

Tides of Passion

by

Tracy Sumner

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On the original acknowledgement page for Tides of Passion, I dedicated the book to my colleagues at the World Trade Center. I reread this dedication as I was editing the book for its e-release, and although it's been 10 years, I still think about those buildings and the people who worked inside them, well, almost every day.

So, I think I'll keep the original dedication in place, with the hope that the passing years have brought a measure of peace.

Chapter 1

*Women can't have an honest exchange
in front of men without having it called a cat fight.*

~Clare Boothe Luce

North Carolina, 1898

Savannah knew she was in trouble a split second before he reached her.

Perhaps she should have saved herself the embarrassment of a tussle with the town constable, a man determined to believe the worst of her.

However, running from a challenge wasn't her way.

She laughed, appalled to realize it wasn't fear that had her contemplating slipping off the rickety crate and into the budding crowd gathered outside the oyster factory.

No, her distress was due to nothing more than Constable Garrett's lack of proper *clothing*.

In a manner typical of the coastal community she had temporarily settled in, his shirt lay open nearly to his *waist*. She couldn't help but watch the ragged shirttail flick his lean stomach as he advanced on her. Tall, broad-shouldered and lean-hipped, his physique belied his composed expression. Yet Savannah detected a faint edge of anger pulsing beneath the calm façade, one she wanted to deny sent her heart racing.

Wanted... but could not.

Flinging her fist into the air, she stared him down as she shouted, "Fight for your rights, women of Pilot Isle!"

The roar of the crowd, men in discord, women in glorious agreement, eclipsed her next call to action. *There*, she thought, pleased to see Zachariah Garrett's long-lashed gray eyes narrow, his golden skin pulling tight in a frown. Again she shook her fist, and the crowd bellowed.

One man ripped the sign Savannah had hung from the warehouse wall to pieces and fed it to the flames shooting from a nearby barrel. Another began channeling the group of protesting women away from the entrance. Many looked at her with proud smiles on their faces or raised a hand as they passed. They felt the pulse thrumming through the air, the energy.

There was no power like the power of a crowd.

Standing on a wobbly crate on a dock alongside the ocean, Savannah let the madness rush over her, sure, completely sure to the depths of her soul, that *this* was worth her often forlorn existence. Change was good. Change was necessary. And while she was here, she would make sure Pilot Isle saw its fair share.

"That's it for the show, Miss Connor," Zachariah Garrett said, wrapping his arm around her waist and yanking her from the crate as people swarmed past. "You've done nothing but cause trouble since you got here, and personally, I've about had it."

"I'm sorry, Constable, but that's the purpose of my profession!"

He set her on her feet none too gently and whispered in her ear, "Not in my

town it isn't."

As she prepared to argue—Savannah was *always* prepared to argue—a violent shove forced her to her knees. Sucking in a painful gasp, she scrambled between the constable's long legs and behind a water cask. Dropping to a sit, she brushed a bead of perspiration from her brow and wondered what the inside of Pilot Isle's jail was going to look like.

Fatigue returned, along with the first flicker of doubt she had experienced in many a month. Resting her cheek on her knee, she let the sound of waves slapping the wharf calm her, the fierce breeze rolling off the sea cool her skin. Her family had lived on the coast for a summer when she was a child. It was one of the last times she remembered being truly happy.

Or loved.

Blessed God, how long ago that seemed now.

That was how Zach found her. Crouched behind a stinking fish barrel, dark hair a sodden mess hanging down her back, her dress—one that cost a pretty penny, he would bet—ripped and stained. She looked young at that moment, younger than he knew her to be. And harmless.

Which was as far from the truth as it got.

He shoved aside the sympathetic twinge, determined not to let his role as a father cloud every damned judgment he made. Due to this woman's meddling, his town folk pulsed like an angry wound behind him, the ringing of the ferry bell not doing a blessed thing to quiet a soul. All he could do was stare at the instigator huddling on a section of grimy planks and question how one uppity woman could stir people up like she'd taken a stick to their rear ends.

No wonder she was a successful social reformer up north. She was as good at causing trouble as any person he'd ever seen.

"Get up," Zach said, nudging her ankle with his boot. A slim, delicate-looking ankle.

He didn't like her, this sassy, liberating *rabble-rouser*, but he was a man, and he had to admit she was put together nicely.

She lifted her head, blinking, seeming to pull herself from a distant place. A halo of shiny curls brushed her jaw, and as she tilted her head up, he got his first close look at her. A fine-boned face, the expression on it soft, almost dreamy.

Boy, the softness didn't last long.

Jamming her lips together, her cheeks plumped with a frown. Oh yeah, that was the look he'd been expecting.

"Good day, Constable," she said. Just like that, as if he should be offering a cordial greeting with a small war going on behind them.

"Miss Connor, this way if you please."

She rose with all the dignity of a queen, shook out her skirts, and brushed dirt from one sleeve. He counted to ten and back, unruffled, good at hiding his impatience. What being the lone parent of a rambunctious little boy would do for a man.

Just when he reached ten for the second time and opened his mouth to order her along, a misplaced swing caught him in the side and he stumbled forward, grasping Savannah's shoulders to keep from crashing into her. Motion ceased when

she thumped the wall of the warehouse, her head coming up fast, her eyes wide and alarmed.

And very, very green.

He felt the heat of her skin through the thin material of her dress; her muscles jumped beneath his palms. Her gaze dropped to his chest, and a soft glow lit her cheeks. Blushing... something he wouldn't have expected from *this* woman.

Nevertheless, he stared, wondering why they both seemed frozen.

Zach was frozen because he'd forgotten what it felt like to touch a woman. How soft and round and warm they were. How they dabbed perfume in secret places and smiled teasing smiles and flicked those colorful little fans in your face, never *really* realizing what all that nonsense did to a man's equilibrium.

It was the first time he'd laid his hands on a woman since his wife died, except for a rescue last year and the captain's sister he'd pulled from the sea. *She* had thrown her arms around him, shivering and crying, and he'd felt for her, sure he had. Grateful and relieved and humble that God had once again shown him where the lost souls on the shoals were.

He hadn't felt anything more. Anything strong.

This wasn't strong either, nothing more than a minute spike of heat in his belly.

Nothing much at all. He didn't *need* like other men. Like his brothers or his friends in town. He had needed once, needed his *wife*. But she was dead. That life—loving and yearning and wanting—had died with her.

"Your mouth is bleeding," Savannah said and shifted, her arm rising.

Don't touch me, he thought, the words bubbling in his throat.

Cursing beneath his breath, the full extent of his childishness struck him. She would think he'd gone crazy. And maybe he had. Stepping back, he thrust his hands in his pockets and gestured for her to follow, intentionally leading her away from the ruckus on the wharf.

Buttoning his shirt, he listened to her steady footfalls, thinking she'd be safe in his office until everything died down.

"I'm sorry you've been injured."

Dabbing at the corner of his lip, he shrugged. He could still hear the rumble of the crowd. No matter. His brother Caleb would break it up. They'd argued about who got what job in this mess.

Zach had lost.

"What did you expect, Miss Connor?" he finally asked. "People get heated, and they do stupid things like fight with their neighbors and their friends. Hard not to get vexed with you standing up there, rising from the mist, preaching and persuading, stirring emotion like a witch with a cauldron."

She rushed to catch up to him, and he slowed his deliberately forceful stride. "Those women work twelve-hour days, Constable Garrett. Twelve hours on their feet, often without lunch breaks or access to sanitary drinking water. And for half the pay a man receives for the same day's work. Some are expecting a child and alone, young women who think they can disappear in this town without their families ever finding them. Their lives up to this point have been so dominated and envired by duties, so largely ordered for them, that many don't know how to

balance a cash account of modest means or find work of any kind that doesn't involve sewing a straight stitch or shucking oysters."

She stomped around a puddle in their path, kicking at shells and muttering, nicking her polished boots in the process. "If you can reconcile that treatment to your sense of what is just, then we have nothing more to discuss."

Zach halted before the unpretentious building that housed Pilot Isle's lone jail cell, getting riled himself, an emotion he rarely tolerated. He didn't know whether he should apologize or shake the stuffing out of her. "I'll be glad to tell you what I reconcile on a given day: business disputes, marriages, deaths, shipwrecks, the resulting cargo and bodies that wash up on shore, and just about everything in between. What you're talking about over at the oyster factory has been going on forever. Long hours, dreadfully long.

The men may well get paid a higher wage—I couldn't say for certain—but they labor like mules, too. Do you think Hyman Carter is begging people to come work for him? Well, he isn't. It's a choice, free and clear." Reaching around her and flinging the door open, he stepped inside and, by God, expected her to follow. "What the hell can I do about that?"

Her abrupt silence had him turning. Savannah Connor stood in the doorway, bright sunlight flooding in around her, again looking like a vision of blamelessness, of sweet charity. She even smiled, closing the door gently behind her. Troubled, Zach reviewed his last words, racing through them in his mind.

"Oh no," he said, flinging his hand up in a motion his son knew meant no, flat out. "I'm not getting involved in this campaign of yours. Except to end it, I'm not getting involved."

"Why not get involved?" she asked, the edge back. "Give me one worthy reason why. You're the perfect person to request a review of the factory's processes."

Ignoring her, he slumped into the chair behind his desk, dug his cargo ledger out of the top drawer and a water-stained list out of his pocket, and began calculating entries. He was two shipwrecks behind. The town couldn't auction property—funds they desperately needed—until he, as keeper of Life-saving Division Six, completed the sad task of recording every damaged plank, every broken teacup, every sailor's shoe.

Work was good for the soul, he had always thought; it had saved *his* a couple of years ago.

Besides, maybe Miss Connor would quit talking if he didn't look at her.

Moments passed, the only sound the scratch of pen across paper and the occasional crunch of wagon wheels over the shell-paved street out front. When the cell's metal door squealed, Zach started, flicking ink across the page. He sighed. "I'm almost afraid to ask what you're doing."

Looking up from plumping the cot's pillow, she flashed a tight smile. "Getting ready for a long night, Constable Garrett. You're writing"—she pointed—"a summons for me in that little book, correct? What will it be? Disturbing the peace? Instigating a mutiny?" She shrugged, clearly unconcerned. "I've been charged with both of those before."

The fountain pen dropped from Zach's fingers. "*Arrested?* Ma'am, I've no

intention of—"

"Thirteen times if you count the incident in Baltimore. That time, the police took us to a school instead of the local station. They didn't have a separate holding area for women and felt it would be inappropriate for my group to share quarters with common offenders."

Thirteen. Zach coughed to clear his throat. "I'm not arresting you. I only brought you here until things calm down on the wharf."

Savannah smiled, relief evident in the droop of her shoulders. "Then you'll help me. Thank goodness."

Gripping the desk, he shoved back his chair. "No way, no how. Are you deaf, ma'am?"

"Are *you*, sir? Did you hear those women out there today begging for equal rights? Women under your protection I might add."

His lids slipped low, the spasm of pain in his chest hitting him hard. *Protect.* Zach had spent his life trying to protect people. And so far he'd failed his wife, his brothers, and 81 passengers that he and his men had not gotten to in time. All events Reverend Tiernan said were in God's hands and God's hands only.

On good days, Zach agreed.

Opening his eyes, he forced his way back to his work, recording the wrong number in the wrong column. "Hyman Carter is a decent man. Pays his taxes, attends town meetings. He even donated enough money for the church to buy new pews last spring."

"He bought your loyalty in exchange for pews?"

His head snapped up. "No one buys my *anything*, Miss Connor."

She simply raised a perfectly shaped brow, sending his temper soaring two notches.

"Listen here, ma'am. That scene you caused today isn't the way to accomplish much in a town like this, though I'm sure it works fine in New York City. Personally, I don't cotton to taking orders from a mulish suffragette whose only aim in life is to secure the vote."

She took a fast step forward, her cheeks pinking. "Constable Garrett, you've grown too comfortable."

"That I have."

"No excuses?"

"Not a one."

"Well, you must know I won't rest until we come to a reasonable compromise."

"All right, then, you must know I can't change a man's way of running his business if it doesn't fall outside the law." He dipped his head in a mock show of respect. "Ma'am."

"Don't you realize that the situation at the oyster factory isn't *just*?"

A headache he hadn't felt coming roared to life. Pressing his fingers to his temple, Zach said, weary and unrepentant, "When did you get the idea life was just, Miss Connor?"

Savannah turned, pacing the length of the small cell, the sudden flicker of emotion in Zachariah Garrett's smoke-gray eyes more than she wanted to see, more

than she could allow herself to. Feeling sympathy for an opponent violated a basic tenet of the abolitionist code. And whether she liked it or not, this man was the gatekeeper.

In more ways than one. She'd only been in town a week, but it was easy to see who people in Pilot Isle turned to in crisis. She had heard his name a thousand times already.

Just when she had devised a skillful argument to present for his inspection, a much better one strolled through the office door.

The woman was attractive and trim... and quite obviously smitten with Constable Garrett. Unbeknownst to him, she smoothed her hand the length of her bodice and straightened the straw hat atop her head before making her presence known.

"Gracious, Zach, *what* is going on in town today?"

Zach slowly lifted his head, shooting a frigid glare Savannah's way before pasting a smile on his face and swiveling around on his stubborn rump. "Miss Lydia, I hope you didn't get caught up in that mess. Caleb should have it under control by now though."

Miss Lydia drifted toward the desk, her clear blue gaze focused so intently on the man behind it that Savannah feared the woman would trip over her own feet if she wasn't careful. "Oh, I didn't get near it, you know that would never do. If Papa heard, he'd have a conniption. But I *was* at Mr. Scoggin's store and it was all anyone could talk about." She placed a cloth-covered basket on his desk. The scent of cinnamon filled the room. "Lands, imagine the excitement of a rally, right here in Pilot Isle."

Zach sighed. "Yes, imagine that."

"And"—Lydia glanced in her direction—"you've, um, detained *her*."

"I haven't—"

"Constable Garrett, if I may?" Savannah gestured to the cell door she'd shut while Miss Lydia stood in the threshold, hand-pressing her bodice. "I promise to be on my best behavior. It's just so hard to converse through metal bars."

"Oh, dear Lord." Zach yanked a drawer open and fished for a set of keys he clearly didn't use often. Stalking toward the cell with murder in his eyes, he asked in a low tone, "What game are you playing, Miss Connor?"

"Forewarned is forearmed, Constable."

With a snap of his wrist and a compelling shift of muscle beneath the sleeve of his shirt, he opened the door. "*Out*."

"My, my, Constable, such hospitality for a humble inmate." She plucked her skirt between her fingers and circled him as she imagined a belle of the ball would.

Belle of the ball was called for with Miss Lydia, Savannah had realized from the first moment. The bored woman of consequence needing fulfillment.

And a cause.

Savannah would gladly give her one.

"If I may introduce myself." Savannah halted before Miss Lydia and flashed a hesitant smile. "Savannah Connor. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

Miss Lydia struggled for a moment but good breeding won out. In the South, it always seemed to. "Lydia Alice Templeton. Pleased, also, I'm sure." She gestured to

the basket on the desk. "Would you like a muffin? You must be starved, poor thing. These are my special recipe. Cinnamon and brown sugar, and a secret ingredient I won't tell to save my life. Zach, oh." She tapped her bottom lip with a gloved finger. "Mr. Garrett, loves them."

"I'm sure he does," Savannah said, not having to turn to see his displeasure. It radiated, like a hot brand pressed to her back. "And I would love one. I'm practically faint with hunger."

Miss Lydia sprang into action, unfastening and cutting, spreading butter, and clucking like a mother hen. Savannah admired women who could nurture like that; Miss Lydia was a born mother when children scared Savannah half to death.

"Here, dear," Miss Lydia murmured, full of warmth and compassion. "Mr. Garrett, haven't you a pitcher of water?"

No reply, but within a minute a chipped jug and a glass appeared on the desk with a brusque clatter.

"Do you mind if I perch right here on the corner of your desk, Constable?" Savannah asked and bit into the most delicious muffin she had ever tasted. "Truly, these *are* good. Ummm."

"I win the blue ribbon every year at the Harvest Celebration." Lydia shrugged as if this were a certain thing in her life. "My father owns a commercial fishing company, and my mother passed some time ago, so I take care of him now. I bake all day some days." She turned her hand in a dreamy circle. "To fill the time."

Savannah halted, a mouthful of muffin resting on her tongue. She couldn't stop herself—really, the urge was too powerful—from looking up. Constable Garrett stood in the cell's entryway, shoulder jammed against a metal bar, feet crossed at the ankle, those startling gray eyes trained on her. Trained without apology.

"No," he mouthed. An honest appeal from an honest man.

She hadn't dealt with many honest men in her life, including her father and her brother. Also, she was confident she hadn't ever had as attractive an opponent. It was wicked to feel a tiny zing when she imagined besting him, wasn't it? Was that letting personal issues and professional ones collide?

Swallowing, she returned her attention to her prey. "You could find other ways to fill your time. I'm happy to tell you that this is precisely what I did."

"But—"

"My mother also passed away when I was a young girl. After that my life consisted of living in our home in New York City, while making a life for my father and my older brother. They were helpless when it came to running a household, so I took over. My childhood ended at that time, but later on, I made sure I would have something to show for it."

"Ohhh," Lydia said, clasping her hand to her heart.

Savannah ignored the audible grunt from the back of the room and continued, "One day I simply found the endless duties and tasks, many of which I was uninterested in, to be so monotonous as to make my life seem worthless. I forced myself to search for meaning—a cause, if you will. I attended my first women's rights meeting the next afternoon." She failed to mention she had been all of sixteen and had nearly broken her ankle jumping from the window of her bedroom to the closest tree limb outside. After dragging her home from the meeting,

her father had locked her in her bedroom for two days.

Without food or water.

He didn't let her out until that lovely old tree outside her window no longer stood tall and proud.

"Miss Connor, I couldn't possibly attend a meeting like that here."

Savannah dabbed a muffin crumb from the desk and licked her finger. "Why ever not?"

"It's not... I'm not..." Lydia's voice trailed off.

"You're not resilient enough? Oh, you are. I could tell right away. Can you honestly say that you are satisfied with your life? What, pray tell, are you doing completely for yourself?"

"Redecorating my father's stu—"

"That's for him. Try again."

"Cooking."

Savannah smiled and shook her head.

Lydia snapped her fingers. "Oh, I have one! I host an information-gathering tea in the historical society office one morning a week. Although Papa feels it's shameful for me to work, even when the position is entirely without compensation."

Savannah relaxed her shoulders, dabbed at another crumb, as if the news weren't simply wonderful. The glow of heat at her back seemed to increase. "And how do you feel about working?"

"I love it. I'm very good at keeping records and tallying donations. I raised more money for the society last year than any other volunteer, even though Sallie Rutherford's total arrived at five dollars more than mine." She leaned in, cupping her hand around her mouth. "Hyman Carter is her uncle, and he gave it to her at the last minute to lift her total past mine."

The wonder, Savannah thought, dizzy with promise. "Miss Templeton, this is a propitious conversation. I need a co-leader for my efforts and until this moment, I wasn't sure I would be able to locate the right woman in a town the size of Pilot Isle." She smiled, placing her hand over Lydia's gloved fingers. "Now, I think I have."

"Me?" Lydia breathed, hand climbing to her chest. "A co-leader?"

Savannah nodded. "I have to govern Elle Beaumont's school in her absence. Teach classes and mentor her female students until her return. You may have heard that she's returned to university in South Carolina. Yet, I couldn't possibly stay here and watch women live in a state of disability and not try to improve their situation. Women working exhausting hours for half the pay a man receives, for instance. Did you know about that?"

"The oyster factory? Well, I have to say, that is, yes." Her gaze skipped to the constable and back. "Although, I haven't ever been employed. Not in a true position of payment. And the factory," she said, voice dropping to a whisper, "isn't where any ladies of, what did you call it, *consequence* are likely to pay a visit."

"As co-leader of the Pilot Isle movement, you should make it your first stop. Let's plan to meet there tomorrow morning. Nine o'clock sharp. Bring Miss Rutherford, who even if she is a bit of a charlatan, might prove a worthy supporter. Too, she can gain access for the group without the burden of another impassioned assembly."

Savannah smiled and added, "Surely her uncle doesn't want that."

"Now wait a blessed minute."

Savannah glanced up as Zach's shadow flooded over them. Bits of dust drifted through the wide beam of sunlight he stood in, softening the intensity of his displeasure. No matter his inflexibility, the man was attractive, she thought.

"A problem, Constable?"

"You're damn right there's a problem."

A soft gasp had him bowing slightly and frowning harder. "Beg pardon, Miss Lydia. I apologize for the language, but this doesn't concern you." He swung Savannah around on the desk, her knees banging his as he crouched before her, bringing their eyes level. "It concerns *you*, and I remember telling *you* I wasn't putting up with this foolishness." He stabbed his finger against his chest. "Not in my town."

She drew a covert breath. Traces of manual labor and the faintest scent of cinnamon circled him. Savannah valued hard work above all else and never minded a man who confirmed he valued it as well, even if he smelled less than soap-fresh and his palms were a bit rough. Forcing her mind to the issue at hand, she asked, "Are we prohibited from visiting the factory, Constable?"

"After today, you better believe you are."

She arched a brow, a trick she had practiced before the mirror for months until it alone exemplified frosty indifference. "My colleagues, Miss Templeton and Miss Rutherford, will attend in my absence, then."

"No."

She scooted forward until the stubble dotting his rigid jaw filled her vision. "You can't stop them and you know it. In fact, I'm fairly certain you cannot stop *me* without filing paperwork barring me from Mr. Carter's property. That takes time and signatures, rounding up witnesses to the dispute. However, I'm willing to forgo this meeting. During the initial phase at any rate. For everyone's comfort."

Sliding back the inch she needed to pull their knees apart, she decided that for all Zachariah Garrett's irritability—a trait she abhorred in a man—he smelled far, far too tempting to risk touching during negotiations. "Don't challenge my generosity, Mr. Garrett. You won't get more."

"Are you daring me to do something, Miss Connor? Because I will, I tell you."

"Consider it a gracious request."

"You can take your gracious request and stick it..." Jamming his hands atop his knees, he rose to his feet. "Miss Lydia, will you excuse us a moment?"

Lydia cleared her throat and backed up two steps. Before she left, she looked at Savannah and smiled, her eyes bright with excitement. Savannah returned the smile, knowing she had won that series if nothing else.

"You must be crazy," Zach said the moment the door closed. "Look at the blood on your dress, the scrapes on your hands. Do you want Miss Lydia to suffer the same? The things you want her to experience are things her father has purposely kept her from experiencing and for a damn good reason."

She gazed at the torn skin on her hands and the traces of blood on her skirt as she heard him begin to pace the narrow confines of the office. "It's a mockery to talk of sheltering women from life's fierce storms, Constable. Do you believe the

ones who work twelve-hour days in that factory are too weak to weather the emotional stress of a political campaign? Do you believe Lydia cannot support a belief that runs counter to her father's? A child is not a replica of the parent. The sexes, excuse my frankness, do not have the same challenges in life."

Watching him, his hands buried in his pockets—to keep from circling her neck she supposed—she couldn't help but marvel at the curious mix of Southern courtesy and male arrogance, the natural assumption he shouldered of being lawfully in control. "Engaging in a moral battle isn't always hazardous to one's health, you know."

"Doesn't look like it's doing wonders for yours."

"Saints be praised, it can actually be *rewarding*."

Looking over his shoulder, he halted in the middle of the room. "Irish."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You. Irish. The green eyes, the tiny bit of red in your hair. Is Connor your real name?"

"Yes, why," she said, stammering. *Oh, hell*. "Of course."

"Liar."

She felt the slow, hot roll of color cross her cheeks. "What could that possibly have to do with anything?"

"I don't know, but I have a feeling it means something. It's the first thing I've heard come out of that sassy mouth of yours that didn't sound like some damned speech." He tapped his head, starting to pace again. "What I wonder is, where are *you* in there?"

"I'm right here. Reasonable and... and judicious. Driven perhaps but not sassy, never sassy."

"You're full of piss and vinegar, all right. And some powerful determination to cause me problems when I have more than I can handle." He halted in the middle of the room. "And here I thought Ellie was difficult. Opening that woman's school and teaching God knows what in that shed behind Widow Wynne's, putting husbands and fathers in an uproar. Now you're here, and it's ten times worse than it ever was before."

"Do women have to roll over like a dog begging for a scratch for men to value them?"

"That and a pretty face work well enough for me."

She hopped to her feet, her skirt slapping the desk. "You insufferable toad."

"Better than a reckless nuisance."

"There's nothing wrong with feeling passionate about freedom, Constable Garrett. And I plan to let every woman in this town know it."

"If it means causing the kind of scene you caused today, you'll have to go through me first."

Savannah laughed, wishing it hadn't come out sounding so much like a cackle. "I've heard that several hundred times in the past. With no result, I might add."

"Guess you have." Halting before a tall cabinet scarred in more places than not, he went up on the toes of his boots and came back with a bottle. Another reach earned a glass. "With thirteen detentions, I can't say I'm surprised." She watched

him pour a precise measure, tilt his head, and throw it back. "Did any of them happen to figure out you were working Irish underneath the prissy clothes and snooty manners?"

She lowered her chin, quickly, before he could spotlight her distress. *Working Irish*. A term she hadn't heard in years. Every horrible trait she possessed—willfulness, callousness, condescension—her father said came from the dirty Irish blood flowing through her veins. Her mother had been the immigrant who had trapped him in an unhappy marriage.

A marriage beneath his station, thank you very much.

And he had never let his family forget it.

"Would you like a medal for your perspicacious deduction, Constable?" she asked when she'd regained her composure.

He laughed and saluted her with his glass. "Heck, I don't even know what that means."

"*Astute*, Constable. Which you are. Surprisingly so." She closed the distance between them and took the glass from his clenched fist, ignoring the warmth of his skin when their fingers touched.

"May I?" she asked and drained the rest, liquid fire burning its way down. Looking at him from beneath her lashes, she smiled. "The Irish like the taste of whiskey on their tongues, did you know that? O'Connor was my mother's maiden name. Her grandfather changed it to Connor when he came through Ellis Island. When my father asked me to vacate his home the first time, I claimed the name because he said if I must disgrace the family, I could disgrace her side of it. So I did."

She handed the glass back. "Now that you know one of my secrets, I should know one of yours."

He went very still, the arm that held the bottle dropping to his side. Before he pivoted on his heel, his face revealed such wretched grief that she felt the pain like a dart through her own heart. It wasn't enough to offer an apology for the offense.

How could she when she wasn't sure what ground she had trespassed on?

* * *

"After she got released from jail, we had coffee she bought specially in New York City. About the best coffee I've ever tasted, too. And these hard, bread-y cookies that Savannah"—Lydia cupped her hand around her mouth—"I call her that now you know, said she has to go to a place called Little Italy in New York City to buy. Can you imagine? And I'm to be her co-leader. My goodness, I never would have thought anything this exciting would happen in Pilot Isle. Not in my lifetime."

"Your father?" Sallie Rutherford asked in a hushed whisper, pleating her skirt with shaky fingers.

"Oh, he'll shoot me dead when he finds out." Lydia fanned her warm cheeks, trying hard not to envision her father's certain fit of temper. "But I'm strong enough to handle him. Resilient, yes."

"And you're still planning to go tomorrow morning?"

She nodded. "With you."

"Oh dear me, no. Dwight looks like he's sucking a lemon most days as it is. Do you want him to move back to his mother's for *good*?" Dwight Rutherford had married Sallie Smithe on the eve of his fortieth birthday and any disturbance on the

calm sea of life sent him running back to his boyhood home and the welcoming arms of his mother.

"Savannah said there's nothing wrong with helping your fellow woman, Sallie. Why should we expect the men in this town to be happy about it, can you tell me that? It's a man's world; laws are men's laws; the government a man's government. We're merely set on changing that."

Lydia felt sure Savannah would have been pleased to hear her parroting with such accuracy.

"Well, what about Dwight? And your father?"

"Oh, posh." Lydia chewed the last of her iced fruitcake with renewed enthusiasm. "They can take a big old leap off Pearson's dock for all I care."

"But the quilting meeting is—"

"Hang Nora and her weekly quilting meeting! I need you to get past the men your uncle will undoubtedly have guarding the gate. Plus, he won't curse too much with you in the room." Lydia dipped her linen napkin in a finger bowl on the table and patted the cool cloth against her lips. She ignored the beads of perspiration rolling down her back. Insufferable summers. "After the historical society calamity last year, you *owe* me. How can you even consider refusing?"

"Why, I never," Sallie sputtered with all the indignation of an affronted peacock.

Lydia drew a deep breath, testing the air to see if the roast she was cooking for dinner needed checking. "Savannah's going to unpack the rest of her belongings today. Books, pamphlets, materials to make signs. Paint and paper, all the way from New York. She also has badges for us to wear. Red with the words Freedom Fighter in gold emblazed across it."

"Gold?"

"If you help us with this, you'll be a bona fide member of the Pilot Isle Ladies Freedom Fighters."

"My...." Sallie sank back against the plump cushions, a wistful look entering her eyes.

Lydia released a pent-up sigh, less frightened than good sense should allow she knew. Savannah and the rally and the chance to live life for herself just this once was too rare an opportunity to let slip away. Besides, Zach Garrett wouldn't let them dilly-dally for more than a day or two.

She needed to have her amusement now.

"I'll do it," Sallie surprised her by saying, quite clearly and without additional arm-twisting.

Lydia clapped her hands and giggled, giddy to the tips of her patent leather boots. "That is fine news. I'm thrilled and relieved. Gracious, now that that's settled, I must tell you what else happened at the jail. I shouldn't, but I simply must."

Sallie vaulted to a rigid position, eager for gossip.

"I really shouldn't say—"

"Oh no, please do! It's been so dull around here since Noah Garrett ran off with that crazy Elle Beaumont."

Too true, Lydia thought. The entire town had hungrily monitored the antics of Zach's youngest brother and Elle Beaumont, who, eccentric as she seemed to be, had

snared the man she'd wanted since long before anyone could remember differently. It made her think of... well, today, at the jail, the way Zach had looked at Savannah, just for a hint of a moment when he thought no one was looking.

Not with interest, no, no, *no*. More as though he had been wound up like one of those new-fangled toys she'd seen in the window of Dillon's Goods in Raleigh.

Agitated was a good word for it. Which was all well and fine because women often roused men to a fever pitch.

Everyone knew that. It was just the way life operated.

Except it never seemed to operate like that for Zachariah Garrett. Even when his beloved wife was alive, he'd been calm and capable and strong. Why, if Lydia felt half a heart in love with him it was *because* she'd never witnessed anything but calm, capable, strong Constable Garrett.

She had never seen him agitated. *Never*.

Lydia wouldn't have guessed he had it in him.

Maybe there was something to this independence craze if it made a man sit up and take notice.

"Of course, this cannot go any further than this parlor," she finally said, tucking a wisp of damp hair beneath her bonnet. "And again, I shouldn't say, but I have to tell you that I've never seen such fire in Constable Garrett's eyes as I did today."

"*Fire?* Zach Garrett?" Sallie swallowed a bite of iced fruitcake too quickly and choked. "Are... are you sure? *Why*, he's so *collected*."

"Without a doubt. Fire," Lydia assured her friend. "And Savannah Connor lit the match."

A Note from Tracy Sumner

Dear Reader,

Soon after the release of *Tides of Love*, I began receiving letters asking when Noah Garrett's older brother, Zachariah, would get his own story.

I had always intended to write Zach's story, but when I finished *Tides of Love* and thought to start *Tides of Passion*, I wasn't sure who could lure Zach away from his lonely, quite solitary existence. He was committed to being a father but had stated in no uncertain terms that he would never marry again.

And I believed him.

This character was definitely not interested in falling in love. Another hardheaded Garrett!

In an *allaboutromance.com* review for *Tides of Love*, someone mentioned that Zach's love interest would have to be a stranger to Pilot Isle; someone he would have instant, insatiable chemistry with. It was then I recalled a scene at the end of *Tides of Love*, where Zach is headed to the train station to pick up Elle's best friend, Savannah Connor.

At that time, I was living in Manhattan, and I understood Savannah (a native New Yorker, as you know) as well as any heroine I have ever written. I loved her strength and her vulnerability—and I realized she would be the perfect match for Zach, a man with a strong sense of decency and loyalty, but also a man who thought he would never find another woman to love.

I loved helping him find out how mistaken he was!

Happy Reading.
Tracy Sumner

Meet Tracy Sumner

Tracy's story telling career began when she picked up a copy of LaVyrle Spencer's *Vows* on a college beach trip. A journalism degree and a thousand romance novels later, she decided to try her hand at writing a southern version of the perfect love story. With a great deal of luck and more than a bit of perseverance, she sold her first novel to Kensington Publishing.

When not writing sensual stories featuring complex characters and lush settings, Tracy can be found reading romance, snowboarding, watching college football and figuring out how she can get to 100 countries before she kicks (which is a more difficult endeavor than it used to be with her four-year-old son in tow). She lives in Charlotte, NC, but after spending a few years in "the city", considers herself a New Yorker at heart.

Tracy has been awarded the National Reader's Choice, the Write Touch and the Beacon—with finalist nominations in the HOLT Medallion, Heart of Romance, Rising Stars and Reader's Choice. Her books have been translated into German, Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish. She loves hearing from readers about why she tends to pit her hero and heroine against each other from the very first page or that great romance she simply *must* order in five seconds on her Kindle.

Ciao!