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LAW OF ATTRACTION

Penny Jordan



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***Daniel was looking at her
in a way that made her
forget all about her work***

Her eyes grew wide and dark as his glance drifted across her face, his eyes holding hers for several heartbeats of time before his attention focused on her mouth. She could feel her heart racing, a frantic fast thud that made her feel breathless and giddy.

"I've been thinking about you all afternoon... about this," he told her simply, and then he lowered his head and started to kiss her gently, caressing her mouth with his, and then when she had made no effort to repulse him, he drew her slowly to her feet, one hand warm and firm against her spine, while the fingers of the other pushed gently into her hair, easing it back off her face.

"Hold me, Charlotte," he begged her. "Put your arms around me and hold me."

PENNY JORDAN was constantly in trouble in school because of her inability to stop daydreaming—especially during French lessons. In her teens, she was an avid romance reader, although it didn't occur to her to try writing one herself until she was older. "My first half-dozen attempts ended up ingloriously," she remembers, "but I persevered, and one manuscript was finished." She plucked up the courage to send it to a publisher, convinced her book would be rejected. It wasn't, and the rest is history! Penny is married and lives in Cheshire.

Penny Jordan's striking mainstream novel *Power Play* quickly became a *New York Times* bestseller. She followed that success with *Silver*, *The Hidden Years*, and *Lingering Shadows*.

Don't miss Penny's latest blockbuster, *For Better For Worse*, available in July.

**PENNY
JORDAN**

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CHAPTER ONE

CHARLOTTE paused outside the block of offices, studying the plaque which read 'Jefferson & Horwich, Solicitors'.

Her knees were trembling slightly and the skirt of her dark blue wool suit, which if anything had seemed rather prim in London, suddenly felt uncomfortably short.

She tugged at it a little self-consciously as she glanced around the busy market square.

It was only just gone eight in the morning, but it was market day and the stallholders were already hard at work preparing for their day's trading.

Perhaps she ought to have bought herself a new suit, something more suitable for a very junior, albeit qualified solicitor, just starting work in a new practice, but the trouble was that new clothes were a luxury she simply could not afford at the moment.

'Jefferson & Horwich'. She read the name again.

Well, Richard Horwich she had already met. He had interviewed her for the job. A comfortable middle-aged family man who epitomised everyone's mental image of a solicitor with a country practice.

But as for the Jefferson...

Charlotte took a deep breath.

Face it, she told herself bitterly. You would rather be working for almost anyone than Daniel Jefferson. The new golden hope of the legal pro-

fession, the man who had single-handedly—well, almost, if you excluded the odd barrister or so, and the usual full complement of legal staff—championed the cause of the downtrodden, in this case the victims of the negligent and callous refusal of a large drugs company to accept that the side-effects of their drug had caused detrimental physical symptoms in some of those people prescribed it, never mind doing anything about it, and had won for them not only recognition of the drugs company's negligence, but also one of the largest sums in compensation ever awarded by a British court.

As she stood staring at the polished brass nameplate on the front of the elegant Georgian building she couldn't help contrasting *her* circumstances with those of Daniel Jefferson.

She too was a qualified solicitor. She too had once had her own premises with her name alongside the door, and she too had once championed the cause of those who sometimes seemed most to need legal advice and who nearly always could least afford it. But there the resemblance between them ended.

Where Daniel Jefferson was successful, fêted, inundated no doubt with people wanting him to act for them, especially since the Vitale case had made the headlines, *she* was now forced to seek work as an employee... forced to start again right at the foot of the ladder, her home, her business and even her fiancé gone, swallowed up by the recession which was slowly strangling and destroying so many businesses.

Perhaps she ought, as her parents and her friends kept telling her, to feel grateful that she had been able to get another job with such relative ease instead of still being so full of anger and resentment about all that she had lost.

But she *was* angry and she was resentful. She had worked so hard. First just when she was studying, and then in her first job as the only female newly qualified solicitor in the large London practice where she had been lucky enough to be employed.

She had even learned to bite on her tongue and not to retaliate when the men she worked with tried to demote and degrade her, giving her the dullest and most routine jobs, and even on one infuriating occasion actually asking her to make coffee for the rest of them. Yes, she had worked hard then, and always with one goal in mind. Her own practice... and before she was thirty.

She had been over the moon when by what had seemed to be the most amazingly fortuitous stroke of good luck she and Bevan, her fiancé, had happened to come across a small local single-partner practice for sale.

It had been just about the time that people were moving out of London in swarms, extolling the virtues of country living, and, as Bevan had told her, she would have been a fool not to have jumped on the bandwagon.

She had bought the practice with a mortgage the size of which had made her wince. And she had also bought herself a small elegant town house several streets away.

After all, as she and Bevan had agreed, once they were married the town house would be large enough

for them both, and then later they could sell it at a decent profit and buy something larger.

Their part of the world was an up-and-coming area with property prices going through the roof, as Charlotte had discovered when she was gazumped both on the house and on the business. Fortunately she had been able to borrow enough to outbid the would-be gazumpers, but that had left her with no cash at all and a large overdraft as well as her huge mortgage.

She *had* been a little afraid then, but Bevan had laughed at her. What was wrong with her? he had demanded. She was only taking the same kind of risk that men had to take all the time. 'What is it with you women?' he had challenged her. 'You want equality and then when you get it . . .'

He had shrugged without finishing his sentence, but she had known what he was implying.

Bevan was inclined to be irritable and quick to make judgements. He lived a very high-powered existence as a dealer working in the City.

Charlotte had met him through a colleague and at first she had been a little put off by his manner, but he had pursued her so determinedly that she had not been able to help being flattered.

Their engagement was an unofficial, casual arrangement, more a declaration of an intent to marry once they had both achieved a certain status in their lifestyles than a formal betrothal.

Charlotte knew that her parents, especially her mother, were a little perplexed with this arrangement. An engagement, to her mother, meant a diamond ring and a date fixed for the wedding.

Charlotte had had neither the ring nor the date for the wedding, and now she had no fiancé either.

Broodingly she looked at the immaculately painted shiny black door. Once she opened it and went in she would be walking into a completely new life. Taking a retrograde step to a stage in her career she had thought she had left behind her years ago.

She was thirty-two years old. Too old to be going back to the bottom of the heap. But then, it was her own fault. *She* was the one who was responsible for her failure. She knew that.

'You failed because you took on too many charity cases,' Bevan had told her brutally when she had broken down in tears as she had told him the news that her accountant had told her that she could no longer go on. That she must cease business and that if she was lucky—very lucky—she might just... just be able to sell both properties for sufficient to clear the outstanding mortgages.

Was that it? Was it because she had perhaps unwisely taken on too many cases which, while worthwhile, she had always known would never pay their way? Or was it because she was simply not a good enough solicitor, that she had not worked hard enough, that she did not have the drive... the skill... the ability to attract the kind of clients she had so desperately needed to build up her cash flow? The kind of clients that the Daniel Jeffersons of this world seemed to have in abundance, she reflected miserably.

And why not? When you had been fêted by every heavyweight national paper there was, when every serious magazine had run articles on you, and every pseudo-current-affairs programme had promoted

and praised you, you would be inundated with people who wanted to give you their business.

As the old saying had it, nothing succeeded like success.

Which was why, in the middle of the worst recession for decades, Jefferson & Horwich were taking on new staff. . . which was why she was here, standing numbly on the doorstep of these premises, knowing that she ought to be grateful to whatever streak of compassion it had been which had persuaded Richard Horwich to take her on.

She was grateful, of course. But she was also angry, bruised, hurt and most of all bitterly aware of the way in which her failure contrasted with Daniel Jefferson's success.

And he was only thirty-seven, five years older than she was herself, unmarried, good-looking—at least if the Press photographs of him were to be believed. She hadn't seen him on television. She had been too busy trying to clear up the financial mess which had once been her business, bargaining with the building society and the bank for more time, until she had managed to find buyers for her properties. *Her* properties . . . their properties more like. Thank goodness they were now off her hands and both her mortgages repaid. At least she no longer had that problem to keep her awake at night.

No . . . but she also had no home of her own, and the unwelcome knowledge that she was having to go back to the beginning and start all over again. She grimaced bitterly to herself. No doubt she would look wonderful in her expensive, silly designer suit, grovelling to the partners, and being asked to make tea by the junior clerks.

Stop it. Stop it, she warned herself. Stop feeling sorry for yourself.

She took a deep breath and pushed open the door. Behind her, in the square, she heard a man wolf-whistle, probably at some passing young girl who had nothing more to worry her than which of her admirers she was going to go out with next, she reflected dejectedly.

As she disappeared inside the building, the man who had whistled turned and grinned at his companion.

'Very tasty, Mr Jefferson. I don't think I've seen that one before. New, is she?'

'It looks like it,' Daniel Jefferson agreed non-committally as he waited for the stallholder to weigh out the cheese he had been buying.

He was going to see old Tom Smith this afternoon. Tom was still worrying about what would happen to his cottage and his bit of land when he died. He had no direct heirs, only several distant relatives on his wife's side, and he was concerned because he wanted to make sure that young Larry Barker, the local teenager who had been so good about doing his shopping for him and calling round to give him a hand with his garden, should not go unrewarded for all his kindness.

Tom was very partial to their creamy local cheese, and so Daniel had stopped to buy him some.

So Charlotte French had actually turned up, had she? He had had his doubts when Richard had told him he had offered her the job.

He had read her CV, of course, and he was still not sure how well if at all she would settle down with them. That suit she had been wearing, for one

thing... personally he didn't mind how a woman or a man for that matter chose to dress, but unfortunately some of their clients did not hold the same views.

Despite all the publicity of the Vitale court case, the majority of their business came from the same rather conservative and traditional segment of the population it always had come from. It was just that now they had a lot more of it, and extremely short-skirted, South Molton Street suits would not be the type of thing they would expect from a woman solicitor. At least not if they were to take her seriously.

He sighed a little as he crossed the square. He knew from her qualifications just how intelligent she was, but...

A pretty, smiling receptionist welcomed Charlotte when she walked in. She obviously remembered her from her interview and offered immediately to show her where she would be working and where the cloakroom was.

'Oh, but is it all right for you to leave the front desk?' Charlotte asked her uncertainly.

The girl smiled back at her.

'Oh, yes, Mr Horwich said I was to show you where you'd be working when you arrived.

'I'm Ginny, by the way,' she introduced herself, stepping out from behind her desk.

'That's Mr Horwich's room on the left,' she told Charlotte, indicating one of the several closed doors off the corridor. 'And this one is Mr Jefferson's.'

Charlotte gave it a brief antagonistic glance. She had no doubt at all which of the partners had the

most expensively equipped and luxurious office space.

'And this is your office,' Ginny told her, stopping so unexpectedly at a door immediately down the corridor from Daniel Jefferson's that Charlotte almost bumped into her.

Her office. That puzzled her a little, since she had been expecting to be sharing an office with several other junior solicitors from the way the work had been described to her. It must just be Ginny's way of describing things, she decided as Ginny opened the door for her, but as soon as she walked into the room she immediately recognised that it was equipped for only one person.

She hesitated uncertainly and looked at Ginny.

'Are you sure...? I mean, I don't think... I thought I'd be sharing an office with other people.'

'Oh,' Ginny looked confused. 'Well, Mr Horwich said to show you in here. Oh, and he said to tell you that he wouldn't be in this morning, but that Mr Jefferson would explain everything to you.'

Charlotte's heart sank. She glanced round the surprisingly spacious and very comfortably furnished office with its window overlooking the town square, and suddenly her earlier anger deserted her, leaving her feeling frighteningly vulnerable and nervous.

'I'd better get back to the main desk,' Ginny told her. 'Mitzi brings the coffee round at about ten-thirty, but if you want a drink in the meantime there's a machine in the staff-room. That's up on the top floor. Mr Jefferson had it all kitted out so that we can eat our lunch there if we want. There's a snooker table up there and a small kitchen.'

'Last year we made up two snooker teams. Men versus women, and the women won.' She gave a small giggle, and then when Charlotte didn't respond she flushed and said uncertainly, 'Well, if you're sure there's nothing you need...'

Charlotte smiled automatically and shook her head, watching as the door closed behind her.

No, there was nothing she needed. If you discounted her own business, her own home, her self-respect, her pride, her future and her fiancé.

Idly she noticed the way she had put Bevan last. Had she always known that he would turn out to have feet of clay? That when it came to it he would not want to stand by her... that he had only wanted her while she was successful, while she enhanced his own image of himself? Had he *ever* loved her as he had claimed to do? And, even worse, had she really ever loved him—the way her father and her mother loved one another, for instance?

She moved over to the window and stood looking down into the square; a man was approaching the office door. He was tall and broad-shouldered, his thick dark brown hair glinting in the sunshine, and he moved energetically, lithely.

He was wearing an extremely conservative dark blue suit. She could see the crisp white edge of his cuff beneath the sleeve of his jacket. It was the kind of suit worn by a professional man. An accountant... a solicitor... Her heart gave a small fierce bound as he paused on the step and then looked up towards her window, almost as though he was aware of her scrutiny.

She recognised him immediately, of course, even though the only photographs she had seen of him

had been grainy and flat. In the flesh she was much more physically aware of the strength of maleness, of his bone-structure, the strength and the power of him.

The suit he was wearing might be that of a traditional conservative man, but the body beneath it was unequivocally tough and male.

She took a hasty step back into the room, her face flushing as she pushed angry fingers into her hair, flipping it back off her face.

Her hair was the only thing she had refused to change when Bevan had insisted on helping her to update herself. It was straight and thick, with the glossy sheen of good health, its dark red colour completely natural, although people sometimes refused to believe it. She wore it in a shoulder-length bob, its silky richness in striking contrast to her pale skin and blue-green eyes.

Bevan had wanted her to have expensive courses of sunbed treatment to tan her skin, complaining that being so pale was unfashionable and unattractive, but she had always refused, pointing out to him the dangers that pale-skinned people like herself suffered from over-exposure to either natural or artificial tanning rays.

Perhaps she should have seen the warning signs then and recognised that Bevan wanted her for the image he believed she could project rather than for the person she actually was. She had certainly discovered very quickly that, once the image, the trappings of success, had gone, Bevan had gone as well.

All right, so maybe once she had recovered from the shock she had found that her pride was more hurt than her heart, but even so... It would be a