

NEVER THE MOON

For John, who shows me every day what real love is.

Chapter 1

2017

The years had not touched him, not to her. He didn't seem to recognise her, though and had walked right past her. She put her head down and placed her hand on the boy next to her as a sign to get moving. He looked at her questioningly.

"Nan? You would like to leave?"

She nodded and they both rose slowly and he led her to the elevator. Standing at the door of the elevator, waiting for it to arrive, she couldn't help but glance back. He seemed to be talking to the concierge, but he was looking directly at her. She felt her stomach flip, but he was already looking the other way. He hadn't seen her. She felt the sadness that she always felt when she thought of him, but the sight of him, there, right in front of her shook her. She stepped into the elevator.

Lucas asked her if she was okay and she just nodded; she couldn't speak, words would betray her; as it was, she could already feel the tears beginning to well behind her eyelids.

Back in her suite, she felt safe, as safe as she could feel with Jack. Lucas had gone back to his own room and she felt very alone. She heard Jack in the shower and a shiver ran down her back. Had she gotten his suit ready before she left? She couldn't remember. She didn't want to care right now. She wanted to remember him, her David, her strong, beautiful David, except he wasn't her David, not anymore.

She wandered to the window and looked out. It was becoming dark. The last specks of sunlight were still flickering between the buildings and she saw her life go down with the sun. There was no moon. She felt the tears start to well again and she clenched her teeth. She couldn't, not now. She had to get ready.

But, David. What would she say if she came face to face with him? He was in the same hotel. But it was a big hotel, she reasoned; they may never cross paths. She knew she wanted to see him, but she also knew that it would incur the wrath of Jack. She would pay. She would pay dearly. She was paying right now...

Chapter 2

1983

'Jennifer, are you ready?' her mother called through the bathroom door.

'Mother! I'm nearly done!'

'David is waiting, hurry up!' Her mother, Judy, gave a frustrated smack on the door before going downstairs to make small talk with David while he waited.

Jennifer was sitting on the edge of the bathtub, finishing her make-up. She rolled her eyes at her mother's knock. She had no intention of hurrying up. She was irritated. She tilted her head to the side and ran a finger down her nose. *Straight, too straight*, she thought, and then surveyed her eyes. Deep set, jade green and curved at the edges, 'just like a cat' her mother always told her. Teasing her fringe, she wondered what people saw in her looks; she didn't think much of them herself and tonight, she hadn't made much of an effort. Shrugging, she replaced the comb in the drawer and stared at herself in the mirror.

Jennifer sighed and then took a deep breath. 'Not for much longer.'

Jennifer was tired of being set up with eligible bachelors and she just wanted to choose someone for herself. She was in love with Michael, but no one knew about them, so she had to go through with these charades to keep her mother happy. Michael was in love with her too and they planned to elope when she was eighteen and that was only a few months away. Her mother wanted to get her out of this town; at least that was something they agreed on.

Judy had moved with her daughters, Jennifer and her elder sister, Elle, to Tioga, when Jennifer was twelve, after their father had died, leaving his family penniless and in debt. She remembered her father well and missed him immensely. Tall, strong, so strong he would carry both sisters on either side of him, swinging them around, while they laughed and squealed and he would pump his biceps with each of them hanging on one arm. Judy would lovingly scold him and he would drop them to the floor gently and pick her up, carrying her over his shoulders. She would shriek and the girls would urge him on. He was always so much fun to be around and Jennifer felt that Judy was, at times, a little jealous of their fun. She later came to learn that their relationship was a tumultuous one,

and although they loved each other without doubt, they had their share of arguments. They were careful to keep it from the girls, although Elle, being older and more perceptive than Jennifer, had suspected as much.

Before the death of their father, they had lived a fairly comfortable lifestyle on the outskirts of New York City. Being taught at the best schools and having whatever they wanted, the move to Tioga came as a shock. Apart from the absence of a father who was among other things a spendthrift and a gambler, as Elle and Jennifer learned later, their new environment was a blow.

Tioga, with roads that seemed stretched like rubber bands, hills that went on forever and waterfalls that poured out endless streams of froth, was certainly a lovely place to live, but with such a small area and population, it was so different from the hustle and bustle lifestyle that that family was used to and took some getting used to.

Judy, never having worked, was faced with taking on menial jobs, such as sewing and ironing for other families and with Tioga being such a small place, she had to travel a long way. The pay she got was not enough to support two growing children, so she began to work in Syracuse, and neighbouring towns, with travel times of two hours or more, cleaning for more affluent city dwellers. This was still not enough to keep the family in the style to which they had become accustomed, but both girls did whatever they could to help their mother and when they were old enough, they got part-time jobs to help out financially. Most of their possessions were sold before the move and they had enough money to rent a little two-storey cottage off Main Street.

It was supposed to be a temporary move, until they got back on their feet, but they never seemed to get there, not with the amount of money that was coming into the home. Her mother, still a young woman, with beauty and vigor, couldn't bring herself to think about another man and focussed her life on making a better one for her own children. She vowed she would get them out, somehow.

And Jennifer vowed to leave.

Except she would be leaving with Michael. She smiled when she thought of Michael. He was everything her mother despised, and she even thought this may have been the attraction. For her to be with someone like her own father, a wonderful, caring man, but who had let down his family in such a bad way, was detestable and she wanted to be with someone whom Judy wouldn't have chosen and Michael was exactly that.

She quickly assessed the plan with Michael for after her 'official' date. Yes, Michael was aware of the pretences she had to go through and although he allowed it, he had his own revenge. It was usually turning up at the allocated date spot and breaking Jennifer out of her jail of a date by punching the chosen suitor or sometimes he would just waltz in and whisk Jennifer away and she would happily dance off with him. She got a little thrill from it, but she also felt a little bad for them. Sometimes

Michael slashed a tire or two and Jennifer would protest. He would laugh and say that the guy deserved it 'for trying to push in on my woman'. She liked that; loved it when he called her 'his woman'. It made her feel like she belonged to someone.

Michael was large, not just tall, but rippling with muscles. He scared people and Jennifer loved this about him. Michael had only completed 8th grade a couple for years ago and had begun working as an apprentice at a garage. He would sometimes take a hot rod car that had come in for a service and they would drive around doing burnouts and speeding past police stations. His boss would always find out and would reprimand him, but he was one of the best workers – one of two – and he knew he would not be fired. Michael was wild and she was his girl.

Jennifer had friends, but had only clicked with one girl, who lived a block away from her. Angel was a kind and giving friend and she, unlike other girls her age, didn't have a jealous bone in her body. Whenever Jennifer had made friends in school, she would find that they didn't stick around for long and at first, she wondered why; she was friendly enough. When she began to get attention, and a lot of it, from male classmates, she understood. She resented these girls for their jealousy and tried hard to win their approval at first, but Angel was different. Attractive herself, olive skinned with jet-black hair, she never begrudged Jennifer for how she looked. She was always there for Jennifer and they talked about things that were different from other girls, not just boys and make-up, but movies, especially old ones, history and their own dreams of escaping this town. New York – that was their dream. Angel didn't approve of Michael and felt that he was a bad influence on Jennifer and she knew better than to interfere with her friend's relationship. But she knew it wouldn't last; she knew Jennifer well.

Jennifer had met Michael at the local diner and he had asked her out. They had been at school together, but as Michael left when he was quite young, they had never had reason to interact and Jennifer had never taken a second look at him at parties and town events. When he did ask her out on a date, which he had been planning on for quite a while, she was taken with his physique and what she thought was confidence, and had accepted immediately. They had been together for two months and she still hadn't introduced him to Judy and Elle, but she realised that with his earning money, he was her ticket out of this place.

She would make it up to Judy and Elle when she got to New York. They would stay here, but not forever. When she got out, she would take them out of here too and they would forgive her for leaving.

Elle had been working full time as a receptionist at a real estate agency in a nearby town and had given up her dream of being a journalist because she had to help support the home. Jennifer would help her achieve her dream – she didn't exactly know how, but she somehow knew she would. Her mother wouldn't be scrubbing floors for rich ladies and Jennifer would leave the florist, where she

worked while she figured out her future. Yes, Michael was her way out of Tioga... she did think she loved him.

Now, floating down the stairs, Jennifer again felt that irritation and wished that her plan with Michael would materialize soon.

I can't do this much longer, she thought.

Then she saw him.

All thoughts of Michael vanished as she surveyed this stranger, who seemed to be in polite conversation with her mother. Dressed in a black shirt, carelessly open at the neck, and blue jeans that hugged his rear end, he was holding a bunch of yellow flowers that her mother was trying to relieve him of. He was lean and slightly unshaven - no, her mother wouldn't approve; she wondered why she was disappointed about that.

'Oh look, here she comes', said her mother looking up at Jennifer and wrenching the flowers from him.

David turned around to face her and she let a small sigh escape. He walked over to her and introduced himself.

'Hi Jennifer, it's good to meet you'. Husky, inviting.

Chapter 3

2017

Walking through the big glass door, framed in gold, Jennifer felt like a fraud. She always did at these big galas. But this was her life. She had chosen this, to be here, to live this life. The silver silk full length skirt swished around her ankles and her sleeveless matching blouse that rose to her throat gave her a regal air and she still turned heads, but she didn't care anymore; she never really did, even though she knew she would never have been here if it wasn't for the way she looked. She smiled wryly at that and wondered how much of her life she really regretted, fully knowing that she had had almost everything a woman could possibly want, almost...

She felt Jack's hand on her back, pushing her forward and just for a moment, she wanted to resist, just to see what he would do in front of all these people, but not feeling in an especially good mood, she knew the evening would just keep going downhill. David was still in her head. She surveyed the scene before her; things did not change much at all. Being fashionably late, the large room was already full. She looked around at the grand ballroom and thought that she should be feeling like a princess. Chandeliers twinkled high above her and seemed to tinkle to the music that could be faintly heard in the background. Giant plant ensembles led the path to a dance floor, which then curved out into mini paths that guided people to their tables. Straight-backed waiters wearing black and white, walked by quickly through the paths serving drinks and appetizers and one approached them, giving a short bow before gesturing for them to follow. Jennifer smiled and nodded and found Jack nudging at her back again. She sighed and moved forward. She wasn't looking forward to this; the incessant small talk to people who cared nothing for her or she for them, for that matter.

At one of the main tables, they took their seats, Jack acting the perfect gentleman and holding out her chair for her. She smiled at him and sat down. Jack seated himself and then, turning his back to her, immediately began a conversation with an elderly, distinguished man sitting on the other side of him,

who gave a small nod of acknowledgement to Jennifer. She nodded back to him, an associate of Jack's, she had met him on a couple of occasions previously. She looked around the room. There were quite a few familiar faces and she smiled obligingly and acknowledged them.

Oh no, she thought; she could see Celia hurrying in her direction.

'Sweeeeeethart!' Celia's high-pitched voice screeched at her. 'I just *have* to tell you about James, you know James, the older fellow with a nasty foot' she began, taking the empty seat next to Jennifer and leaning into her.

Yes, I remember James, thought Jennifer, *he is in fact three months older than I am and twelve months older than you! Nasty foot! – Yes, I'd like to shove that somewhere!*

'Hello Celia, er, I think that seat is reserved for someone else.'

'Oh, don't worry darling, they can wait,' Celia waved her hand as though swatting a fly. Celia was a woman of entitlement; born and bred rich and spoiled, she spent her spare time, of which there was a lot, hosting parties and spreading gossip.

'How are you, Celia? James, what about James?' They air-kissed both cheeks.

Celia droned on and Jennifer nodded politely and oohed and aahed at the rights times. Celia was in the middle of a monologue about her husband Ralph's latest flavor of the month, when she felt her spine stiffen. She instinctively looked around the room.

David was seated three tables away and he was watching her. Her eyes widened in excitement and fear and she hoped that he hadn't really seen her as she had thought in the foyer. She closed her eyes slowly and opened them again. He was still looking at her.

Her David! Looking as he always had, the same beautiful face she remembered so well, always imprinted in her memory.

'Sweetie, you okay?' Brought out of her reverie, she felt Celia's hands on her shoulders, shaking her slightly and her face was leaning in close to her own – she looked concerned. Jennifer realized she must have been as white as a ghost. 'Jack, darling', Celia began to reach out to Jack, who was still occupied with his neighbor.

'No, no, I'm fine,' Jennifer was quickly brought back to reality. 'I think I'm just very tired.'

'Sweetie, you should see someone about that.'

'I'm fine, I just haven't had much sleep lately.' *Go away!* Jennifer shouted in her head. She couldn't think straight and Celia just would not stop talking at her.

'Sweets, I can give you something for that,' Celia leaned over conspiratorially.

Jennifer tried to smile patiently and wondered how to get Celia to change the subject or even how she could get rid of her, but she didn't have to bother.

'Sweetie, I see James and Fiona, I must say hello and enquire about his foot.' Jennifer wanted to protest; that was not polite conversation, but she also wanted to free herself of the annoying woman and gather her thoughts.

'Yes, you must, I will catch up in a little while.'

As Celia sauntered away, calling out to James, Jennifer sighed and slowly raised her eyes again. David nodded to her and raised his glass and she smiled shakily in return. He then turned around to talk to his companion.

Jennifer looked at her. Dressed in emerald green, her hair rolled into a French bun, she leaned into David placing her hand on his knee. Jennifer winced and felt a shooting in her belly and her body tensed. She remembered the feeling, he could always do that to her. Her mind started to go back, back in time, so long ago...

Jack was poking at her and whispering furiously. 'Jennifer, answer me! Where is my drink?'

'I haven't asked for it yet.'

'Seriously? What is wrong with you tonight?' He poked at her ribs harder.

'Really, Jack? The waiter was just here, why didn't you ask for it yourself?' She regretted it the moment it was spoken; she forgot herself. 'Wait, there's one there,' she quickly said. He may not do anything in public, but for Jack, it could wait, and waiting was worse. She motioned for the waiter and turned to Jack to confirm his drink of choice and she felt her blood drain. He was staring at David, his brows knotted in a confused and malicious way.

'Jack, what do you want?' she tried to say it as calmly as possible, but she knew it was too late.

'What...the...fuck?' he said slowly through clenched teeth. 'I will fucking kill him.' He was talking to himself.

Panic began to rise in Jennifer. *No, I must handle this.*

'Jack,' she whispered leaning over, 'what's the matter?' Jennifer's voice was one of innocence, but her throat was tight and she already knew there was going to be trouble.

'Are you serious?' Jack was still talking to himself and Jennifer felt her heart begin to race, but there wasn't anything she could do.

'Jack, be quiet,' she whispered, 'people are starting to look at you.' Appealing to his vanity, she desperately needed to distract him. Jack craved acceptance and admiration and the ploy worked, but

when he turned his attention to her, she drew back instinctively. His face was contorted and she felt his hate pierce through her. He wouldn't. Not here. She was not so sure now...

The man on the other side of Jack tapped at him, watching Jennifer at the same time, which brought him back. He stiffened and changed his expression, before turning away to face the man. She let out a sigh; she had been holding her breath, but at that moment, she felt his hand on her thigh. He was pinching hard, again and again, digging his fingernails into her skin, through her silk skirt. She felt tears start to well and gave her leg a quick tug. He still clung to it. She stood up quickly and excused herself from the table. Jack turned around and looked up at her suspiciously.

Collecting her purse, Jennifer walked towards the ladies' room with her head held high. She felt the looks around her, she always did. They loved her and yet hated her. Some women admired her, some were envious and men just ogled. She wasn't thinking about them. She wasn't thinking; she wanted to get to the ladies' room as quickly as possible; she could feel a tear that had already escaped and was threatening to roll down her cheek. Her thigh was smarting and there would be an enormous bruise tomorrow, but she was not thinking about that now.

The ladies' room was empty and she quickly got herself into a cubicle and sat down. She put her head in her hands and wept.

I hate him. I hate that man.

Then she thought of David. She loved David. After all this time, she knew her heart was still with him.

She heard the door of the ladies' room open and then, voices. She shoved the scrunched-up toilet paper against her mouth and began counting in her head. 10, 9, 8...

She could hear women talking, but she wasn't listening, at least not until she heard his name.

'I think David wants it to happen soon, tick tock, you know,' a voice that sounded like green dressed lady's would.

Was this her David they were talking about?

'Well, what's the problem?' another voice, older, less refined.

Jennifer leaned forward and her purse clattered to the floor, alerting the women to her presence. She held her breath.

'Shhhh, someone's in here.' That was the older woman.

Jennifer picked up her purse and opened her compact. She surveyed the damage to her make-up. Not too bad, she told herself. She was a clean crier and her make-up was always the best. She was dusting her face when she heard the door again. They were leaving. She walked out of the cubicle and stared

at her reflection in the mirror.

'Who are you?' she asked.

Chapter 4

1983

'I'm Jennifer,' she said and stuck out her hand.

David looked at it with an amused smile and took it, unsure of what to do with it. He then raised it to his lips and kissed it ever so slightly. Jennifer felt a slight shiver.

'Come on, you lovebirds, shouldn't you be on your way?' her mother cut in.

She gave Judy a stare and picked up her cardigan from the armchair.

'It was good to meet you, Mrs. Mason, maybe next time, I can meet your other daughter.'

'Oh, please, Judy it is! Yes, Elle is out tonight, poor Elle, working late again...oh, enough, come on, get going.' She shoed them out the door and Jennifer felt David's hand on the small of her back, gently moving her forward. She felt her stomach flutter and she quickly walked to his car.

She suddenly remembered Michael. He could be anywhere, watching. She looked around furtively but couldn't see any sign of him. *Shit, Michael.*

David led her to the passenger side of an older model Ford Fairlane. He opened the door for her and she got in as daintily as she could.

He jumped into the driver's seat and started the engine and Jennifer found herself tongue-tied. She was suddenly very self-conscious which was unusual for her. Boys she had dated before never made her feel so nervous and she began to wonder if she had made enough of an effort with her choice of clothing, not to mention her make-up. She looked down at her legs; long and tapered, she wished she

had worn a shorter skirt that emphasized their shape. The dowdy cardigan, a pale green, highlighted her eyes, *so at least that was something*, she thought.

Both didn't speak and Jennifer was trying to find something to say that would come out easy and refined, but her mind was blank and she knew if she tried, it would come out all wrong. So, she remained silent and so did David. She wondered what he was thinking about and she tried to look at him without turning her head to him. She couldn't see anything, but felt his presence - a musky scent she couldn't identify, filled her nostrils and she breathed in deeply. At one point, as he shoved in a tape, he brushed her arm and she felt her stomach flutter again.

What is wrong with me! Jennifer thought, frustrated with her nervousness.

With the music of the Eagles filtering out of the tinny speakers, David drove for two blocks and then he stopped and turned off the ignition.

Jennifer looked at him questioningly. He leaned over and she jerked backwards, thinking he was about to kiss her. He smiled, a smile that was trying not to laugh. She felt embarrassed and annoyed and pouting, folded her arms.

Well, why the hell would he not want to kiss her?

David leaned back in his seat, with a small smile still on his lips. 'Look, we can split up now. I have stuff to do anyway and you clearly don't want to do this.'

Jennifer looked at him in surprise.

'Where can I drop you off?' he continued and looked lazily over the steering wheel. He was brushing her off, rejecting her!

'Look David...'she started angrily.

He let out a quick laugh. 'Chill out, Jen...'

'Don't call me Jen!' Her ears were becoming hot.

'No, no...sorry, I mean,' he looked at her again, this time with a confused expression, and leaned forward, 'it's just that, I know you don't want to do this. Your mother and my aunt want this. I just figured we would get this evening done and then tell them it wasn't meant to be.'

Jennifer folded her arms tightly again and turned to the windscreen. 'Well, David, you said you would take me out. Take me out!'

'Um, oh, okay, uh, so, where do you want to go?' David looked flustered and started the car again.

It was her turn to smile. She looked at him and her tone softened. 'Wherever you want, I'm happy to go, but I have to warn you, I am starving.'

'Thank God, a woman who eats,' he was relieved the tension was broken.

Chapter 5

2017

She picked at her food trying to avoid facing the direction of David and she couldn't raise her eyes to him, as badly as she wanted to, as Jack had been watching her from the moment she stepped out of the ladies' room. In fact, he had been waiting outside the door for her to emerge. He had grabbed her elbow and had whispered in her ear 'You! You knew he was here, you wait, you lying bitch.'

She walked past him without answering. There was no point; it was too late. So, she sat at the table and made small talk with the young impeccably dressed girl beside her, another familiar face, name unknown.

Jennifer noticed Jack downing his drinks very quickly and she started to become really fearful.

She put her hand on his arm and the look that he gave her made her quickly pull her hand away. He was capable of killing her, he had come close on many occasions. There were still scars on her right breast, large splashes of yellowy white, which meant she was unable to wear anything low cut. That didn't matter to her as she was quite reserved in her choice of dress, but looking at them every day made her feel like less of a woman, a pathetic weak animal. She would fight back, she always did, even knowing that it would make the punishment worse. But she still had to keep some self-respect for her own humanity. She hoped no-one suspected and would be mortified if anyone had an inkling.

Jack, the ladies' man, tall and strong and charming, more handsome than Paul Newman; Jack, the most eligible bachelor at one stage, the owner of one of the biggest ranches in the industry. Jack the

wife-beater - no one would believe it.

One spring afternoon, some years ago, Jack had lost his temper in a fit of jealousy, after a meeting when a young man had commented on his beautiful wife and had sent his regards to Jennifer. Barging through the front door, he had lunged at her without realizing that her friend Angel was visiting with her and was in the kitchen, making them both coffee. Angel had heard the snarl and barrage of profanity and had come running into the living room to find Jennifer crouched beneath Jack on the sofa, while he shook her shoulders violently. He knew if he held her shoulders, she would be pinned down and would find it hard to fight back, but she was trying.

That was the scariest part. His attacks were calculated and he didn't completely lose control, not always. He knew what he was doing. Yes, once it was over, he would claim to have lost control and would apologize profusely, but she knew better and yet, she accepted his apologies and gifts and forgave him. She had to; there was no choice.

Angel had dropped the cup she was holding, screamed, and had lunged at Jack. He looked up quickly and was pushed over by the force of Angel. She sat on top of him and punched his face repeatedly, while he just lay there, stunned, and Jennifer had to use all her strength to pry her friend off him. Jennifer shoved Angel into the bedroom and locked the door. Angel was heaving.

'What the fuck, what the fuck...Jenny, what the fuck was that!'

Jennifer slumped to the floor and put her face in her hands. 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.'

'What the hell are you sorry for!' Angel paced and counted 10, 9, 8, 7... 'Oh my God, Jen, what the hell!' She bent down and took Jennifer in her arms. They sat without speaking, rocking back and forth until the light began to fade.

'What now? I can't leave you. Come with me Jenny. Stay with me, just till you figure out what to do, there's enough room for you.'

Jennifer looked at her and then looked away. 'I can't.'

'This isn't the first time Jenny, I can tell. I will stay here then, until it's safe.'

'It's never safe, but I can handle myself.'

'Come with me. Leave. Why are you here?'

'Angel, you have to go now,' Jennifer sighed. 'It will only get worse.'

'Are you out of your mind? No fucking way!'

Jennifer stood up and smoothed her clothes.

'You have to go now. Thank you, Angel, but you must leave now.'

She missed Angel, her best friend. She had been around for as long as Jennifer could remember. They had grown up together, worked together at one point and had been roommates for two years. They would stay up late on weekends drinking coffee and talking; they could talk and talk about any and everything. They knew each other so well that when one of them was in a bad way, the other instinctively knew it. They supported each other through the bad and the worse, so it was surprising that Angel was clueless as to what was going on with Jennifer and Jack.

Angel had never been a fan of Jack. She knew he could be controlling, but seeing the extent to which he could go was completely unexpected to her. After that day, more than six years ago, Jennifer had not seen her, except at a wedding and at a funeral. She refused her calls and didn't open the door when she came to see her. Quite soon after, Jennifer and Jack had moved and she hadn't let Angel know where she was. Angel had gotten in touch with Jacky, Jack and Jennifer's son, who was not oblivious to his father's activities, but was powerless to help. He had spoken to Angel, warning that any insistent contact would put Jennifer in more trouble.

Angel had stopped trying, but she had kept in touch with Jacky as long as was possible and kept track of Jennifer's life as much as she could. She would send messages and gifts for her, but Jennifer didn't reply or reciprocate as she didn't want to encourage Angel by doing so. For Angel to re-enter their lives would mean danger for Jennifer and she was also worried for Angel. She was aware of what Jack was capable of and couldn't be sure of how far he could go, which had nothing to do with his violence. Jack was well connected and could make life miserable for just about anyone.

Angel, for her part, sensed Jennifer's feeling and stayed away. Jack was pleased that Angel was no longer around as facing her would cause him embarrassment and require some sort of explanation, although, previous to that particular altercation, he had quite liked the woman and she would have come in very handy in the last couple of years, when dealing with Jennifer's illness. Instead he had to care for her himself, as she refused help of any kind, even from her mother.

Now, Jennifer looked at Jack again and something snapped. She picked up the bottle of wine on the table and poured herself a large serve. Jack looked at her in surprise and she very deliberately pushed her glass to his and clinked it so firmly, she thought it would break. Jack raised his eyebrows in astonishment.

'Cheers, my darling husband,' she said softly and downed the drink in one long gulp. She almost gagged, but managed to keep it down.

'What are you doing?' A furious whisper between clenched teeth.

'Having a drink with my husband, that's what!' she replied defiantly and then smiled broadly at him.

'Perhaps you should go back to the suite.' He whispered, trying to grab hold of her arm, which she deftly dodged.

'I'm just fine darling.' Then, very deliberately turning her back on him, she reached out for the bottle again.

She hesitated and then put up her hand for the waiter, who was there so quickly, she wondered if he was a genie.

'Vodka, rocks please,' she smiled at him.

The young lady next to her smiled at her and began to chat about the grand hall and how beautiful everything looked tonight - small talk again, but it was better than looking at Jack. She could feel the wine warming her empty stomach and wondered whether she had been foolish but at that moment, a glass of vodka was put in front of her. She looked up at the waiter.

'Thank you so much, but could you keep it coming?' He nodded obligingly and moved away.

Jennifer emptied the glass in one swig and almost in an instant, there was another full one in front of her. She wondered if Jack had noticed, but didn't risk looking his way.

Her head was becoming light and she was starting to not care so much. She looked over to David's table, but he wasn't at it. She looked around in panic and saw him at the bar. He was in conversation with another man, but his eyes were on her. This time, as the alcohol had made her bolder, she was the one that raised her glass. She felt invigorated. She was still slightly scared, but she knew it was too late, she had thrown caution to the wind and she was going to bear the consequences of David's existence here tonight anyway. What was a little more? In any case, she was hoping he would go so far as to kill her soon. He would be killing two birds with one stone. She would be free from her misery with him as well as the pain she had to endure every day and hopefully, he would be in jail!

Wishful thinking, she sighed. Then she smiled at David, that dazzling smile that he had loved so much.

David raised his eyes in astonishment and then his eyebrows furrowed. He knew this was dangerous for her. He had been watching Jack and knew there would be consequences.

At David's expression, Jennifer became more emboldened; she gulped what was left in her glass, stood up and strode over to where he was. She didn't look back to Jack, she kept her chin high and her eyes on David. He looked flustered and put down the drink he had just received. She reached him and she suddenly didn't know what to say.

'Take me away, quickly.' She blurted.

It was as if time had not passed. David grabbed her hand and strode towards the exit. They didn't

look back.