

ALSO BY JUDE DEVERAUX

True Love

For All Time



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A NOVEL



Jude Deveraux



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Chapter One



Nantucket

Graydon Montgomery couldn't take his eyes off the young woman. The bride and his cousin Jared, the groom, were standing at the front of the little chapel, the pastor between them, and Graydon kept looking across them at her. She had on a blue bridesmaid dress, was holding a bouquet of flowers, and her attention was fully on the ceremony.

While it was true that she was pretty, she wasn't conventionally so. She wasn't the type of woman who'd make people do double takes. With her oval face, eyes the color of bluebells, and her flawless skin, she looked like a girl you'd see in the newspaper as having attended a debutante ball. She'd be able to wear pearls and long gloves without looking like she'd rather be in jeans.

Earlier, when the four wedding attendants had been waiting outside, there'd been a lot of commotion inside the little chapel. At the last minute, there'd been some kind of mix-up that had caused a great deal of chaos. In normal circumstances, Graydon would have made an effort to find out what was happening, but not today. Today he was distracted by her.

Sounds of angry shouts and furniture crashing to the floor had come from inside the chapel. The two bridesmaids and the other groomsman went to the door to see what was going on, but Graydon stood where he was. He wasn't even curious. All he could do was gaze at the back of the young woman. She had long blonde hair that curled down her back, and she had a nice figure. Not flashy, but trim and subdued.

Through all the turmoil, Graydon had stood back from them. He was only vaguely aware of the surroundings, of the big tent that was set up for dinner and dancing, of the moonlight on the wooded area around them, even of the brightly lit chapel where the wedding was to be. He seemed only able to think about what the young woman had said to him just minutes before.

When Graydon had been asked to escort a bridesmaid down the aisle, he'd thought it would be an easy, enjoyable task. After all, he was certainly used to red carpets and ceremonies of all kinds.

But when he was introduced to the young woman, he'd been shocked by what she'd said—and he still hadn't recovered.

When the noise inside the chapel finally calmed down and they prepared to go inside, Graydon moved to stand beside her and crooked his arm for her to take. When she put her hand on his arm, he smiled warmly at her, slipped his hand over hers, and clasped it gently.

Without a word, she snatched her hand away, took two steps back, and glared at him. There was no mistaking her meaning that he was to make no overtures of any kind toward her. And

that seemed to include even friendliness.

Graydon didn't think he'd ever before been at a loss for words, but in the face of her anger every language he knew seemed to disappear from his mind. All he could do was stand there and blink. Finally, he managed to nod his agreement. No touching, no smiles, no anything outside what was necessary to get the job done.

As they walked down the aisle together, she kept her distance from him. Her hand was on his arm, but her body was two feet away from his. Graydon held his head high, doing his best to swallow his pride. Never before had a woman found him . . . well, repulsive. Truthfully, no woman had ever before tried to get away from him.

He wasn't naive—he well knew that a lot of the fawning and flirting directed his way was because of what he'd come to think of as the “unfortunate circumstances of my birth,” but still . . . That she didn't want anything to do with him wounded his ego.

When they got to the front of the chapel, she seemed relieved to get away from him. She went to the left, and Graydon went to the other side to wait for the bride to come down the aisle with her father.

Throughout the ceremony Graydon couldn't help peering around the bride and groom to look at her. What was her name? Toby, wasn't it? Surely that was a nickname, and he wondered what her birth name was.

As the ceremony neared the end, Graydon felt that old, familiar pull, what people called the “twin bond” and he knew his brother was there. He glanced to his left, through the crowd of people that were packed into the chapel. Family was in chairs but the back was full of guests standing and watching. It took Graydon only seconds to find his brother in the very back, purposely hidden behind other people. Rory wasn't dressed properly for a wedding, but then his leather jacket and casual slacks fit in with the American style. At least his brother didn't have

Lexie disappear into the darkness.

For a moment Toby stood outside the tent, holding the empty utensils, and letting the warm air soak into her. This had to be the most unusual day of her life. It was as though from the moment she and her friends had walked into a bar and seen that man sitting in the back, surrounded by women, everything had started changing.

She looked inside the tent. They were dancing, eating cake, drinking, and laughing. It looked perfectly safe to return.



Rory had changed his clothes and was now wearing a tuxedo identical to the one his brother had on. After Gray went back to his little blonde, it hadn't taken Rory long to find Roger Plymouth. He was in a corner of the big tent chatting with three pretty girls. Rory motioned for him to come outside.

When they were alone, Roger spoke first. "I thought I saw you in the back hiding behind those people. So you and your brother both are here? What's the occasion? Some royal shindig coming up?"

"We're related to the Kingsleys," Rory said quickly. He didn't have time to make small talk. "Is it true that that bridesmaid, Lexie, works for you?"

"Yeah," Roger said, and shook his head for a moment. "She's a handful. Right now she can't stand me, but I'm working on her. Give me another couple of months and I'll soften her up." He gave a humorless laugh. "But I said that a year ago and I haven't made any progress. A man can dream, can't he?" He narrowed his eyes. "You aren't thinking of going after her, are you?"

Rory knew he'd never get used to the American way of telling everyone everything. "No, not at all."

"I get it," Roger said. "You're asking me about Lex because

your brother is interested in her roommate. I saw the way he was staring at her all through the wedding. At first I thought he was you, but I know you're not going to hang it all out for everybody to see. Your brother stared at her like he was the snake at the end of a flute."

"I think that's a little strong," Rory said stiffly, wanting to protect his brother.

"Yeah, right," Roger said. "I know he's the one who'll be king. I like that country of yours. Best skiing in the world and the food's not bad, either. But I think I better warn you that, from what I've heard, he'll have an easier time being king than he will in conquering pretty little Toby."

"What does that mean?"

"That half the male population of this island has tried with her. The scuttlebutt is that she's 'saving herself for marriage.'"

"You're saying that she's . . . ?"

"A virgin is what everybody says," Roger said. "Whatever is true, I can tell you that a lot of people like that girl. If your brother decides to go after her just so he can put another notch on his bedpost, many people are going to be angry at him, including Jared Kingsley."

Yesterday, Rory would have said that his brother wasn't like that, but today everything seemed to have turned upside down. "My brother wants to stay here on Nantucket for a week and he would like the young lady to spend some time with him, but I fear that her roommate will interfere. She—"

"You don't have to tell me!" Roger said. "You wouldn't believe the things I have to do to make Lexie stay with me. I have to hide things then pretend I've lost them." He grimaced. "She thinks I'm a moron, but if I don't do that, she says 'Toby needs me' and runs off."

"So there's no chance that you could occupy the roommate for just a week? A trip somewhere, maybe?"

"I know she wants to travel and I've asked her to go with me