

## CHAPTER 1



What Jade needed right now was to get away from her family. She kicked the pebble down the beach, the kicked-up sand sticking to her tights. Things back at the house were still going, but she was not in the mood to socialize. They were all so happy compared to her, not that she was depressed. She was just moody. She felt like a teenager again and it was being around her family that caused it.

Ahead, she saw a dark spot on the ground. The waves lapped over it, the gray sky and oppressive clouds making her cold as well as miserable. Why did her family have to be so... annoying? She hated the way they laughed.

Her interest peaked as she got closer to the dark spot. Oh my God, it was a hole. She craned her neck, amazed to find that it was so solid since it was made in the sand. She edged closer, taking note of the sand and the smooth sides as if a tube of clear plastic had been stuck into the sand. From where she stood, she couldn't see the bottom. What the hell?

She circled it, noticing it was more like a steep slide than a straight hole. Was it a well? A drain? How come the ocean hadn't filled it in? Aware that she didn't want to fall inside, she went to her

knees and looked over. Her jaw dropped. It went down and down into darkness.

The sand under her palms began to erode. She moved back, but like an avalanche, everything began to move too fast and in too large a scale. Her stomach flipped as she felt the sand under her knees slide away. The sand sprayed into the vast hole. Down there, was darkness without a bottom.

She scrambled back ineffectually, already riding the sandslide like a wayward surfer. She was falling closer to the emptiness of the hole.

Doom and panic flooded her. Her hands lost the battle and only had insubstantial air to hang onto. She wavered, the sand cascading around her. Her upper body made her center of gravity top heavy. She screamed in terror for help as she fell forward into the pit.

Second by second, she tried to recover, tried to find a handhold. The heels of her rubber boots failed to dig in deep enough into the sandy side as she twisted in midair to face the gray sky. Then her boots lost their hold and she was falling. She knew if she landed, she'd be badly hurt. She watched above her as a wave washed over the pit as if there was a glass pane covering it. She fell and fell and knew she was going to die.



WILLIAM LOOKED out at the ocean far in the distance, wondering when life was going to start getting easier. He wasn't a fool who hoped life would become flowers and fairies, but just a single break would be welcome. Behind him, his two little boys fought over some colored piece of yarn. Just one day when he wasn't worried, didn't have to mother his boys, didn't have to shoot at prowling wolves. One day.

Far off, he saw a glint of movement. Someone was coming up his trail. The word road would be too generous a name. He had yet to widen it to fit a large cart because he didn't own a large cart and

he was only ten miles from town as it was. When his boys were older they'd help him make the road passable.

He scolded his boys over his shoulder and got a few minutes of obedient silence before one boy hit the other. Mason was the stubborn one, thinking because he was a year older he could do what he wanted. William couldn't focus on work knowing someone approached his homestead, so he waited, lighting his pipe.

Tommy began to cry, the yarn having snapped after so much pulling. William could hear the angry guilt of Mason as he tried to console the boy, as only children could, by telling him it was just a piece of yarn after all. Then why had they been fighting over it so fiercely, William thought? It had been their ma's. Mayhap they recalled that. Mason was four and remembered his ma well enough while Tommy was having an easier time of letting her go, except when he cried over a bad dream or a scraped knee, then he'd beg for Ma instead of Papa.

After some time, Tommy forgot to be sad and became mad instead as they found something else to argue about. A rider came up the slope through the trees. It was Sam, the baker's son. He was an errand boy since he was the youngest of their brood. The wild-haired lad jumped from the horse and trotted to William eagerly. He had interesting news, William could tell, judging by the way his mouth curved in a cheeky grin.

"Mornin' Mister Darnell. Mister Prince sent me to tell you he's got yer wife in holding, sir!"

The words flung a little shock through his body like being slapped on the back by a stranger, but he kept his face clear of his reaction.

"Since when?" William asked.

"Since today, sir. She'd done thrown a terrible fit."

Sounded like his wife. William stepped into his cabin and grabbed a half penny. Mason and Tommy were peeking out at the older boy. He eyed them, then turned to the baker's son.

"Watch my boys while I go collect my wife and there'll be

another half penny in it for you.” He tossed the penny and the boy caught it.

“Yessir.”

William saddled his horse and headed down the path, listening as the eight-year-old explained something enormously crucial to his younger boys.



JADE SAT in the tiny stone cell, her arms wrapped around her knees, her feet bare. The man had stolen her rubber boots right off her feet. He'd been nasty and had gone and stuck his knife into the side to test it. Then he'd backhanded her when she'd yelled at him.

When she'd woken up on the beach, right as rain except for some sore joints, she'd thought she'd dreamed it all. It was the sort of thing that happened in a dream. There was probably some sexual meaning behind it. But then she'd gone walking back home and hadn't seen the house or any other houses. She was practical and didn't get worried. But seeing the two women walking arm in arm carrying wicker baskets and wearing long old fashioned dresses had made her feel like something more might be going on. They'd taken a long look at her, then had spoken to each other and had turned around and hurried away. She'd watched their skirts twitch as they went up an uneven path. She'd gone up it too, her hands stuffed in her black hoodie while wishing she'd put on real pants instead of her flashy leggings in this cold. The long shirt she wore barely covered her bottom.

The trail had gone for a long way. She'd eventually found the first building and had gawked. There had been nothing *wrong* with it per se, but she had visited her aunt and uncle in this town enough that she was sure there were no historical buildings that tourists could go and pay to look at. This one was two stories, made of logs, and had moss stuffed in the cracks. The roof was made of bark shingles. There had been a horse tied up out front.

She'd caused a scene as she walked through this old-timey place. She had looked around for camera crews that were filming these people wearing old fashioned clothes, but saw none. Then a man, the sheriff or constable, had stalked to her wearing a sneer while everyone else had stood watching. He'd spoken with a British accent and didn't explain what was going on. Then he'd hauled her away to this jail cell that had a barred door that locked and wasn't a movie prop in any way. It was cold in here, too.

She glared at him through the bars where he sat cutting up her boots for no reason.

"Stop that," she said, but got the barest glance in return.

He was wearing a uniform with gleaming buttons, but it was slightly worn around the edges. He had a fat belly, but was far from obese. He was just an unappealing man overall, his sneering face not helping.

"Why am I locked up?" she yelled at him.

He slammed the knife on the table and stood in such a menacing way that she immediately regretted having spoken. He leaned on the bars, giving her a nasty look.

"Chit like you ought to know to keep her pretty mouth shut, eh?"

"My family's expecting me back," she warned.

He drew out his key ring which only had three keys in total. "In what condition? I'll see to it you don't walk around town so lewdly again."

She felt the threat fall over her like a sudden downpour of rain. Was this some cult town? Were her tights offending them?

"Go fuck yourself," she said, moving away from the door to lean on the wall.

That only made him grin. "Doxy's got a mouth." He swung a single key on his finger. "Might be I'll let you go if you pay me in return."

She stubbornly looked away. He continued to taunt her for a few more minutes until she was truly afraid he was about to

come inside. She kept looking at the wall, her jaw set to hide her fear.

Where the hell was she?



WILLIAM TIED his horse to the post outside the small prison. Constable Prince was a man as likeable as an Indian raid or a lying, adulterous wife. He paused for a few moments before entering the stone building, wondering if he shouldn't leave his wife in the hands of Prince. She'd more than earned it, running off with a sailor as if marriage vows meant not a thing.

He opened the door. His wife might be a lowly whore but he wasn't going to lower himself to her level.

Prince was at the door of a cell, blocking the view of who could only be his wife. The constable turned, his expression forming into a glower.

William crossed his arms. "I hear my wife's been found."

"She's a might indisposed at the moment. Mayhap you'd like to come back later?"

Prince had a cruel streak that he thought all other men shared. No matter how much he hated his wife, he couldn't allow her to be raped. She was still his wife. If Prince had offered a beating, he might have considered it.

No, William couldn't even fool himself. Prince might be the law here, but a man's wife was off limits to other men.

"No," William said.

Prince sneered, then stepped to his desk as if he didn't mind that William had ruined his fun. There, on the floor, was his wife. Her straight black hair was shorter, her skin tanner, but her ill temper just the same. Her clothes caused him a moment of confusion. He'd never seen such a vibrant mix of sunset colors on someone's legs before.

He blushed for her sake and turned on Prince. "What have you done with her skirt?"

Prince shrugged, grinning because he knew something William didn't. "Didn't have one. Whole town saw her legs."

William stepped between Prince and his wife. She wore a hood attached to a short cloak that had no buttons.

"She was wearing these as well."

William turned to see Prince holding up a boot so odd that his eyes watered at the strangely flat colors. It was as if it had been painted with the same brush that had attacked her legs. He held it, feeling the flexible material that was as smooth as a seal's skin. On the desk, William saw the remains of the other boot.

Jade watched as the new man eyed the rubber boot with the same curiosity that the constable had. At least he wasn't ripping it apart. This new man was taller, younger, and more handsome. He had dark hair swept back from his forehead, likely by his hand, and a bit of stubble on his jaw. He also had the air of someone honorable who wasn't going to bully her or tease her about rape.

He wasn't here about her, unfortunately, because he was looking for his wife. She was glad he was staying for the moment because it transferred the ugly man's attention away from her.

William tucked the strange boot under his arm, turned back to his wife and gave her his best grim glare. He wanted her to know she was going to get it good and hard over his knee when they returned. For the past year, her children hadn't had a mother to raise them. They'd see what happened, even to adults, when a person skipped out on their responsibilities.

"I'll be taking her home now," William said, not looking away from the petite woman. She wasn't looking near as scared as she ought to be. She looked a little like a timid dog, unsure if she should run or beg a bone.

"Here I am, writing up the report, so I can't release her just yet."

William turned to Prince, seeing that he'd removed a quill and

had it hovering over a paper half filled with words. William saw, *Dearest Mother*, and that was all he needed to know.

But Prince didn't need to find out that William could read. He had been educated before coming to the colonies in fact. "If you proceed in your writing, I will ride out right now to speak with Reginald Sawyer." He was the richest man in the area and held a great deal of influence over the rule of law.

Prince flinched and turned away to hide his annoyance. "Suppose it's a matter best dealt with by a husband," he muttered as he moved his letter to the back of the desk. Prince stood and unlocked the cell, standing aside, clearly unhappy to have lost his toy.

The handsome man glared at her. Jade was confused, but wasn't about to protest being let out. She got up, walking on her sock covered feet, and edged out around the two men. This building was so small it barely fit them all. The man followed her outside and she grimaced as her feet sank into the mud that was everywhere. The streets were mud and there were some plank sidewalks, but not many. There was no pavement in sight.

"Mark my words, you'll get it good when we get home," the man said low enough for only her to hear since a few people were staring at them.

She jumped, looking at him with a crease between her brows. He didn't explain, instead helped her forcefully toward a tall horse.

"Hey," she said.

His hand went to the back of her neck, holding tightly. "Come along easy or I'll leave you with Prince."

She guessed Prince was the constable. She didn't need any more encouragement.

He motioned to the horse, but when she just looked at it, he manhandled her until she was sitting uneasily in the saddle, sure that at any moment she'd slide off either side. The man leapt up behind her, pressing very close. He shifted, then his long jacket was laid across her lap, nearly long enough to warm her chilled legs. Before she was ready, he clucked at the horse and held the



reins on either side of her. She grabbed the pommel, hanging on tightly.

Riding a horse was nowhere near as fun as she thought it would be. For one, the horse was wide which forced her legs apart in a way that immediately made her thigh muscles sore, and another, she was nearly in this stranger's lap. No matter the attractiveness of the man, sitting in his lap wasn't on her to do list.

When she had begun to get the rhythm and was feeling more herself, she asked, "Um, where are we?"

William refused to answer. Isabel's voice was different, an accent he hadn't heard her use before. It was rough and hard on his ears. She seemed to slam each word at him.

She turned, looking up at him for a moment with guileless eyes. His face hardened. She hadn't acted so innocent since before they'd married.

Jade quickly turned to face front again. The man was clearly angry and she was pretty sure he was angry at her. She still didn't understand why he had taken her instead of his wife. She thought over her dream about the hole and waking up here, but none of it made sense.

She decided to try again, needing to find a way back to her family reunion. "Um, do you know where Chesterfield is? I'm pretty lost."

There was no answer from the man. She turned, annoyed enough by his silence to rebuff his fierce eyes. "Hello?"

William wanted her to close her mouth and stop using that grating way of speaking. "Your boys missed you, Isabel," he said, meeting her eyes. Instead of the shame and regret he had hoped to spur in her, she only looked perplexed.

"My name's Jade."

He closed his eyes briefly, then stared over her head, deciding enough was enough. He wasn't going to humor her as she played another nasty trick on him. She'd married him only to come to the colonies, knowing he had the money to afford a decent life here. It

had taken longer to get a ship than they'd thought, long enough for her to bear Mason, then become with child on the journey here. She'd stayed long enough to find out she didn't like the constant illnesses that spread through the area, the near starvation of winter, and the endless amounts of hard work. After she realized she couldn't manipulate him into moving to Jamestown, she had found a sailor who would take her there and spoil her rotten.

Now, she was back, pretending to be someone else.

Jade, for the last ten minutes as the horse walked them deeper into the forest, had been watching the peak of a mountain. The city butted up against that mountain and had clean roads winding around it to the expensive houses with nice views. She hadn't seen a single pale line of a road in the trees. She was fairly sure there should be a city here as well.

"Is Chesterfield nearby?" she asked again, desperately needing to find out where she was. When he acted like he hadn't heard her, she repeated herself, this time in an insisting tone.

"Wife, be quiet."

"I'm not your wife," she said, covering her worry with sourness. She noticed his hands grip the reins tighter. "Tell me where I am."

There was the troublesome wife he remembered. He couldn't wait to start spanking that sass out of her.

Altogether, everything was making her unnerved. The lack of a city where one should be, a man calling her his wife, and not to mention the town that let her be locked up by a sadist. She wasn't just in some out of the way hick town. Something bigger was happening. It occurred to her she might be going crazy. It had all started with the hole in the beach.

Hesitantly, she asked, "What's your name?"

They'd only been traveling a mile and Isabel was already causing him all sorts of grief. What was she playing at? He'd put a stop to it. He halted the horse and hopped down, grabbing Isabel before she could think to run off. She knew quite well where all her silly questions would take her.

“What are we doing?” she asked as he set her on the grass.

He took her hand and pulled her to a small boulder, where upon he sat and tugged her closer.

“What are you doing?”

He felt his groin swell at seeing her legs, only covered in the thin, colorful cloth. He could see much of her as her top clothes had ridden up. He hardened even more when he saw how her bottom was shaped. She had a fine bottom. Small and perky. Her womanhood was outlined just as much as her bottom. What was his arrogant wife doing walking around like this without a second thought?

“Keep your mouth shut the rest of the way, woman,” the man said, drawing Jade closer with an unyielding hand over hers.

He was moving her, making her stand at his side. She tripped at the awkward expectation that she stand where he wanted her to. She tried to remove her hand from his, but he held it tighter.

“I just want to know where I am,” she said. It wasn’t that much to ask.

He let go of her hand and pressed against her back, making her stagger forward. She caught herself on his shoulder. There was a twisting of limbs, then he had tilted her over his lap.

“What are you doing?” she cried.

So many questions. His ears rang with them all, and all in that voice that sounded like she had rocks in her mouth. He lifted her to a better angle, ignoring her weak struggles. She was frantically asking him more questions when she knew quite well she had earned a spanking. Or had she been gone for so long she’d forgotten that he was a husband intent on keeping his wife in line?

He found where the cloth on her legs ended and was momentarily distracted by the feel of the material. He dragged it down, then had another shock. There was a red triangle at the peak of her bottom. Her kicking and fighting renewed in earnest, so he had to spend a moment trapping her legs between his and cuffing her wrists behind her back with his hand. He pulled on the red piece and in disbelief, saw that it went between her wiggling cheeks. He

pulled the whole strange thing down, trying to avoid wondering what it was used for. Now that that unfamiliar part of the process was done, he laid his hand on her bottom.

She stiffened, pleading for him to let her go.

"A whole year," he said. "My boys have been without a mother for a whole year." He spanked her, glad to finally see her paying for her betrayal. She arched and whined. "You ran out on me, your husband." He spanked her again, slapping hard enough to make her hiss.

"You come back here, your reputation ruined, not caring how it looks. Do you know what people say of me behind my back?"

Jade cried out, in pain and feeling unfairly treated, but when she blurted out the words, "I'm not your wife," she only got more spanking. She was crying.

"Going on and on with your questions when you know that I know who you are and you know Chesterfield is right where I found you. Did I get a Thank You, Husband for getting you out before Prince started in on the drink? Did I get a Thank You, Husband for taking you home after your little adventure spit you back in my lap?"

Jade tugged on her wrists, his warm, solid hand holding her firmly. She didn't miss what he'd said about Chesterfield. She hadn't missed that everyone spoke with an English accent. And she hadn't missed that this was not the America she was used to.

"I don't know where I am," she sobbed out as he continued to spank her. She only had to make him understand. If only he'd *listen* to her. "Please, I don't know where I am." She got an extra hard spank.

"If you say one more word before we make it home, don't doubt that I'll get you right back off that horse and over my knee again. I'm not going to go easy on you this time. You'll learn to be a good wife."

William closed his eyes, enjoying his begging wife. He wasn't a cruel man who caused pain for his own pleasure. No, he only

wanted to see his whore of a wife become obedient and tears were the only way to start with this woman. Another woman might learn her lesson, mature and become wise, but he'd come to understand that Isabel was not born that way. She was going to need steady discipline and rules or she'd find a way to escape and act the child again.

He peered at the red, a vibrant blood red, string and decided he was not going to put it back as he'd found it. He removed the knife at his belt, drawing a gasp from Isabel, and cut the strings, flinging it into the forest. He yanked up the cloth on her legs and tried to pull her shirt and cloak down, but there was no helping it.

When the barbarian released her, Jade stumbled away, wiping at her face. He looked unperturbed about the whole thing, but she was still shaking. Had she been asked before what she would have done if a strange man had forcefully spanked her, she would have scoffed and said she'd kick him in the nuts and run. She hadn't even known how to imagine the feeling of losing control of her own personal space. Even as a child, her parents hadn't used spankings as punishment. She rubbed her bottom, trying to breathe full breaths and staying away from the man. She wanted to cry like a lost, little girl.

He held out his hand to help her onto the horse. She shook her head. There was no way she was going anywhere with this man. When his glare did nothing to sway her, he moved toward her. He was a big man, broad with muscles and taller than her, as nearly everyone was.

"I'm not going with you," she said, quickly retreating.

William sent a prayer up to God asking him why he had been cursed with this wife. "You'll get on the horse or you'll go back over my knee," he said.

His wife shook her head, looking appropriately afraid of him, as she should be. Women simply didn't leave their family to go gallivanting with a sailor, not if they didn't want the entire family shamed by her antics. He'd been the topic of gossip this entire year. His boys had been teased by other children when they'd come into

town. He'd been accused of pushing his wife into another man's arms and of being less than satisfactory in bed. Everyone had much less respect for him and thought him inherently weak.

He considered himself to be a fair man, not impatient, but certainly not weak willed. As he strode toward her, she skipped away, almost tripping over a rock. Was she going to make him chase her? His cheeks flamed with heat; angry and embarrassed.

Jade watched him heading toward her like a man with a chainsaw who could walk at an even pace yet manage to catch up with the sprinting coeds. She turned and ran.

Blast. William went after her and in only a few yards, he caught up. His little wife wore no shoes and had lost the strength she'd had when she'd been living here and doing hard labor each day. He considered tackling her to the ground, but knew that would be childish of him. Instead, he wrapped an arm around her waist and forcefully made her slow down. She beat her fists on his chest and tried to shove away.

Jade refused to go any deeper into these woods with this man. She might have better luck finding help in the town. Oh God, was it really Chesterfield? They were walking back to the horse, he as if on a morning stroll, she as the captive she was. She tried to trip him, but tripping a tree would be more successful. She tried to punch his nuts, but he caught her hands and sent her a *look*. So, she leaned toward his arm and bit him.