



New York Times
bestselling
author of
The Blessing

Jude Deveraux

High Tide

High Tide *Jude Deveraux*



POCKET BOOKS

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY SINGAPORE

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.



POCKET BOOKS, a division of Simon & Schuster Inc.
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

Copyright © 1999 by Deveraux, Inc.

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce
this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever.
For information address Pocket Books, 1230 Avenue
of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

ISBN: 0-671-01416-1

First Pocket Books hardcover printing November 1999

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

POCKET and colophon are registered trademarks of
Simon & Schuster Inc.

Printed in the U.S.A.

High Tide

Books by Jude Deveraux

The Velvet Promise
Highland Velvet
Velvet Song
Velvet Angel
Sweetbriar
Counterfeit Lady
Lost Lady
River Lady
Twin of Fire
Twin of Ice
The Temptress
The Raider
The Princess
The Awakening
The Maiden
The Taming
The Conquest
A Knight in Shining Armor
Wishes
Mountain Laurel
The Duchess
Eternity
Sweet Liar
The Invitation
Remembrance
The Heiress
Legend
An Angel for Emily
The Blessing
High Tide

Published by POCKET BOOKS

Prologue



"I won't do it," Fiona said with an icy smile, then refused to say another word as she stared at the man across from her. It was a stare that usually stopped people in their tracks. In heels, Fiona was six feet tall—and when necessary, she used every inch of her height to intimidate.

James Garrett might be several inches shorter than she was, but he *did* own the company. "I did not say *if* you were willing to go," he said quietly, his dark eyes as hard as the obsidian they resembled. "I said that you were going. My secretary has your tickets." With that, he looked down at his desk as though the matter were finished and she was to leave his office.

But Fiona hadn't gotten where she was by being timid. "Kimberly needs me," she stated flatly, her lips set so firmly they were little more than a line below her nose. Her chin

was elevated in such a way that she was looking down on top of his head. Were those hair plugs? she wondered.

"Kimberly can—" James Garrett shouted, then calmed himself. He was *not* going to tell her to sit down. He wasn't going to have her or anyone else saying he had a Napoleon complex or that tall women made him feel— "Sit!" he ordered.

But Fiona remained standing. "I need to get back to work. Kimberly needs a few adjustments, and I need to talk to Arthur about projections for the coming season."

James counted to four, then turned his back on Fiona and looked out the window at the dark streets twenty stories below. New York in February, he thought: cold, windswept, bleak. Here he was offering his top executive a trip to Florida, and she was refusing.

Turning back to Fiona, he narrowed his eyes. "Let me put it this way. You go on this fishing excursion with this man or I'll separate you and Kimberly forever. Understand me?"

For a moment Fiona stared at him without comprehension. "But I *am* Kimberly," she said in disbelief. "We can't be separated."

James rubbed his hand over his face. "Three days, Fiona. Three days! That's all I'm asking. You spend three measly days with this man, then you never again have to leave the streets of New York. You can set up housekeeping in the middle of Saks for all I care. Now go! Pack! The plane leaves early tomorrow morning."

Fiona had a few thousand words she wanted to say, but the man was, after all, her boss. And his threat of taking Kimberly away from her was more than she could bear. Kimberly and her family were Fiona's life. She had other

friends, other enjoyments, but Kimberly was everything. Kimberly was—

Fiona's thoughts paused as she passed James Garrett's secretary. The odious woman was smiling as she held Fiona's ticket in her bent hand.

"Bon voyage," the woman said, smirking. As usual, she'd heard every word that had gone on in her boss's office. "We'll all see that Kimberly is tucked in every night. I'm sure she'll miss you dreadfully."

As Fiona walked past the woman, her heels clicking, she took the tickets and smiled sweetly. "Get your raise, Babs?" James Garrett was notorious for his penny-pinching.

The secretary tried to snap the tickets back, but Fiona was too fast; she caught them and kept going.

Three days, Fiona thought as her long legs ate up the distance back to her office. Three days amid swamps, crocodiles, and . . . and some man who was *demanding* her presence.

"Just who the hell does he think he is?" she muttered as she strode into her office.

"Who does who think he is?" Gerald asked as he put Kimberly's new designs on Fiona's desk.

Fiona could hardly stand to look at them. James Garrett might think it was only three days, but to her it was—"Oh, hell!" she said as she glanced at her watch. It was nearly six, and tonight was Diane's birthday dinner.

Looking down at her assistant, Gerald, Fiona started to speak, but he beat her to it.

"No need to say a word; it's all over the office. Do you know *why* this man wants *you*? I mean other than the usual reason a man wants a . . ." He trailed off.

"I've never met him; I know nothing. But worse, I didn't have time to—"

"Buy Diane a present?" Gerald said, eyes sparkling, as he withdrew a beautifully wrapped gift from behind his back. "Ferragamo shoes, size six and a half," he said. "Hope you don't mind if I snooped a bit in your private file, just to check sizes and—"

Fiona wasn't sure if she should thank him or slap him or just fire him. She kept everything on her computer, including what her friends and her many business associates liked or wore or collected. That Gerald had gone into this private file was certainly overstepping his duties as her executive assistant.

"Don't worry about a thing," Gerald said as he removed her sheared beaver coat from the closet and held it up. "I'll take care of Kimberly and Sean and Warren, and I'll make sure the maps get to production. In fact, why don't you take a vacation and stay a little longer? I hear that Florida is wonderful this time of year."

Reluctantly, Fiona pulled on her coat; then in the doorway, she turned back and smiled at Gerald. He was already standing behind *her* desk, looking at *her* designs.

"You change one hair on Kimberly and I'll bring back a crocodile and lock it in the toilet with you," she said with her very sweetest smile, then turned and walked out.



"All right, tell me one more time," Diane said just before she threw back her head and downed yet another shot of straight tequila. This was at least her fourth drink—or

maybe it was her fifth. "You have to go where when and *why?*"

"I don't know," Fiona said in exasperation as she held up her hand to the waiter to bring her another drink. She knew she was going to regret this in the morning, but today had to be the worst day of her life. But now her four best friends in the world were here, and they wanted to share, so . . .

She looked at each face with love. They'd been together since they were kids, and—

"Hey! Wake up!" Ashley said. "No getting soppy on us. What is this all about? Is this man in love with you?"

"How could he be? I've never met him," Fiona said. "From what I hear he's sixty-some and has a figure like Santa Claus."

"But he's rich, right?" Jean said as she emptied her glass of iced tea. Long Island iced tea, as in vodka, gin, rum, and tequila mixed together.

"If he isn't rich now, he will be as soon as his show hits the market; then he'll—"

"Excuse me," Susan said, interrupting Fiona as she lifted her triangle-shaped martini glass. Susan didn't really like martinis, but the glasses were so sexy it turned her on just holding one. "Not all of us live here in this fabulous city, and not all of us—"

"Yeah, yeah," Jean said, laughing. "Don't start the I'm-a-poor-little-girl-from-Indiana routine."

"Los Angeles," Susan said, deadpan. It was a running joke of the two who lived in Manhattan about whether anything west of the Hudson was civilized or not.

"All right, calm down," Fiona said, holding her hands up in a sign for peace. "I'll tell you all I know—but it's very little. A man from Texas, by the name of Roy Hudson, created

a children's show called *Raphael*. I know nothing about it except that it was such a big hit on his local TV station that it's been bought by one of the national channels."

"Which one?" Jean asked.

"What does it matter?" Ashley asked. She had flown in from her home in Seattle the night before.

"PBS or NBC?"

"I see," Ashley said. "Money."

"Of course. Isn't that always what everything is about?"

"Are you going to let Fiona speak or not?" Susan said.

"There isn't much more," Fiona said as she took another sip of her gin and tonic. "As there always is with these things, there'll be franchising, and Davidson wants the contract to manufacture the toys from the show. Simple."

"Mmmm," Jean said. "So what do you—and Kimberly—have to do with this TV show? What's the name of it again? And what's it about?"

"I didn't see the tapes, so I have no idea what it's about. It's called *Raphael*, and I imagine it's about . . . Well, actually I don't know what it's about—I just heard about all this today for the first time." Fiona took a deep drink of her gin and tonic.

"So why—?"

"Why has this man said he'd only sell to Davidson Toys if I personally go on a trip to Florida with him?" Usually Fiona's excellent manners would never allow her to raise her voice in public, but her confrontation with Garrett had nearly sent her over the edge.

"I don't know!" she half shouted, then quieted when Ashley put her red-nailed hand on her wrist. "All I know is that this Texas good ol' boy has requested that I go on a . . ." She

had to swallow before she could say the word. "A three-day *fishing* trip with him and a guide named Ace." At that she downed the last of her drink then raised her hand to the waiter for a refill.

Susan was the first to laugh. It escaped out of the corners of her mouth in a way that was familiar to the other women. They'd often said that Susan's sense of humor had saved their sanity.

" 'Ace'?" Susan said, the corners of her mouth twitching. "Do you think he's one of those men who carry photos of his first wife, his second wife, and the third one in his wallet? And photos of all the kids from each marriage?"

"And each photo is at least twenty years old?" Jean said, laughing.

"Little Leroy in the photo is now serving five to nine for grand theft auto."

They were all laughing now, and Diane ordered a high calorie cheesy thing to dip into with fried chips. So far they hadn't gotten around to ordering dinner.

"No, Ace flew a plane during World War Two," Jean said. "He'll show Fiona his war medals."

"Really, girls," Ashley said. "It's Florida. He'll have skin rougher than the alligators he wrestles. And he'll call all women 'honey' and 'babe.' "

"And *his* tattoos were done before they were fashionable," Diana said.

Fiona leaned forward. "As always, you're all off base. Ace is gorgeous: tall, dark, and handsome. He has everything except one little bitty thing."

At that all the women laughed suggestively. "If it's little, I don't want it."

"Oh, not that . . ." Fiona practically purred. "*That* is developed to the size of—Oh! here's the food," she said, grinning, her green eyes sparkling.

Jean laughed. "Then the little part must be his—" Breaking off, she looked around the table. "All together now, ladies, one, two, three." Lifting her arms in imitation of a bandleader, she directed the chorus.

"His *brain*," they said in unison.

"You know, Fee," Ashley said, her mouth full of chip and dip, "I could stand three days with some bronzed Adonis named Ace."

"Puh-lease," Fiona said. "I like a man to have something besides pectorals."

"Not me," Susan said, mouth full. "I never cared whether a man had a brain or not."

"You'll care after the newness wears off—so to speak," Fiona said seriously. "Then you'll be left with nothing. He'll run off with some blonde bimbo, and you'll be left—"

"Give me a break!" Diane said. "It's my birthday."

"Right," Fiona said apologetically. "It's your birthday, and all we're doing is talking about *my* problems."

"Some problems," Ashley said. "Three days in sunny Florida alone with a beautiful body with no brain and—"

"And good ol' boy Roy and another guy who cleans the fish," Fiona said with a dry chuckle. "Meanwhile, Kimberly—"

"*Aaaaargh*," came the collective groan.

"Okay, okay. I know. No talk of Kimberly allowed."

"Yeah," Susan said, "let's talk about something else altogether."

"I agree," Jean said.

For a few moments all the women were silent.

"So what's this Ace's last name? Or does he just go by 'Ace'?" Ashley asked, running her fingertip around the rim of her glass.

With a sigh of reluctance, Fiona reached down to her briefcase, removed a paper, and scanned it.

"Montgomery. His name is Paul 'Ace' Montgomery."

One



"I refuse to accept it in that condition," Ace said, glaring at the man who was holding out a clipboard and expecting him to sign the acceptance papers.

"Look, mister, I'm just the deliveryman, and nobody said anything about busted crates. So just sign it so I can get out of here."

Ace kept his hands at his side. "Maybe you can't read, but I can," he said. "The fine print on that contract says that once I accept shipment, it's my responsibility. That means that if it's broken, then it's my problem. But if I find out that it's broken before I sign, then it's your problem. Got it?"

For a moment the man stood there opening and closing his mouth. "Do you know what's in that thing?"

"I most certainly do, since I'm the one who ordered it. And paid for it, I might add."

The man still didn't seem to understand. "So let's get it out of here so we can—"

"No," Ace said. "We open it here and now."

At that the man looked about him pointedly, as though Ace didn't understand exactly where they were. They were in the baggage claim area of the Fort Lauderdale airport. Right now there were only a few porters removing unclaimed bags from the carousels, but any minute the escalator to the left might start delivering a plane full of people. "You want me to uncrate the thing here? Now?" the man said quietly.

"Now," Ace said firmly. "You put it in my truck, it's mine, so I have to pay for it if it's damaged, and I paid too much for it to—"

"Yeah, yeah," the man said, bored, then turned to a skinny kid standing next to Ace. The kid was wearing the same gray uniform that the guy giving the orders was wearing. "He always like that?"

"Naw, sometimes he's a real pain in the neck."

"I hope you're gettin' paid well."

"Actually . . ." he began, but a bark from Ace stopped him.

"Tim! You want to get away from that end of the crate? I don't want one of my guys touching it until I see that it's working."

With his back to Ace, the deliveryman grimaced. He was tired and hungry, and worse, he was alone. He'd have to uncrate the damned thing by himself all because of a little dent in one corner. Using a crowbar, he pried up one side of the fifteen-foot-long crate, and there, lying in a bed of Styro-