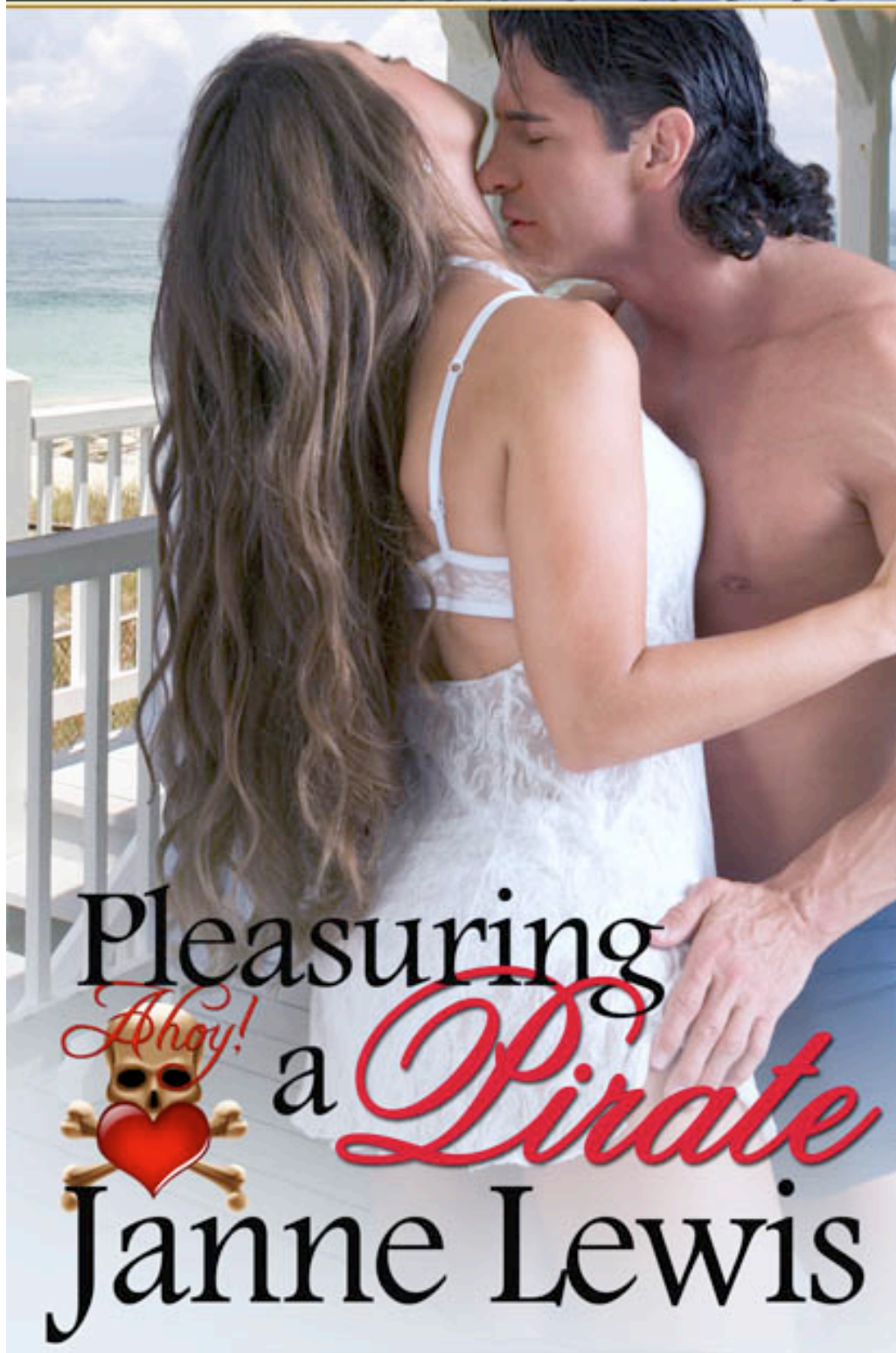


ELLORA'S CAVE *Moderne*



Pleasuring
Ahoy! a *Pirate*
Janne Lewis

Pleasuring a Pirate

Janne Lewis

When Jenny Miller's widowed mother becomes engaged to the father of Jenny's ex-lover, Jenny is torn. She knows a renewal of her affair with Robert, her soon-to-be stepbrother, could jeopardize her mother's marriage. But Robert was the sexiest, most commanding lover Jenny has had, and though he has a reputation as a heartbreaker, she yearns to get him back in bed.

When Robert plays the role of Pirate Blackwell in a video production, and Jenny plays the pirate's wife, Robert's passionate on-camera kiss sends Jenny's libido into overdrive. Jenny is a dedicated lawyer who has prided herself on her self-control. But resisting the irresistible Robert? That's a whole other case.

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Pleasuring a Pirate

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PLEASURING A PIRATE

Janne Lewis

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Chapter One

Jenny Miller clutched the fabric of her long dress as she carefully walked down the steep stairs from her second-floor apartment. She was determined to get through this day without disaster, despite the too tight costume and the uncomfortable shoes and the awkwardness that lay ahead. She reached the door to the street, opened it, stepped onto the sidewalk, let the door slam shut behind her and realized she was stuck. She looked behind—a clump of fabric at the back of her dress was trapped by the now locked door.

“Damn!” She rummaged through her shoulder bag until she found her key ring, took it out of her bag and promptly dropped it. She bent to pick up her keys, her breasts nearly popping out of the low-cut dress. “I must look like an idiot,” she muttered. She fumbled with the keys until she found the one she needed. She inserted the key, but it wouldn’t turn in the lock. Was there something wrong with the lock? That was all she needed this morning. She pulled out the key. She was using the wrong one. She took a deep breath, inserted the right key, unlocked the door, freed her dress and turned once again to face the day. *Relax*, she told herself. *Everything is going to be fine. You will not make a fool of yourself in front of him.*

The sun shone in a cloudless blue sky. The leaves on the maple trees that lined the cobblestoned length of King Street glowed greenly in the bright spring light. She had planned to drive the mile from her apartment to the beach at Perkins Cove, thinking she would feel ridiculous walking through town in her 18th century costume. Now she reconsidered. She could use the walk to steady her nerves. She needed to be in control of all her emotions if she was going to get through this day without embarrassing herself. She set off down the street.

At the corner of King and State Street, Agnes Hopewell came out of her antiques store. In her hand she held one end of a leash, the other end of which was attached to the collar on Jo-Jo, her pony-sized black Newfoundland. "Hi, Jenny!" Agnes said. "Where are you off to, dressed like that?"

"I'm acting in a promotional video for the Chamber of Commerce." Jenny stepped off the sidewalk to the street. She wanted to protect her costume from the string of slobber hanging from Jo-Jo's enormous mouth. "We're doing the Pirate Blackwell story."

Agnes snorted. "I don't care what the *History of Stoneyport* says—it's a made-up myth. There may have been a privateer named Blackwell in the seventeen hundreds, but he didn't bury gold here!" She followed Jenny into the street. Jo-Jo trotted behind.

"I'll be sure to tell our director that," Jenny said.

"Who's the director?"

"Susan Goodman."

"How nice!" Agnes said. "Your mom must be pleased you two have become friendly. I know how hard Susan took it when her mother died. It must be tough for Susan to have her dad engaged to your mom. Though Carol is a real sweetheart. Caring for your dad all those years. A real angel."

Jenny picked up her pace. Agnes' business was selling antiques but her hobby was gossip. Sometimes Agnes' gossip hit painfully close to home—Susan deeply resented her father for marrying Jenny's mother.

"I can bet who Susan got to play the pirate," Agnes continued, undeterred by having to jog to keep pace with Jenny. "That bad boy brother of hers. Jimmy Chang told me Robert is back in town. Saw him at the Barnacle last night. He's quite a character but handsome as they come. Probably left a string of broken hearts all over the world. Have you met him yet?"

Ouch! Direct hit! “Got to hurry! Don’t want to be late for my film debut!” Jenny started to run. Fortunately Jo-Jo spotted a cat and took off in the other direction, dragging Agnes with him.

Jenny hurried up the steep hill as fast as she could. When she reached the top, she stopped. She gasped for breath. She glanced behind. Agnes had not followed. Jenny’s breasts ballooned over the top of her bodice. Why on earth had Susan picked this costume for the pirate’s wife? It made Jenny look like an 18th century hooker. She yanked the top of the bodice as high as she could.

Damn Agnes! She’d named the very source for Jenny’s anxiety that morning—her soon-to-be stepbrother and one-time lover Robert Goodman. For weeks Jenny had been dreading seeing Robert at her mother’s wedding. Last night, Susan had called to instruct Jenny one more time about the shoot and casually mentioned that Robert would now be playing the part of Pirate Blackwell. The guy Susan had asked to play the part had broken his arm and Robert had offered to come home early and help her out. Jenny had to disguise her shock at the news with a fit of coughing. Susan, of course, did not know about Jenny’s fling with Robert. Nor did Susan’s father or Jenny’s mother.

Down below, at the base of the hill, several people were walking along the paved path that led between 18th century row houses to Perkins Cove. Jenny was still too far to decipher faces, but even after more than nine months of not seeing him, she would know Robert’s body. He was tall with broad shoulders and a torso that tapered at the waist, leading to the muscular legs of a lifelong athlete. A perfect body. A handsome face. A deep, commanding voice. Jenny pressed her hand over her stomach to still the butterflies that were now in full flight. She didn’t see him, but her mother was standing next to Robert’s father John Goodman. A slim figure in black by the gate was certainly Robert’s sister Susan.

Jenny walked slowly down the King Street hill, the hem of her dress sweeping the sidewalk. Nine months ago, Jenny was living in Manhattan, working for a big New York law firm. She had traveled to San Francisco for a legal conference. Her father had

died two months earlier, succumbing to a lung infection after years of paralysis from a car accident. Jenny had always been disciplined and driven, but in the days before his death, her father had urged her to lighten up, to seek adventure, to follow her passions. She'd walked the hilly streets of San Francisco thinking about her father's words until thirst led her to a bar. She'd walked into the bar and immediately caught the eye of a handsome stranger.

Jenny squeezed her clasped hands, remembering the sexual attraction that blazed between her and Robert at that first meeting. From the moment she looked in Robert's face, she wanted him, the feeling only growing stronger as they talked and flirted. They discovered they both grew up in the same small town on the Massachusetts coast, but Jenny went to Stoneyport High School and Robert, like his sister Susan, went to private school. After college, he traveled the world, teaching English, never staying in one place very long. She told him about her all-consuming legal career and about her much-missed father. He told her about his much-loved mother who'd recently died after a long bout with cancer. He whispered an invitation to his apartment. She decided to take her father's advice and said yes. After their first frenzied night together, she ditched the conference and spent two weeks in Robert's bed.

In Robert's bed. The words conjured up powerful images, blistering sensations. Robert with his warm mouth on her nipples, moving down her belly between her legs, using his tongue so delicately, so skillfully, so tenderly she almost wept with pleasure. Robert's cock moving inside her, thrusting, circling, bringing her climax after climax. Robert binding her hands, caressing her skin, spanking her so hard she had to cry the safe word he'd given her. Robert soothing her, stroking her, bringing her to so powerful a climax afterward she could hardly walk.

Jenny leaned her cheek against a lamppost, needing the cool metal to calm the heat in her face. Her nipples were hard against the stiff material of the bodice. The crotch of her panties was damp under the heavy skirt. *You can't think of him that way!*

A soft breeze blew up from the harbor, carrying with it the briny smell of the sea. She was close enough now to see clearly the features on the faces below. Her mother waved to her. Jenny exhaled. She waved back. She could have told her about Robert when she came back from California but Jenny wasn't in the habit of discussing her sex life with her mother. She and Robert had a friendly parting. He was moving on to a job in Mexico, she had to go back to Manhattan and figure out the rest of her life. They both understood that their time together was an erotic interlude, a temporary fling.

Only a fool would let herself fall in love with a man like Robert. He would never settle down, never commit. Jenny was not a fool. She kept tight control of her emotions. She had made up her mind to tuck away her memory of Robert like one stored a stack of old love letters. *Filed under F for fucking fabulous.* And it might have worked if life hadn't gotten so damn complicated.

Jenny's mother met Robert's father John at a party given by mutual friends. They hit it off. John asked Carol out to dinner. Jenny agonized about contacting Robert to beg for his silence. Eventually she sent him a message. *Hope this finds you well. I've left Manhattan and moved back to Stoneyport. Opened an office downtown – can you believe I actually did it after all that talking? Not sure if you know, but my mom and your dad are going on a date. Probably will not lead anywhere, but do me a favor and don't tell your dad about our fling. Could be awkward.*

Robert's answer – *No problem. I don't kiss and tell.*

That was it. End of story. Except that after a month of dating, John asked Carol Miller to marry him and Carol said yes.

Down the hill, John put his arm around Carol's waist. He kissed the top of her head. It was impossible to look at John and not think of Robert—he had the same build, the same high cheekbones, the same wavy hair, though John's was steel gray and Robert's brown. Carol smiled up at John, her soft, white hair blowing around her glowing face. Jenny could not remember her mother ever looking as pretty as she did now. Jenny had inherited her father's olive coloring and his curly dark hair, but she was grateful she

had her mother's fine bone structure, her heart-shaped face. John said something to Carol. Carol laughed.

How happy she looks! Jenny swallowed hard to dislodge the lump in her throat. Her mother had sacrificed so much for Jenny and Jenny's father. She'd never asked Jenny to stay close to home for college or law school, had fully supported Jenny's decision to take a job in Manhattan. It was only when Jenny's father was near death that Jenny fully appreciated what her mother had done.

What if she told her mother about her little episode with Robert? Wouldn't it be better for everyone to get it out in the open? Make a joke of the whole thing? Maybe—if Susan wasn't so angry about the upcoming wedding. Susan walked around with a giant chip on her shoulder, and John and Carol and Jenny tiptoed around her, hoping not to set her off. Jenny shook her head. The best thing for all concerned was to keep her past with Robert a secret. What could possibly be gained by telling?

Jenny straightened her spine and threw back her shoulders in her best courtroom posture. Her priority was making sure John and Carol's marriage got off to an excellent start. That meant placating Susan and staying far away from Robert. How hard could that be? The wedding was in two weeks. After the wedding, he was bound to leave and go off on another adventure. She just had to be strong. She just had to stay in control.

I will be polite. I will be civil. I will be distant.

* * * * *

"You look beautiful in that dress, Jen!" Jenny's mother said. "And I love the way you've done your hair. I always said you should wear it in an updo more often."

"I tried to copy the style on one of the portraits in Town Hall," Jenny said. "The one of the woman in the pink dress."

"She had nothing to do with Pirate Blackwell," Susan said.

"Well, she was from around the same time period," Jenny said, making her voice as pleasant as possible.

Susan made a noise and rubbed her hand along the top of her close-cropped blonde hair. Carol had told Jenny that Susan used to have long hair but cut it off and donated it when her mother lost her hair during chemotherapy. Since then, Susan had kept her hair boyishly short. Jenny thought the short hair suited Susan. There wasn't much of Susan's father or brother in her face or her whippet-thin body. Where John and Robert exuded charm, Susan was prickly and private.

"Looks like you've got enough equipment," Jenny said, indicating the cameras and tripods leaning against the wrought iron fence that lined the pathway to the beach. "Very professional."

"That's because I am a professional!" Susan snapped. "The only amateurs here are the actors and that's because the Chamber gave me a pea-sized budget!"

"Jenny knows that, honey," John said. "That's why she's here."

"And I get to use my high school drama club training," Jenny said.

"Where the hell is Robert?" Susan said.

"Your brother will be here," her father said. "You should be grateful he offered to help you out."

"I'd be more grateful if he actually showed up on time." Susan shielded her eyes with her hand and looked to the left and right on Beach Street.

A deep voice behind Jenny made her jump. "Are you looking for me, Suze?"

Jenny turned. There he was—all six feet three inches of him dressed in a simple white linen shirt and brown breeches. *Oh God! He was beautiful!*

She could not look him in the face but dropped her gaze to the tips of his black boots.

"How did you get here?" John asked his son.

"Rowed the boat over from Dock Street. Thought it would help get me in the pirate mood."

"Okay," Susan said. "Let's get started."

"Wait a minute," John said. "We've got to introduce the pirate to his lass." He put his arm around his son's shoulders. "Jenny Miller, I'd like you to meet my son Robert. Robert, may I introduce your stepsister-to-be."

Jenny held out her right hand. "Pleasure to meet you, Robert."

She raised her gaze to his face. His brown eyes studied her. His expression was serious, thoughtful. Then one side of his mouth lifted in what seemed to be a mocking smile. "The pleasure is mine, Miss Jenny." He reached for her hand but didn't shake it. He lifted her hand to his mouth, brushed his lips along her skin.

A tremor shot through her.

He dropped her hand and straightened. "I always wanted to greet a woman like that," he said.

"Don't be an ass," Susan said.

"Just trying to get in character." He smiled. "Really, it is nice to meet you, Jenny. My father has sung your praises for weeks. I'm delighted we'll soon be one happy family."

"Truly heartfelt." Susan said. "Now let's get to work. I need your help with this." She pointed to the equipment. "My film students are down on the beach scouting the location."

While John and Robert helped Susan with her equipment, Jenny and her mother carried a large cooler down to the beach.

"What do you think of him?" Carol asked Jenny.

"Robert? He's good-looking."

"Like his father," Carol said. "John is so fond of both his children. It hurts him deeply to see either of them unhappy. He just wants all of us to get along." Carol looked down the U-shaped beach to the strip of land that formed Blackwell's Point—the left arm of the cove. Robert was placing the tripod under Susan's direction. "I hope Robert behaves. Susan seems primed for an explosion. A family quarrel would make John's

blood pressure skyrocket. I told him he has to take care of himself. I'm not willing to be a widow again anytime soon."

Jenny squeezed her mother's hand. "Everything will be fine, Mom."

"Thank you, sweetheart. I can't tell you how much your support means to me. Oh! Susan is calling you. Better hurry!"

The film crew stood in a bunch around Susan. Robert stood in front of them. It was easier to look at him now that the initial shock of seeing him had passed. Jenny took her place next to him but kept a good two feet between them.

Susan explained to her students that what they were filming would be one short scene in a film that would eventually encompass a number of scenes from the history of Stoneyport. There would be no dialogue. Susan had hired a professional actress to narrate the film. Jenny was to run down to the beach and out on to Blackwell's Point. Once there, she was to wave a large, white handkerchief to signal to Pirate Blackwell. Robert would row ashore. He would have a shovel and a small weighted sack in his boat. Once ashore, he would dig a hole on Blackwell's Point and bury the sack. Jenny would stand on the point and look around, as if keeping watch. Robert would cover the hole with a large rock, which had been placed in readiness on the point, and then row away. Jenny would return alone up the beach.

"Any questions?" Susan asked. "And yes, Brian, the Film School dean has okayed three credits for helping me on the film, but I'll want a written report when we've finished shooting. We'll talk about that later."

"I've got a question," one of the male students said. "Does anyone believe it really happened this way? The people living in these houses would have seen everything."

"At the time Blackwell came to this spot, there were no houses. The cove was a good distance from the main harbor."

"Where'd he get the gold?" the boy persisted.

"Blackwell was a crew member on a privateer that attacked Portuguese ships off the coast of Brazil," Susan said. "Unfortunately, that action was a violation of His

Majesty's treaties. When the privateer came back into port in Salem, most of the crew were arrested and hanged. Blackwell escaped home to Stoneyport and buried his gold here."

"What happened to the—"

"Jacob, shut up and pick up the camera," Susan said. "If you want to learn more, you can read a damn history book."

The rest of the crew laughed. Jenny glanced at Robert. He was looking at her. His glance slid down to the top of her bodice then back up to her face and directly into her eyes. There was an invitation in that glance that sent the heat to her cheeks. She looked away. She would have to be clear and direct. There could be nothing between them.

One of the girls applied makeup to Jenny's face.

"He's cute," the girl said.

"Who is?" Jenny asked.

"Your boyfriend." She gestured to Robert with her chin. "Him."

"He's not my boyfriend," Jenny said. *He's going to be my stepbrother!* She hoped her cheeks were not turning red.

"I bet he wants to be, the way he keeps looking at you." The girl giggled.

There was no time to worry about Robert. Over the course of an hour, Jenny ran down to Blackwell's Point so often, sweat dripped down her back and between her breasts. Each time Susan found something wrong with the take and ordered her to run again. In between takes, Susan explained her thinking to her students. At last, Susan was satisfied and let Jenny run all the way out to the point to wave the handkerchief. Then it was Robert's turn to be filmed rowing the boat.

"Remember," Susan shouted to her brother, "this isn't a joyride. You're a desperate man in fear for his life."

The film crew gathered on the point and took turns filming him.

Jenny held a cold can of soda to her hot cheeks. It wasn't only the May sunshine that was making her hot or the running she'd done. It was watching Robert—the strong muscles in his back flexing as he pulled on the oars, the concentration on his face when he glanced over his shoulder.

Robert's father watched too. John had a broad grin on his face. He shook his head and said, "My son is one of those charmed men who is good at anything he sets his mind to do. Look at him! Anyone would think he really was Blackwell."

Jenny turned away. Her heart was beating much too fast. *If you only knew how good he was!*

Behind her at the top of the beach, she heard a dog barking. Agnes Hopewell was there with Jo-Jo, talking animatedly to a group of people. Jenny had no doubt that the residents of Stoneyport were busy debating the fine points of the Blackwell story. One of the men shouted, "You've got the wrong boat for 1705!"

John hurried over to enforce quiet.

"All right, we've got Blackwell rowing," Susan said. "Let's get Jenny back on the point and we'll do the landing and burial."

Jenny took her place on the point. Robert pulled the boat onto the beach. He grabbed his shovel and the sack and ran up to where Jenny waited. Susan made them repeat the scene three times. The digging scene went smoother.

"Okay," Susan said. "Let's try the next scene in one take. Robert, put the sack in the hole, cover it with the rock, stand up, brush off your hands and leave."

Robert dragged the stone across the hole. He stood up. He looked at Jenny. She couldn't meet his gaze but dropped her eyes to the tender area where his neck joined his broad chest—a very kissable spot. He was coming closer to her. She held her breath. He put a finger under her chin, tilted her face and kissed her. *Oh yes!* Her lips parted. She tasted his mouth, felt the touch of his soft tongue on hers. The hunger coiled inside her sank its fangs into her pelvis and released a hot rush of need.

"Robert, what the hell are you doing?" Susan yelled.

Robert dropped his hand from Jenny's waist. She stumbled backward. The film crew laughed. The crowd on the beach hooted and cheered. Jenny struggled to catch her breath, to act nonchalant. She stood awkwardly, arms hanging limp at her sides.

"A pirate would give his woman a proper farewell!" Robert said.

"You're an idiot!" Susan yelled.

"Sorry," Robert said. He didn't sound sorry in the least. "I wanted to spice things up a bit. Jenny didn't mind. Did you?"

Jenny shook her head.

"See?"

Susan scooped up a handful of pebbles from the beach and threw them at him. "Everything is a game to you!"

"Suze, I'm sorry!" This time he sounded genuinely apologetic. "I did what I thought Blackwell would have done. If you want me to act differently, tell me what to do and I'll do it."

"Pull the rock into place then look at her and go!"

Jenny wanted to call him back. Wanted to wrap her arms around his back. Wanted to press her body against his. He pulled the rock into place and looked up at her. In his face, she thought she saw a hunger like her own. He turned from her and hurried to the boat.

"Jenny – run to the beach!" Susan ordered.

Jenny ran but she turned for one more look at Robert. He had his hands on the oars but did not begin to pull until she met his gaze.

"Cut!" Susan yelled. "That's a wrap! Thank God we're done!"

She walked over to Jenny. "I have to apologize for my brother."

"Don't be silly," Jenny said "It was nothing. Really, nothing."

"Robert thinks he can get away with all kinds of crap. That's always been his problem."

"Don't worry about it, Susan. It's not a big deal."

"It is to me!" Susan walked away.

"I think you did a wonderful job!" Jenny's mother exclaimed. "It looked very authentic from here!"

"I can't wait to get this dress off," Jenny said. "And these shoes are killing me."

"Terrific job, Jenny!" John patted her on the back.

"Thanks, John."

She heard pebbles crunching behind her.

"And you, Robert, great job!" John said.

"Thanks, Dad. You need help with that cooler?"

"If you and Jenny take it," Carol said, "your dad and I can get the beach chairs."

Carol and John moved away.

"I'll take this end," Jenny said.

Robert squatted by the cooler. "I can carry it by myself." He lowered his voice. "We need to talk. I have to bring the boat back to Dock Street. Can we meet in an hour?"

"I'm going home to change. We can meet in my office."

"Where's that?"

"Seventy-two King Street. I live in the apartment upstairs."

"How convenient."

"We'll talk, Robert, but that's all."

"Of course." He stood, his arms tensed as he held the heavy cooler at his waist. "I hope you realize you've inspired a new appreciation for history."

"What are you talking about?"

"That dress." He grinned. "That heaving bosom. Makes a man think quite differently about Stoneyport's so-called puritanical ancestors. No wonder they were so

eager to come home from the sea. Look what they had waiting for them!" He turned and walked away.

Be polite, be civil, be distant!

Chapter Two

After a quick shower, Jenny opened her closet door and considered her clothing options. She did not want to look sexy. She wanted to look...sisterly. She took out a knee-length khaki skirt and a short-sleeve, white cotton blouse and put them on over her bra and panties. She looked in the mirror on the inside of her closet door and considered the buttons on the blouse. Button all the buttons? She felt choked. Unbutton the top three? Too suggestive, especially after Robert's remark about her bosom. She buttoned another button, leaving only two open.

She reached automatically for her perfume. She hesitated, her hand on the bottle. She'd been wearing this perfume with its light rose scent for years. She felt naked without it. Should she worry that the perfume might send the wrong message to Robert? Surely that was ridiculous. She didn't need to pretend to be someone else—all she had to do was be her own sedate, controlled self. She dabbed the perfume on her wrists and behind her ears. She put simple pearl studs in her ears and clasped a plain silver chain with an elongated starfish around her neck. With a pair of flat sandals on her feet, she was dressed for an ordinary Saturday afternoon. If only she could get her brain to behave and stop thinking about his kiss.

Jenny shut her closet door. She straightened the white-and-blue-paisley bedspread on her bed, adjusted the blinds to let in more light. She wandered into her living room. She plumped a velvet pillow on her sofa, straightened the books on her coffee table, adjusted the seascape that hung on the wall. From the tall windows she could see beyond her neighbors' shingled rooftops to the harbor's curve of blue water. A breeze stirred the yellow drapes and cooled her skin. She brushed her finger along her lips. She shook her head slightly, as if to shake away the memory, but failed. *The soft pressure of his mouth on hers, the sweet taste of his tongue.*

Before Robert, she'd chosen her lovers based on their suitability as long-term partners. With them, she evaluated every gesture, scrutinized every expression, stewed over every conversation. None of those relationships lasted. From her first talk in the bar with Robert, she understood that what would unfold between them would be very different. That knowledge freed her. For once, the judge in her head was silent. She let herself luxuriate in sensuality. Like the day she complained he was too good a cook. She told him she was packing on the pounds with all the rich food he insisted on feeding her. He challenged her to a game of Scrabble. "Winner decides on the dinner menu." Though it was a game at which she usually excelled, he crushed her. She set his kitchen table and sat in a chair, napkin opened across her lap, waiting for the repast he was busy preparing. He complimented her on her table manners. She told him she couldn't help it—even as a little kid she hated to get dirty. He laughed and said, "I'm afraid that's exactly what the chef has in mind."

He put a bowl of soup on the table then stood behind her and lifted her shirt over her head. He tossed the shirt on the floor and made quick work of removing her bra and shorts. "The chef requires a certain restraint among his patrons," he said. He tied her hands to the back of the chair. Then he fed her a spoonful of the soup—curried cauliflower. It was delicious. He dribbled the warm soup across her breasts then licked the dribbles with the point of his tongue. The soup was followed by forkfuls of buttery squash ravioli in a rich sage cream sauce. "Is it good?" he asked her.

"Oh yes," she said.

She laughed as he coated her with the rich sauce. He licked her nipples, her belly, her inner thighs. For dessert, he offered her ripe strawberries dipped in a warm chocolate sauce. "Now for the climax," he said. He untied her from the chair, removed her panties and lifted her onto the table. He painted her with chocolate. When he licked her clean, she shut her eyes and gave herself up to the sensation. More warm chocolate, more soft tongue. Her clit swelled. Her muscles tensed. She wanted more, craved more. She spread her legs wide for him.

"Another helping?" he teased.

"Yes, please," she said. She dropped her head back. He sucked her clit and sent her into a shuddering climax.

"I trust you found dinner to your liking?" he asked.

"I haven't finished yet," she said. And then she did something she never would have done before—she yanked his shorts down over his erection, dipped her hand into the pot of chocolate sauce and smeared it all over his cock and balls. He laughed until her licking and sucking and squeezing made him call out his coming. She reached for her napkin, delicately wiped her mouth and thanked him for an excellent meal. They ended the evening in his bathtub, covered in chocolate sauce, and fucked as hard as they could until they were absolutely spent.

Jenny leaned her head against the window molding. *My time with him was the best of my life.* Now she had to act as though it never happened, had to make sure nothing happened between them again. Had to be firm on this point. Firm and in control. The doorbell rang. She glanced down at the street and saw the top of Robert's brown head. She took a deep breath and headed out of her apartment and down the stairs.

When she opened the door, he was waving to the driver of a passing car. His curls were damp. He must have showered. He wore a navy polo shirt, open at the collar, and khaki shorts. He turned to her and grinned, a lovely, melting grin. "That was John Sawyer, my high school swim team coach. It's nice to see familiar faces again."

Hard not to smile back when a thousand watts of charm are radiating at you. "Let's talk in my office." She led him the few steps down the street to the glass door that opened on her office. She unlocked her office door and pushed it open. "Come in."

He followed her inside.

"Nice place," he said.

"It's coming along."

The room was small and spare. Light-green walls and white trim defined the space. In the center of the room was a large, old-fashioned cherry-wood desk with curved legs and claw feet. Bookcases lined the rear wall. Two wood chairs for visitors were set in front of the desk. A computer monitor sat on top of the desk and file cabinets lined the wall behind. Jenny's college and law school diplomas were framed in black and hung above the file cabinets.

"There was a tax accountant in this space before me. Not a very impressive law office, but it's all mine."

"I think it's damn impressive," Robert said. "You told me you felt trapped working in New York, but you sprung the trap and got out."

"Most of my friends don't see it that way." Jenny leaned her backside against her desk. "They think my coming back here demonstrates a lack of nerve."

"They underestimate you. You told me you wanted to work with people, not with paper. You said you wanted to make a difference in a person's life, not in a corporation's financial statement. You're doing what you wanted to do."

"I said all that?"

"Yep, you did." Robert rested his hands on the back of the visitor's chair. "I've got nearly perfect recall, and that time with you was one of the most memorable of my life."

Definitely not the direction Jenny wanted the conversation to take. She crossed her arms over her chest and studied her toes. "You must have thought it was funny when you found out I'd moved back to Stoneypoint. You spent your teens itching to get out of this town."

"I understood perfectly why you came back. You've got roots here."

"So do you, but you'd never think of moving back. I've got a good memory too. You told me you wanted to live in as many places as possible, meet as many people as possible, and then, some day, when you're old and tired, settle down in some remote spot and write a book about your experience. You said you couldn't imagine having any other goal in life."

He shook his head and laughed. "I must have sounded ridiculously arrogant when I said it. Fortunately, I don't admit that memoir idea to too many people. Only the ones I really trust." He moved to the window. "I always admired this building. I worked with Charlie Barrett doing carpentry in the summers. Charlie was an old-timer, full of stories. We did some work on this roof. He told me this place has good bones."

"It does. That's why I bought it. I've got a five-second commute to work, a view of the harbor from my apartment, a backyard. One of the lawyers in town is getting ready to retire. She's sending work my way. I do divorces, mediation, contract disputes, wills and some pro bono work for a local charity. It's not glamorous, but I'm happy."

"And the personal stuff—found your soul mate yet? As I recall that was part of your life plan."

"I figure that will happen when everything else falls into place."

He laughed again. "Jenny, you're a wonderful mixture of the passionate and the analytic. Like one of those exotic cocktails bartenders like to mix up."

"That's me, sour and salty. Anchovies and lime."

"Not the combination I was thinking of—more like sage and chocolate."

Her cheeks warmed. *Definitely not good!*

He smiled. "You may not have found the perfect life partner yet, but you've got the perfect desk." He gestured to her desk and walked toward it. "That's a beauty."

"It was my dad's."

Robert ran his hands over the desk, his movements sure and fluid. He looked up at her. She looked away again.

Why do I have this unbearable urge to touch him? To bury my face in his neck? His hand rested on the desk only a few feet from her. A hint of clove rose from his skin.

"You okay with my dad marrying your mother?"

"More than okay. I'm thrilled for them both. They love each other."

"I'll admit, when my dad told me he was engaged, I had some momentary pangs. It's hard to think about someone replacing my mom."

"You sound like Susan."

"I understand how she feels." He ran his fingers through his hair, the same gesture Susan had made that morning. "Susan and I were once very close. She's been angry at the world since my mother died. It doesn't help that her fiancé left her right after my mom got sick. She thinks my father is being disloyal to my mother's memory."

"And you?"

He shrugged. "I want him to be happy, wherever that leads him. Your mother seems like a kind woman. Susan will have to deal with his decision."

"My mother has tried hard to reach out to her. We both have."

"My father told me what you've done. He thinks very highly of you. We agree on that."

"You haven't told him anything about us?"

He shook his head. "You asked me not to. But I think anyone seeing us together could tell that my feelings for you aren't exactly brotherly."

Jenny's stomach twisted. "That's all in the past, Robert."

"It didn't feel in the past when we were on the beach today."

He took a step toward her. She moved back and banged her ankle on a desk leg. "Ouch!"

"You okay?"

"It's fine. It's nothing." She winced from the pain.

"Let me see it. Hold out your foot."

"Don't be silly."

"Come on, Jenny. Among my many talents, I'm a certified EMT. I know what I'm doing."

Reluctantly she leaned back against the desk and held her foot out to him. He took her foot in his hands. He pressed gently against her heel, rotated her foot.

"There doesn't seem to be much swelling. Looks like a simple bruise. You should put ice on it."

She was no longer aware of any pain, only the warmth of his hands. "Thanks for the advice." She tried to pull her foot away. He held it firmly.

"Do you remember when I tied you to my bed and kissed along your leg, one inch at a time?" With his free hand he brushed the inside of her captive leg from her ankle to behind her knee.

There seemed to be an invisible string between her leg and her pelvis. His touch sent a flash of fire zooming along that string. "We had a lovely time, Robert. But that's finished. Done. Completely over."

"If it was completely over, your pulse wouldn't be racing. You wouldn't be aching for me to move my hand higher."

She yanked her leg away from him. "That's ridiculous."

"Every time my dad spoke about you, your image was bright in my mind." He touched her cheek. "I was hoping you felt the same way as I did." He slipped his arms around her and pulled her up to him. *Resist! Push him away!* But then his lips were on hers and there was the addictive taste of his mouth, the potent pressure of his tongue. She wanted more. Needed more. He brushed his lips along her neck.

"Ah, Jenny. Your scent has haunted me for months."

Her body vibrated to his words. He unbuttoned her blouse, pulled it from her shoulder. His lips blazed a trail down her neck to the swelling of her breast. He tugged at her bra. His warm breath touched her nipple, made it pucker. A spasm of desire gripped her. His tongue flicked her nipple. She moaned. He sought her mouth again, his erection pressed against her pelvis. His hand tightened in her hair and tugged it back. The other hand curved around her breast. He squeezed her nipple and sent another electric thrill straight to her pelvis. He dropped his hand to her thigh, slipped it

under her skirt. In a second, he would brush against her crotch and find her wet and willing.

Stop him!

She cried out, "Thunder!" It was the safe word he'd told her to say if he ever went too far.

For an instant he held her then his hands fell away. He stepped back.

She heard his ragged breathing but could not look at him. She tugged her bra back into place with shaking fingers.

"I'm sorry, Jenny. I got carried away."

She buttoned her blouse.

"We'll take it slower," he continued.

She slipped away from the desk and stood by the window, her back to him.

"We won't take this anywhere," she said. "I know exactly where this leads. We'll go up to my apartment and fuck like crazy. Then Susan will find out. She's bound to. It will be just the excuse she needs to erupt in a rage. Your father will get upset and my mother's happiness will be ruined." She turned to him. "You're a wonderful lover, but a few hours in the sack with you isn't worth the pain it'll cause."

His eyes widened. "That's what you think this is about? A few hours in the sack?"

"Isn't it?"

He exhaled sharply. "Not for me. But if that's how you feel..."

"It is. I want to forget anything ever happened between us. I want you to be polite and distant and stay far away from me."

"Jenny..."

"Please!"

He opened his hands to her then shut them. "Okay. I get the message. I'll stay away."

There was a loud rapping on the door. Jenny looked out the window. Susan was knocking.

Jenny opened the door.

"Sorry to disturb you, Jenny, but I wanted to pick up your costume and return it before I'm charged another day's rental fee."

"No problem," Jenny said. "It's upstairs in my apartment. Come in. Your brother is here."

Susan walked past Jenny into the office.

"What the hell brings you here?" Susan asked Robert.

"He came to apologize," Jenny said. "I told him it wasn't necessary."

"I wasn't thinking," Robert said quietly. "I took some things for granted. I shouldn't have done that."

"No hard feelings," Jenny said. "None at all. If you don't mind waiting, Susan, I'll be right down."

The effort to keep calm, to stay in control made Jenny's head hurt. She gathered the costume and shoes and stockings and returned with the costume bag to her office.

Susan sat in one of the visitor's chairs.

"Where's Robert?" Jenny asked.

"He said he had to leave," Susan said. "He had an appointment. My brother doesn't always behave like an ass. He can be charming."

"I'm sure he can be."

"Sometimes I think his bad behavior is my fault. When we were kids, I'd direct him in elaborate scenarios and record them with my parents' video camera. I made him pretend he was a superhero and told him to climb a tree and jump from it. Once I didn't tell him what I was doing and had some of my friends grab him and pretend to kidnap him. He broke someone's nose trying to get free. It made a great movie." She shook her

head. "I'm surprised he survived his childhood. Though he tells me now he's grateful I toughened him up."

"I used to feel sad I was an only child," Jenny said.

"Be grateful for your peaceful upbringing. I'm sure there was much less drama in your life." Susan rubbed her hand through her cropped hair. "Robert is one of the few people who isn't afraid to point out when I've gone too far. He pointed out I haven't thanked you yet for your help on the video. I do appreciate what you did for me today. The film looks great."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"He also reminded me that I'm not the only one who's lost a parent. He said this was your dad's desk." Susan patted the desk.

"It was."

"So you know what it's like to lose someone you love and feel like everyone else has forgotten that person."

"You've still got one parent, Susan. Don't you want your dad to be happy?"

"You sound like Robert."

"Maybe you should listen to him."

Susan stood. She took the costume bag from Jenny. "Thanks again for your help."

Jenny closed the door behind Susan. Everything had turned out the way she wanted. Susan seemed marginally less hostile. Robert would leave her alone—he would stay out of sight and out of mind. The sexual storm he had aroused in her would subside. She would not let herself think about his mouth. Would not let herself think about his hands. She had things completely under control.

So why is my head pounding as if someone's using it for a drum?

Chapter Three

Robert kept his word—he stayed away. But he was hardly out of Jenny’s mind. Her mother called on Monday and told her how pleased John was to have Robert staying with him in his house. Carol had moved into a condominium after Jenny’s father’s death. John planned to move in with her after the wedding but needed to make repairs in his house before he could list it for sale. Robert was very handy, Carol said, and was doing the repair work for his father.

“He’s a good son,” she told Jenny.

On Tuesday, Jenny met with Edith Waverly to discuss the remaining clients Edith wanted to send to her. Edith said she had run into Robert Goodman in Lookout Park. She had lived next to the Goodman family years ago and had known Robert when he was a rebellious teenager. She was struck at how much he had matured.

“We had the liveliest conversation,” Edith told Jenny. “He’s become such a charming, well-read, well-spoken man. And all the traveling he’s done! He promised to help me map out a route through Thailand and Vietnam.” She laughed. “Who would have thought little Robbie would turn out so well?”

On Wednesday, there was a photograph of Robert in the *Stoneyport Reporter*. It was a shot that had been taken at Perkins Cove. He was rowing the boat and grinning his thousand-watt smile. The photograph was captioned *Stoneyport’s Pirate Blackwell Comes Home*. Jenny put the paper in her recycling bin.

Agnes Hopewell poked her head in Jenny’s office on Thursday afternoon as she was taking the slobbering Jo-Jo for a walk. She told Jenny she just had a minute but wanted to say how much she enjoyed watching Jenny act in the Pirate Blackwell video.

"I told you Robert Goodman would make an excellent pirate," Agnes said. She shook her head. "Jimmy Chang told me Robert's up to his old tricks. Seems he and Karen Butler were having drinks at the Barnacle last night."

"Who's Karen Butler?" Jenny asked.

"She dated Robert one summer when they were home from college," Agnes said. She wiped a puddle of Jo-Jo's slobber from Jenny's office floor. "Karen was a beauty with coppery-red hair. She was friends with my daughter Nancy. Nancy used to tell me how embarrassing it was to hang out with Karen and Robert that summer—they couldn't keep their hands off each other." She laughed. "A dog doesn't change his spots. I just hope Karen doesn't get hurt. She's had a hard time of it."

Agnes' words about Robert left a stinging pain in Jenny's heart. Jenny was relieved when Agnes and Jo-Jo went on their way, but she could no longer concentrate on her work. The headache that had plagued her since her encounter with Robert was back in full force. She took a walk out to Lookout Park. She sat on a bench and looked out over the main part of the harbor and the white hulls of boats floating like so many toys in an enormous bathtub. Running through her mind was the image of Robert sitting at a table with a faceless red-haired woman. Kissing that woman. Leading that woman to bed. She rubbed her forehead.

Loud laughter behind her caught her attention. She turned. A tall, broad-shouldered man approached. Her heart gave a little leap, but in a second, she saw he was not Robert. She sat back against the bench. She had to exercise greater control over her feelings.

Her head still hurt but her stomach was growling. She'd forgotten to eat lunch. She headed to Fuller's Market to pick up something for an early dinner. She might sleep better if she also had a glass of wine. Last night she'd had a vivid nightmare that she had fallen into water and couldn't get out. She walked into the wine aisle.

Robert was examining the bottles. He wore a t-shirt and jeans that were spattered with paint. A smear of white paint stood out on his biceps. She had never seen him look

more appealing. She told herself to leave before he saw her, but her feet seemed stuck to the floor. He turned his head and caught her gaze.

"Hi," she said.

"Hello, Jenny."

She would be friendly. Friendly couldn't hurt. After all, he was going to be her stepbrother. "Looks like you've been painting. My mom told me how you've been helping your dad."

"Least I could do after all he's done for me."

"Yeah, I know how that is." She twisted a few strands of her long hair. "I thought I'd get some wine to have with my dinner. Any recommendations?"

"How many people are you serving?"

"Just me." Her cheeks warmed.

"What are you eating?"

"I'll pick up some fish and toss it in the oven. I'm not much of a cook. I always overcook everything I make."

"Hmm. Let me think – what goes well with overcooked fish?"

He considered for a second then grabbed a bottle of wine and held it out to her. "A Napa Valley chardonnay. Boring but serviceable."

Does he mean me or the wine? "Thanks."

"Enjoy."

He walked away. She had a terribly strong impulse to run after him. She wasn't sure what she would do if she caught up with him. Kick him? Throw her arms around him? Kiss him?

Get a grip on yourself!

She moved toward the front of the store and saw him go quickly out through the exit. Was he hurrying away from her or on his way to someone else? Someone like his old girlfriend Karen Butler?

She leaned against a refrigerator case. She was not handling this situation at all well. She needed help. She needed a friend's advice. When she got home, she put her fish and her wine in the refrigerator and called Stacey, her college roommate, the only person she'd told about Robert.

"There's nothing abnormal about your confusion, Jen," Stacey said. Her familiar voice was soothing. "You had the best sex of your life with him. Of course you still find him attractive."

Jenny sat on the couch in her living room, her cell phone pressed to her ear. "I have to find a way to stop wanting him."

"Have you considered the possibility that what you're feeling is more than sexual attraction? That you care about him?"

There was the sound of a baby crying in the background. Stacey was married and living in Baltimore, and was, in addition to being a pediatrician, the mother of twin one-year-old boys.

"One second," Stacey said.

Did she care about Robert? Jenny pressed a sofa pillow against her chest.

"I'm back," Stacey said.

"I can't have feelings for him. Number one, I told you, he's not the right type of man for me. He can't commit. Number two, he's going to be my stepbrother. Number three, I think he's taken up with an old girlfriend. Romantic feelings are absolutely out of the question. I've got a simple case of lust, that's all. Help me, Doctor. What's the cure?"

"Even you can't control all your emotions, Jen. But if you're looking for a cure for lust, I recommend sex. Find someone to screw."

But he's the only man I want. "Thanks," Jenny said. "That's very helpful."

Stacey sighed. "I know I'm not being very perceptive. The boys are teething. I was up most of the night. All I can tell you, girlfriend, is lust eventually wears off. Love, on

the other hand, lingers far longer and causes a great deal more suffering. If it's only lust you're feeling, be grateful. After the wedding, come visit me and the babies. We'll show you an exciting time."

Jenny said goodbye to Stacey. She cradled the pillow and stared out the window.

Maybe Stacey was right. Maybe, instead of fighting her desire for Robert, she should give in to it. She couldn't actually sleep with him—that was out of the question. But a good fantasy fuck could relieve some of this ridiculous tension she was feeling. It might work almost as well as the real thing.

She unzipped her jeans, pulled them off and lay back against the couch. She slipped her hand under her panties and touched her clit. She shut her eyes. The memories she'd guarded against flickered across her mind. Which one should she choose?

Their first night together.

Robert led her to his bedroom. They had been kissing in his living room. She was woozy with lust but nervous. He turned on the light by his bed. She was determined to seize the moment, to act more sophisticated than she was. She shed her clothes and stretched out on his bed. She watched him undress. His broad chest, flat belly, the fine, dark hairs leading down to his erection acted on her like a triple shot of espresso. Her hand brushed the pillow next to her and touched something small and soft. Instinctively she turned and looked—gray body, beady eyes, round ears. She screamed and jumped from the bed. He swept the pillow to the floor and crouched to catch the invader. He burst out laughing. He held up the offending rodent by the tail and shook it. It rattled. He explained that he'd been cat-sitting—Lola must have left one of her toy mice behind as a parting gift. She wanted to yank the blanket from the bed and hide under it. He pulled her into his arms and kissed away her embarrassment. He was sweet and tender. There was something in the way they came together—the fit of his cock inside her—that brought her to climax again and again.

Over breakfast, she waited for the polite conversation that would signal it was her time to depart. Instead he asked if she could stay with him longer—another night,

another week, maybe a month or two. That afternoon, tipsy with the wine they'd had with lunch, they lay side by side on his living room sofa. She fondled his cock through his jeans. She wanted to tease him. She sat astride him and ground her pelvis against his erection. She held his hands above his head and kissed him. She unzipped his jeans and lifted her skirt and rubbed the head of his cock against her panties, as if they were teenagers afraid to go any further. She couldn't play this game long—she wanted him too much. She rose off him and took his arm to lead him into the bedroom. She told him she wanted him now.

"Don't be in such a hurry," he said. He teased her by moving slowly.

She tugged his jeans to his ankles and pushed him to the bed. She pulled her panties off and took her place on top of him again, ready to take him inside. "Slow down, we have plenty of time," he said. He rolled on top of her. "Some pleasures should be savored." He kissed a long, slow trail down her neck to her breasts, around her nipples, down her belly to the inside of her thighs. He introduced her clit to the tip of his highly talented tongue. He sent tremors through her.

Every day she was in a hurry to have him. She knew their time together would be brief, though he acted as if they had all the time in the world. On their fifth day together, he said he was going to teach her to be patient. He knotted one of his ties into a noose and slipped the noose around her wrists. She laughed. He led her to the bed and made her lie down on it. He tied the noose to one of the bars on the headboard of his brass bed. He used other ties to bind her ankles to the footboard. He kissed along the inside of her legs, an inch at a time. He brushed her labia and clit with the lightest touch of his lips. She arched her hips and begged for his tongue. He knelt between her legs and tucked the tip of his finger inside her.

She groaned in frustration. "More!" she demanded. He slid his finger deeper. Is this what she wanted? She told him yes, but it wasn't enough. Not near enough. "Please," she said. "I've learned my lesson."

He laughed. "I don't think so." But he gave in to her demands. He lay on top of her and fit his cock inside her.

"That's what I need!" she said. In seconds they were both crying out and laughing at the speed of their release. He freed her then curled around her. "Enough?" he asked.

"For now," she answered.

But it was never enough. All too soon it was their last night together. Those last, soft kisses. His searching look...

No! Jenny did not want to think about their farewell. She summoned a different memory.

They'd gone for a run. She complained that no matter how much she exercised, she could not reduce the size of her backside. He confessed he preferred women to have curves. He found something deeply erotic about a woman on her knees with her ass raised. She took a deep breath and told him she wasn't the kinky type. She didn't do anal. Didn't do submission. He shrugged and said she hadn't had the right partners or she'd feel differently, but he would never ask her for anything that made her uncomfortable. She asked him what he liked. He smiled and said, "The sound and feel of a hard spank on soft skin. The way skin reddens at my touch. I love, for a brief moment, to be in control." He gave her a wicked look, his eyelids half closed, his lips in a sly smile. "You have a perfect ass for it." Her skin prickled. She turned away from him. She wasn't prepared to give in to him.

But the next evening they had dinner with his friends. She liked the company. Robert was charming. She wanted to repay him somehow for giving her this lovely night. More than that, she trusted him to take her where she had never gone before. They came back to his apartment. The Scrabble game was on the table. She turned over the tiles. While he made tea, she spelled out a message on the board. She watched his face as he read what she'd spelled out—*spank me*. His eyes widened. He looked at her with such intensity, she shivered.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Think of a word," he said.

"What kind of a word?"

"A short one."

Lightning flared outside. Rain swept across the windows. "Thunder," she said.

"That's your safe word. When I've gone too far, say 'thunder' and I'll stop." His hand closed around her wrist. His voice deepened. "Until then, you do what I say."

He told her to unbutton her shirt. "Here?" she asked. They were still in his living room. He nodded. He didn't smile. His gaze was focused on her face. She unbuttoned her shirt and dropped it on the floor. She reached for her bra.

"Not yet," he said. "Now your pants."

She unzipped her pants and stepped out of them. "Panties?"

Robert shook his head.

He circled her. She looked in his face, but he frowned at her. She understood he wanted her to lower her gaze. A current of energy crackled between them. He stood behind her and unsnapped her bra. Hands closed around her breasts. He pinched her nipples hard. She gasped. A sharp pain but pleasure too as the pressure on her nipples intensified. He released her. "Now your panties." She took them off. Heard the sound of his zipper sliding down his pants. He slid a leather ottoman in front of her. "Bend," he said.

She started to kneel. Two hard pinches on her ass stopped her. "Bend!"

Jenny bent at the waist and put her hands on the ottoman. He raked his fingers along her back and over her ass. He pressed one hand against her lower back. A hard slap struck her buttocks. She caught her breath. One slap quickly followed another. Not pain exactly. There was hot pleasure with each slap too.

"Kneel!"

She knelt on the floor. Robert pushed the ottoman away and pressed her shoulders down. She rested her cheek on the floor, her buttocks raised in the air. He spanked her again and again, harder, faster. She shut her eyes. A tear leaked from under her eyelids. Her skin was burning, but there was a different kind of burning in her cunt. A fire that needed to be put out. She needed him to touch her, stroke her, take her. The pain on her ass was too strong. "Thunder!"

He soothed her skin with the palms of his hands. The burning on her ass lessened, but the burning in her cunt did not.

Robert slid his fingers between her legs. She moaned. She was slick with moisture and open for him. He knelt behind her and pressed his cock inside her. He filled her, pounded against her. Nothing mattered but the sensation of his cock thrusting into her. Jenny gasped as the tremors started. She was suspended on the brink and then rocketed away. Coming down to earth, she felt him grab her thighs, felt him pulse inside her.

They lay on the floor, wrapped in each other's arms. She was sore and spent. He kissed her forehead. "Thank you."

Jenny pressed her face into her sofa pillow. She pressed her hand to quiet the throbbing in her cunt. Her orgasms had not satisfied her in the least. If anything, she burned hotter. She swung her legs off the couch. She needed her vibrator. She needed a rock-hard dildo. She needed a man. A man with a lovely, thick cock and strong hands and a commanding voice. Robert. She needed Robert.

Her cell phone rang. She looked down at it lying on the coffee table. The caller ID caught her eye. It was Susan. She swallowed hard. The need in her body was commanding, but Susan rarely called her. Jenny answered.

"Hi, Jenny. I'm down at the Barnacle with a couple of my film students. Brian's got a rough cut of the video on his laptop. I'd like to get your opinion about something. Can you come over to see it?"

"Now?" *But I want more Robert!* She shut her eyes and got her lust under control. "Be right over."

* * * * *

The Barnacle was crowded. There was a line of people on the stairs waiting to be seated in the second-floor restaurant. The open area with the view of Stoneyport harbor was the place for tourists and families. The first-floor bar area was darker, cozier. It was the spot for locals. Jenny spotted Susan's cropped blonde head far back in the corner. Jenny recognized the others with her as members of the film crew. At Susan's direction, Jenny took a seat next to Deirdre, the girl who had done her makeup.

"Brian, let's show Jenny what we've got," Susan said.

Brian put an open laptop in front of Jenny.

"It's still rough," Susan said. "We haven't got the music yet or the voice-over, but you'll have a good idea of where we're going."

"Okay," Brian said. "Here's the first version."

Jenny watched herself run down the beach. The hours of filming were reduced to seconds. Robert rowed up, buried the bag and left.

"Now here's the second version."

It was similar, but this time after Robert buried the bag, he swept Jenny into his arms for his kiss.

"What do you think?" Susan asked. "My crew votes for the second. They think it's much more dramatic. As much as I hate to admit it, I think they're right. It does work better."

"The kiss makes it more piratical," Brian said.

The other students chanted, "We want the kiss! We want the kiss!" They banged their hands on the table.

"Do you mind if we include it?" Susan said.

Jenny sat perfectly still. The ghost of his kiss was on her mouth, his phantom touch was on her skin. If she let down her guard for one second, her emotions might erupt. But she could not do that. Would not do that. "Not at all. Keep the kiss."

The students cheered.

"Let's drink to the kiss!" Brian said. He took a bottle of tequila and filled shot glasses.

Deirdre handed Jenny a glass.

Jenny downed the liquor. It burned her throat and blazed in her belly.

Deirdre refilled Jenny's glass. She whispered in Jenny's ear, "I still don't think it was all acting."

"Here he is!" Susan said. "The pirate himself." She stood and waved. "Come on over, little brother!"

Robert was standing by the stairs to the restaurant. He waved and called, "Be right over." Next to him was a red-haired woman. She was heavier than Jenny, with large breasts and wide hips that were accentuated by her tight, white dress, but even in the dim light, Jenny could see that she was beautiful. This had to be Karen. Jenny gulped her second shot. She watched Karen kiss Robert on the cheek. Watched him smile at her. Watched Karen's generous ass shimmy as she walked up the stairs.

Jenny poured herself another shot. While she'd been lying on her couch touching herself, Robert had been screwing this voluptuous woman. Her ass was probably still red from his spanking, her cunt still sore from his fucking.

She downed her third shot. Better the burn of liquor than this awful, uncontrollable ache in her heart, this uncontrollable yearning in her body.

Jenny poured another shot. She did not look up as Robert took the chair across from her. Did not look at him as he watched the videos.

"You were right, little brother," Susan said. "The kiss works better. Jenny agrees."

"Does she?"

Jenny downed her fourth shot and refilled the glass. Her hand was shaking.

"I propose another toast," Brian said. His words sounded slurred to Jenny, but then the faces at the table were blurry. "To pirates everywhere, but especially to the ghost of Stoneyport's own Pirate Blackwell!"

They raised their glasses. "To Pirate Blackwell!"

Jenny sucked down the tequila and refilled her glass again.

Robert leaned across the table. "For a girl who usually limits herself to four ounces of wine at dinner, you're knocking that stuff back awfully fast. That's not water, you know."

Just to spite him, she drank the shot in one gulp. Oh, to be numb to everything! Numb to hurt, numb to desire, numb to him! She filled her glass again.

"I have a favor to ask you," Robert said. "I've got a friend who's going through a rough time. She needs a good divorce lawyer. I thought you might be able to help."

"Would her name be Karen?"

"It is."

"Red hair? Big tits? Big ass? Dresses like a hooker?"

His eyes narrowed. His lips thinned. "Sorry I said anything." He turned away from her.

She wanted to hurt him. Wanted him to feel the ache she was feeling. "Have you told your new babe about your life plan? Your memoir? Here's a title for you—*Travels with Robbie*." Her tongue was thick, but the tequila had provided enough grease to keep the words spilling. "Sounds like a children's book. But then you are childish. A man whose goal in life is to see how many countries he can piss in. How many women he can screw. Then he'll tally up his pisses and screws and write a book about it. A book no one will ever read." She laughed. "Sounds like a fucking waste to me."

He bent toward her. "If you want to hurt me, you'll have to do better than that, Jenny. You'll have to get much more vicious before I say 'thunder'."

The ropes she'd knotted around her heart snapped.

"Fuck you!" she cried. She tossed her tequila at his face.

He blinked. Tequila dripped from his nose. From his chin.

The others at the table fell silent. Someone nearby laughed.

Robert picked up a napkin and wiped his face.

"What a waste of good liquor," Susan said.

Jenny stood. "I've had enough of you both. Had enough of your whole lousy family." The room spun. She grabbed onto the table for support.

"Get her home, Suze," Robert said. "She's plastered."

Jenny did not want to be taken home. She did not want assistance from Susan or anyone else, though the floor rolled under her feet. She staggered on her way to the door and collided with a table, sending drinks into the laps of the patrons sitting there. Jimmy Chang, the Barnacle's manager, grabbed her arm and would not let her go home on her own. After protesting loudly that she was fine, she let Deirdre give her a ride. She insisted on helping Jenny up the stairs to her apartment door. As soon as Deirdre left, Jenny collapsed on her living room floor in a sobbing, wretched heap.

* * * * *

Friday morning was warm and sunny. Jenny had never felt more miserable. Hammer blows hit her head whenever she moved. She could not work. She forced down a piece of toast and several painkillers and crawled back into bed. She slept until noon. When she woke again, she felt marginally better. Then her cell phone rang. Her mother was calling.

Jenny had no doubt word of her behavior had spread. Everyone in Stoneypoint must know what had happened. She sighed heavily and answered the phone.

"Thank goodness you answered!" her mother said. "I was just about to come over and break in your door. I've called you several times already."

"I was asleep."

"Are you all right, Jenny?" Her mother's voice was full of concern. "I heard you were in rough shape last night."

"I'm fine. I have a wicked hangover, but I'll live."

"What happened?"

"I didn't eat all day. I drank too much."

"I heard you threw a drink at Robert."

Oh yes. That.

"I was a jerk, Mom. A drunken jerk."

"Did something happen? Did he say something to you? Make a pass at you?"

"He didn't do anything. It was all me. All my bad behavior. I can't tell you what set it off."

"John is so concerned there's something wrong. He's worried that the three of you had some kind of argument. He'd like us all to have dinner tonight at the yacht club. I know I've asked a lot from you, sweetheart, but it would mean a great deal to me if you would come."

"Of course I'll come."

"Robert is working at John's house today. If you could go over and apologize, I think that would help."

Jenny shut her eyes. "I'll do it." *Though sticking knives in my eyeballs would be less painful.*

* * * * *

He was in his father's front yard, vigorously sanding a door propped horizontally on two sawhorses. She watched him for a few moments.

"Hey," she said. She stepped forward.

He didn't look up at her. Did he hear her?

"I came over to say I'm sorry about last night. I was a drunken ass."

He didn't look up but worked the sandpaper more vigorously on the door's surface. "Yes, you were."

"I had too much to drink."

"That's what drunk means."

"I had no right to say the things I did."

"That's correct." He dropped the sandpaper and picked up a clump of steel wool and punished the door with that. He still did not look at her.

"I don't want you to hate me, Robert."

He snorted. "That's not the impression I get."

"I hope we can be friends," she said. "Put all this emotional turmoil behind us."

"Friends." The word sounded halfway between a statement and a question. He looked at her. He squeezed the steel wool in his gloved hand.

"I know I behaved badly. I've been under a lot of stress. I lost control. Forgive me."

She could not tell him of her jealousy. Not when she'd already lost him.

For a moment she thought he would turn his back on her. At last he said, "All right."

"You'll come to dinner tonight? I promise I won't throw anything at you."

He looked at her. There was no warmth in his face. It was as if he'd flicked off the switch on his charm. That or he was saving it for someone else. "I told my father I would come."

She had one thing she could offer him. One thing that was painfully hard to say. "Tell Karen to call me. Tell her I'll give her a free consultation. Map out a strategy for her."

He rested his hands on the door and leaned on them. "I will." An awkward pause. "Thank you."

"See you at dinner."

When she reached her car, she turned back to look at him. He stood in a pool of sunshine, watching her. She was hit with the certain knowledge that she'd lied to Stacey. She'd lied to herself. She was in love with him. She had been in love with him since San Francisco. Solidly, deeply, impossibly in love.

Chapter Four

Jenny drove up the coast road. There was a small state park nearby that her father had often taken her to when she was younger. She parked the car and took a path through the piney woods. The path ended on a pile of granite boulders, the leavings from an old granite quarry. There were few other people around. Some young children played on the rocks in the distance with their dog. Jenny sat on a rock and watched the waves. The waves boomed as they rolled in, whooshed as they pulled back.

She loved him. She had focused on her lust because that was easier, less risky. Now she let her memories of other feelings, other moments come rushing in with the waves. The way he held her hand when they went for long walks. The way he listened to her, his eyes focused on her as though she was the most important person in the world. His gentle touch when he brushed her hair away from her face. His smile in the morning when he served her coffee. His arms slipping around her waist when she stood at the sink brushing her teeth. The way they'd touched each other their last night together.

She lay back on the boulder and rested her face on the smooth, warm stone.

She had lain like this with her head on Robert's chest one night toward the end of their two weeks. She had listened to his breathing, rode along with him as his chest rose and fell. He made a noise in his sleep. She raised her head and looked at him, at the soft curve of his eyelids, at the planes of his face. Tenderness for him filled her heart, warmed her skin, her blood, her bones. And then the voice of the critical judge in her head that had been silent snapped awake. "You can't allow this. He's not for you. Draw back! Keep safe!"

In the morning, he told her he had to go to Mexico, but he would be free in six months. He had looked in her face, that steady, searching gaze of his. And she had

looked away, too frightened to say what she wanted to say — that he should come to her when he was free. The moment passed. He did not mention it again.

Jenny rose to her feet. She knew the painful truth. She had kept Robert away not only to protect her mother but to protect herself. To save herself from a broken heart. She had failed miserably.

* * * * *

The Stoneyport Yacht Club sat at the tip of a point that jugged into Stoneyport harbor. The main building was a large, shingled structure encircled by a wide porch. Here was the place Jenny's mother and John Goodman would soon tie the knot. John had been a member of the yacht club for years. If the Barnacle was the place locals could go to let everything hang out, the yacht club dining room was where the privileged went to keep things buttoned-up. Jackets and ties were required for men—jeans, shorts and sandals were forbidden. Jenny had teased Robert in San Francisco about being a yacht club brat. When she was growing up, she had been envious of those kids whose families were members. The yacht club had an enormous pool and tennis courts and a nationally known sailing program. The one possible benefit for that deprivation was that now she could walk through the restaurant in relative anonymity.

"Jenny, just in time to see the sunset!" John Goodman said. He stood and kissed her on her cheek.

"Don't you look nice in that dress," Carol said. "Blue is your color."

Jenny was wearing a simple linen sheath. It was the clothing equivalent of the wine Robert had selected for her — boring but serviceable.

John pulled out the chair between Jenny's mother and Susan. She sat down. John pushed the seat in. Only then did she realize that Robert too had risen to his feet when she came to the table. Robert, like his father, had on a white shirt, striped tie and navy sports coat. He nodded at Jenny. She nodded back.

Susan was transformed. She had shed her usual black for a brown silk dress in a forties tight-waisted style. "Feeling better?" Susan asked Jenny.

"Much," Jenny said. "I'm sorry about last night."

Susan shrugged. "Happens to the best of us."

There was polite discussion about the menu. John made recommendations for main courses. He and Robert discussed the wine. Carol patted Jenny's hand.

"What did you do this afternoon?" she asked her daughter.

"Went for a ride. I drove up to Ocean Park and walked out to the boulders."

"You loved that place when you were little."

"I treated myself to an ice cream on the way home," Jenny said. "Black raspberry."

Susan chimed in. "From Mildred's? I love that place. Best root beer floats."

Carol said she preferred Conway's and mint chocolate chip herself. Susan agreed — Conway's was very good but so was The Tides.

"Jenny Miller?"

Jenny looked up. It took her a second to recognize the slight woman with the short gray bob and pink sweater twinset who was smiling down at her. "Mrs. Porter!" She started to rise but Mrs. Porter put her hand on Jenny's shoulder to stop her.

"Don't get up, dear." Mrs. Porter said. "I just wanted to thank you for the wonderful job you did at our last board meeting."

"Thank you," Jenny said. Mrs. Porter came from an old Boston Brahmin family. Jenny was always conscious of her manners in her presence. She turned to her mother. "Mrs. Porter, may I introduce my mother Carol Miller, my soon-to-be stepfather John Goodman, his son Robert and daughter Susan. Mrs. Porter is the president of the Board of Trustees for Girls' Safe Harbor. I'm serving as counsel to the board."

"And we are thrilled to have her," Mrs. Porter said. "Ms. Miller is smart, articulate and dedicated. I have no doubt other organizations will soon be clamoring for her

services. We're lucky we got her first." She patted Jenny's shoulder. "See you at the next meeting." She moved away to her table.

"I paid her to say that," Jenny said.

"What an actress," Susan said. "She made you sound positively saint-like. I'd like to hire her for my next production."

Jenny smiled. "I've no doubt at the next meeting she'll ask me all about you and whether you have anything to contribute to the organization."

"What does it do?"

Jenny explained that the mission of the organization was to provide enrichment programs to girls in underserved areas. "There's a big emphasis on self-empowerment and personal growth. It's a wonderful program."

"Sounds interesting," Susan said. "Maybe I could be of help. Teach a class on making videos. Or help with fundraising. I've been looking for an organization to get involved with."

"That would be wonderful," Jenny said. *Was this the same Susan?* She glanced up to see Robert staring at her. He quickly turned to look at his father.

The wine was served. John Goodman held out his glass. He cleared his throat. He looked around the table. "I'm quite fortunate that my favorite people are here tonight. I'd like to propose a toast to us all. To new beginnings."

They clinked their glasses. Jenny took a tiny sip. She was not sure how her stomach would handle the alcohol, but the wine was soft and buttery.

"Speaking of beginnings," Robert said. "I have some news of my own."

Jenny smoothed the napkin in her lap. The polite conversation had distracted her. She steeled herself for his news. Where was he off to next—Europe? South America? A 'round-the-world tour with Karen Butler?

"Starting in September, I'll be teaching English at my alma mater, Brookings Prep. I applied for the job last month. The headmaster called me this morning. He asked me to agree to a three-year commitment. I accepted."

John Goodman was so shocked his mouth fell open.

Susan laughed. She had obviously known about this beforehand. "Tell them your other news."

"As some of you know, I've been toying with the idea of writing a book. A memoir. When I was in Mexico, I realized I was still on the path I'd drawn for myself when I was seventeen, but I wasn't that boy anymore. About that time, a friend of mine made a huge change in her life. She broke out of the trap she was in and followed her heart. I thought, if she can do it, I can too."

Circulation departed Jenny's hands. They were as cold as ice.

"When I was in college, I spent my summers working with Charlie Barrett. He told me terrific stories about the fishermen and sailors in this area. Walking the beach in Cancun, I realized I wanted to write a book about Charlie and the stories other sailors in the area tell. I wanted to find a way to use those stories to illustrate a way of life that's fading away. I did some research, and wrote up a proposal for a grant."

"I helped him," Susan said, "but I didn't think he'd actually follow through on it."

"I did. I learned today the grant came through. I've got funding for my project. It'll take me years to complete, working in the summers and on weekends, but that's fine with me. So you're stuck with me here for quite some time."

"Robert..." John's voice cracked. "I don't know what to say. I'm thrilled for you, my boy." He stopped to wipe tears from his face. Carol patted his back.

"How wonderful! How exciting!" Carol said. She beamed at John and at Robert.

Dinner was served. Susan made jokes about Robert teaching at their old school, a place that on graduation he'd sworn to avoid for the rest of his life. John told stories

about the trouble the two of them had gotten into. Every now and then, he shook his head and wiped his eyes.

Jenny sat silent. She was certain if she tried to speak, all that would come out of her frozen throat was a frog's croak. *How am I going to live in this town with him, be in this family with him?*

The waiters cleared the dishes. Robert apologized and said he had to leave. He had plans for the evening. "It's Gil Abrams' birthday. I told him I'd stop by and join the celebration."

"The old high school crowd," John said. "Let me guess who else will be there. George Kelly, Mike Brown, Karen Butler. Am I right?"

Robert nodded. "Good guess," he said.

John excused himself. "I'll be right back. The ladies must stay and join me for dessert."

Jenny sank back into her chair. She was exhausted.

Carol got up to greet some friends at another table.

"I don't know if this is the best time for confessions," Susan said. "But I know about you and Robert."

All the air was sucked out of Jenny's lungs. She stared at Susan.

"I could tell there was something going on between the two of you. Even Deirdre suspected something and, let me tell you, she's not the brightest bulb on the planet. I asked Robert what was going on. He told me the two of you had a thing when he was in San Francisco. Didn't offer any details. Just said it had happened but it was over. He said you had asked him to keep it a secret because you wanted to protect your mother from embarrassment. I can understand that. I won't say anything to my dad or your mom. The past is past."

Jenny's vision blurred. She wiped her eyes with her napkin. "Excuse me," she said. She grabbed her shoulder bag and hurried out of the dining room, tears streaming

down her face. She was horrified when she reached the front hall and found it crowded with people.

Someone grabbed her hand. "Best place for a cry is this way," Susan said. She steered Jenny down the hall to the ladies' lounge.

Jenny sat on a couch and tried unsuccessfully to stem the flow.

"I spent the night of the Yacht Club Spring Social in here," Susan said. "I'd lost my virginity the week before to this loser guy who broke up with me after the first dance. I used all the tissues and had to resort to rolls of toilet paper." She handed a box of tissues to Jenny. "Obviously I didn't say the right thing to you. I thought from what Robert said everything was finished between you two. I take it you don't feel the same way."

Jenny shook her head. "I'm in love with him." She wiped a new stream of tears. "You must think I'm an idiot."

"Anyone who falls in love with my brother should have her head examined. Does he know you feel this way?"

Jenny shook her head. "I don't want him to know. He's moved on. He's back with his old girlfriend Karen Butler. She was with him last night."

"Is that what prompted your explosion?"

Jenny nodded.

Susan sighed. "Robert and I have talked about a lot of things the past few days, but not the current state of his love life. He doesn't have the greatest track record where women are concerned. None of his relationships lasted long."

"I know." Jenny sniffed. "That's why I didn't want to love him."

"You weren't very successful."

"No, I wasn't."

"Don't tell Mrs. Porter. It will spoil the image she has of you."

In spite of her pain, Jenny laughed. She went to the sink and washed her face. Susan handed her a towel.

"Sometimes love sucks," Susan said. "I know that from bitter experience. Eventually the heart heals. Or at least the wounds scab over."

"Thanks," Jenny said. "Thanks for listening."

"No problem," Susan said.

The door to the lounge opened. Carol walked in.

"Is anything the matter?" Carol asked.

"Jenny had giant dust balls in her eyes," Susan said. "I removed them. The dust balls, I mean. Her eyes are still there."

"Are you okay now, Jenny? Your eyes are still red."

"I'm fine, Mom."

"I have a favor to ask you both. The catering manager would like to meet with John and me tomorrow morning to go over the plans for the wedding reception. I was hoping you both could join us. You're both so good with details."

Jenny waited for a sharp retort from Susan.

"Sure," Susan said. "What time?"

"Ten," Carol said. "Jenny, can you come?"

Jenny nodded. "I'm going to head home now. I'm tired. Tell John I said thanks for dinner. I'll see you both tomorrow."

"Are you sure?" Carol said. "John's ordered the special chocolate soufflé."

"I'll stay," Susan said. "I never miss the soufflé."

* * * * *

Jenny took the short way home through Lookout Park. She saw a group of tall figures under a streetlight. They seemed to be kicking a soccer ball. She heard a man

call out. It sounded like Robert's voice. A ball rolled toward her. Robert came running after it.

"Jenny!"

"Is this the birthday party?"

"Gil wanted to visit his favorite places. Next up is Perkins Cove. Then we're heading in to Cambridge to hear jazz. Come over, I'll introduce you."

By the park light, she caught the glint of red hair, the curve of a voluptuous body.

"Another time. I don't think I congratulated you on your news. The job, the grant. I'm happy for you. Your father and Susan are thrilled."

"I meant what I said. You were the inspiration for me."

"Susan told me that she knew about San Francisco."

"She was cool about it. I explained things to her."

"She told me."

"Hey, Robert!" A man's voice. "Kick the ball!"

"I've got to go. Sure you won't join us?"

"No. Have a good time."

He moved a step backward, as if waiting for something more from her. He turned, kicked the ball and ran toward his friends.

She left the park and took the long way home on the quiet streets of Stoneypoint.

* * * * *

She opened her apartment door and headed straight for her recycling bin. She rummaged through her newspapers until she found the *Stoneypoint Reporter*. She cut out the photograph of Robert as Pirate Blackwell. She got into bed and set Robert's photograph on her nightstand where she could see it. She lay back against her pillows and slipped her hand between her legs.

He wanted to cook dinner for her their last night together, but she said she had little appetite for food. They took a long walk and stopped in the bar where they'd met. They had a crisp white wine from a vineyard he knew well. He'd picked grapes there in the fall. It was a beautiful place with a view of rolling hills—he'd love to take her there. She told him the wine was delicious. She said nothing about going to the vineyard. She said her time with him had given her clarity about her life. She would leave Manhattan and find a place where she could make the kind of difference in people's lives she needed to make. She smiled and said he had taught her a valuable lesson about patience. He studied her face with his intense, thoughtful look. She could not meet his gaze. She looked down at the table. "I have to go," she said, as if answering an unspoken question.

In his apartment, they stood kissing as they had that first night. But this time, she unbuttoned his shirt and slid it off his shoulders. She kissed the warm skin of his shoulders and chest and belly. Jenny knelt before him and released his belt, pulled the zipper down his jeans, helped him step out of his jeans and underwear. She stood and stroked his back, his tight, hard ass, his muscular thighs. She tried to put into her touch and her kisses her gratitude for what he had given her. She knelt in front of him again and brushed his cock with her lips. She heard his soft sigh.

"I'm very fond of your cock," she said. She looked up at him and smiled.

"I'm more than my cock."

"I know." She stood.

"Jenny..."

She kissed him. "We both know how things are. We've known from the start."

Robert touched her face. He kissed her lips, their tongues touching, slipping over and around each other. She pulled away. He took her hand and led her to his bed for the last time.

They kissed again with greater hunger, greater need. His fingers stroked her clit, slid into her. She moved on top of him. She took him slowly, rubbing the head of his

cock against her until she was drenched with moisture. She took him inside and let out a soft moan at the perfect way he filled her.

She rocked against him, gently, slowly, though her cunt begged her for movement, for friction. She rose on her arms above him. Kissed him again and again. And then she could not bear gentleness anymore. She had to let loose. Had to thrust her hips against his pelvis. Had to lose herself in that blissful sensation. He caught her hips to slow her but she would not be slowed. She was so close. So close. His body stiffened. His fingers dug into her flesh. Then she was there—lifted and loosened even as his cock pulsed inside her.

Jenny opened her eyes. Her orgasm had brought her a momentary, fragile peace. She looked at Robert's smiling face in the photograph. She pulled a pillow to her chest and held it tight.

If she could cradle his head against her breast like this, she would tell him all that she had wanted to say to him their last night together. Instead, she whispered it to his photograph.

Chapter Five

Carol and Jenny waited for the catering manager in the mahogany-paneled lobby of the Stoneyport Yacht Club. Carol checked her wristwatch. "Susan said she would be a little late. I suppose we can start without her."

"Maybe she has the same bug her father has."

Carol had arrived alone at the yacht club. She had told Jenny John was feeling a little under the weather that morning.

"You also seem a bit out of sorts," Carol said. "I didn't want to say anything last night, but I couldn't help seeing that Robert's news upset you."

Jenny studied the pattern on the Oriental rug. "Not really," she said.

"I like Robert," Carol said. "He's a good man." She put her hand on Jenny's arm. "I can understand if you have feelings for him that are not entirely sisterly."

Jenny looked up into her mother's blue eyes.

Carol smiled. She started to say something more but was interrupted.

"Good morning, Mrs. Miller!" The catering manager strode into the room. He had slicked-back black hair and a navy double-breasted blazer. He introduced himself as Joseph Petty. He smelled strongly of cologne. He sniffed loudly. He frowned at the receptionist and told her to fix her hair.

Jenny disliked him instantly.

"Let's begin outside where the ceremony will take place," Mr. Petty said. "Come along."

Carol whispered to Jenny, "He's a bit bossy, but he knows what he's doing."

Mr. Petty led them onto the porch. Beyond the porch was a green lawn that rolled gently down to a sandy beach. "We'll set up the chairs on the lawn facing the club," Mr. Petty said. He described in detail the placement of the chairs.

Jenny walked out onto the lawn. Off to the right were the pool and tennis courts and the club's docks. Several children in tennis whites were running toward the clubhouse from this direction. They were yelling. Jenny couldn't make out their words.

"What is this commotion?" Mr. Petty said. He sounded greatly annoyed.

A young boy who was faster than the others came near. He yelled, "Pirates!"

Mr. Petty waved at the boy as if he were shooing away a dog. "Don't be ridiculous. Go back to the courts."

The other children came up yelling and screaming. Some of them were laughing, but a small boy looked terrified. Following them were a dozen or so adults also dressed in white, but not for tennis. They wore kerchiefs tied tight around their heads or tricorn hats. Some of them had enormous mustaches. Some had eye patches. All of them waved swords in the air.

"Good heavens," Carol said. "I believe we are under attack."

"This is ridiculous!" Mr. Petty said. He pulled out a cell phone from his pants' pocket. "Stefan, there's a bunch of hooligans on the property!"

Jenny's arm was grabbed from behind.

"Hi, Jenny," Deirdre said.

"What's going on?" Jenny asked.

Two men tackled Mr. Petty.

"Arrgh!" one of them cried. "You're my prisoner now, matey!"

"Is that Brian?" Jenny asked Deirdre.

"Pirate Brian to you," Deirdre said, "and you're my prisoner."

"I am not!" Jenny tried to shake off Deirdre's hand.

Her mother was laughing. She appeared to be offering no resistance to her captor — a tall pirate with gray, wavy hair. John Goodman?

“Deirdre, what the hell is going on? Is this some kind of game?”

“Not a game! This is Art! We’re filming a commentary on the contemporary capitalist system. Modern pirates as it were. Or something like that. It’s Susan’s idea.” She pointed toward the porch where a slim figure dressed in black paced, camera in hand. “Come on, Jenny. Help me out. Put your hands behind your back.”

Jenny owed Deirdre and did as the “pirate” requested. She felt Deirdre tie a rope around her wrists. Meanwhile other pirates were tying up various people. Some continued to wave swords in the air. Mr. Petty, though tied up and laid prone on the ground, was still yelling his protests and his promise that the cops would soon arrive and arrest everyone.

“Now I take you to the chief!” Deirdre said cheerfully. She pushed Jenny in the back. “This way, you scrappy dog, and be quick about it!”

“I think you mean scurvy dog,” Jenny said.

“Whatever.” Deirdre giggled.

A roar went up among the pirates on the lawn. “New recruits!” Three young boys and one elderly lady sported eye patches and waved swords. The elderly lady laughed so hard, Jenny worried she might hurt herself.

Deirdre waved her sword in the air. “I’ve got the prisoner!” she yelled.

“That’s very good,” said a deep voice behind Jenny.

Deirdre turned Jenny to face him. “Greetings, Pirate Blackwell,” Deirdre said.

He wore the linen shirt and breeches he wore in the photograph. On his head was a black tricorn.

“Hello, Miss Jenny.”

“Apparently, I’m your captive,” Jenny said.

"Appearances are deceiving. In truth, I am your captive. I am your prisoner." He fell on his knees.

Her mouth went dry. "What is this?"

"I may have looted and plundered my way across the Atlantic and Pacific, but you, Jenny Miller, have done far worse. You stole my heart!"

"Don't do this!" Jenny said. Her legs were weak. How could he be this cruel?

"I'll admit, at times I acted like an ass. A horse's ass. A donkey's ass. But I tell you now..." He swept off his hat. His face softened. He looked at her as he had on those long walks in San Francisco, the way he had on their last night together, as though her face was the one face in all the world he wanted to see. "I love you, Jenny."

Her lips parted but no words came out. He loved her?

"He means it," Deirdre said. "If you promise to be nice to him, I'll let you go."

Jenny looked at the love of her life kneeling on the ground before her. His brown eyes focused on her face as if he wanted the force of his gaze to convince her of his sincerity.

"Please, Jenny. Believe me. I love you. I would do anything for you."

The pincers that had been squeezing her head all week let go. She was buoyant. Lighter than air. He loved her. He loved her! "Would you give up piracy?"

He grinned. His face lit up with a thousand watts of charm.

"If that's what you want, I will!"

His grin was infectious. Her lips curled into a grin that came straight from her heart. "You can let me go, Deirdre. I promise to be very, very nice to him."

"Oh good!" Deirdre tugged the rope loose.

Sirens blared in the distance and quickly grew louder.

"The cops are coming!" Deirdre cried. "Run!"

Robert jumped to his feet. Jenny ran forward and grabbed his hand. "You'd better have a good escape plan."

"This way!" Robert said. He tugged her to the left. They ran down the hill. A motorboat was tied to a mooring. Robert swung himself into it and reached back to help Jenny in.

"What about Deirdre and the others?"

"Susan's got things worked out."

He started the motor and steered the boat from shore.

The explosive sound of a cannon firing made her jump. "What the hell was that?"

"That's the cannon the members of the club shoot off every morning at eight when they raise the flag. It was my father's mission to shoot it off today."

"Will they still let him and my mother get married at the club after this?"

"He's going to announce a very large donation to the children's sailing program. That should smooth any ruffled feathers."

He glanced at her. "You're beautiful."

"So are you."

His gaze met hers. She saw the hunger in his eyes, a hunger so like hers.

He reached for her hand and gently squeezed it. "I promise I will kiss you often and deeply as soon as I get us out of the harbor."

She sat back and watched him pilot the boat into the rough water of the Atlantic.

"We're heading there," he said. He pointed to one of the small green islands that dotted the area outside the harbor.

"I didn't think visitors were allowed on the islands. I thought they were all private."

"Fortunately, I know the owner."

He brought the boat up to a steel dock and tied a line to the dock. He clambered out of the boat and helped her onto the dock.

"This way," he said. He led her to a path between waist-high bushes. There were pine trees on either side. In a few paces they were in a grassy clearing. There was a quilt spread out on the ground. Next to the quilt was a picnic basket.

"Looks like you have something in mind," she said. "What would you have done if I hadn't come with you?"

"Drowned my sorrows in the salt sea." He touched her cheek. "I want to kiss you, Jenny, but I learned my lesson that day in your office. First explain then kiss. So here goes." He took a deep breath. "I thought I'd been in love before, but when you came into my life, I found out what love truly is. One part desire, one part tenderness, one part admiration. Did I mention desire? But as much as I cared for you, you seemed determined to push me away. I went to Mexico. I gave my life serious thought. I decided if you and I were meant to be, we would be. In the meantime, I did everything I could to bring us together."

"Except tell me," Jenny said.

"You weren't ready to hear me. When my father fell in love with your mother, I thought fate was on my side. I imagined coming home for the wedding and sweeping you off your feet. But then I got my chance with you and blew it in spectacular fashion. I came at you entirely the wrong way. You flashed that giant stop sign at me."

"I was afraid."

"And then you were unbelievably angry. I thought you hated me. I was hurt. Deeply hurt."

"I was jealous. Incredibly, stupidly, stupendously jealous."

"Susan told me. We had a long talk last night when I got home. Karen is an old friend. Even if I wanted something from her, which I don't, I wouldn't get it. She prefers women these days. We're friends. That's all."

"So I was the ass."

"Yes. You were."

She smiled. "Can we be finished talking now?"

"If you insist."

She wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed her body against his. She stood on tiptoe and pressed her lips to his. She parted her lips and found his tongue. He moaned softly.

"Ah, Jenny."

They kissed again and again, each time with greater hunger.

She unbuttoned his shirt and drew it off his shoulders. He tugged the zipper down her dress, pulled the dress to her ankles. He kissed her neck, her shoulders. Deftly he removed her bra. She pressed her breasts to his chest. The touch of his warm skin against her nipples made her lean her head back and laugh. "I'm flying," she said. "I'm drunk."

He laughed roughly. "Is this better than tequila?"

"A hundred, a thousand times better." She stepped out of her panties.

His cock strained at the tight cloth of his breeches. She helped him with the buttons. His cock sprang out at her touch. "Hello, old friend," she said. She wrapped her hands around the hard muscle and squeezed.

"That's the polite way to greet a friend," Robert said. "With a firm handshake."

She laughed. "I prefer a kiss." She sank to her knees and kissed the head of his cock. It lifted in response.

"It likes you," Robert said. She laughed again. She circled the tip with her tongue. Robert held her head gently between his hands. He stepped back.

She looked up into his eyes. His face was set, his eyes dark and focused on her.

It was time for disclaimers. "I'm still on the Pill. I haven't been with anyone since you."

"Neither have I."

"Then we're free to do as we please." She moved back on the quilt. Her gaze fixed on his face. He was breathing harder. She smiled and held her hand up to him.

He knelt down between her legs. He stroked her thighs. She parted her legs wider. His fingers traced her opening. Spasms radiated out from his touch.

"I have a confession to make," he said softly. "I've had you almost every night since you left me in San Francisco. I could see you in my mind. I could smell your scent. But I couldn't remember how you taste."

He bent forward and kissed her clit. His tongue swirled around and around. She sighed with pleasure. His tongue probed her opening. She arched her hips and came to a gentle climax.

"I need to feel you inside me," she said. "Please."

He stretched out on top of her. He pressed his cock to her opening and then his cock was inside. Even in her most detailed memories she had not been able to capture how wonderfully right it was to have him inside her.

"I wish you could see how beautiful you are," he murmured. "Wish I could let you under my skin so you could know how good you feel surrounding me. Warm and wet and tight." He kissed her. "There is nothing in the world like loving you, Jenny. Nothing as sweet or as good. Like the answer to all my prayers."

He kissed her again hard on her mouth, bit her neck, bit her shoulder.

"Oh Robert," she whispered. "How good, how right you feel. Only you can fill this need in me."

She kissed him. And then there was no more talking. Only him, thrusting deep inside, and her, arching her hips to take him in, raising her legs high and wide in the air to bring him deeper. His mouth searched hers. She dug her fingers into his back to urge him deeper. She was lifted high on a wave of pleasure and then there was nothing more to want or need.

"Yes!" she cried to him. "Oh Robert, yes!"

He stiffened against her and clutched her thighs. "Jenny!" She could feel his cock release deep inside.

They lay together for a good long while. Her nose buried between his neck and chest. His arms wrapped around her.

"Tell me about this place," she said. She brushed the hair from his forehead.

"It belongs to the family of a friend of mine." He sat up. "Let me show you something." He moved to the edge of the quilt and brushed some pine needles from the face of a large, flat, granite rock. "What do you see carved in this rock?"

She knelt by his side and looked. "A capital letter B."

"That's right." He sat back on the quilt.

"B for Barrett," she said. "Your friend Charlie. This is his family's land."

"It is his family land. Going back to long before the Revolution. But the B isn't for Barrett. It's for Blackwell."

"No." She squinted at him.

"Yes. Charlie's great-great-however-many-greats-grandfather was Amos Blackwell, the famous pirate of Stoneyport. Only the family knew the true tale of old Pirate Blackwell."

"Which was?"

"He didn't bury his treasure on Blackwell's Point. All he buried on the point was a bag of stones. That burial was a decoy. He slipped the bag with the gold dust to his wife and she buried the treasure here on this island and marked it with this rock. When Blackwell was caught by the king's men, he was empty-handed. Eventually he was released, unlike his unfortunate crewmates. He came back to his wife's loving embrace. They had ten children. The treasure stayed here for years until Blackwell thought it was safe for him to retrieve it. Charlie said when he was a boy he found gold dust nearby."

Jenny laughed. "I don't believe you."

"Are you doubting me or Charlie Barrett?"

"Both," she said.

He raised his eyebrows as if highly insulted. "Take that back."

"No."

He pulled her across his lap and gave her three hard spanks on the ass. "That's for doubting me and Charlie."

She turned her head and looked at him. "I still don't believe you. You'll have to punish me more."

His face was tense, alert. She knew the look. Her nipples tightened in response and the muscles in her pelvis spasmed.

"On your knees, wench."

She complied with his command.

He pressed down on her shoulders with one hand and spanked her ass with the other. She whimpered, the pain and pleasure mixed in a delicate, wonderful combination.

"That's for not believing me," he said. "That's for not believing Charlie. That's for throwing tequila in my face!"

Her skin was on fire. He stroked her burning skin with his cool hands. "You get so red."

He kissed the swell of her ass. He slid his fingers between her legs up to her cunt. She closed her eyes. His touch was as gentle as his spanks had been hard.

"I want you again," he said.

"Take me."

He pressed against her, his cock finding its home in her cunt. She groaned when he filled her, concentrated on the wonderful rightness of the friction he made with his rhythm. In and out, like the tide. And then she lost all metaphor as her climax shook her, sending sparks of white-hot energy along all her synapses.

He pulled out of her and lay down on the quilt.

“Ride me,” he said.

She sat astride him and guided his cock home. She rocked against him, thrilled with the rightness of their coupling, glorying in the astonishing power she had over him. Her pleasure built. He squeezed her breasts.

“My girl, my beautiful, beautiful girl!”

She shut her eyes and rode him for her own pleasure. She gasped with surprise as her climax gripped her. He laughed and then stiffened and groaned with the power of his release.

She lay on his chest, her head rising and falling with his breathing.

He stroked her back. “There was something else Charlie said about Blackwell. He said Blackwell told his descendants his true treasure wasn’t his gold—it was his woman. That was the message he wanted to go down through the years.”

“He was a very smart pirate,” Jenny said.

Robert laughed. “He was indeed.”

Chapter Six

Eventually they put their clothes back on. Robert put away his pirate costume and pulled on a t-shirt and jeans. He served her lunch—an oozing brie on French bread accompanied by succulent olives and a chilled bottle of torrantes. “I didn’t have a chance to do any serious shopping or I would have prepared a more elaborate feast,” he told her. “Susan’s plan didn’t come together until very early this morning.”

“I wonder if all the pirate crew escaped.” Jenny licked her fingers. She was hungrier than she’d been in months.

“I’ll check,” he said. He looked at his cell phone. He laughed. “My father apparently had to increase the size of his donation to the children’s sailing program, but other than that, all is well. Susan says the video is awesome. She’s wondering if she can find a way to slip it into the Chamber of Commerce’s movie.”

They walked around the island. They stood on the pebbled beach and took turns skipping stones on the water. Robert was the champion, which did not surprise Jenny in the least. What did surprise her was how easy it was to be with him. How right and easy. He put his arm around her waist and pulled her close. He kissed her head. She kissed his neck.

“As much as I hate to leave, we should go,” Robert said. “I have to get the boat back to Gil. He was one of the pirates. Said he couldn’t think of a better way of celebrating his thirty-second birthday than acting like an eleven-year-old. You’ll like him.”

“I’m sure I will.”

They folded the quilt and climbed into the boat. Robert drove the boat back into the harbor. He turned every now and then to smile at her. They tied up the boat at the mooring near Dock Street.

“Back on the mainland,” Jenny said. “What do we do now?”

He put his arms around her waist. "What do you want to do?"

"Take you back to my place. When I see you sprawled out on my couch, I'll know this is real."

They walked up Harbor Street to King Street and were steps away from her apartment when Agnes Hopewell and Jo-Jo loomed into view. Jenny dropped Robert's hand.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Agnes. If she sees us, everyone in Stoneyport will know."

He stopped walking. "Don't you want them to know?"

"Yes, but..."

"No buts allowed."

He pulled her to him and gave her a long, deep kiss. "I love you, Jenny Miller. I want all of Stoneyport to know."

"Then you should say it louder."

He grinned, a blazing, wonderful grin. He shouted, "I love you, Jenny Miller!"

She laughed and kissed him.

"I love you, Robert Goodman."

"Louder!"

She yelled, "I love you, Robert!"

Jo-Jo barked. Agnes Hopewell clapped. She cupped her hands around her mouth so her words could be heard all over Stoneyport and shouted, "I hope the two of you will be very happy!"

Much later, Jenny lay on her bed and studied the man lying next to her – the curve of his eyelids, the planes of his face. Her ass was still tender from his ministrations, her cunt still sore from his loving. A lovely tenderness filled her heart, warmed her skin, her blood, her bones.

"Listen to that," she whispered.

"To what?" he said sleepily. He pulled her close. She rested her head on his chest.

"When I was with you in San Francisco I used to hear this voice in my head warning me not to love you."

"And now?"

"No warnings, no alarms. Only...peace."

About the Author

Janne Lewis has been telling stories since she was little, and grew up loving to read historical romances (always reading the last page first to make certain the heroine ended up with the right guy). Janne is now a multi-published author and has won awards for her writing in other genres. She is fascinated by how sexual desire can turn the most rational and reasonable human being into someone altogether different. She hopes her readers find as much pleasure in her stories as she did in writing them.

Janne welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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