

All Women Need Their Own
SIMPLE PLEASURES ...

in woolen Bikinis

Catherine Dougherty



in Woolen Bikinis
by
Catherine Dougherty

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Dedication

*Dedicated to my “Cozy Cap” friends,
with gratitude.*

Acknowledgements

I'd especially like to acknowledge and thank my two sons, Mike & Billy, who surprised me with flowers and a very special message on the day my first novel *in Polyester Pajamas* was released in June 2012. Words cannot begin to express how much this meant to me.

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Jim Novak, author of *Ora's Boy* (www.orasboy.com)

Chris Stralyn, author of *This Time You Lose*
(www.thisimeyoulose.com)

(Both of their books are great reads-be sure to check them out!)

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Last, but not least, to my husband, my family, my co-workers, my friends, and all of my readers (this includes all of you!), I just want to say I am more than thankful for you and blessed because of you.

And now, with pleasure, I bring forth another Jean and Rosie adventure. I know you're going to love it!

Catherine Dougherty
June 2013

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Chapter 1

The time had almost come. It was really about to happen. Within days, the new yarn and book shop would be open for business. We're calling it *Simple Pleasures* and it's a dream come true.

As I placed another book on the shelf in front of me, I couldn't help but grin. There was so much to be thankful for—a husband I adored, two wonderful grown boys, this new venture, Jean as a best friend and now she was going to be my business partner, too.

There's only one thing left to do, I thought. The grin faded quickly as I squatted down, leaning my back against a nearby wall for sudden support. I had put this off for way too many years now. Maybe, maybe, it was also the time to....

"Rosie, where the hell are you?" shouted Jean as she walked downstairs from her new apartment above the shop.

I could already tell she was nervous. Her heels were clicking frantically across the wooden floor. She'd be even more nervous if she knew the surprise I had planned for her on our opening day. I've arranged the whole thing and haven't shared a word of it with anyone yet. It's going to knock her woolen socks off!

I began to grin again. So much to be thankful for, I reminded myself. As I stood upright, I wiped away a small tear that had trickled down my cheek. "I'm over here, Jean, just shelving some books. What's wrong?"

"One of the knitting suppliers called. Their last shipment was late getting out and there's a good chance it won't be here in time."

"Don't worry—look how much inventory you have already." I walked out from among the bookshelves and headed toward the yarn area to meet her. "Everything looks great. No one will even know."

Jean was standing in the middle of her vast assortment of yarn looking lost.

"What have I done, what have I done?" She placed her head in her hands. "I don't know the first thing about knitting. I'm only a beginner. I'm going to fall flat on my face."

That was Jean being Jean. She always sees the glass half-empty. This is where she needs me the most, for reassurance, since I tend to remain optimistic no matter what.

"Hey, calm down. I'll be here and I knit. And you even have that woman, Gertrude, from the nursing home who's going to volunteer. She's been knitting all her life. That's over 75 years of experience."

Jean looked a bit more relaxed. "You're right again, Rosie. I'm sorry. But it's still kind of scary. I've never done anything like this before."

She walked over and gave me a big hug. Little did she realize how much I needed one. Then, she pulled back and looked right at me.

"And how are you feeling? Are you ready for this?" she asked.

"I sure am," I said. "As ready as I'll ever be. There are only a few more books to price and put on the shelves. Then I'm finished with my area, it's all set to go."

"But wait a minute. I just remembered. There is still something you've got to do,"

I added.

Jean looked at me quizzically. “What could that be? I’ve worked my butt off here for the past few weeks and, except for a late shipment, everything should be in order.”

“But you’ve forgotten one thing, Jean.” I smiled at her and paused for a moment to get her worked up. I love seeing Jean get irritated every once in a while.

“Come on, Rosie. Cut the crap. Just tell me.”

“Okay, okay, you’ve forgotten your promise, that’s all. Remember what you promised Jacob? Remember the fish?”

“Aaagh! The betta fish! I said I would buy one and put it by the register.” Jean started shaking her head frantically. “Oh, I don’t know if I can do it, Rosie. I hate fish. I’ve hated them ever since I killed Robbie’s when he was a kid. I didn’t treat the water like I should’ve and the next thing I knew, his goldfish were floating dead on the top of the fish bowl. Robbie was traumatized and it was my fault. How can I go out and buy another fish again? I’ll kill it for sure.”

“Hey, take a breath, girl, and while you’re at it, take one of your anxiety pills because you’re way too stressed,” I replied. “Now a promise is a promise, so let’s go to the pet store right now before we forget again.”

“Do I have to?” Jean whined and stood at a stance. She already knew what I was going to say next.

“YES!” I grabbed her firmly by the arm and dragged her out the door.

Chapter 2

Jean was still reluctant as we entered the pet store. “Hey, how about this betta?” I asked her as we walked towards the fish area, pointing to a pretty red and yellow one.

“No, it has to be blue. Remember? We need to call it Bluey, like in Jacob’s books.”

She was right. Bluey was the main character in all of Jacob’s picture stories. Jean met Jacob this past summer while she was staying with her dying mother in Cleveland, and I’ve been a fan of his for years, but only met him recently. He’s written dozens of children’s stories and has won awards for several of them. I bought his books when Tommy was a tyke.

Now Tommy was on his way to college in a few short weeks, headed to the University of New Hampshire. I’m thrilled he’ll only be a little over an hour away, but the thought of not seeing him on a daily basis scares me to death. When he leaves soon, it will only be Jack and I left in the house. And even though Jack is the love of my life, he isn’t a conversationalist-not at all-and his attitude is more like Jean’s, which is negative in nature and quite the opposite of mine. I’m worried how I’m going to handle it.

“Rosie, Rosie, ROSIE, are you listening?” Jean looked at me annoyed.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I spaced out for a moment.” I gave her one of my smiles.

“Duhhh,” she replied. “Now let’s find the fish and the necessary supplies and get the hell out of here. I’m sick of having those goldfish over there eyeballing me. It’s like they know I’ve killed their ancestors or something.”

Her remark not only brought me back to the task at hand, but also made me crack up. Jean can be so dramatic and funny. But I knew she was asking me, in her own way, to take control, so that’s what I did. After stifling my sudden laughter, I signaled one of the clerks to help us. A young girl came over-she looked like she was 12-and I explained what we wanted, expressing the fish had to be personable and it had to be blue. Glancing at the little display cups they kept them in, we agreed on one that didn’t look sickly and who seemed to be begging to be picked. Then I asked for fish food, a net, some colorful rocks and a vase-the biggest vase they had. If the fish had to live alone, it at least needed plenty of room to swim in. I also requested a nice plant to go on the top of the vase, but they only sold artificial ones. The girl suggested we check out the florist nearby. Through all this, which took about ten minutes, Jean looked like she was going to pass out. She was still so stressed out about the whole thing.

When we left the pet store, after placing everything in the back seat of my Jeep (in a sheltered spot so the fish wouldn’t fry), we strolled over to the florist shop a few steps away. Not knowing what type of plant to get, I mentioned what it was for. The woman, who appeared to be the owner, knew exactly what we needed. While there, I also decided to pick up a nice arrangement of fresh flowers.

As soon as we got back to our own soon-to-be shop, it was time to put the whole

fish thing together. Jean attempted to make an excuse to leave, but I made her at least watch while setting everything up. That way, if everything went well, she could be over and done with her fish phobia.

After putting the colorful rocks in the bottom of the vase and filling it with bottled water, I opened the container and carefully dropped the fish into his new home. I could see Jean out of the corner of my eye squirming. The betta dropped right to the bottom, like it was in shock or something. Honestly, I thought it was done for-close to DEAD-even though I knew I'd done everything right. Jean came up closer to the glass. She stared at it, and then back at me, her eyes and mouth wide open in fear.

"See? That's what happens when fish are around me. I'm a fish killer," she gasped.

"First of all, it's not dead yet. The gills are moving. Look! Second, I'm the one who put the guy in there, not you. If it dies, it's my fault."

I stopped talking and held my breath. All eyes were now on the betta.

Slowly, it started to squirm, then move. Before long, it was swimming around the tank and looking back at us. I picked up the vase, found it a great location at the register counter, and placed the plant on the top of the vase in the special plastic cover made just for holding it. Voilà. Mission accomplished. We now had a new mascot, besides Max, of course.

Speaking of Max . . .

"Hey, Jean, where's Max today?"

"Bob has him. It's his dog custody time," she replied. "He's also bringing him in for a nice wash and cut because he wants him to look his best on opening day."

As I was arranging the flowers in another vase, I said, "It's hard to believe it's already the end of August and we're opening this shop up in only two days."

Only two days! I was beginning to feel butterflies in my own stomach.

"Yeah, could you ever have imagined earlier this year we'd be doing something like this? Never mind that we'd be best friends? Oh I can remember how much I didn't like you," Jean said as she shook her head. She then gave me a little nudge.

"Well, I grew on you, didn't I? And you did the same to me," I replied. "Now we're joined at the hip, so to speak. A business is a big step, but I'm excited about it. Thank you, Jean, for everything you've done to make it all come true."

"We'll just have to see how it goes. You might not be saying that in a few months. You know, we could fall flat on our faces together with this venture. After all, books and knitting supplies aren't always best sellers. More and more people are opting for those e-books lately, bookstores are closing left and right, and many people don't have the time these days to take up a new hobby like knitting. We're going to have to hook them somehow-have some knitting classes and book discussions, give them the extra something to keep them coming back."

"We shouldn't even wait to plan those things," I said. "Let's put our thoughts together and come up with some ideas. Then, we can place some flyers in the windows."

"Well, since I now know how to make hats and scarves and even socks ..." Jean lifted her right pant leg to display her newly-made colorful knit socks. "I can set up a class one evening a week for a few weeks. I have plenty of colorful yarn already for people to buy. But the class itself, let's make it a freebie-no charge-so it'll entice

others to join in.”

“Ohhh, that sounds wonderful. Great idea. I can choose another evening for a book discussion, so I’ll have to pick the book to read and display. Right now, I haven’t a clue which one to choose.”

“How about *The Cheerleader*?” Jean suggested. “You said it was written by a New Hampshire author, right? So it would be a great one to start with. You already have several copies, too.”

“Perfect,” I replied. “Now that we’ve decided, let’s go upstairs and relax a bit. We’ve worked pretty hard today and besides, it’s almost three-time for tea.”

Myra, the previous owner, was a big tea fan, so it had become a ritual for us to drink tea most weekday afternoons since Jean had moved in here. It’s also something we’ve decided to integrate into the shop-tea at three for all customers who want to join us. We’ve discovered it’s a great way to celebrate each and every day. And, as Jean has said, it’s also a great way to take a breather and keep our heads on straight when life, and love, can get so confusing.

“How’s Bob?” I asked while she was filling the tea kettle with water. “You are still dating, right?”

Jean stopped what she was doing, turned to face me and replied “He’s fine and yes, we are dating, but I just don’t know, Rosie.” She shook her head in confusion.

When it comes to love and confusion, Jean’s the expert. Bob, her husband, left her last year for a younger woman and, at one time, wanted a divorce. Now he’s back on the scene and doesn’t see the need for one.

I was good at reading Jean’s mind. “You’re also thinking about Jacob. I can tell you miss him. Don’t worry. I’m sure you’ll see him again.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Jean said as she placed the kettle on the stove. “I doubt it. But, at least we talk everyday on Skype. Guess that’s better than nothing.” She turned the burner on before coming to sit beside me at the table.

“I can’t live without him, but he doesn’t turn me on so I don’t want to sleep with him. What’s wrong with me, Rosie?”

“Nothing, so don’t beat yourself up over all this.” I reached over and gently patted her shoulder for reassurance.

“I’m doomed at love, Rosie. I really am. Look at all the men in my life lately and not one of them is right for me.”

I couldn’t argue with that. There had been a lot of men in her life recently. For a while, she was hot for a long-time friend who stuttered. Then, there was the night when she almost gave in to Justin’s charm. He’s an ex-fiancé of mine who is now serving time.

I laughed. “Face it, Jean; you’re crazy about men, all sorts. I can’t even compare my romantic life to yours, nor do I care to.”

Jean started to laugh. “Maybe you can’t, but I can.”

I pulled my hand away from her.

“Hey, wait a minute,” I protested. “Jack’s the only man in my life besides my two boys. Now, how can we compare?”

“Well, he’s not the boys’ father, is he?” she chortled.

“Okay, you’re right, but he’s been a good dad to them. My first husband, Charlie, is their biological father, but he’s a two-timing jerk. Besides, he doesn’t stay in touch

often enough and he has a drinking problem.”

“Calm down, Rosie. I’m just getting on you, don’t take offense. We both have had our man problems. And it wasn’t so long ago, was it, when another man in your life caused quite a stir?”

I rolled my eyes. “Don’t remind me!”

Jean was referring to Justin. I was only 20 when I met him. He was my very first love and we were going to be married. At least until he went and slept with my best friend before the wedding date, and until I found out he embezzled money from the bank he was working at. Justin disappeared right before we tied the knot, and it wasn’t until I saw him again this past spring that I found out he had spent two years in jail after he left me at the altar. It would be great if I could forget all about him, but I was already two months pregnant when he deserted me way back then. I put the child up for adoption, haven’t heard from or seen the child since, and I’ve never told Justin he was the father.

Thoughts of Justin brought me immediately back to this unfinished business I’d been mulling over all day in my mind. Now I’m hoping to finally find out who my biological child is, I want to meet them. It’s been 25 years and I’m curious. My stepmom, Eloise, knows the adoptive parents, one is a distant relative, and has gathered photos and information from them over the years. The photos are now in a sealed envelope in my safety deposit box-I haven’t looked at them yet-and I’ve been wondering if I should. The boys are old enough to know what happened so many years ago, and it’s not fair not to tell them they have a half-brother or sister somewhere. Jack is on the mend from a heart attack, but I think he’s well enough to deal with it, too. He knows some of the story already, but not all of it. As for me, it’s still conflicting. I want to know, but should I know? I just don’t know.

The kettle started whistling, which brought my attention back again to the present moment. As Jean was preparing the tea, I figured I might as well bring the subject up.

“Remember when I shared my secret about giving up a child for adoption?” I asked her.

She glanced over at me. “How can I forget it, Rosie? I can’t believe that you haven’t looked at those photos yet. Don’t you want to know if it was a girl or a boy? Don’t you want to finally meet them?” She appeared anxious to hear my reply.

“That’s why I’m mentioning it. I’m thinking that once this shop opens, well, then, maybe it’s time to.”

“Woo Whooo!” Jean exclaimed, almost dropping the filled tea cups as she brought them over to the table for us.

As she sat down again, she leaned forward and said, “Ever since you told me at our first pajama party, I’ve been waiting for this. So, no more delays, let’s crack that envelope open, girl!”

“Hold on a second. Not yet,” I said as I took a sip of tea. “After the shop opens; I don’t want to rush things. We’ve got enough to handle right now. Besides, there’s something else I have to do first, something really important.”

Chapter 3

The following morning, I decided to take the opportunity to go to the nursing home where Eloise lived. It was located about 50 miles away and there was another planned stop I could tie it in with. I didn't ask Jean to come with me, I didn't even tell her I was going. Instead, I told her Jack had a doctor's appointment, which he did, but, unbeknownst to Jean, I wasn't going with him.

Eloise no longer has much of a long-term memory, but with any luck, she would still remember a little bit about the adoption. It happened so long ago, I couldn't be sure. I also wanted to share the exciting news about the book and yarn shop with her so I came equipped with some pictures since she wouldn't be able to attend the grand opening.

Two years ago, Eloise suffered a stroke. Besides robbing her of some of her memory, it left her partially paralyzed. Luckily, she's still able to speak. Her face droops a bit on her left side and she hasn't much use of her left hand, but she does okay. I think she may be one of the youngest nursing home residents-only 72-and one would think this would get her down, but it doesn't. According to Eloise, she is where she's meant to be because that's where the Good Lord decided she's needed most.

And she does make a difference. She enjoys playing card games and cribbage with other residents. Bingo, too. Then, there are trips they take to the mall every other week. The men fight over who will scoot her around in her wheelchair. Despite the paralysis, she's still great looking and you couldn't find anyone with a better personality and disposition. She just warms your heart.

I love Eloise and enjoy visiting with her, which I try to do at least once a month. I've thought of taking her in to live with the family and even mentioned it once after her stroke when she was in the hospital. She told me she wouldn't go. Not that she didn't enjoy being around me, but she felt she belonged where she is now, not stuck in a home without any company her own age. I didn't understand at first, but now I do, and I can tell she's happy.

It was mid-morning when I arrived. She was already in the front lobby waiting for me and reached out her right arm to give me a hug. It was so good to see her again.

We spent the first hour on the nursing home's large screened-in patio breathing in the fresh late summer air and talking about the new shop. I showed her the pictures of what it looked like and also gave her a book to read. I knew she couldn't knit anymore, so I brought along a few samples of yarn, too. She enjoyed weaving the strands repeatedly through her fingers.

"Oh, how I used to love to knit. Just feeling the yarn moving through these old fingers of mine is bliss," she said. Her eyes closed briefly, like she was cherishing a memory.

"I used to watch you," I replied. "You taught me how to knit, remember?"

"Yes, I do. The first thing you made was a bright orange scarf for your dad. It almost glowed in the dark." She chuckled. "It was absolutely horrid."

Her memory was very good today.

“It wasn’t that bad,” I replied. Sure, it was filled with mistakes and uneven knitting, but everyone’s first project is bad anyway. Still, my Dad wore it proudly.

“Knitting is a gift and so is reading,” I continued. “I know neither are big money makers, but I’m hoping we can be successful enough to keep Simple Pleasures going. As you know, I’ve wanted a bookstore for a long time.”

“Yes, you have, Rosie. And you’ve also wanted to write for a newspaper. Are you still hoping to do that?”

“Not just hoping, I’m planning on it. I’ve already approached our weekly paper and they’ve agreed I can do a write-up about the shop every week. They’ll even pay me for it. It won’t be only for self-promotion, but also to share what’s new in the world of knitting or reading or whatever else I care to focus on.”

This was something I hadn’t even told Jean about yet. I wanted it to be another surprise and was going to wait until my first column was in print to announce it.

Eloise and I enjoyed a nice lunch in the cafeteria before we headed back to her room. Plans were to ask her about the adoption once we could be in private. I was hoping she could give me more information about the adoptive parents and how they would feel if I contacted them.

As we settled into chairs in her small, but well-arranged sitting corner, I started in with my questions.

“I need to ask you about the people who adopted my first child. I haven’t looked at the photos or any information you’ve given me yet, but I want to know if you are still in contact with them and if you think they’d be put out if I ever decided to introduce myself. Be honest, because if it would bother them, I don’t want to pursue this.”

Eloise reached towards me and held my hands with her own aged-softened ones. “Oh, Rosie, I do know more. I’m so glad you brought this up because it has weighed heavy on my own mind. I’ve recently heard from the mother, my distant cousin. There have been some health concerns with the child. It may be nothing, but their doctor mentioned the possibility of contacting blood relatives to find out if there might be any solutions found.”

“When did you hear this?” I was startled. What could be wrong?

“Calm down, only yesterday, dear. And then you called and said you were coming today. I didn’t want to alarm you, so I was hoping you’d bring this discussion up first. I prayed for it to happen, and thank God, it did. I really have tried not to interfere with any of your decisions about this, and I don’t want to pressure you to open that envelope if you’re not ready to.”

She was right, she had never pressured me and it had been seven years since she had given me the photos. The envelope they were kept in had remained sealed, but it was time to find out, it was time to know.

“What is wrong? Is it serious?” I didn’t know how I was going to deal with this right away since the grand opening was tomorrow. And then there was Jean’s surprise that would take away being able to do anything for at least the next few days. Also, I didn’t know how I was going to tell Jack or the kids yet.

“Oh, I can see you’re still concerned. Don’t be because it isn’t urgent. There’s

some depression, and overuse of pain pills and alcohol, but treatment is ongoing and another week or two won't make a difference. The child was even in a facility for help earlier this summer being well taken care of." Still holding onto me, Eloise patted my hands to reassure me.

"Are they planning to call again soon?" I asked.

"Yes, yes. They will call again-maybe in a few days, maybe next week."

"Then give them my number please. I'll be busy with the shop, that's for sure, but soon, real soon, I plan on opening that envelope. And if I can be of any help to them, and especially to the child I gave up, I'd be more than happy to do whatever I can."

"I know you would, Rosie. I do."

I couldn't help it, tears started to flow from my eyes. Eloise pulled me towards her and we embraced.

She felt my pain. She always could.

Chapter 4

I arrived at my next stop right on time, and the ride back home was interesting. After doing a few more errands and checking in with Jack, I went straight to Jean's. We still needed to prepare flyers to put up in the shop before opening tomorrow. There was also an informal celebration dinner planned. Jack and Tommy were picking up pizzas and joining us in about an hour. Bob was also going to come.

Jean was in a tirade when I got there. I didn't know what had gotten into her. It was something about what Jacob did, or maybe didn't do. She just kept rambling on and was clearly upset. I could tell the stress was really getting to her and was glad the others hadn't arrived here yet. I had to calm her down before she ruined the evening.

"HEY!" I said loud enough to get her attention. She stopped complaining and looked straight at me like she was scared of something. You'd think she'd seen a ghost.

"Hey," I said again, this time not as loud. "Calm down. Nothing can be that bad. I'm thinking maybe you're just burnt out from all of the preparation."

She took in a deep breath. It was working-she was beginning to calm down.

"Oh, thank God you're finally here. Where the hell have you been all day? I thought I'd hear from you before now."

This time it was my turn to take a deep breath. Sometimes that woman can really get on my nerves.

"I went to visit Eloise. I wanted to share some pictures of the shop since she's not able to be here tomorrow. Plus, I wanted to find out more about the envelope."

Jean turned red. I could see she was getting mad again.

"You didn't open it without me, did you? How could you? You promised I could be there when you did."

"Calm down, woman. Of course I didn't. I just needed to make sure she thought I was doing the right thing. She does. We'll open it in a few days, okay? After our grand opening, and after I figure out how to tell Jack and the boys."

Looking like she was about to cry, Jean reached out her hands to me but then put them again by her side.

"I'm sorry, Rosie. I'm just scared to death about tomorrow. I don't think I can go through with it." She began wringing her hands and pacing back and forth.

"Of course you can." I tried to reassure her by stopping her in her tracks. I then wrapped my arms around her and patted her softly on the back. I could feel the tension starting to leave her as she sunk into me.

"And then there's Jacob," she went on, her voice muffled into my shoulder. "He hasn't been in touch with me all day. I even tried to call Aunt Helen and Walter, but there was no answer. Where could they be? Do you think something is wrong?"

"No news is good news," I replied and gave her a squeeze. "Everything will be fine and I'm sure you'll be hearing from Jacob soon. He's probably been busy."

She pulled away and started pacing again and getting herself all worked up.

"Yeah, right, Rosie. Doing what? Pulling weeds without me? Working on a new

story? He knows the shop is opening tomorrow and he's nowhere to be found. It's not like he ventures far with that agoraphobia of his. If he did, he'd be here."

"Forget it. He'll be in touch soon. Right now, we need to get those flyers done and then enjoy an evening together-all of us-so put the smiley face back on and let's get going. We can start celebrating while we work. I'll pour us some wine. It might calm you down."

"Wine, did you say wine? Damn! I knew there was something I'd forgotten to get. What is wrong with me these days?" Jean was in a panic. She continued to move back and forth, now having something new to worry about.

It was going to be a long evening. Somehow I had to find a way to calm this harried woman down.

"Just give Bob a call. He knows what you like and I'm sure he'll bring it with him. Besides, maybe we shouldn't drink while we're working after all-wrong idea. You know how that can be. In less than an hour, we'll all be celebrating anyway."

Jean put in a distress call to Bob. No problem-the wine was on its way. A little more relaxed again, she finally sat down at her computer and we soon became involved in creating the flyers. She seemed to forget all about how nervous she was and how upset she'd been about not hearing from Jacob. Phew, what a relief.

Using some nice colorful graphics of yarn and a pair of knitting needles we found by searching online, Jean created a flyer for the upcoming knitting class she was offering. She also put in a graphic of a hat-a "cozy cap" she called it.

"I've thought about it some more and hats will be a better first project. That colorful yarn will be perfect for them. Socks are just, well, too hard for a first project and might discourage the newbies. Besides, we can even donate them to chemo patients if we want to, like Jacob does."

Silence all of a sudden. I thought she was going to start up again about not hearing from him, but she didn't.

"I hope we can get enough people involved," she commented.

It was decided the knitting class would be on Thursday evenings for four weeks beginning in September. As for my book discussion, I opted for Tuesday nights, beginning the same week. Tuesday was a night Jack had plenty to watch on TV so he wouldn't miss me as much and I could prepare his dinner beforehand. Still, he wouldn't be too thrilled about it. But, hey, maybe he could join in? I was going to see if I could convince him. Jack was an avid reader, but, unfortunately, not a social person. If he would only give it a chance, I think he'd enjoy it, especially seeing he doesn't know what to do with his time since the heart operation. Recently, he's been busy helping to get the shop ready by making bins and bookcases for us. The work has uplifted him; he hasn't been so depressed. It has given him some purpose, but all the preparation is about finished. So, honestly, I'm a bit worried about him. His depressed mood is coming back. He doesn't even have a desire to have any intimate relations with me, either, not since the heart attack, and that was several months ago. He's scared it will cause another one. We've discussed it with his doctor and the doctor says it is fine-go ahead, do it-but Jack is still nervous. I wish there was some way I could convince him otherwise. Maybe I should get a few tips from Jean. Nah...she hasn't had sex in a long time either.

We proceeded downstairs to the shop after creating the flyers to post them. We

made three of each-one for the entrance door, one for near the cash register where I took a moment to say hello to Bluey, and one randomly placed in our separate sections of the store. Now all we needed were for people to sign up. Hopefully that would happen in the next few days.

Jean and I were finished just in time to see Jack and Tommy walk through the door with several pizza boxes. Then, in walked Bob behind them. He was toting a case of wine with a grin plastered on his face.

“Turn around and close your eyes, Jean. We have a surprise for you,” Bob announced.

This was the moment I had been waiting for. I was about to return a favor to her for letting me be a co-owner of this shop and making my dreams come true. Now I wanted to make her dreams a reality.

Jean did as Bob said and then we all called out “SURPRISE”. I told her to turn back towards us and open her eyes. When she did, you should’ve seen her! Her face was white as a sheet-she was in shock. I thought she might even have a panic attack right in front of us, but she didn’t. Instead, she fainted.

Chapter 5

"How the hell did they get you here?" Jean asked once she came around. Jacob was holding her head up a few inches from the floor staring down at her. He appeared as pale as she was, having had to overcome his agoraphobia to fly all the way from Cleveland.

"It didn't take too much convincing," he replied as he grinned at her. "I've been going to meetings, you know. I wanted to be here for the grand opening, but I never said anything so you wouldn't get your hopes up." He pushed aside the graying hair from his face to reveal his gentle blue eyes.

That's when I joined in the conversation. "Jacob called me last week and we planned it all out. I picked him up at the Manchester airport today after visiting with Eloise." I shot a glance over at Jacob and smiled. "He even contemplated bringing Aunt Helen and Walter, too, but decided that they're both too fragile to come all this way."

"They went on a week-long retreat with other people from their church. At least I won't have to worry about them," Jacob said.

By this point, she was sitting up and gaining some color back in her cheeks.

"I can't believe it. It's so awesome you're here." She then grabbed hold of Jacob's face with both of her hands and planted a big kiss right on his lips. He looked a bit surprised. When she pulled back, she said, "Well, where are your bags? You're staying with me, you know."

At that comment, I glanced over at Bob who didn't seem to be smiling anymore. No doubt about it, he was jealous.

I needed to get everyone redirected. After all, the pizza was getting cold.

"Get yourself off the floor, Jean. I'm hungry, so let's go upstairs and eat," I commanded.

"And don't forget I brought wine," added Bob, trying to be noticed. I could tell he was still bothered, but knew there was nothing he could do about it. Jean had already informed him months ago how important Jacob was to her. She also told him she didn't feel any romantic sparks with Jacob, like she still did with Bob. Is he forgetting that? Maybe later I can remind him, if for no other reason than to keep the peace between them.

We all slid a few slices onto our plates and poured some wine into our glasses. Then we sat around Jean's small living room chatting about opening day. Jean did most of the talking, but it was exciting news and, of course, she had someone to impress. She held up her glass of wine and proposed a toast.

"To the beginning of a prosperous and fun adventure," she said. We clinked glasses, all agreeing it would be fun. As for prosperous, well, time would only tell. As Jean mentioned earlier, books and yarn aren't always top sellers. We'll have to be innovative enough to keep them coming through the doors. Having Jacob, a popular author, around for the first few days of business will help, that's for sure. I must remember to check with him later to see if he can read a few stories to kids while

he's here.

My personal collection of all Jacob's picture books were already displayed in different areas of the shop for customers to enjoy. None of them were for sale, though, because they meant too much to me. Also, I'm hoping someday to hand them down to a grandchild. I don't have one yet, but my oldest boy, Jonathan, has just found, in his exact words, "the woman of his dreams." He lives in Maine, is an outdoorsy type, and teaches at an elementary school. The girl he met is another teacher who was hired for this upcoming school year. Jonathan is still young, only 23, but usually knows what he wants when he sees it. He always knew he would be a teacher, he loves kids, and he's only had a couple of girlfriends before. I can't wait to meet this girl-Laura, that's her name-because I already know I'm going to like her.

After eating, Jean took Jacob's hand and led him back downstairs to the shop for a personal tour. Jack and Tommy were anxious to get home to watch TV-they were bored-so they bowed out early. I promised to come soon after. Jack was not at all thrilled about me hanging out so late with the big day tomorrow, but I wanted a few extra minutes to talk with Bob alone. He continued to be concerned by Jean's ogling over Jacob tonight.

Once we were alone, I poured another glass of wine for both of us and then started the conversation.

"Are you all right with Jacob being here?" Before he had a chance to answer, I added, "I appreciate your help in bringing him tonight. As you know, it means a lot to Jean."

"Oh, Rosie, what am I going to do? She may not think she's romantically attracted to the guy, but just look at her. She's had her hands all over him tonight and ... and that kiss she gave him."

I put my glass down and leaned forward. "Well, if she is, then she hasn't told me. I know he means a lot to her, and so do you. I really think what she feels for Jacob is quite similar to your feelings about her."

"What do you mean by that? Romantically, Jean and I have, or should I say had, it really good. I'm sure she's told you we have plenty of great memories together in that way."

It was a bit embarrassing talking about this subject, but I knew it was important to get around to what I had to say next.

"I don't mean that exactly. Yes, she's told me about the two of you, just a bit. She's also told me how much she loves you, but she doesn't feel it's mutual. Not in the way that makes a real marriage work between two people."

He didn't respond. I had said something he knew was true, so I went on to finish explaining how this tied in with Jacob.

"As for Jacob, well, I think he truly loves Jean, or at least thinks he does, and she loves him, too, but not completely, not romantically, so that's not going to work either. It wouldn't be fair for either one of them. You still mean a lot to her, so don't forget it. If she could bottle you both up into one ideal man, you know she would."

"But she can't," replied Bob as he frowned and looked defeated.

"No, she can't," I agreed. "That's something Jean is going to have to realize for herself. Until then, you'll just have to accept things as they are."

Bob looked more relaxed, but still concerned. "Hey, you know I wish I could love