

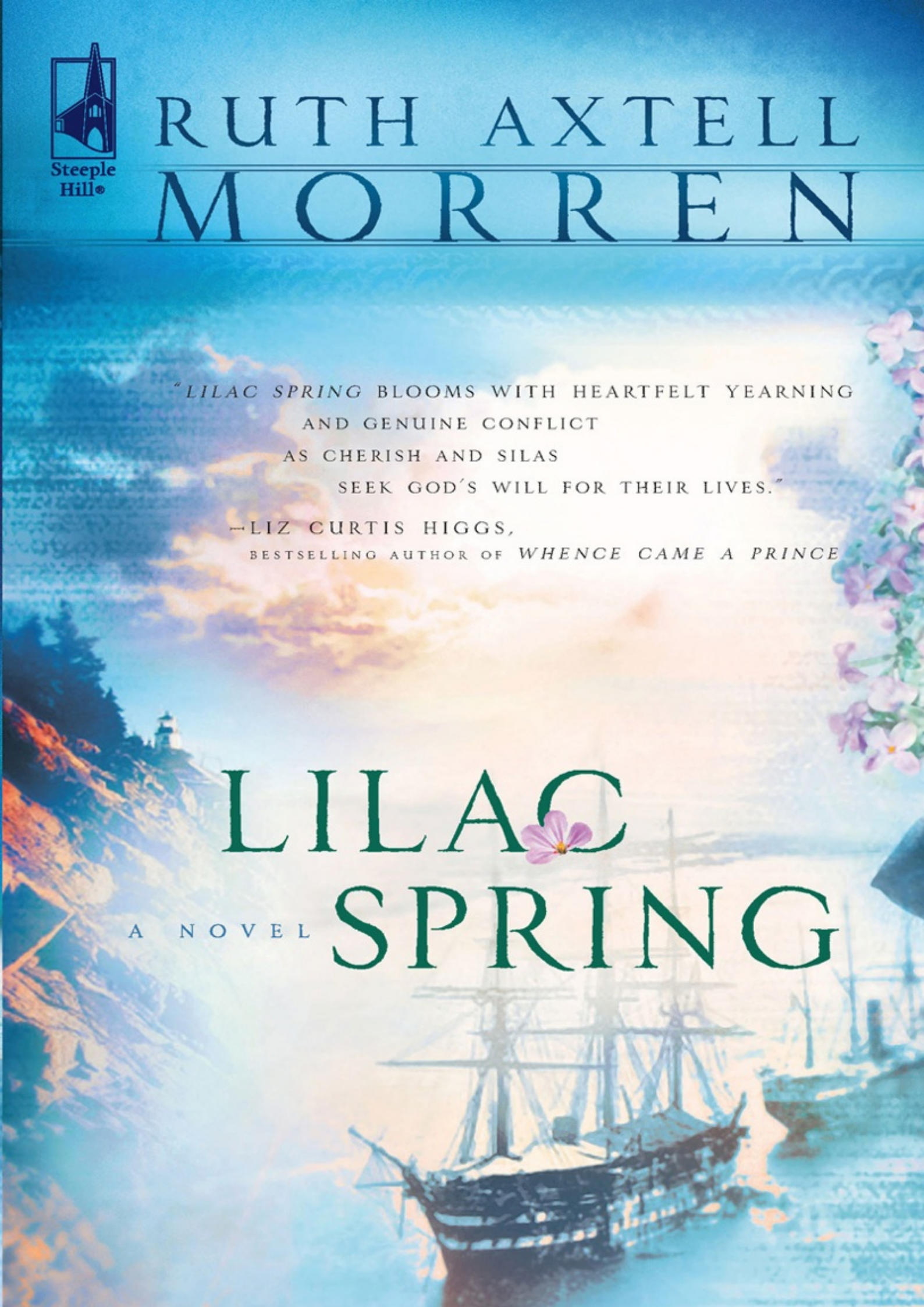


RUTH AXTELL
MORREN

*"LILAC SPRING BLOOMS WITH HEARTFELT YEARNING
AND GENUINE CONFLICT
AS CHERISH AND SILAS
SEEK GOD'S WILL FOR THEIR LIVES."*

—LIZ CURTIS HIGGS,
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *WHENCE CAME A PRINCE*

LILAC
A NOVEL SPRING



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RUTH AXTELL MORREN

LILAC SPRING



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For the town of Cutler,
from where I drew my inspiration for *Lilac Spring*.

My thanks also to the guys at *The Boat School* of Washington County Technical College in Eastport, who allowed me to ask many questions and observe them as they worked on their wooden boats.

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Prologue

*Haven's End
Maine, 1861*

“You’re the new ’prentice, aren’t you?” Cherish asked the boy hunched over one of Papa’s drafting tables.

He twisted around, a startled look on his thin face, as if she’d caught him doing something wrong.

Cherish stepped through the doorway of the boat shop and approached the table, her rag doll, Annie, swinging back and forth from one hand.

The boy swiped the edge of his palm against the corner of his eye, watching her silently as she neared.

“Aren’t you?”

Staring at her through disconcertingly gray eyes, he finally answered, “Yes.”

“Why’re you crying?”

“I’m *not* crying!”

“Yes, you are. I can tell. Your eyes are all red.” It suddenly occurred to her that maybe, being a big boy, he didn’t want to admit to crying. She never minded crying; it usually made her feel better afterward. The only problem was it usually followed a spanking.

“Whatcha’ doin’?” she asked curiously, peering beyond him to the drafting table.

“Nothin’. Just looking.”

“That’s Papa’s model.” She stood on tiptoe at the edge of the table, eyeing the wooden half-hull sliced in sections like a loaf of bread cut lengthwise.

She dragged another stool over to the table and climbed up on it. “I waited till Papa was down at the yard ’fore I came over this morning. It was a long time! Then I was ’fraid Mama wouldn’t let me walk over.” She smiled. “She thinks I’m outside playing with my kitty-cat.”

The boy said nothing.

“I cried yesterday,” she told him, settling Annie on her lap. “Mama sent me to my room.”

He continued eyeing her as if deciding whether she was friend or foe. He had nice eyes, she decided. Green-tinged gray, like a choppy sea. “What did you do?” he asked.

“I pulled kitty’s tail. I was trying to tie her to my dolly’s stroller, but she wouldn’t ’bey me.”

She could see the beginnings of a smile tugging at the corners of his lips, and that made her glad.

“Kitty scratched me. See?” She pushed up her sleeve and showed him the bright red line running up her forearm.

“Papa never sends me to my room or spansks me. Mama says I’ll be spoiled if someone don’t spank me. Papa says I’m his little lady and should never be spanked.”

The two sat quietly for a few moments. The boy’s attention, she could see, had returned to the pieces of carved wood on the table. “Are you from far away?” she asked, shifting on the hard stool.

“Real far,” he murmured.

“Where?” she asked, finding it hard to picture anything beyond Haven’s End.

“Swan’s Island.”

“Swan’s Island,” she repeated in awe. Her mama had just read her a story about a swan the night before. She imagined a beautiful island full of snowy-white swans.

“Do you have a mama and papa?” she asked when he said nothing more.

“Just a mama. Papa was lost at sea,” he added in a fierce tone, as if proud of the fact.

“That’s too bad.”

He sniffed, rubbing the back of his hand against his nose. His thick golden hair fell over his forehead as he bent over the smooth pieces of wood that fitted together in descending order.

“Are you your mama’s little gent’man now your papa’s gone to heaven?”

He scoffed. “I’m too big to be a little gentleman.”

“Are you going to be a gent’man when you grow up?” Papa said she was going to marry a gent’man when she grew up.

“Naw! I’m going to build boats.”

She smiled. “I am, too!”

He turned his head toward her as if seeing her for the first time. Instead of laughing at her the way Papa did whenever she told him, he looked interested. “You like boats?”

“I love boats!”

“Your father is going to teach me how to build boats.”

She nodded. She’d heard Papa talking about the ’prentice.

He focused on the model again, running his forefinger down the sheer of the gunwale. “Some day I’m going to design them, too,” he said softly, reverently. He seemed not to be talking to her, but to himself.

“Me, too,” she replied at once, wanting to bring his attention back to her, although she wasn’t quite sure what “design” meant. That was okay. If the new boy could do it, so could she.

“What’s your name?” she asked, taking a liking to him despite his aloofness. He was nice, not like those big bullies at the schoolhouse.

“Silas.”

“I’m Cherish.”

“Cherish.” He turned his gray eyes on her again. “That’s a funny name.”

“It is not!”

He grinned, revealing even white teeth against the honey-hued skin of his face. “Do people call you Cherry?”

“No! My name is Cherish ’lizabeth Winslow.”

“Cherish Elizabeth Winslow,” he repeated. “That sounds too grown-up for you. How old are you, Cherry?”

“*Cherish*,” she corrected, and held up her fingers. “I’m five and a half.”

He nodded.

“How old are you?”

His thin chest puffed out. “I’m twelve.”

She remembered his red-rimmed eyes. He hadn’t seemed so grown-up then. She looked down at her doll. “Here. You can have Annie. She’s good for wiping tears. See?” She picked up a limp rag arm and wiped her eyelid in pretend fashion. “I use her a lot.”

He frowned, forced to take the doll she’d thrust at him. Before he had a chance to do anything with it, they were interrupted by her father’s voice.

“Silas! What are you up to?”

Silas jumped down from the stool he’d been straddling. “Nothing, sir.”

“You’re not here to loaf but to learn a trade. Now, go stow your gear upstairs and report down at the yard.”

“Hello, Papa.” Cherish climbed down more slowly from the stool. “I was talking with Silas.”

Her father gave her cheek a soft pinch when she reached him. “Cherish, sweetheart, haven’t I told you more than once to stay out of Papa’s boat shop? This is a place for men.”

“I’m going to ’sign boats,” she told him, ignoring the scolding.

He chuckled, taking her by the hand and leading her toward the door. “You’re going to learn to be a lady and marry a handsome gentleman. Run on home now to Mama. Papa’ll see you at dinner.”

As he walked her to the door, she realized her other hand was empty and she remembered she’d given Annie away. She gave one last, longing look toward the drafting table, but there was no sign of her doll. She remembered Silas’s hunched back and the sight of red-rimmed eyes and she shrugged away her sense of loss. He needed Annie more than she right now.

Chapter One

May 1875

Cherish paused on the threshold of the boat shop. The smell of cedar wood tickled her nostrils. She breathed deeply of its lemony, spicy fragrance and smiled. Home.

The rays of the late-afternoon sun pierced the tops of the ancient fir trees across the inlet and shone through the windows of the boat shop, picking up the dust motes and bringing a golden gleam to the wooden frames of the boat hulls laid upside down in various stages of construction. Her eyes didn't linger on these; there'd be time enough to examine the works in progress. She was interested only in the shop's lone occupant.

Silas stood at a worktable. Intent on his task, he leaned his wiry frame against a plane as he pushed it against a plank of wood. A curling cedar shaving emerged from the tool and dropped to the floor, a floor littered with a hundred others.

"Hello, Silas," she said softly.

His eyelids rose and she was the focus of those gray eyes—the turbulent green-hued gray of a stormy sea.

"Cherish!" A smile broke out on his face, transforming it from a frown of intense concentration to an expression of boyish delight.

Cherish felt a slight easing of the tension that had been building with each mile she'd traveled closer to Haven's End. After days across the Atlantic and a night up the coast from Boston, she'd finally arrived back at her home port.

She stood motionless a moment longer, wanting him to take a good look at her. The golden afternoon light shone on her. She knew the slate-blue of her gown complemented her complexion and eyes. She was glad she'd had the outfit made in Paris, just before her departure.

Every item was in place. She'd brushed and redressed her hair just before disembarking. She knew how to read men's appreciation—she'd learned in the countless European capitals she'd visited in the past year. Now she wanted to read it in the only eyes that mattered.

He laid down his plane and took a step toward her. "We didn't expect you until tomorrow. I would have come to meet you, but I knew your father would want to have you all to himself."

"That's all right. I'd rather say hello to you right here." How she wanted to run to her childhood companion and throw herself into his arms. But suddenly she felt shy. She was no longer a girl in pigtails but a young lady he hadn't seen in over

two years. Oh, how desperately she wanted him to see the changes in her.

So with deliberate steps, those years of balancing a heavy tome on her head at the young ladies' academy paying off, Cherish walked toward Silas. Her skirt rustled, from its ruched panels down to its pleated hem. She carried a small parasol in one hand, swinging it lightly to and fro as she neared him.

When they stood face-to-face, she stretched out her hands to him, still seeking that appreciation in his eyes. It was there...yet, was it?

"How did you get here?" he asked, smiling at her, his hands clasping hers. "Your father said you were sailing in tomorrow. Does he even know you're here?"

She shook her head slowly from side to side, smiling all the while. Did he see how ladylike she'd become since he'd last seen her? Did he notice her hair swept up under the stylish little hat perched atop the ringlets cascading behind her head?

"I took a steamer out of Boston a day early and caught a ride with Captain Stanley on the schooner *Emerald* out of Eastport. I just arrived. My trunks are still down on the wharf," she added, unable to restrain the laughter bubbling out of her.

His gray eyes were alight with amusement. How she'd missed that look! "Your father's planning a big homecoming tomorrow."

"I *know*. That's precisely why I came a day early. I wanted to settle in quietly. Tomorrow I'll be the dutiful daughter, but today..." Her glance strayed across the cluttered boat shop. "Today I want to savor just being home."

He nodded, and she knew he understood. "Are you glad to see me?" she asked, her eyes searching his once again.

"Of course I'm glad. The place isn't the same without Cherry underfoot. But you must have had a grand time—a tour of the Continent. I'm surprised you wanted to come back."

She frowned. "Of course I wanted to come back. This is home." *This is where you are.*

"And you've come back quite the lady."

How she'd dreamed of this moment, when at last he'd see her as a woman.

"Last time I saw you, you were still running around like a hoyden, banging up your fingers with hammer and nails, trailing after Henry to teach you everything about drafting."

"Do I look like a hoyden now?" She let go of his hands and turned around slowly as she'd seen the mannequins do in the House of Worth off the rue de la Paix.

"You're looking so grown-up I hardly recognized you."

Cherish experienced a moment of disappointment at his tone. There was admiration, certainly, but nothing more.

Never mind, she thought, there was plenty of time. She was home for good this time.

"Your father will have a fit when he knows you traveled unaccompanied from Eastport." He frowned. "Did you come up by yourself all the way from Boston?"

She put a finger to her lips. "Shh! There was an acquaintance of ours on board, so I was properly chaperoned. Anyway, I'm back, and that's all that's important. I wanted to say hello to you first, right here, just as when we first met."

He grinned. "You came nosing around to meet the new apprentice and

caught him sniveling with homesickness and trying his best to act grown-up.”

“You had a right to be homesick. You were only a boy.” She took her time examining him, looking for any changes during her two-year absence. His build was still slim and compact, but the lean frame was deceptive. Her glance strayed to his bare forearms. She remembered their corded muscles when they had pulled on a pair of oars across the harbor.

He was in a vest and rolled-up shirtsleeves, his collar undone. His deep blond hair, thick and straight, was pushed away from his face, a face tanned from his hours down below in the yard. He’d always been a serious boy, but now his face showed a deepened maturity.

“Do I pass inspection, Cherry?”

She rolled her eyes. “Haven’t I finally outgrown that silly nickname?”

He smiled wickedly. “What’s the matter? Remind you too much of the pesky brat you were?”

Before she could take offense, he said, “Europe seems to have agreed with you.”

It was about time he noticed. “It was wonderful. Are you glad to have me back?”

“Sure, though I expect you’re too refined for the boat shop.”

“Not at all.” She laid her parasol on a table, fighting the sense of letdown. Something was missing in his welcome. Stifling a sigh, Cherish turned her attention to the boat frames in the large room. “What are you working on?”

“Oh, just finishing up these dories for a Gloucester schooner. We’ve laid the keel on a schooner down in the yard, now the good weather’s come.”

She touched the wood he’d been planing. “I *am* going to be coming to the boat shop, you know.”

He eyed her sidelong. “Is your father aware of this?”

“Not yet. Not that I’ve ever hidden my intentions.”

Silas brought her a stool and got one for himself. “Why don’t you tell old Silas all about it.”

She felt on surer ground now. Silas was the only one who truly understood her yearning to be equally involved in the work at her father’s boat shop.

“Silas, I need your help.”

His mouth turned up on one side. “Already?”

She didn’t return his smile. “I didn’t come back to Haven’s End just to be courted by some gentleman from Hatsfield and get married.” She could feel her face coloring at the steady and attentive way he was listening to her. “I know that’s what Papa expects. I could have stayed in Boston with Cousin Penelope, if that were the case. Or even in Europe,” she added, thinking of the marriage proposals she’d refused.

“Your father would have been sorry to lose you to Boston or the Continent. Ever since your mother passed away, you’ve been the apple of his eye.”

She nodded, remembering that awful time when her mother had fallen ill. “Papa needn’t have worried that he’d lose me,” she continued more briskly. “I always meant to come back to Haven’s End, because I want to work here. In the business. I want to build boats, Silas, just like you. Has...has Papa done anything to replace Henry?” she asked, referring to her cousin, whom her father had hired around the time

she'd been sent away to boarding school.

Silas shook his head.

"Is Papa giving you more to do now that Henry has left?" As soon as Henry had reached his majority, he had accepted a job at a larger shipyard in Boston.

"My job's the same as it's always been."

She frowned. "Papa doesn't need to replace Cousin Henry. He has you. You're much more talented than Henry ever could be. I'm sure that's why Papa hasn't found a replacement for him."

When he made no comment, she went on. "My time wasn't completely wasted those years at the young ladies' academy in Massachusetts." She smiled at him conspiratorially. "All that pin money Papa sent me—most of it went for lessons. I learned as much as I could pay for about naval architecture."

She leaned forward eagerly, placing a hand on his forearm. "I'll teach you everything I know. But I'll need your help, Silas. Papa will fight me on this. Do you believe I can work with you here?"

She held her breath as he remained silent. Would he laugh at her ambitions the way her father did?

"I don't think my opinion holds much weight with your father, but for whatever it's worth, I'm on your side."

"But will you think I'm just a nuisance hanging around here in the shop? Or do you think I can earn an honest day's pay?"

"After the time you spent with Henry, I know you're just as capable as he of drawing up a floor mold."

"Thank you, Silas." Slowly she removed her hand from his arm and offered it to him. He took it in his and they shook on it as if they'd just come to a momentous agreement.

Silas scraped at his jaw with the razor's edge. He would have preferred many times over to have stayed down at the yard working on the schooner in the stocks, but he knew Cherish would be hurt if he didn't attend her homecoming party. She'd made him promise to be there.

He bent over the basin and washed the shaving soap off his face, wetting the front part of his hair in the process. He patted his face dry before taking up a comb and doing his best to flatten the damp hair as he looked at himself in the small square of mirror hung on the wall above his washbasin.

His blond hair looked dark and slicked back now, but he knew it would fall back against his forehead as soon as he was out the door. He turned away from the mirror and took up the clean white shirt folded in the chest of drawers. Mrs. Sullivan, Cherish's aunt, insisted on doing his laundry, ironing and mending his clothes—"keeping him in clothes"—as she called it, the way she'd done since he'd first come to the Winslows as a boy. She said he was family to her and she wouldn't do less for him than for her own boy, Henry.

As he unbuttoned the starched shirt and slipped it on, he marveled at how grown-up Cherish had become in the time she'd been away. She'd been away before—off to boarding school during her secondary school years, but home during holidays

and summers, always coming around to the shop as soon as she arrived. But he hadn't seen her in over two years, between the year at an exclusive girls' academy near Boston, followed by another year on the Continent accompanying a wealthy distant cousin.

Silas hadn't expected her to come straight to the boat shop. It must be a testimony to her dedication to boatbuilding that a year in Europe had not diminished it.

He put on his gray trousers, his only good pair, and knotted a string tie under the collar of his shirt. Last of all, he pulled on the dark blue sack coat, which had seen quite a few summers already. Glancing into the small mirror one last time, with another unsuccessful attempt at smoothing back the wave that fell forward, he headed toward the door.

A short walk brought him to the Winslow residence, a large Victorian house set high on a bluff. A veranda ran all along the front, with turrets at each end. The house overlooked the inlet, and from its height one could catch a glimpse of the village farther down the road at the mouth of the harbor.

Arriving at the house, Silas ignored the invitation of the wide-open front door and headed on up the drive to the kitchen entrance he'd been using since he was a lad.

The screen door banged shut behind him as he left the sunshine and entered the dimmer kitchen. Celia, the kitchen maid, greeted him and sent him toward the front, telling him that Cherish had been asking for him.

He walked down the corridor, the noise of people having a good time growing louder with each step. The party was in full swing in the large front room overlooking the veranda. He clearly distinguished Cherish's voice among the crowd of people.

He stood still, watching her. Once again he had to gaze in wonder at the transformation in her. Not that she hadn't always been a pretty girl, but now she looked so much like a lady. She wore—He searched for an adequate word. *Frock* didn't seem to describe the concoction she wore. It was nothing like the simple schoolgirl dresses and pinafores he'd been accustomed to seeing her in. This gown sported bright blue polka dots on a white background. The skirt was all gathered up in the back and cascaded down in folds like a waterfall. A wide blue sash draped over one side. The rest of the skirt seemed to be all ruffles and pleats. The bodice was the complete opposite, molded tightly to reveal a tiny waist and hourglass figure.

As soon as she spotted him, she headed straight toward him.

"Silas, there you are!" Cherish reached out both her hands to his and gave him a wide, welcoming smile. Her dark brown hair was also dressed very differently from the pigtails or ponytail she used to favor. Now it was pulled back, showing a wide creamy forehead, and fell from the top of her head in ringlets. Little dangling earrings shook each time she moved, bringing his attention to her soft pearly earlobes.

Her eyes gazed up at him now with laughter in their smoky-blue depths.

"What kept you so long?"

He shrugged. "I figured you'd have enough folks wanting to welcome you back to keep you busy all evening."

She looked around in amusement. "Yes, I suppose I do. It's wonderful being back home. Come on, let's go outside. You know everyone, although there are a

few acquaintances Papa is expecting from Hatsfield whom he wants me to meet.”

She linked her arm in his and drew him toward the veranda. They were stopped every few moments by guests wishing to talk to Cherish. Everyone wanted to hear about her European tour. Silas admired how deftly she turned the conversation around, asking instead about the local happenings in her absence.

They finally reached the veranda.

“Cherish!” Tom Winslow, a handsome, dark-haired man, hailed his daughter from the drive where he walked alongside a tall young man with a young lady at his side.

Before Silas could disengage himself, Cherish tugged at his arm, pulling him along with her as she descended the porch steps, where the trio reached them.

Her father said, “I want you to meet Mr. Warren Townsend from Hatsfield and his sister, Annalise. They’ve driven all the way over especially to welcome you back.”

Cherish held out her hand first to the sister, a pretty, brown-haired girl, who wore spectacles.

“Pleased, I’m sure,” Cherish said before turning to the young gentleman. He was at least half a head taller than either Silas or her father and wore a well-cut tweed suit. “Mr. Townsend, welcome to our home.”

“Annalise and I have heard so much about you from your father that we wanted to make the acquaintance mutual as soon as you came home.”

Cherish smiled at her father. “Papa has probably exaggerated half the details, but I am grateful for the chance to present myself in person so you may separate fact from fantasy.” She turned to Silas, including him in the group. “This is Silas van der Zee, Papa’s most gifted shipwright.” After shaking hands all around, Silas was content to let Cherish do the talking.

He marveled to see how the year of finishing school had “finished” her, and the year on the Continent had given her an unmistakable presence. Gone were any remnants of the girl he remembered. He doubted she would be the same Cherish who would be content to get her hands dirty in the boat shop.

“Well, I’ll let you young people get acquainted,” Mr. Winslow said with a chuckle before moving away from the group.

“You have just returned from the Continent?” Mr. Townsend asked Cherish.

“Yes. My year abroad,” she said in a laughing tone that disparaged the event.

“I was there a few years ago.”

Cherish’s eyes widened in delight. “Truly? Where did you travel?”

“London, Paris, Vienna—all the capitals. We also had a wonderful time touring the Black Forest, the Swiss Alps and down the coast of Italy.”

“Oh, yes, aren’t those regions beautiful? I was so charmed by the scenery. I remember a perfect afternoon boating on Lac Léman. I must try to paint it some day from my sketches.”

“Yes, I was there, too. Château de Chillon.”

“Couldn’t you just picture Byron’s words?”

As the two continued chatting about mutual experiences in Europe, Silas

glanced over at Annalise Townsend, who looked mutely from her brother's face to Cherish's. He judged her to be about Cherish's age—nineteen.

“Have you been to the Continent as well, Miss Townsend?” he asked, wondering if she felt as out of place as he did. Although she, too, was fashionably dressed in a gown with a bustle, her outfit was somber in comparison to Cherish's.

She shook her head silently. After a moment, as if realizing it was her turn to contribute to the conversation, she asked, “Have you?”

Silas had to bend forward to hear her soft tone. “No, I haven't.” Then he grinned. “Would you like me to get you some refreshment? There is a delicious assortment of food inside.”

She looked hesitatingly at her brother. Cherish, having heard his question, turned to them. “Why don't we all have something? The gentlemen can get us each a plate—how about that?” Before anyone could counter the suggestion, she took Annalise by the arm and led her toward the veranda.

About an hour later Cherish leaned against the veranda railing, eyeing the guests on the lawn. Several couples were ranged about croquet wickets set in the grass.

After eating with her and the Townsends in the parlor, Silas had excused himself and wandered off. She spotted him now, down on the lawn in conversation with a couple of men.

She was only half-sorry. If he'd stayed with her any longer, how much better acquainted would he have become with Miss Townsend? He certainly had a knack with the shy young lady, even getting her to smile now and again.

Cherish stifled a yawn, glancing to her side. Mr. Townsend still stood there, as if awaiting her next move. He reminded her so much of the dozens of young men she'd met in Europe—so proper, so “Yes, Miss Winslow. No, Miss Winslow. Here, let me get that for you, Miss Winslow.” She sometimes felt she'd drown in a sea of politeness.

She smiled at him, conscious of her duties as hostess. “Why don't we play a round of croquet? Would you and your sister like that?”

At his ready assent, she led them both down to the yard, heading toward Silas to invite him along. If he thought he was going to spend the afternoon talking with a bunch of men he saw practically every day when she'd been deprived of his company for over two years, he could think again. And she'd make sure he'd be *her* partner! Mr. Townsend could assist his sister.

She and Silas had a lot of catching up to do.

Chapter Two

The next morning Cherish entered her father's office and breathed a sigh of relief to see him alone.

"Good morning, Papa. I'm sorry I missed you at breakfast. I was lazy this morning."

"Hello, Cherish! As well you should be, only your second full day back. What are you doing down here? Your aunt want something?"

"No, nothing. Only to have me stay inside cooking and cleaning, but I escaped her."

He chuckled. "Well, I suppose it's not a bad idea to have her teach you a few things. I know she's been after you, and I've been pretty indulgent with you since your mother passed away."

Cherish patted his hand. Although it had been four years since her dear mama had succumbed to influenza, they both still felt the void she'd left behind. Even though his sister had taken over the housekeeping, things had never been the same.

Her father sighed. "Well, no matter. I want you to enjoy your summer. There's plenty of time to think of other things."

Cherish brought a chair over, to sit across the table from her father. Relieved, she looked at the plan he had been reviewing. "A new boat?"

"Yes, a forty-five-foot pinky." He tapped the end of his pencil against the paper. "Charles Whitcomb's commissioned it. He'll use it up and down the coast for the herring trade and cod fishing. It's not much of a boat, but I'm glad to have the job." He sighed. "Business has slowed a bit lately. It's not like the old days."

Cherish studied the three profiles of the hull: side view, plan view and forward-and-aft view. "When will you lay the keel?"

"In a few weeks. I need to order the wood and draw up the loft mold." He sat back, a smile creasing his face. At fifty-two, her father was still a good-looking man. His dark brown hair was thick, interspersed with only a few strands of gray. "I thought I'd go see what Townsend has in his lumberyard. You met his son yesterday. What did you think of him?"

"Nice enough, I suppose."

"You don't sound too enthusiastic."

Cherish interlaced her fingers and extended her arms in front of her. "To be honest, he seemed a duplicate of most of the young gentlemen I've met since I've been away."

"What do you find so wrong with today's young gentlemen?" her father asked in amusement.

She made a face. "They're so bland, like milksops."

“Oh, come,” her father chided. “I wouldn’t call young Townsend a milksop. He seems a fine, strapping gentleman with a good head on his shoulders, and a good future, I might add. I’d be proud to have someone like him for a son-in-law.”

“Oh, Papa, I’m only nineteen and just returned home. Are you marrying me off already?”

“Of course not. You’re right. You have plenty of time for courting.” He looked down at the lines drawing and made a notation on the table of offsets. Then his dark eyes pierced hers. “Your mother was your age when she married me. I suppose people married younger back then.

“Girls are too modern nowadays. Wearing bloomers, wanting the same higher education as men...”

“As we should be entitled to,” she countered.

“Oh, well, I’m not going to debate that with you this morning. It’s too fine a day and I’m too happy to have you back home again.” He coughed. “I just want you to promise me you’ll give young Townsend a second look. You’ve hardly known the man long enough to form an opinion.”

“That’s true,” she conceded. “I promise to withhold judgment on ‘young Warren Townsend the Third’ until further acquaintance.”

Ignoring her teasing tone, he said, “Good girl. I can’t ask for more than that. Now, why don’t you sail over with me to Hatsfield tomorrow? You can meet the Townsends again. Their daughter was about your age, wasn’t she?”

Cherish stopped herself from making a face as she thought of the insipid girl who could hardly get two words out without blushing and stammering. “Yes.”

“They’re a very nice family. They bought out McKinley’s Sawmill. They own a lot of timberland up-country. Townsend has plans for a few schooners to ship the lumber to Boston and farther on down the coast.”

Cherish’s interest perked up. “Maybe he’d contract us to build the schooners...although there are shipyards he could go to in Hatsfield.”

“Precisely.” Her father looked pleased at her acumen. “So far, I’ve managed only a nodding acquaintance with him. That should change now you’re here.”

“How so?”

“Well, Townsend’s offspring are about your age. Perhaps you could cultivate the friendship by planning a few parties and outings, now it’s summer weather, and invite them along.”

“Certainly, Papa, if you think it would help.” Cherish clasped her hands before her on the table. “Papa?”

“Yes, my dear?” He eyed her fondly.

“I’d like to help you out here in the shop.”

“Why, you’ve just helped. If you play hostess for me, you can’t imagine the benefits that could result.”

“I’d enjoy that. But Papa, what I mean by helping is that I want to work here, as I’ve done in the past, but now that I’m finished with school, I want you to consider me a permanent helper—the way you did with Cousin Henry.”

Her father’s face soured. “Don’t talk to me about that ungrateful boy! After all the training I gave him, to up and leave me. Thinks he’s found greener

pastures down in Boston. He'll find out soon enough," warned Winslow.

"You can't blame him for wanting to work in a large shipyard where they're building steamships. He sees the future there, and perhaps he's right."

"Those tramp steamers can't compete over long distances with our three-masted schooners. They've got to fill half their hulls with coal. Think of the expense. And when their coal runs out, they're dead in the water."

"Yes, I know, Papa. I think there'll always be a place for the sailing ship, but you can't fault Henry for his ambition."

Her father stared gloomily past her. "I groomed him to take over the shipyard, and now where am I? Certainly not getting any younger. He was the only family member left, the only one showing any promise for the business."

"You have Silas."

"What's that?" He turned startled eyes toward her.

"I said, you have Silas. He can do anything Henry did. You know he can go beyond Henry. He can be more than a shipwright. You know he could design his own vessels given half the chance. He probably has half a dozen designs in his head."

"Whoa, Cherish, you slow down. Silas works down in the yard. He's a fine worker with a good understanding of ship's carpentry, but don't expect me to hand this shipyard over to him." He turned back to his drawing.

Stifling her desire to argue further, she said instead, "Anyway, we were talking about me—about my working here."

Her father sat back and folded his hands on the desk. "As to you, my dear, I know you've always had a hankering for boats and hanging around the shipyard, and I've indulged you in a good many ways, but you're no longer a little girl. You're a young lady. I've given you the best education money can buy just so you could go out in polite society and hold your head high, knowing you're as good as—better than—most ladies around here."

"I appreciate all you've given me, but Papa, what I really want is to work with you."

"Don't be silly. A shipyard is no place for a lady."

Cherish felt her temper rise, and she prayed for composure. "In that case, I relinquish my claims to the title 'lady.'"

"It's a little late for that," he said dryly. "Do you honestly think I've invested all the time and money in your education and travels just to have you working in a boat shop?"

No doubt seeing the outrage in her eyes, he chuckled and patted her hand. "You're too young to know what you want. I suggest you run along home and do what your aunt bids. You still have your watercoloring, don't you? Why don't you walk down to the harbor and paint some of the ships? Then tomorrow we'll sail over to Hatsfield and you can do some shopping, visit some acquaintances and get to know the Townsends better. We'll make a full day of it."

"Papa," she said quietly, swallowing her frustration with an effort, knowing it would do no good to vent it before her father, "what *are* you going to do about replacing Henry?"

Her father ran a hand through his hair in a gesture of impatience. "I haven't figured that out yet. At this point, I don't need any extra hands."