



COLD AS ICE

USA TODAY bestselling author

ANNE
STUART

"Brilliant characterizations and a suitably moody ambience drive this dark tale of unlikely love."—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review on *Black Ice*

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ANNE STUART



This is for all the people, friends and family,
who left me blessedly alone to write this,
gave me space and freedom from demands.
And for those of you who didn't—
well, you know who you are.

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1

Genevieve Spenser adjusted her four-hundred-dollar sunglasses, smoothed her sleek, perfect chignon and stepped aboard the powerboat beneath the bright Caribbean sun. It was early April, and after a long, cold, wet winter in New York City she should have been ready for the brilliant sunshine dancing off the greeny blue waters. Unfortunately she wasn't in the mood to appreciate it. For one thing, she didn't want to be there. She had a six-week sabbatical from her job as junior partner in the law firm of Roper, Hyde, Camui and Fredericks, and she'd been looking forward to something a great deal different. In two days' time she'd be in the rain forests of Costa Rica with no makeup, no contact lenses, no high heels and no expectations to live up to. She'd been so ready to shed her protective skin that this final task seemed like an enormous burden instead of the simple thing it was.

The Grand Cayman Islands were on her way to Central America. Sort of. And one extra day wouldn't make any difference, Walter Fredericks had told her. Besides, what red-blooded, single, thirty-year-old female would object to spending even a short amount of time with *People* magazine's Sexiest Man of the Year, billionaire division? Harry Van Dorn was gorgeous, charming and currently between wives, and the law firm that represented the Van Dorn Foundation needed some papers signed. This was perfect for everyone. Serendipity.

Genevieve didn't exactly think so, but she kept her mouth shut. She'd learned diplomacy and tact in the last few years since Walt Fredericks had taken her under his wing.

She pulled out her pale gray Armani suit, put on the seven-hundred-dollar Manolo Blahnik shoes she hadn't even blinked at buying—the shoes that hurt her feet, made her tower over most men and matched the Armani and nothing else. When she first brought them home she'd emerged from her corporate daze long enough to look at the price tag and burst into tears. What had happened to the idealistic young woman who was determined to spend her life helping people? The rescuer, who spent her money on the oppressed, not on designer clothing?

Unfortunately she knew the answer, and she didn't want to dwell on it. In her tightly controlled life she'd learned to look forward rather than back. The shoes were beautiful and she told herself she deserved them. And she'd brought them to see Harry Van Dorn, as part of her protective armor.

They didn't make climbing down into the launch any easier, but she managed with a modicum of grace. Genevieve hated boats. She rarely got seasick, but she always felt vaguely trapped. She could see the massive white shape of the Van Dorn yacht against the brilliant horizon; it looked more like a mansion than a boat, and maybe she could simply ignore the sea surrounding them and pretend they were in a fancy restaurant. She was good at ignoring unpleasant facts—she'd learned the hard way that that was what you had to do to survive.

And her job should only take a few hours. She'd let Harry Van Dorn feed her, get him to sign the papers she'd brought with her in her slim leather briefcase, and once she'd arranged to have them couriered back to New York she'd be free. Only a matter of hours—she was silly to feel so edgy. It was far too beautiful a day to have this sense of impending doom. There could be no doom under the bright Caribbean sun.

Her tranquilizers were in her tiny purse. Harry Van Dorn's crew had gotten her comfortably seated with a glass of iced tea in one hand. It was a simple enough matter to sneak one yellow pill out and take it. She'd almost planned to leave them behind in New York—she didn't expect to need tranquilizers in the rain forest, but fortunately she changed her mind at the last minute. The pill was going to take a few minutes to kick in, but she could get by on sheer determination until then.

Genevieve had been on yachts before—Roper and company specialized in handling the legal concerns for myriad charitable foundations, and money was no object. She'd gone from her job as public defender to private law practice, and she'd hoped specializing in charitable foundations was still close enough to honorable work to assuage the remnants of her liberal conscience. She'd been quickly disillusioned—the foundations set up as tax shelters by the wealthy tended to spend as much money glorifying the donors' names and providing cushy jobs for their friends as they did on the actual charity, but by then it was too late, and Genevieve was committed.

Harry Van Dorn's floating palace, *SS Seven Sins*, was on a grander scale than she'd seen so far, and she knew for a fact it was owned by the Van Dorn Trust Foundation, not Harry himself—a nice little tax write-off. She stepped aboard, her three-and-a-half-inch heels balanced perfectly beneath her, and surveyed the deck, keeping her expression impassive. With any luck Harry Van Dorn would be too busy on the putting green she could see up at the front of the ship to want to waste much time on a lawyer who was nothing more than Roper, Hyde, Camui and Fredericks's perfectly groomed messenger. Damn, she wasn't in the mood for this.

She plastered her practiced, professional smile on her Chanel-tinted lips and stepped inside the cool confines of a massive room beautifully furnished in black and white, with mirrors everywhere to make it appear even larger. She could see her reflection in at least three different directions. She'd already checked her appearance before she'd left that morning. A young woman, just past thirty, with her long blond hair neatly arranged, her pale gray suit hanging perfectly on her shoulders and disguising the fifteen pounds that she knew Roper et al didn't approve of. Genevieve

didn't approve of it either, but all the dieting and exercise in the world couldn't seem to budge it.

"Ms. Spenser?" It took a moment for her eyesight to adjust from the bright glare of the sun on the water to the dimmer light in the large room, and she couldn't see anyone but the indistinct shape of a man across the room. The voice held a faint, upper-class British accent, so she knew it wasn't Harry. Harry Van Dorn was from Texas, with a voice and a character to match. The man took a step toward her, coming into focus. "I'm Peter Jensen, Mr. Van Dorn's personal assistant. He'll be with you in a short while. In the meantime is there anything I can do to make you comfortable? Something to drink, perhaps? The newspaper?"

She hadn't thought of the word *unctuous* in a long time, probably not since she'd been forced to read Charles Dickens, but the word suited Peter Jensen perfectly. He was bland and self-effacing to a fault, and even the British accent, usually an attention grabber, seemed just part of the perfect personal-assistant profile. His face was nondescript, he had combed-back, very dark hair and wire-rimmed glasses; if she'd passed him on the street she wouldn't have looked twice at him. She barely did now.

"Iced tea and the *New York Times* if you have it," she said, taking a seat on the leather banquette and setting the briefcase beside her. She crossed her legs and looked at her shoes. They were worth every penny when you considered what they did for her long legs. She looked up, and Peter Jensen was looking at them, too, though she suspected it was the shoes, not the legs. He didn't seem to be the type to be interested in a woman's legs, no matter how attractive they were, and she quickly uncrossed them, tucking her feet out of the way.

"It will only take a moment, Ms. Spenser," he said. "In the meantime make yourself comfortable."

He disappeared, silent as a ghost, and Genevieve shook off the uneasy feeling. She'd sensed disapproval from Harry Van Dorn's cipher-like assistant—he'd probably taken one look at her shoes and known what she'd spent. Normally people in Jensen's position were impressed; she'd walked into a particularly snooty shop on Park Avenue in them and it seemed as if the entire staff had converged on her, knowing that a woman who spent that kind of money on shoes wouldn't hesitate to spend an equally egregious amount in their overpriced boutique.

And she had.

Genevieve steeled herself for Peter Jensen's reappearance. Instead, a uniformed steward appeared, with a tall glass of ice-cold Earl Grey and a fresh copy of the *New York Times*. There was a slender gold pen on the tray as well, and she picked it up.

"What's this for?" she inquired. Didn't they expect her to be professional enough to have brought her own pen?

“Mr. Jensen thought you might want to do the crossword puzzle. Mr. Van Dorn is taking a shower, and he might be awhile.”

Now, how did that gray ghost of a man know she did crossword puzzles? In pen? It was the Saturday paper, with the hardest of the week’s puzzles, and she didn’t hesitate. For some irrational reason she felt as if Peter Jensen had challenged her, and she was tired and edgy and wanted to be anywhere but on Harry Van Dorn’s extremely oversized, pretentious yacht. At least the puzzle would keep her mind off the water that was trapping her.

She was just finishing, when one of the doors to the salon opened and a tall figure filled the doorway. It had been a particularly trying puzzle—in the end she’d been cursing Will Weng, Margaret Farrar and Will Shortz with generalized cool abandon, but she set the paper down and rose with serene dignity.

Only to have it vanish when the man stepped forward and she realized it was simply Peter Jensen again. He glanced at the folded paper, and she just knew his bland eyes would focus on the empty squares of the one word she couldn’t get. “Mr. Van Dorn is ready to see you now, Ms. Spenser.”

About frigging time, she thought. He moved to one side to let her precede him, and it was a momentary shock to realize how tall he was. She was a good six feet in her ridiculous heels, and he was quite a bit taller than she. He should have dwarfed the cabin and yet he barely seemed to be there.

“Enigma,” he murmured as she passed him.

“I beg your pardon?” she said, rattled.

“The word you couldn’t get. It’s enigma.”

Of course it was. She controlled her instinctive irritation; the man got on her nerves for no discernible reason. She didn’t have to play this role for very much longer, she reminded herself. Get Harry Van Dorn to sign the papers, flirt a little bit if she must and then get back to the tiny airport and see if she could catch an earlier flight to Costa Rica.

The bright sun was blinding when she stepped out on deck, and there was no more pretending she was back on the island with all the water shimmering around them. She looked up at the huge boat—not a mansion, an ocean liner—and followed Peter Jensen’s precise walk halfway down the length of the ship until he stopped. She moved past him, dismissing the executive assistant from her mind as she took in the full glory of Harry Van Dorn, the world’s sexiest billionaire.

“Ms. Spenser,” he said, rising from his seat on the couch, his Texas accent rich and charming. “I’m so sorry to have kept you waiting! You came all this way out here just for me and I leave you cooling your heels while I’m busy with paperwork. Peter,

why didn't you tell me Ms. Spenser was here?"

"I'm sorry, sir. It must have slipped my mind." Jensen's voice was neutral, expressionless, but she turned back to glance at him anyway. Why in the world wouldn't he have told Van Dorn she was there? Just to be a pissant? Or was Van Dorn simply dumping the blame on his assistant as he knew he could?

"No harm done," Van Dorn said, moving forward, taking Genevieve's hand with the most natural of gestures and bringing her back into the cabin. He was clearly a physical man, one who liked to touch when he talked to people. It was part and parcel of his charisma.

Unfortunately Genevieve didn't like to be touched.

But a client was a client, so she simply upped the wattage of her smile and let him pull her over to the white leather banquette, forgetting about the unpleasant little man who'd brought her here. Except that in fact he wasn't that little. It didn't matter—he'd already made himself scarce.

"Now, don't you mind Peter," Harry said, sitting just a bit too close to her. "He tends to be very protective of me, and he thinks every woman is after my money."

"All I'm after is your signature on a few papers, Mr. Van Dorn. I certainly wouldn't want to take up any more of your time—"

"If I don't have time for a beautiful young woman then I'm in a pretty pitiful condition," Harry said. "Peter just wants to keep my nose to the grindstone, while I believe in having fun. He doesn't have much use for women, I'm afraid. Whereas I have far too much. And you're such a pretty thing. Tell me, what sign are you?"

He'd managed to throw her completely off guard. "Sign?"

"Astrology. I'm a man who likes my superstitions. That's why I named the boat *Seven Sins*. Seven's my lucky number and always has been. I know that that new age crap don't mean squat, but I enjoy playing around with it. So indulge me. I'm guessing you're a Libra. Libras make the best lawyers—always judging and balancing."

In fact she was a Taurus with Scorpio rising—her teenage friend Sally had had her chart done for an eighteenth birthday present, and that was one of the few details that had stuck. But she had no intention of disillusioning her wealthy client.

"How did you guess?" she said, keeping the admiration in her voice at a believable level.

Harry's laugh was warm and appealing, and Genevieve was beginning to see why people found him so charming.

People magazine hadn't lied—he was gorgeous. Deeply tanned skin, clear blue

eyes with laugh lines etched deep around them, a shock of sun-streaked blond hair that made him look like Brad Pitt in his seedy mode. He radiated warmth, charm and sexuality, from his broad, boyish grin to his flirting eyes to his rangy, well-muscled body. He was handsome, charming, and any warm-blooded woman would have been interested. Right then, Genevieve couldn't have cared less.

But she had a job to do, and she knew that one of her unspoken orders was to give this very important client anything he wanted. It wouldn't be the first time she'd considered sleeping with someone for business reasons. She knew perfectly well what that made her—a pragmatist. She'd avoided it so far, but sooner or later she was going to have to be less fastidious and more practical. If it turned out that she had to sleep with Harry Van Dorn just to get some papers signed and get out of there...well, there were plenty of more onerous duties she'd had to perform while at Roper et al. She could perform this one if she had to.

But she knew the drill. They weren't going to get to the business she'd brought until the social amenities were covered, and with Texans that could take hours.

"You mustn't mind Peter," he repeated. "He's an Aries, with a very auspicious birth chart or I wouldn't keep him around. April twentieth, as a matter of fact. He's too damn gloomy by half, but he gets the job done."

"Has he worked for you a long time?" she asked, wondering when Harry was going to take his hand off her knee. Good hands—big, tanned, perfectly manicured. There could be worse hands touching her. Like the slimy Peter Jensen's.

"Oh, it seems like forever, though in fact he's only been with me for a few months. I don't know how I managed without him—he knows more about me and my life than I do. But you know how men like that are—they get a little possessive of their bosses. Look, I don't want to spend the afternoon talking about Peter—he's about as interesting as watching grass grow. Let's talk about you, pretty lady, and what brought you here."

She started to reach for her briefcase, but he covered her hand with his big one and gave an easy laugh. "To hell with business. We have plenty of time for that. I mean, what brought you to an old-fart law firm like Roper and company? Tell me about your life, your loves and hates, and most of all tell me what you want my chef to prepare for dinner."

"Oh, I can't possibly stay. I have a plane to catch to Costa Rica."

"Oh, but you can't possibly leave," Harry mimicked her. "I'm bored, and I know your associates would want you to make me happy. I won't be happy unless I have someone to flirt with over dinner. Those oil wells aren't going to dry up overnight—nothing will happen if I don't sign the deeds of transference till later. I promise, I'll sign your papers, and I'll even see that you get to Costa Rica, though why you'd want to go to that pesthole is beyond me. But in the meantime, forget about business and tell

me about you.”

Genevieve let go of the briefcase, and after a moment he let go of her hand. She should have been uneasy, but he was such a simple puppy dog of a man, wanting someone to play with him, throw a ball for him, that she couldn't feel edgy. He was harmless, and she could play along for a while. As long as he didn't start humping her leg.

“Whatever your chef cares to make,” she said.

“And what do you drink? Apple-tinis, right?”

Any kind of martini made her stomach turn, though she'd downed more than her share of them in order to fit in at the requisite social functions that Roper sponsored. Cosmopolitans were the worst, and everyone assumed she loved them. Her *Sex and the City* persona must have been very effective.

But he was one of the ten richest men in the western world, and he could get anything he wanted. “Tab,” she said.

She'd managed to throw him. “What's Tab?”

“A hard-to-find diet soda. And not that revolting energy drink version. Never mind, I was just kidding. Whatever you're having.”

“Nonsense. Peter!” Harry barely had to raise his voice. His assistant entered the room so silently he only increased her feeling of uneasiness. “I need you to get some kind of soda pop called Tab. Apparently it's what Ms. Spenser drinks.”

Jensen's colorless eyes slid over her. “Of course, sir. It might take an hour or so but I'm certain some will be available.”

“That's fine, then. The original—not any newfangled crap. Ms. Spenser is staying for dinner, of course. Tell the chef I want him to do his very best work.”

“I'm afraid, sir, that the chef has left.”

It was enough to wipe the charming smile off Harry's handsome face. “Don't be ridiculous. He's been with me for years! He wouldn't take off without warning.”

“I'm sorry, sir. I have no idea whether his reasons were professional or personal, I simply know he's gone.”

Harry shook his head. “Unbelievable! That's the fifth long-term employee of mine who's left without notice.”

“Sixth, sir, if you count my predecessor,” Jensen murmured.

“I want you to look into this, Jensen,” Harry said in a dark voice. But then his sunny smile took over. “In the meantime, I’m sure you can find someone to take Olaf’s place and rustle up something wonderful for me and my guest.”

“Certainly.”

“I wouldn’t want to put you to any trouble in the midst of such a domestic crisis,” Genevieve interrupted. “Really, you could just sign the papers and I’ll take off—”

“I wouldn’t hear of it,” Harry said grandly. “You traveled all this way just for me—the least I can do is feed you properly. See to it, Peter.”

She watched Harry’s assistant disappear with a twinge of regret. There was no getting out of this. At the very least, however, she had little doubt he’d manage to scare up both Tab and a five-star chef—he had that kind of machine-like efficiency down pat. And Van Dorn was turning up his Texas charm—in a few minutes he’d no doubt be talking about his dear old pappy—and she might as well lean back and make the best of it. At the very worst she was going to be bored to death, but there were worse ways to spend an evening.

Peter Jensen could move with frightening efficiency, even in the guise of the perfect executive assistant. It had taken him longer to get rid of Olaf than the others, and he was afraid he was going to have to use force, but in the end he’d done his job and the chef had decamped in a righteous snit.

Not that Peter would have minded using force. He did what he had to do, and he was very well trained. But he preferred subtlety, and brute force left bruises and bodies and too many questions. In the end Olaf had left, Hans was primed and ready to step in, and they were just about to make their well-planned move.

The girl, however, was a problem. He should have known Harry’s law firm would send someone young and pretty to keep him happy. They didn’t know enough about Harry’s complicated appetites to realize anyone would do.

The papers she brought with her were another question—were they simply an excuse or a clue to something more important? Harry hadn’t seemed the slightest bit interested, but then, Harry wouldn’t.

He had to get the woman off the boat, fast, before they could put their plans into motion. They would get the go-ahead in the next few days, and he didn’t want any stray civilians to get in the way and complicate things. The assignment was relatively simple—nothing he hadn’t done before, and he was very good at what he did, but timing, as always, was everything.

Ms. Spenser was getting in the way, and the sooner he got rid of her, the better. He was a man who avoided collateral damage, and he wasn’t about to change his ways at

this point, no matter how important the mission. And while he knew only a part of Harry Van Dorn's maniacal Rule of Seven, he knew stopping Van Dorn was a very important mission indeed.

He knew what they called him behind his back. The Iceman. Both for his ice-cold control, and his particular expertise. He didn't care what they called him, as long as he got the job done.

Ms. Spenser would have to go, before it was too late. Before he was forced to kill her.

He remembered her dark eyes as they'd looked through him. He shouldn't have mentioned the crossword puzzle—that was something she might remember if someone started asking her questions once the job was finished. But no, he'd played his part well enough. She'd looked at him and hadn't seen him, and that ability to vanish was his stock-in-trade.

She'd be no threat to their mission. She was bright and pretty and clueless, and she was going to be back in her safe little world before anything bad could happen.

And she'd never know how close to death she came.

Madame Lambert looked out over the bare tree branches outside her nondescript office in a nondescript building near London's Kensington Gardens. She was slim, elegant and ruthlessly chic, with creamy, ageless skin and cool, ageless eyes. She stared at the trees, looking for some sign of life. It was April, after all, time for things to come alive again.

But it always took longer in the city, where pollution slowed the natural evolution of things. And for some reason the trees and gardens near the offices of the Spence-Pierce Financial Consultants, Ltd., tended to die. If Madame Lambert were a more fanciful person she'd think it was a sympathetic reaction to the actual work they did. Spence-Pierce was nothing more than one of a dozen covers for the covert work done by the Committee, a group so steeped in secrecy that Isobel Lambert was still just learning some of the intricate details, and she'd been in charge for more than a year.

It was April, and time was running out. The Rule of Seven was in play, backed by Harry Van Dorn's brilliant brain and seemingly limitless resources, and they still didn't know nearly enough about what it was. Seven disasters, orchestrated by Harry Van Dorn, to plunge the world into chaos, chaos that would somehow be turned to Van Dorn's benefit. But the whens, the wheres, the hows were still maddeningly unclear. Not to mention who—Harry couldn't be doing this without help.

Whatever it was, it was deadly.

And it was the Committee's job to keep deadly things from happening. No matter

how high the body count happened to be.

She wasn't feeling good about this, and she'd learned to trust her instincts. Peter was the best they had, a brilliant operative who'd never failed a mission.

But she had the unpleasant feeling that all that was about to change.

She shook herself, returning to the spotless walnut desk that held nothing but a Clarendon pad and a black pen. She kept everything in her head, for safety's sake, but sometimes she just needed to write.

She scrawled something, then glanced down at it. The Rule of Seven.

What the hell was Harry Van Dorn planning to unleash on an unsuspecting world?

And would killing him be enough to stop it?

2

Harry Van Dorn's McMansion of a yacht was large enough that Genevieve could almost forget she was surrounded by water. The smell of the sea was still there, but she loved the ocean if she wasn't on a boat, and she could easily pretend she was on some nice safe cliff overlooking the surf, rather than bobbing around in the middle of it.

Harry Van Dorn was both quirky and charming, there was no denying it, and he was focusing all that charm on her. His megawatt smile, his crinkly blue eyes, his lazy voice and rapt attention to her every word should have made her melt. Except that Genevieve didn't melt easily, even beneath the warm Caribbean sun with a billionaire doing his best to seduce her.

The Tab had appeared, of course, cold with a glass of ice as well. She knew she ought to have insisted on Pellegrino or something equally upscale—the firm would never approve of something as mundane as soda pop—but she should have been on vacation, and for now she could let little things drop. She'd even kicked off her shoes as she stretched out on the white leather chaise, wiggling her silk-covered toes in the sunlight.

She knew how to make the most self-effacing man become expansive, and Harry was hardly a wallflower. The Van Dorn Foundation had never been under her particular purview—she'd been kept busy with the relatively simple concerns of several smaller foundations—but she found his worldview fascinating. It was no wonder he collected humanitarian awards by the bucketload—he'd even been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize, though she thought it would be a cold day in hell before he got one. The profits from his overseas production companies were cut in half because he refused to let them employ child labor, and the workers received enough of a living wage that they didn't have to send their children into factories and brothels. He still made a profit, Genevieve thought cynically, and his generous salaries were still only a fraction of what he used to pay the workers in the American factories that now lay closed and abandoned in the dying cities in the Midwest, but the humanitarian organizations ignored that part. Either ignored it, or knew that giving a billionaire an award was likely to make his charitable foundation feel even more charitable toward them.

His money came from everywhere—oil fields in the Middle East, diamond mines in Africa, investments so complicated she doubted even he understood them. All she knew was he made money faster than he could spend it, and his tastes were lavish.

But she had become used to billionaires in the past few years, and in the end there were all the same, even someone like Harry Van Dorn with his little eccentricities. She listened to him ramble on in his lazy Texas accent, telling herself she should just relax, that by tomorrow she'd be stripped of these clothes and her professional armor and be hiking through the jungles of Costa Rica, fending off mosquitoes and blisters. Compared to this plush cocoon it sounded like heaven.

She awoke with a start. Harry was still talking—apparently he'd never even noticed that she'd drifted off for a moment. She could thank her mirrored sunglasses for that—if Walt Fredericks ever knew his protégée had fallen asleep in front of a client she'd be out on her ass in a matter of hours. Though there was always the good possibility that that was exactly what she wanted.

And then she realized what had woken her. Not Harry's lazy ramblings, but the feel of the boat beneath her. The unmistakable rumble of an engine, when this damn thing should be floating and silent.

“Why did they turn on the engines?” She broke through Harry's discourse on tarot cards.

“Did they? I hadn't noticed. I think they do that every now and then to check the engines. Make sure she's in good running order. Sort of like a fire drill. They don't usually do it until a few hours before we're supposed to set sail, but I have no plans to go anywhere right now. Must be some sort of maintenance thing.”

She'd sat bolt upright. They'd been under the shelter of an overhanging deck when Harry had ensconced her on the chaise, but now the sun had advanced far enough that it was halfway up her legs. It was a reasonable explanation, but she wasn't buying it.

She swung her legs over the side of the leather couch, slipped on her killer shoes with barely a wince and rose. “I hadn't realized it had gotten so late—I've been so interested in your stories,” she lied with the talent she'd honed over the years. “I really do need you to sign those papers—I have a plane to catch. I'm due in Costa Rica tomorrow afternoon.”

“Nonsense. I wouldn't hear of you leaving,” he replied. “We'll have a lovely dinner, you'll spend the night, and tomorrow I'll have my private jet take you wherever you want to go.”

“I couldn't—”

“And don't think I have wicked designs on you,” he said with a wink. “I do, but my mama taught me to be a gentleman where ladies are concerned. This place has seven bedrooms, each with its own bath, and there's nothing like sleeping in the rocking arms of the ocean. It'll rock your cares away.”

“I don’t have any particular cares at this moment,” she said, lying through her teeth with utter charm. “And I couldn’t ask you to go to so much trouble.”

“No trouble at all.” He overrode her. “I have a jet and a pilot just sitting around with nothing to do—he’d love a chance to get out for a day or so. He can even wait for you while you do your business down there and bring you back, either here or to New York.”

“I’m staying for six weeks, Mr. Van Dorn.”

“No one calls me Mr. Van Dorn,” he protested. “That was my daddy’s name. And why in hell would you spend six weeks in Costa Rica?”

“I’m going on a hiking expedition in the rain forest.” She waited for his reaction.

He blinked, and for a moment she wondered just how deep his humanitarian commitment ran. “The Van Dorn Foundation has always been active in environmental issues as well. After all, this is the only earth we’ve got.”

She wasn’t about to tell him that her vacation choice of rain forest had been motivated more by the notion that she’d be unreachable than by any charitable instincts. “Indeed,” she murmured. “But I really do need to be going...”

“Peter!” Harry barely raised his voice, but Peter Jensen was there instantly. He must have been hovering just out of sight. “I need you to get in touch with my pilot and tell him to get the jet ready. Ms. Spenser will be flying down to Costa Rica tomorrow, and I want her to be comfortable.”

She opened her mouth to protest again, and then caught an odd expression lurking behind Peter Jensen’s rimless glasses. It was unreadable, but definitely there, and very curious. Enigma, she thought, remembering the crossword puzzle.

“If you’re certain it’s no trouble,” she said, keeping her pleasant demeanor firmly in place. It looked as if she was going to have to spend the night on this boat, in the middle of the damn water.

“Very good, sir,” Jensen murmured tonelessly.

“And have them make up the mate’s cabin for her, would you? She’s going to spend the night.” He turned back to Genevieve with a winning smile. “You see? All open and aboveboard. I intend to be a perfect gentleman.”

For some reason Genevieve found herself glancing at the assistant. She must have imagined the sheen of contempt in his colorless eyes—a good servant never betrayed his emotions, and she suspected Jensen was a very good servant indeed. Harry could afford the best, and she’d already witnessed Jensen’s machine-like efficiency.

“Very good, sir.”

“You’ll need to have someone fetch Ms. Spenser’s bags.”

“I’m afraid that’s impossible, sir. I checked on them when I went to secure a new chef—it seemed prudent since I was on land. Ms. Spenser’s bags were already sent on their way to Costa Rica on her scheduled flight.”

Prudent. Now, there was a word you didn’t hear every day, Genevieve thought. She would have been annoyed, but Jensen’s “prudent” action gave her the excuse she needed.

“That was very kind of you to try, Mr. Jensen. It seems I’d better try to catch my plane after all.”

“Simply doing my job, Ms. Spenser,” he murmured. “I’ve arranged for the boat to be ready in an hour’s time.”

“Well, you can just unarrange it,” Harry said grandly. “Ms. Spenser is spending the night. Don’t tell me there aren’t clothes on board to fit a pretty little thing like her, because I know different. Besides, it’s April seventh, and you know seven is my lucky number. I bet your birthday’s on the seventh of October, Ms. Spenser. Isn’t it?”

For a moment she wondered where he’d come up with such an outlandish notion, but then she remembered she’d agreed when he asked if she was a Libra. Would he give up trying to keep her here if she said she was born on the fifteenth?

“You really are amazing,” she said in a light voice, avoiding the issue altogether.

“I’m afraid all the women’s clothes on board are more likely to fit a size two or four. On your orders, sir.”

Genevieve didn’t know who pissed her off more, Harry Van Dorn for assuming she’d do what he wanted, or Peter Jensen for his implied suggestion that she was fat.

“I wear a size six,” she said in a dulcet tone. In fact, she was an eight and sometimes even a ten, and she suspected in cheaper clothes it might even be worse than that, but she wasn’t about to admit it. She just had to hope Jensen wouldn’t be able to turn up some size sixes that she would have to try to squeeze into.

He didn’t look skeptical—he probably knew what size she wore, even down to her shoes—but he was too well trained.

“Hell, we’re informal around here,” Harry said. “I’m sure you can rustle up something for her, Jensen. I wouldn’t put anything past you.” He turned to Genevieve. “He’s an Aries, remember. Tight-assed son of a bitch, if you’ll pardon my French, but he gets the job done. Whereas I’m an Aquarius—more of an ideas man. I don’t usually get along with Libras, but I expect you’ve got one hell of a rising sign.”

The only thing rising about her was her temper, but there wasn’t a damn thing she