid who hung around and pestered them. "But . . . he was so much younger!"

Shelly smiled. "Only five years. He grew up pretty good, didn't he? Dang kid had a crush on you from the first day you met. I found out later that's why he hung around all the time." She appeared to sigh at the memory. "Broke his heart when you started going steady with Michael. Not sure he ever got over it."

"You're joking." Denise couldn't believe her ears. A person she barely knew existed had a crush on her. Suddenly, the image of her and Jerrod returned to her mind and she felt like an idiot. Jerrod had barely known she existed, too. She'd flung herself at him like a cheap hooker. Thank heavens nothing had happened.

"Well" Shelly smiled. "I guess he got over you. He lived with the same girl through college. They finally broke up about a year ago. He was excited when he heard you were going to be here tonight, though. Asked me to bring him along."

"Really?" Denise glanced around. "Where is he?"

Shelly shrugged. "He left. We saw you dancing with Jerrod Stone and figured that was it. We live nearby so we didn't get rooms. He's probably home now."

Another round of disappointment sank in Denise's chest like a rock. "That's too bad."

"How'd it go with Jerrod?" Shelly's eyes sparkled.

Denise thought about what she could say, then simply smiled. "He's a nice man, but he lives in New York, and he's not fond of kids. No point in starting anything that can't go anywhere."

"True." Shelly nodded. "I was just about to get another drink. Join me?"

"I don't think so. It's been a full night. I think I'll head back to my room. It was great seeing you, though, Shelly."

"Let's keep in touch. Sunshine and Blue Skies Travel Agency, okay?"

"You bet." Denise gave her a quick hug, then headed out of the ballroom. She spotted Michael and Lucas chatting with another couple, and before she could look away, Michael noticed her. He raised a hand and gave her a small wave.

Denise plastered a smile on her face and waved back before she slipped out. She'd explain things to Michael the next time she saw him. Tonight, she just wanted to get back to her room.

The lobby of the grand hotel had an elaborate chandelier and she paused to look at it before reaching the elevators. Light reflected in different colors from the sparkling glass, and it mesmerized her.

"Pretty, isn't it?" Someone said from behind her left shoulder.

She looked around and spotted Tyler Garth standing there. "Yes, it's lovely."

"Not as lovely as you are tonight," he countered.

She smiled. "What are you doing here? Shelly said you left."

"I did. I walked around outside for half an hour, but just couldn't seem to get in my car. I thought I'd give it one more shot—see if you and Jerrod Stone were still together, or see if luck finally shined my way."

"I don't know about luck, Tyler. I'm not feeling like much of a catch, just now. You see, I haven't dated anyone in two years, and I had it in my mind Jerrod was the one who could break my dry spell. I'm not proud of how I practically threw myself at him. His idea of romance and mine were vastly different. When we ended up in a storage closet, I knew I couldn't go through with anything."

Tyler winced. "Please don't tell me — "

"Nothing happened." Denise interjected quickly. "Let's just say we both came to our senses, said farewell, and took leave of one another. I was just headed up to my room, tired and a little humiliated."

He tugged at his necktie and loosened it. "That sounds like just the place to be. What do you say we get a bottle of wine and go on up? We can talk and relax."

When Denise held up her hands he added, "No expectations, no strings. Believe me, I'd never do that to you. I'd just like to kick these rented shoes off and talk. Maybe get to know each other a little better."

She looked into his dark eyes and saw a familiar glimpse of the child she used to know. Denise shook her head. "I can't believe you're Shelly's little brother."

He stepped toward her, towering over her by a head. "Not so little anymore."

"Touché." A flicker of interest ignited in her chest, but the events of the evening left her wary. "I don't know, Tyler. What do you say we step into the bar and have a drink?"

"Away from prying eyes at the reunion." He nodded and smiled. "I'd like that. After you."

Denise walked past his extended hand and headed into the dimly lit bar just off the lobby. They found a table with a padded corner bench and both scooted in from opposite sides until their knees touched.

"What would you like?" His eyes twinkled.

Loaded question. She grinned and bit back her first response. "Um, let's see. Something to compliment that fruity red punch I drank earlier."

Tyler leaned his head in so their faces were inches apart. "I've always been partial to a Long Sloe Comfortable Screw."

Denise stared into his eyes, savoring their mutual attraction for a moment before pulling away. "Yeah, I bet you have. Personally, I prefer something light and cherry – what about a Singapore Sling?"

He nodded. "There's something sexy about a drink with a good head of foam." Tyler tore his eyes away from her with obvious reluctance when the waitress approached their table.

"Evening." The pretty, buxom brunette batted her lashes at him. "What can I get you?"

"Two Singapore Slings, please," he said politely before turning his attention back to Denise.

"Coming right up." The waitress made a note on her pad and returned to the bar.

"Wow." Denise smiled at him. "She was oozing something, and whatever it was, was aimed directly at you."

"Really?" He raised his eyebrows for a second, then shrugged. "I didn't notice. Guess I'm a bit preoccupied."

"Oh yeah?" She allowed him to pick up her hand and shivered as he traced each of her fingers with a delicate touch. "With what?"

His smooth fingertips danced up her forearm to the elbow and back. "At the risk of sounding like a kiss-ass, I'd have to say, without hesitation – you." He placed a warm kiss on the palm of her hand.

Tingles of desire zipped straight to her core, but Denise fought to maintain composure. "You talk a good game, Mr. Garth. But I've seen that look before. A quick roll in the hay will have you back noticing other fillies in no time."

The waitress reappeared, placing two red, frothy drinks in front of Tyler. "Two Slings. Can I bring you anything else, sugar?"

"No thanks, I'm good." Denise piped up.

Tyler muffled a chuckle as the woman's face reddened.

"I'll be back to check on you," she mumbled and hurried away.

"You are bad." There was no hiding his grin as he moved one drink in front of Denise.

"You said it." She tasted the foam on top and decided the cocktail fit her mood perfectly. Decadent.

He tasted his drink then set it aside. "You said something that I take issue with. I never professed to be after a quick roll in the hay. I believe that was your intent this evening."

A nugget of guilt welled in Denise's gut. "You're right. I've been honest with you up to now, so I might as well continue. I've been lonely since Michael left, and too damned busy to do much about it. For some reason, I thought hooking up with someone here might be easier than meeting up with a stranger. Five minutes with Jerrod Stone convinced me how wrong I was."

"Not easier?" Tyler touched her hand again.

Denise shook her head. "Not for me. I'm not that kind of a person. I'm afraid I came here tonight pretending to be someone I wasn't."

He chuckled. "If my sister's ranting was correct, you weren't the only one. Maybe class reunions bring out a different side in people – a side they wish they had."

"Maybe." She took one more sip of her drink then pushed it away. "This isn't really me, either. I'll drink a glass of white wine on occasion, or a cold beer at a ballgame."

Tyler shoved his glass away. "Thank God. Wine and beer I can handle."

Denise smiled. "So what do you say – shall we order that bottle of wine and take it up to my room? We can talk and get to know each other a bit." She reached under the table and rubbed her aching foot. "Kick out of these horrible shoes."

"I say *absolutely*. Let's go." He pulled her by the hand from the booth and they approached the waitress at the bar. Tyler requested a bottle of wine and paid their tab. Shifting the bottle under his arm, he glanced at the nametag attached to her blouse. "Ready, Denise Crawford née Lipton? Good God, who says née anymore? That totally blows me away."

She laughed and caught his fingers in hers. "Who knows? Come on, Tyler née Garth, let's get out of here." She led him to the elevators in the lobby and pushed the up button.

"Totally improper use of the term." He slipped one hand around her waist and as the door closed, pulled her close to him.

"Which is okay, because I'm being totally improper tonight." She kissed him, and their bodies pressed together. Denise felt his muscular chest and abs, but she didn't feel an erection until they'd kissed all the way to her floor. She believed he'd been prepared to go there just to talk and wasn't a horndog who'd jump on her at the first opportunity.

Tonight, the role of horndog is being played by Denise Crawford. The elevator door opened, and she dragged Tyler to her door, fumbled for the card key, and unlocked the door.

He rushed her in and shoved her against the door as he locked it, and set the wine bottle down. Through frantic kisses, he said, "I thought we agreed this wasn't why we came up here."

"We did." With her lips still pressed against his, the words came out muffled. "Ah, hell, what do we know? I want you, Tyler. No, this isn't normally how I act, and yes, I'm completely sober. Make love to me. Let me make love to you. I don't care which."

His smile was seductive as he backed away. "That would be fun, wouldn't it? But I think we should take things a little slower. You know what they say about anticipation; it's half the fun."

Denise frowned. "And it can drive you freaking crazy. So do you really want to talk?"

An expression of confusion crossed his face. "Um, I don't know. I honestly hadn't thought that far ahead." He grinned again. "And I really didn't think you'd give up so easily."

"Who says I gave up?" With a flick of her ankle, she tossed off one then the other black stiletto. She propped her foot on a nearby chair and slowly rolled a stocking down over her thigh, past her knee, until it was completely off.

"Oh, Jesus." Tyler folded his arms across his chest, watching with interest.

"Should I stop?" She batted her lashes.

"For heaven's sake, no, don't stop." He motioned with his hand for her to continue. "I'll just be over here, pinching myself to make sure this is real. My only concern is you'll regret it in the morning."

Denise shook her head. "No regrets. Look, Tyler. I'm not here to find a husband, or a life partner, or anything so serious. I thought we could have some fun, and whatever happens after that, well, it happens."

He moved closer to her. "You're right, let's don't talk just now." His fingers moved nimbly to unbutton her blouse and the small hooks on the back of her bra. "Let's make love to each other — on the bed, surrounded by fluffy pillows. Later, we can open that wine and maybe share a hot bubble bath."

Denise's pussy gushed. "God, yes. Bed, now. Please."

A chuckle rumbled through his chest as he finished undressing her and tossed back the covers. He laid her gently across the bed and stood over her as he tore his clothes off.

She licked her lips when his full, thick erection sprang from his shorts. He paused long enough to retrieve a condom from his wallet.

She smiled gratefully. "Thank you."

Tyler pushed her thighs apart and knelt on the bed between them, rolling the condom along his shaft. "Don't thank me yet. Let's see if I'm any good first." He kissed his way up her thigh, and, when his mouth reached her apex, he spread her sopping pussy lips with gentle fingers.

His warm breath on her most sensitive area made her shudder, and when his tongue flicked across her labia, she groaned. "You're good. No worries there."

After another low chuckle, he increased his speed, alternating fast licks with slow, succulent kisses to her clit and folds.

"Oh, God, Tyler. You're going to make me come."

"That's the idea, beautiful lady. Come in my mouth, so I can taste the full flavor of you."

His words sent her tumbling over the edge. A fast, sharp climax raced through her, all nerve endings tingling with an aliveness she hadn't felt in ages. "Yes!" she cried, shuddering through the glorious waves.

"Mmm." Tyler buried his face between her legs, shaking his head, licking and sucking as if to prolong her pleasure.

When Denise stopped quivering, she tugged first at his head then at his shoulders, urging him to bring his body higher. "I want you," she pleaded wantonly, ready for his thick cock to fill her.

He climbed over her and nudged the tip of his crown to her slit. "We'll do it fast, this first time, because we both want it. But next time, sweetheart, I get to take my time. I'm going to explore every inch of you with my hands and mouth."

"I'll let you." She grasped his ass cheeks and pulled him closer. "And I'll do the same to you, with pleasure. But right now, Jesus, Tyler. Fuck me."

He sank his shaft into her with one smooth stroke. He paused, seeming to savor the sensations as much as she did. "God, yes. Hot and tight."

"More, please." She barely got the words out on a whisper.

He needed no further encouragement. His thrusts slammed full and deep, and when he planted a knee into the mattress for better purchase, Denise came again.

She couldn't have quieted her moans had she wanted to. The feelings he elicited in her were the most amazing sensations she'd ever experienced. Waves of heat, wetness, pressure and delight filled her senses. Her climax lingered, and when it crested again, Tyler groaned.

"Coming."

Denise clutched his sweat-slicked back and rode the heights with him this time. His shudders thrilled her, and the warmth of him spilling into the latex in her pussy gave her a third jolt, the best orgasm yet.

When his limbs must have been as exhausted as hers, he rolled their bodies to the side, gently disengaging. He tossed the condom toward the bedside trash bin and drew her back to him. Tyler kissed her eyelids, her nose, and everywhere he could reach lying so close.

"My God." Her voice sounded raspy, even to her. "That was incredible."

"Oh, yeah." He sighed. "Incredible is putting it mildly. When my brain comes on again, I'll think of a better word."

Denise laughed. "You did all that amazing work without the use of your brain? What a guy you are!"

Tyler grinned. "I hoped you'd figure that out. Never thought it would happen this quickly, but I'm not complaining. Believe me; I'm happy as a clam."

She tilted her forehead to his chest. "I'm sorry, Tyler. I can't imagine what you must think of me. I acted like such a slut."

He kissed the top of her head. "Certainly not that you're a slut. More like a woman who knows what she wants and goes after it." He raised her face; their gazes locked. "Am I ever glad you did. Damn, the sex was fantastic. I loved every minute. The only thing that could make me unhappy now is if you continue the 'not looking for a partner' talk. I want to be with you, Denise. Long after the night has ended."

She smiled. "We have this room until noon tomorrow."

"We could move the party to my place after that. I live close by."

For the first time in an hour, the nugget of discomfort returned to Denise's chest. "So do I, but I have to pick up my kids from my parent's house. I've got two teenagers, Tyler."

His face brightened. "I love kids! Do they like baseball? I have season tickets to the Cubbies."

Relief took her breath for a long, thoughtful moment, then she smiled. "Yeah, they love baseball. Conner's a Cubbie fan but Renee likes to be different so she roots for the White Sox."

He grinned. "A girl who knows her own mind. How cool. She got that trait from her beautiful mom."

"You think?" Denise laughed. "Watch out, we can be a little stubborn at times, too."

He kissed the tip of her nose. "Wouldn't have you any other way. And I can't wait to meet your kids — when you think the time is right, I mean. I don't want to rush anything."

"Except the sex," she teased. "That was mutual, of course."

"Oh yeah. And that ship has sailed. There'll definitely be lots more sex, rushed and not rushed. It's the relationship part we'll need to work on. I want to learn everything that makes you tick, Denise Crawford." He kissed her temple.

Denise's heart melted. She'd come to the reunion this weekend looking for a quick hook-up, but was leaving with something better – more wonderful – than she ever could have expected. *Handsome, sexy, Tyler, who wants a relationship with me.*

"How did I get so lucky?" She beamed at him.

"I think I'm the lucky one." He cupped her chin.

She sighed and snuggled into him. "I can't imagine any place I'd rather be than right here in your arms."

"Me, either, so let's not try." He held her tightly, and they kissed.

~The End~

About the Author

Jenna Byrnes could use more cabinet space and more hours in a day. She'd fill the kitchen with gadgets her husband purchases off TV and let him cook for her to his heart's content. She'd breeze through the days adding hours of sleep, and more time for writing the hot, erotic romance she loves to read.

Jenna thinks everyone deserves a happy ending, and loves to provide as many of those as possible to her gay, lesbian and hetero characters. Her favorite quote, from a pro-gay billboard, is "Be careful who you hate. It may be someone you love."

For the latest news, visit Jenna's blog at <http://jennabyrnes.blogspot.com/> and her website at <http://www.jennabyrnes.com/>

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