2. HER PRINCE

Jenna does not take it well to lose her first love. But she feels that there is a divine destiny awaiting, She will do everything in her power to insure that destiny takes its proper course

She wanders around in the hope that the bug of passion might again bite her. She can sense that somewhere in the bustling heat of the afternoon, there must be the perfect love waiting for her. In the cool breeze, she can hear the wind whispering to her. L-O-V-E. This is her very belief. She is being prepared for that ultimate moment.

Just seventeen, she senses the celestial kiss waiting somewhere for her. It has become almost a curse waiting for that delicious revelation. Her lips already anticipate the touch of the ideal lover, the prince without a principality. He can rule over her.

Jenna feels so old-fashioned. She clutches her cell phone in her hand. But she imagines that she is still lost in a world of horse and buggies. As a reward for her successful junior year, her parents decide to bring her along on a trip to Mobile. They know a couple with a nice house near the water. Not far from Mobile, they have a big boat where they give parties. In a land once populated by Jean LaFite, Jenna can lead the noble lifestyle that is part of her destiny. She feels liberated to finally be away from her high school mates such as Beau and Sammy. Let them make their own hell for themselves. Jenna has bigger fish to fry.

She has driven her own car down with her parents. She wants to head home a day early. She convinces them that she will meet them at the party. She needs a little more time to get ready.

"Here are the instructions on how to get there." Her dad goes over them a thousand time. She feels that she knows them by heart.

Dusk is just settling. There are calm skies all around. Just slight traces of the humid day. Jenna makes clicking noise with her heels as she walks along the dock. She is in an indigo silk dress with gold heels. She is lost. She reminds herself that she had the direction memorized. What has happened? She is starting to panic. She sees a dashing young man on his own boat.

"I am looking for the Adamson's. Do you know them?"

"Yeah, it's the big yacht over there where all the noise is coming from."

The noise played as a muffled tone in the distance. Elsewhere the silence of the night hangs on." She wants to catch up to her parents, but she feels paralyzed.

"You're sort of young to have your own boat," Jenna remarks.

He protests, "I'm eighteen. It's my parents'. Actually, they gave it to me."

"What's your name?"

"Reggie."

"Hello, Reggie. I'm Jenna." She holds out her delicate hand for him to shake. He boldly kisses it. It sends a shiver up her spine.

He invites her, "You want to come on my boat."

She hesitates, "I don't know. I'm already late."

"I won't bite. It will only be for a second."

The breeze stirs around her. It seems to guide her path. She gives naturally to its flow. He helps her step on the deck.

"Take a seat," he offers her. She sits on one of the cushioned seats.

"Are you in high school around here," she asks.

"No. I'm a college boy. I just finished my first year. I'm studying business at Penn." "A northern boy?"

"No, I'm from Mobile. I'm just going to school up there."

"Do you like it?"

He is enthusiastic, "Actually, I love it."

"Don't you miss your parents."

"It's good getting away from them." He has a casual tan bred of healthy days on his boat. He has none of the rudeness of Beau. He is a sophisticate.

She wants him to kiss her. She can feel the night air telling her things. She feels beyond control. She needs to catch her breath.

He sits across from her at a distance of about six feet or so.

"Do you want to come sit next to me?"

"I don't think that I better," she affirms.

She is a total picture of loveliness. He says as much. "I've never seen a girl like you.

Where do you come from? Heaven."

"You're just full of flattery tonight, Mr. Reggie. Is this where you lure all the unsuspecting girls?"

"They're all pretty wise to my tricks."

She smiles, "I wonder why. If you were only a little more subtle."

He makes excuses, "I try the best that I can."

He needs to seal the deal while he can. Otherwise, she will head off to see her parents. His own charms are hardly limitless.

"Do you want a cocktail?" he asks.

"I'm already light-headed." She has a glassy-eyed stare.

"It's the night air. There's a deep humidity that it never really casts off."

She observes, "So the night is working in your favor as well."

"Let me get you a soft drink. You seem a little warm."

"The breeze feels nice. Give me a Sprite."

He pours the can in a plastic cup and hands it to her. She slowly sips the drink.

He has the most wonderful blue eyes. He knows their hypnotic quality. She has to look away.

"I gather that you're still in high school. Are you with a guy?"

"I just broke up. It was a little nasty in the end. My best friend hooked up with him. I went ballistic. But I'm pretty much over all that. I was sixteen then."

He teases her, "You seem so much older now."

"I feel more mature." She sits up in her chair. He smiles back.

She continues, "I'd almost feel like royalty hanging out on a boat if we weren't drinking out of plastic cups."

"Consider it fine crystal." She likes his humor. She feels that she has no resistance left. She wants him to vanquish her on deck. Jenna shakes her head. She needs to regain her composure.

"What was that about?" Reggie asks.

"I don't know. The humidity. Maybe a mosquito."

"They do get bad out her. I could spray you."

"Please do." He gets the insect repellent.

"If only there was a spray for boys," she asserts with a grown up air.

As the evening progresses, he pours another drink. He starts to feel sentimental about her presence.

"I can tell you a story."

He tells her that his family can trace their ancestry back to Bourbon princes who fled France during the Revolution and ran off to Louisiana. She hardly believes the story. But she likes the idea of hanging around with royalty. She is only afraid that some offense on her part might have him send her to the guillotine. He laughs at her humor.

"I'm just a harmless boy."

"That's what you're telling all your lovers before you send them to the slaughter."

He offers a meager defense, "How else can I rid myself of an obsessive maniac."

"So that's what all your ex's become."

She pretend that she is in the clutches of Bluebeard. In fact, she is rather impressed that she has found her prince. He looks the worthy sort. She is more and more taken by him with each further development.

"What more do you have in store for me?"

He adds, "I think that we may be the heirs to a fine union."

"Whatsoever do you mean?"

"A goddess and a prince together. What more could you want?"

'I believe that you are trying to come on to me," Jenna accuses him. He is still far enough away so that he can defend his ground.

"I'm just doing a little historical investigation."

She teases him, "Well, wise master, teach me some more."

He is reaching, "We have never forgotten our royal heritage. I have relatives who still speak French passed on parent to child from the old country."

"You're making that up as you go alone."

He stares at her, "Look at me. You can tell if I'm lying."

"I just think that guys like to lie in general. It's part of their nature."

Reggie raises his hand, "Are you challenging my good name and reputation?"

"I can tell what kind of reputation you must have. I can take just one look at this boat. Who knows how many young girls have had their virtue besmirched in that cabin below. When you say come on board, I can certainly understand the import of your command."

"Now you are casting me as the executioner. You certainly have an active imagination." She tells him why, "I've studied theater. I have been trained in high dramatics."

He wonders, "Can you cry on cue?"

"Not really. But I can fake kissing if that's what you'd like."

Her suggestion seems appealing, but neither wants to leave the respective positions.

"Let's pretend that we're engaged in a duel," he suggests.

"And what are the choice of weapons?" she queries him.

"Our mouths."

"Tongue included," she asks.

"All and everything inside."

Now she is vicious, "I can bite and draw blood."

"You can watch me bleed to death on the deck of my own boat," he is resigned to his cruel fate.

"Speaking of your boat, are you going to take this thing out for me. I'd like to see it drive the waves. Something that I fear the owner himself is not too adept at."

"I can hold my own," he maintains. "But I don't like to take it out at night. Come by in the day, and I'll show you."

"Are you suggesting that I leave now." She stands up.

"No hardly!" He is now standing next to her. Their gaze is more intense. He drops his drink.

When he kisses her, she can feel herself losing all control. She can sense his excitement as he tries to fill in all the contours of her dream. She longs for him. All of her body aches for his body. They sway together in the breeze, two dancers attuned to one music.

She whispers inaudibly, "I want you to be the one."

He strains to hear, "What?"

She has her legs wrapped around his body. They fall to the seat where he as been. Her body is on top of his.

"AH!"

"What was that?" he asks.

"Kiss me again." He has never felt a kiss laced with such affection. He hardly knows her, but he feels that he can tap her darkest secrets. He put his hand on her hips and starts to work his way down.

She feels that it is all happening to fast. She wants to savor this moment forever. It is too overwhelming. She pushes him back and collapses on the other end of the bench.

"Did I do something wrong?" he asks.

"I barely know you, Reggie. I've never gone this far with a boy. I want to make sure it's right."

He offers his explanation, "I'll treat you right. I'll be gentle."

'That's not it. I want it to be special. I don't know what I'm doing. I've got to get to that party before it's over. If I don't find my parents, I won't be able to make it back."

She stands up. He remains sprawled on the bench.

"I want to see you tomorrow for sure now," he reminds her."

She smooths out her dress. "Of course, of course." Her heart is fluttering. She can barely catch her breath. She feels that she is about to have a heart attack. She is fit and in good form. It is all a mystery. Is this what love feels like?

"Wait for me, my prince."

She feels that they share a special secret. She does not want to surrender her heart so easily. But they seem destined to be together.

She rushes off to find the Adamson's boat. He is silhouetted in the moonlight. She blames it all on the moonlight. It's eerie glow took her heart and turned it into something

perverse. She has been driven close to a devil heart.

How can she think ill of him. He is her prince, her love. She is worried that her parents will be worried. She runs to the boat that she thinks is the Adamsons'. The music from far off is now close and blaring in her ear. She finds it harsh. It disturbs the delicious moment that she has shared with Reggie. She already wants to turn back. But she has her duty. She can see party revelers stepping onto the dock. Maybe it is all over. But she continue to see lights on inside. And the band crank out another tune. She feels as if she is walking into another era, the long and dead past. She is a ghost of her former self.

Her father sees her when she steps into the main room.

"Where have you been? We've been worried sick. Were the directions OK?"

She tells her Father what has happened, "The directions were great. I was a little under the weather and was slow in leaving."

"You look a little red. Are you running a fever?"

"Not at all."

"Well, your dress looks great. Mother is in the other room."

The party is thinning out, but there are still a lot of guests there. In the far side of the room, she sees a familiar face. It makes no sense to her.

"Sammy what are you doing here?"

"What am I doing here? What are you doing here? The Adamsons are our family friends. Your parents met them through my parents. Didn't you know that? I've told you a million times how we come to Mobile for the summer."

"It never registered. Sorry. Where are you parents?" Jenna looks around.

"They left long ago. They went back to the place that we rent for the summer. You'll have to come by."

"Or course," says Jenna.

There are a few people dancing in the middle of the floor. The band is still playing on. "This is some party," Jenna say to Sammy.

"They do this every year," Sammy replies. She does not want to be upstaged. "I met a boy."

Sammy seems dismissive. "Great. You can tell me about it another time. I've been making out with some guy on deck. I don't want to lose him while I can close the deal."

Jenna finds Sammy's manners to be rude. But she tolerates her friend. She feels a little out of place.

Jenna's mother finds her, "Dear, your father explained how you were feeling under the weather. We're going to go back. Do you want to follow us? You could even leave your car here."

"I just got here. I want to have some fun. You run along. I'll be OK. Sammy is here." Her mother makes a face. She hardly trusts Sammy.

Her father hears what has been said. "Sammy will take care of her. The Adamsons are great people. She'll be in good hands."

She breathes a sigh of relief as her parents leave. She is thinking of Reggie again. Jenna wanders off to find Sammy. She is making out with some guy on a deck chair. Jenna looks around to find some guy staring at her. He has the same idea as Sammy and is looking for the

right partner. Jenna glares at him, and he runs off.

Jenna figures that she should have left with her parents. Now she really feels out of place. The stragglers are mostly older people. They are giving Jenna the strangest looks. Some of the guys have designs on this sweet young thing.

The boat is hardly moving. It is anchored. But Jenna imagines herself sea sick. It is the mix of the sea air and young love-a fatal combination.

She considers downing a glass of fine champagne. Then she realizes that will take her to the point of no return. She decides to walk back to her car. On the way, she passes Reggie's boat. All the lights are out. He has no doubt gone to sleep. If only her parents weren't at that party, she could have continued her fun. Reggie's image burns deep into her mind. She is a little lovesick!

The next morning she tells her parents that she has plans. She alters the truth a little. "I met this friend of Sammy's. He's going to take us boating."

Her father is very pragmatic, "If you met the boy at the Adamsons' and he's a friend of Sammy's, he's all right for me."

Her mother gives her a little bit of a sneer. But she concurs with her husband's judgement. In the daylight, she has no trouble finding the dock. He is all ready to go when she arrives.

"You are even more of a picture of perfection in the sunlight. I passed out here last night. I had to call my parents to explain. I didn't tell them that I had kidnaped a young girl."

"I'm not so young." She is wearing her swim suit underneath her shorts. She has golden sandals on her feet.

He takes the boat out quite a distance. She gets a real kick out of the speed as it knocks against the water's surface.

"Push it faster."

This only incites him more.

When they are out of site of the shore, he drops anchor to enjoy the wonderful day.

"I'm not going to drink until later. I could get you something."

"Are you going to get me drunk and abandon me?"

"I 've thought about it?" he chuckles. He is ready to pick up from yesterday. She has had trouble sleeping because she can think about nothing but the two of them together.

He now has both his hands on her hips as he pulls her close. The boat rocks gently back and forth.

"I know it's early. But the sun is getting to me." She has a convenient excuse. I think I'm more partial to love in the evening."

He kisses the sweat on her neck. She purrs.

"I could use a soft drink."

He observes, "You are a little hot house flower."

"Don't tease me. I just feel all weird out here. There's so much reflection off the water. It's blinding me."

She is feeling a little dizzy. She is trying to get sympathy from him. He wonders what is really bothering her.

He puts his arm around her as they sit down. "Let's just relax." Her lips again beckon

him. They surrender to a gentle embrace. As they move together, he is getting a little aggressive. She doesn't imagine her prince like this.

"I really think that the sea is not agreeing with me. Let's go in."

He doesn't what to push things. He feels that he needs to oblige. But his desire is inflamed. Enough so that he can forgive her offenses. He puts off to evening what they cannot accomplish in the daylight.

When they get back, she makes plans for later. "I have to meet my parents for dinner. I want to get together later."

He is sold on her charms. Nothing less will do. They kiss on his boat before she disembarks. He holds her hand as she moves over to the dock.

"I'll return my prince," she promises.

"I'll be waiting for you."

At dinner, all that she can think about his her nighttime rendezvous. She hardly hears a word that her parents say.

"What is wrong with you, Jenna?" her mother asks sternly.

"Too much sun."

"And you want to go out after dinner. I absolutely forbid it."

"I'm seventeen" says Jenna forcefully.

Her father is more conciliatory, "Let the poor girl have her fun!" You're only young once."

Her father is convincing. Her mother relents. Little does she know about her daughter's actual intentions.

"I can't wait until I have my own place!" she tells herself.

She still feels a little heavy from dinner. She is a little nervous to go back. What has Reggie been doing while she has been gone?

The drive seems to take forever. It is a ways from where they are staying. Jenna is full of enthusiasm. She almost runs from her car.

Reggie's boat has its lights on, but they are dimmed. She hears music from the boat. As she gets closer, she hears muffled noises. The small boat rocks back and forth.

As she gets closer, she can see her prince. He is not alone. The small cabin door is open. A girl's legs are propped up in the air. Jenna can see Reggie pumping away. She is shocked. She is mortified. Worse, she recognizes what is really happening. She lets out the loudest shriek. Reggie and the girl jump up. More lights come on the boat. A panic. Everyone is yelling.

Jenna knows the girl. She's recognized those legs. It's Sammy.

"Sammy, what the hell are you doing here?" screams Jenna.

"Me. I'm doing nothing wrong."

"Reggie is my prince!" says Jenna. She sounds mawkish.

"Prince, nothing. Reggie and I have been having a fling since I was 14. Who the hell did you think taught me about sex? I lost my virginity to him."

"Reggie, I guess that's your style. Stealing things from young girls."

He still doesn't say a thing. He has been doing up his pants. He is entirely red-faced.

"Sammy is right. I'm sorry, Jenna. I wasn't trying to lead you on. I didn't even know

that you knew each other."

Jenna wants to cut low. She reveals her elitism. "Sammy's learned the intricacies of oral from hip hop songs. I bet she's got busy in the back of dimly lit pool halls."

Sammy looks face on at Jenna, "You are a bitch!"

Jenna retorts loudly, "You've ruined my life."

"I can't ruin something that's already ruined," yells Sammy.

Reggie pretends to be reasonable. "Jenna may have a point. Sammy does know a few things."

Sammy has words for Reggie, "You're a dick head. I always knew that about you."

Both girls conveniently turn on the fine prince. "You didn't tell Jenna the bull shit about your family. I bet he even told you that he goes to Penn."

Jenna admits, "That he did."

"He's a scalawag at Alabama. The only reason that they took him is that his father gives them loads of money."

"You are a creep. You stole my honor from me!" Jenna is severe.

The two girls agree that they have to vacate the premises before the putrid order kills the both of them.

"Thanks, Reggie. You're always good at starting something and not finishing them." Sammy offers a brilliant parting shot.

As they walk off, Jenna has an insult for Sammy, "You have been rather cruel to me."

"I didn't know. This is not like Beau. I really knew him a long while ago. And he did show me a thing or two. You would have got your money's worth."

Jenna shares a fear with Sammy, "I have a lot more to risk here."

"Whatever. You have to quit being Miss Priss."

"Lets's go back to my car."

"I do need a ride home. He took me out here." Sammy looks desperate.

"What was he thinking? He knew that I was coming out here."

Sammy is flabbergasted ,"I don't know how he was going to hide me. He has quite a reputation around here. I learned that when I was very young."

Jenna wonders, "Why do you go back to him?"

"You have a thing or two to learn about sex."

Now the two girls are sitting on Jenna's car.

"Like what?"

"Some times, you just gotta' have it."

"Whatever you say, she tells Sammy.

"Do you have anything to drink?" asks Sammy.

"I've got a couple of Doctor Peppers for the way back."

"Are they warm? "Sammy asks.

"I just bought them."

They are still a little cold. The girls share them as they sit on the trunk.

"Just like old times," says Sammy.

"Pals." says Jenna.

Jenna finds it unusual that Sammy keeps showing up at the most unfortunate time. When

she saw her in the boat, she was ready to strangle her. After that she planned to tear Reggie limb from limb. Then she realized that it wasn't worth it. Reggie is just a clown who just got caught at being himself. She hates the fact that she considered him more noble than Beau. He's just a more devious version of the same.

Jenna can't make sense of the strange hold that Sammy has over her. She has twice disappointed. She only wonders what the future has in store for her. But she needs her as a friend. Sammy seems to know things. And Jenna is too afraid to make the mistakes on her own. Better to learn from Sammy's errors, she can then correct her own deficiencies.

For once, Jenna thought that she had met the perfect guy. But it turned out to be worse than she ever could have imagined. How had she been so easily tricked? She imagines Sammy watching her from some mountain on high. Her friend is manipulating Jenna like a piece on a chess board. Even as Jenna tries something new, Sammy is a hundred steps ahead of her. And in the endgame, Jenna faces another untimely demise. Jenna has done everything that she can to plan her life. Sammy just lets things happen. And Sammy's method has been achieving such great success. For the time being, she wishes that she was drinking whiskey, not Dr. Pepper.

"Well, Sammy, let's get back to town."

Samantha is just as glad to say good by to this episode in her life.

In the morning, Jenna's parents wonder about her.

"I met Sammy, and we hung out talking." For once, she is speaking pretty closely to what actually happened. Of course, she leaves out a lot of the other details. Her parents plan to spend another day in Mobile. Jenna wants to go home immediately. She doesn't mind going back to her piano and her books. Since her parents won't be around, she can have the house to herself.

Other girls might get into mischief on their own. Sammy would have a string of bizarre sidelights to occupy herself. Jenna feels so ordinary on her own. It is only in a crowd that she feels that she can work her magic. She almost needs Sammy as that rival that she can overshadow. But everyone knows that Jenna holds back part of herself. She hampers her own popularity. She looks at the wages of social life as a distraction. Sure, she wants to be desirable. Nevertheless, she refuses to give up those things that make her who she is.

She is about to start her last year at high school. Reggie has made her realize that there are college boys with a lot of sophistication. At the same time. She needs to be prepared for their games. They have a lot more experience at tricking young girls.

In high school, everyone's reputation seems to follow them. She knew about Beau before she ever went out with him. That way she could anticipate his subterfuges. Reggie was much more poetic in his technique. Even someone so imaginative as Jenna could not have anticipated an opponent such as Reggie.

Now that she is a year older, she realizes that everything depends on what she does her senior year. She's thought about ditching Sammy. She could find new friends or just be the loner. She's thought about getting a job. She may not have enough for college. But she wants to live on her own when she is finished high school. She is on a self-reliance kick. Her parents really haven't saved enough for all four years of college. But they can help if she goes to community college and later transfers to University of Alabama at Birmingham. When she was younger, she had dreams of studying acting at UCLA. But with age, reality sets in. She has had to settle for more meager rewards. But she still might take acting lessons on the side.

She has already distinguished herself in drama. She might have done a play during her senior year. But now it seems like a distraction. Even if she is not going directly to college, she wants to finish high school with a bang.

It makes little sense to be on her own for that final year. She has scoured the senior class of a suitable replacement for Beau. Her escapade with Reggie has convinced her that college boys are her only hope. But she would hate to be a victim of her own bad judgement again. Such ventures needs more than a little planning. Like drama, boy chasing might be postponed to a later time in her life.

Sammy reminds her of the pitfalls of trying to maintain her virtue during times of psychological upheaval.

She warns Jenna, "These are your teens years. You're bursting like Mount Vesuvius." Jenna has the weirdest image of melting in flowing lava.

"What is a poor girl like me supposed to do. Kiss the first boy that she sees."

"I only know that it's better to love than one your with when you're not with the one that you love." Sammy offers her advice.

Jenna is taking mental notes as if she is in chemistry class. But when it comes to the problem section, she seems to be flunking Sammy's health class. Maybe Sammy is just not the proficient teacher that she claims to be.

Senior year is full of a serious of disastrous crushes. She sees a cute boy working parttime at the local library. He clearly is a UAB student. He even engages Jenna in a discussion of Fitzgerald. He invites Jenna to a movie with him. He brings another girl with him.

"Who is this?" Jenna asks him rather casually.

"Oh, she's the girl that I'm going out with."

Later in the year, a guy shows particular interest in her.

"So, Ross, who are the other girls that you've dated at this school."

"I went out with Samantha Merriwether."

"Oh, great." Jenna tells herself.

Even at a New Year's Party, she finds that she is the victim of a guy whose dates has passed out upstairs.

"Let's go have some fun." He pulls Jenna up the stairs to the coat room.

As she is making out with him, the vivacious date wakes up and greets the revelers with a thorough tongue-lashing.

Jenna has a suitable reply for both of them, "If I had have known that you were almost as alive as your unconscious sweetheart, I would have been out of here long ago."

Jenna is starting to doubt her own appeal. She continues to be the most sought-after girl at her school. There are rumors that she is dating a football player at the University of Oklahoma. She perpetuates the gossip as it keeps away the dead weight. If only her real life could be as exciting as the gossip.

To compensate for her boredom, she does a great deal of reading. She settles on Jane Austen novels. By spring, she has progressed to Henry James and finds that she is watching loads of Merchant-Ivory films. She feels that she is truly a sensitive heart. She only fears that when it finally breaks that will be her final demise.

"I don't want to be old before my time," she tells her mother.

"That is why you're saving yourself for the right man."

Sammy continues to alert her to the foolishness of her mother's philosophy. Jenna has been convinced by Sammy's reasons long ago. She just finds it more practical to follow her mother's counsel. She is starting to feel so far out of the game that there seems no logical place to start.

"A guy is a guy!" becomes Sammy's new maxim. Jenna imagines a string of naked boys in the showers after gym class. It is hardly an appetizing image to her. In former times, she may have wished for a prince. But her prince was simply a pirate masquerading under the king's colors. What could be a worse fate?

She can hardly become a recluse. Although she is becoming an avid reader of Dickinson. If she can't find the love of her life, at least she can pine over some imaginary knight who is permanently lost in the forest. This is what has happened to romance in the 21st century. There is no one to answer the call.

At times, she pretends that she is one of the pioneer women who is waiting for men to be sent from back east. Better yet, she is a whaler's wife who waits for her man to return from a long hard year on the sea.

"If you continue with that fantasy," Sammy tells her, "then you better dress in black. For the love of your life has more than likely gone down with his ship."

"Leave it to you, Sammy, to be the bearer of bad new."

"It does get better, Jenna. We could get fake ID's and hang around college bars."

"You may want to abandon yourself to a life of inebriation. But I don't think that I want to bring home an alcoholic. I think that's why Reggie was so loose with his tongue."

Jenna seems to be taking the loss of her prince more to heart than the loss of Beau. The girl needs a miracle.