

SWEET REVENGE

by

Jeannette Dean

"She's the one," Rachel's smile was triumphant. "Perfect."

"I've never stolen anything," Yolande whispered.

"You'd never escaped from prison either, but we're here now and if we don't get off this island soon we'll be back inside. No cush open prison with visits to town next time. No, it'll be back to basic with the cold-turkey muppets in a closed nick."

"I know, I know," Yolande sighed.

"Well then stop whinging." Rachel checked her Casio, nodded. Throughout the week she'd watched 'Intrigue' from the river bank, the fishermen's cafe, and the marina restaurant where they were now seated. The boat's owner, Gerald Wasteford, was pretentious

and middle-aged. He wore pristine whites and new deck shoes.

He'd only taken the boat out two times on afternoon sails and she would bet he'd kept the engine running as his type wouldn't understand the tides and currents. He'd had a few guests but was now alone.

"She should be taken away from him, given a chance to do what she was designed for," Rachel declared. She devoured the last of her greasy fish.

Yolande pushed hers away. "This is almost as bad as prison food. I thought yacht clubs were posh with gourmet food and thick carpet."

"A misnomer," Rachel laughed. "Proper ones are among the last bastions of elitist sexism in England. Rarely is the food impressive. Stateside they're based more on bank balance."

They became attentive as Wasteford left 'Intrigue' in her end berth and strolled toward the restaurant. Rachel gave Yolande a look and they were out the front door by the time he entered through the glass marina door from the quay.

Rachel cautiously surveyed the council estate when they returned that evening to the 'safe house' Chad had arranged. It belonged to an old woman of middle age whose son had dealt for him but was now 'inside'. Chad was paying her mortgage. Rachel knew the search for them wouldn't be intense and certainly wouldn't stretch all the way across country to Falmouth, but she was nervous, cautious.

The small bedroom they shared had its own entry. They had been careful, leaving before sunrise and returning after dark each day. They hadn't seen the woman since meeting her when they'd arrived, an arrangement that suited Rachel. Her plan was to sail away, involving as few people as possible.

Yolande poured them each a Chablis and opened the smoked salmon, cream cheese and rye bread. "You think it'll be tomorrow night?"

"To our great escape!" Rachel toasted as she began transferring supplies to their boat bags. "I'm sure of it. He's put a couple of bags in his car. He'll probably leave before noon to beat the

traffic and leave the boat clean-up to the yard."

"Why are we taking 'Intrigue'?" Yolande pulled the flowered curtains closed, sat down on the matching quilt and sipped her wine.

"I mean, you said you only do 'victimless crimes'. Why not take one of those boats they rent out, they'd be heavily insured."

"'Intrigue' is listed in the window of the boat charter company. She's definitely insured," Rachel snapped, her jaw set firm beneath the short blonde curls. "Listen, if you don't like the plan, stay here. You asked to come along, to get out of England, to get back to Nevis. It's my plan, my money."

"Okay Yank," Yolande laughed nervously. "Just a question, not a complaint."

Rachel sighed and leaned against the wardrobe. "It's against everything in me, stealing someone's boat." The harsh overhead light highlighted the yellow flicks in her brown eyes. "Wasteford's the one who grassed."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Yolande's soft voice hardened. She'd spent the week sketching the marina, giving Rachel detailed

reports on movements of marina employees, Wasteford and people on neighboring boats. "So that's why you've worn sunglasses and kept your hair under your cap. What else don't I know?"

Downing her wine in a gulp, Rachel refilled her glass and topped up Yolande's. "I've been living at sea and smuggling cannabis for so long I'm not inclined to 'open up'."

She studied the skinny artist. She was striking, an interesting mix with long lustrous black hair, high cheekbones and light brown skin but the pale blue eyes threw you off, were unreadable. They had been transferred to HMP Drake at the same time, shared a cell through induction, then moved into the same dorm. Yolande had turned to her in panic when the husband she'd stabbed sent word he'd paid someone 'inside' to get revenge. Rachel couldn't understand why anyone would live with a man who beat her but had accepted that if Yolande was tough enough to finally stab the bastard, she was capable of crewing for her.

Yolande said softly, "If you can't trust me, how can you consider taking me to sea with you?"

"Yeah," Rachel mumbled. She took a piece of the tender pink salmon and some rough dark bread. "I've missed texture and flavour." She chewed slowly, took a fat pinch of cream cheese. After washing it down with wine she licked her fingers. "How I hated plastic prison utensils. If that's what 'Intrigue' has they're going overboard and we'll eat with our hands."

"My grandmother always ate with her hands and was such a lady with it." Yolande sipped her wine, reached over and took a handful of the soft cheese and squeezed, then began nibbling at the bits that oozed between her fingers.

Laughing, Rachel began a condensed version of her life, from working in a marina as a kid to becoming an outlaw. It wasn't a boring story, there were storms and narrow escapes aplenty. They had finished the wine by the time she got to, "So Wasteford was to have met me in Brighton to make a pickup for a customer. HM Customs showed up instead. Chad had financed the deal but stayed untouched. Luckily Wasteford hadn't known him. I gave no names, took the rap. That's why Chad picked us up on our town

visit, got us to the station, and gave me money."

"So he helped you escape and supplied this place to stay and the info on finding Wasteford. But, why didn't he just get you a boat? I mean, you protected him, you did the time."

Rachel smiled, "Oh, he's fattened my account in the Caribbean but my bust crippled him financially. Besides, I want revenge."

"Just walk like you own the place," Rachel instructed as they headed down the quay, full canvas boat bags weighing them down. Football had everyone glued to the television in the marina bar.

"Lovely night for a sail," chirped Yolande.

Rachel was tense, reacted to every sound and movement, but she knew it was worse for Yolande. She'd talked her through every move, rehearsed their story should anyone ask questions. But there were always variables. She smiled. The art was in handling whatever came along.

She heaved her bag onto 'Intrigue' amidships, stepped aboard and took Yolande's bag. Her attention went immediately to the

companionway. She'd crewed on a couple of old Swans before, knew it would be easy enough to get in, but was pleased to find it unlocked. Some still did that in marinas they trusted.

"Hello," she called down. Getting no reply, she went below and straight to the navigation table. Lifting the top, she felt around and laughed aloud. Predictable fool. A flashlight to the left and spare keys under charts in the right back corner.

"Can't believe our luck," Rachel whispered as she started the engine. It was a relatively quiet diesel. "Sounds healthy," she smiled. "Okay, throw off the dock lines." They both jumped when a loud cheer went up from the bar. "Hurry," she snapped, "but be careful."

Yolande fell when climbing back on board but caught a stanchion, recovered, and limped into the cockpit.

"Just sit down," Rachel growled. Every inch of her honed to the task of getting clear of the slip. She had memorized the chart she'd bought as soon as they'd arrived in Falmouth. Deftly she maneuvered 'Intrigue' out into the Channel on the outgoing tide.

After two hours of intense silence, Rachel gave a loud yelp, threw back her head and began laughing. Yolande was startled into nervous giggles.

"We did it, Yolande, we did it!" They hugged and both began talking at once, stopped and froze at the sound.

"Oh no!"

"Hush!" Rachel grabbed her arm. She stared at the radar screen, watched the dot advancing from land. It steadily shortened the distance from one-half to one-quarter mile.

"It's not a fishing boat, that's for sure. It's a power boat," she stated flatly.

"Well speed up," Yolande ordered.

"We're at full bore, Yolande, and there's not enough wind to fill the sails. There's not a thing we can do."

They stood holding hands, waiting for their capture. Rachel shrugged, "Hey, it's been an adventure."

Yolande was trembling but managed, "Yeah, prison was boring."

The dot joined theirs on the radar screen but still was masked by

the night. "They're running without lights." A glimmer of hope crept into Rachel's voice at the thought that they, too, must be on an illegal mission.

"They're going around us!"

In silence they listened as the phantom sped ahead of them into the distance. Laughing and crying they hugged and cheered.

"It was meant to be," Yolande declared. "Caribbean, here we come!"

"Okay," Rachel sobered. "Gauge says we've got over half a tank of water but we've got to use a bare minimum. Drinking, cooking and brushing teeth only. Sea water for the rest and I'll show you how everything works tomorrow. We brought enough food for four week's survival and Wasteford probably left a few tins. Here, take the helm. We're not out of danger 'til we're out in the Atlantic."

Rachel didn't relax until they had worked their way through a series of squalls and a fleet of fishing boats into the open ocean. It took two days and they were exhausted.

Yolande was learning fast and proclaimed a love for sailing after her seasickness passed. Rachel walked her through the safety checks before they both went below to stow their supplies and search 'Intrigue'.

While Yolande put things away Rachel ferreted about in obscure places. Every boat had at least one secret spot and she was determined to find it. She was sure Wasteford would have something hidden away. With a screwdriver she removed a series of locker panels before locating the stash. Wrapped in several bags was a plastic container. Even she was unprepared for the bundle of cash it contained. Together they counted the neat packets.

"£200,000," Yolande breathed incredulously.

"Wonder who he screwed for this," Rachel snorted.

"Well, you won't need to work for a while."

Rachel looked at her. "We split it. Fifty-fifty."

She laughed at Yolande's stunned silence and gestured around them. "I've got 'Intrigue'." Her eyes danced. "And, I've got sweet

revenge."

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