

Chapter 3 by Bonnie (Palmer) Harrison

Jack's First Girlfriend

It was the first week in September of 1992 and I was starting my sophomore year of college. I received the same room as I had the previous year, which meant I didn't have to move anything, since I'd paid in full last spring. The coed dormitory in which I lived was an experiment on campus. The university combined three rooms with four separate sleeping quarters. The soundproofed bedroom walls formed a small central communal area for all to share. The dormitory bathrooms for showering were halfway down the hall, with boys using one and girls the other.

I arrived early Sunday morning. Gloria, a new roommate for me, had moved in on Saturday. Women slept in the individual bedrooms to the left and men in the sleeping quarters on the right. Steve brought his gear up at two, and around two thirty, his father showed up with a television for the common area. Steve was disappointed because there was no cable and we had to preorder the cable and pay the entire quarter in advance. The cable line without the box acted as an antenna and received an Akron PBS channel and a couple of Cleveland channels. We all wondered who occupied the fourth bedroom as the day slipped into evening.

It was after six when this old man showed up carrying a small overnight bag. Waiting for his kid to show with the rest of the stuff, the old man went into the bedroom and came back out a few minutes later. He introduced himself as Jack Brown, but our registration said John Brown, so we asked him about it. His name was John but he grew up as Jack and preferred if everyone called him Jack. When Jack shook everyone's hand, introducing himself, it was like shaking hands with a wrench. After Jack retired early, Steve cried that he'd thought the gorilla was going to break his hand. Jack pointed at the thirteen-inch television on the stand and asked if we were stuck with this. Steve blurted it was his thirteen-inch television and if Jack could do better, Steve said, "Go for it."

I got the impression that Steve thought highly himself as the dominant male. He had a macho personality that the world had to revolve around for him to be happy. Before Jack had arrived, Steve was taking over every conversation. Jack seemed very interested in Gloria's and my opinions. As we discussed our classes and our expectations for the future, Steve disappeared halfway through the night. At 10:00 p.m., Jack announced it was time for bed, and Gloria stayed up with me talking until midnight. We both commented what a great man Jack was, with Gloria adding, "If he were a few years younger, I would marry him."

On Monday, Jack entered the dorm around five, and a local store delivered his new television during the day, including reconnecting the cable into the new TV. When Jack turned on the television, it produced one hundred channels of static and snow. I told him no one had the money for cable and we were using the cable line as a normal antenna. Jack stated he would buy the cable, but we would have to come up with the money for any special channels. Steve informed him it would take two weeks to get the cable hooked up, and he would have to go to their office and pay in advance to get it. Jack pulled the latest pocket-sized cell phone from his jacket pocket, pushed some buttons and said, "Hello," followed by, "Don't you owe me a favor?" Jack

explained the situation and said he would like to have cable by six to watch the stock market show.

About a half hour later, there was a knock on the door and the cable worker said he needed to check the connection. The technician removed the cable from the back of the TV and hooked it to a meter, then called down by radio to someone and said he was getting a good signal. He reconnected the television, turned it on, set the channels and made sure everything was working properly. Jack came out of his room when he heard the television and asked if the cable worker if they were finished. Jack grabbed the TV remote and changed the channel to the one reporting the latest stock market prices. Seeing the work met his approval, he signed the cable worker's paperwork and thanked him. Jack asked if they were working the night shift and the worker explained the boss had requested them to work over that night for this job. Jack took two twenties out of his pocket and told him and his unseen partner to have a beer on him. Jack wouldn't tell their boss about the tip if they didn't, and the worker shook Jack's hand before leaving. Jack sat on the green dormitory couch and watched his show intently, following all the numbers flashing on the screen.

After his show, Gloria came in for the evening and the three of us of became involved in conversation. Steve appeared with disdain on his face to see us on the couch deep in discussion and avoided the conversation, going to his room. It seemed the school didn't make exceptions to their rule about freshmen staying in on-campus dormitories for anyone. Jack had an early-morning class on Tuesdays and Thursday and would be staying in the dorm on the nights before. We were welcome to use the television anytime, but when playing MTV, he said, please keep it down when he was there. The three of us ended up watching Monday Night Football until halftime, when Jack went to bed.

That Wednesday, Jack went to his room and studied directly after his show. I noticed Friday morning, Steve was removing his television from the dorm. When I returned from class, his door was open and the room empty and meticulously clean. We never saw Steve again.

The next Monday, the three of us started a habit of watching football again until halftime. Wednesdays were my study night because Gloria was at a pottery class and went out with friends afterwards. I liked to lounge in my underwear when studying, so I threw on a robe and went to see Jack watching the last of the stock market show. This was the first time we were alone together, and we talked in depth about me and life in general. As the dialogue became reflective, I couldn't help but notice how hot his sparkling blue eyes were.

We were talking for forty-five minutes when Jack stopped me in midsentence and asked me to put that away as he looked down at my breast. Apparently, the last time I'd shifted in my seat it had completely popped out of its hiding spot. Jack showing embarrassment of seeing my breast said he knew a bare breast didn't affect young people, but he was old-school and found them a distraction while talking. I quickly put the fugitive breast under the cover of the robe and was ready to continue our discussion. Jack tried to cover up his embarrassment by making an innocuous suggestive joke. I found his awkward ruse somewhat amusing and decided to

challenge him. To my surprise, he met the challenge, and I found myself amid some heavy petting with him.

Looking back on the situation, I realize Jack was trying to get out of the exploit his libido had gotten him into by saying someone might interrupt us. I explained that Steve had quit school and Gloria was out until ten or later. He added, "We should stop, I don't have protection," and I took Jack by the hand to my bedroom.

Before leaving for school, my mom had bought me a box of condoms because she didn't want any grandkids before I graduated college. I always heard narrow-minded parents say if you buy your kids condoms, they will have sex. In this case, if they hadn't been easily available to us, we probably would have stopped.

Jack was a very gifted lover, and after finishing, he gathered his clothes and left for his room without saying a word. I didn't hear from him the rest of the night, and the following Monday night, Jack didn't enter the dorm until after 9:00 p.m. I heard someone enter the dorm and came out of my room then I saw his door closing behind him. I'd never pictured Jack as a love-them-and-leave-them type, but he was definitely avoiding me.

The following Wednesday, the week after our exploits, Jack was on the couch when I looked out at six thirty. He turned off the stock market show when I peered out my door, and Jack requested I join him on the couch. I paused for a moment, not knowing if I was willing, then sat next to him as I had the week before. I was calling him all kinds of dreadful things in my mind when I looked into his eyes, and instead of hot, they were deep murky pools of sad blue.

He started by apologizing for his behavior for the past week, explaining it was not in his character to behave in a deceitful way. He acknowledged I was a wonderful lover and he appreciated the sacrifice I'd made for him. This was not an excuse for his behavior, he said, but he would like to explain his actions. Usually, when a man frames his reason within a justification, some lame excuse is coming up next. He said his appalling behavior of the past week revolved around his wife.

Shocked by the unexpected news that he had a wife, I became concerned for her well-being. He explained, "I was married for almost twenty-five years when my wife passed away a year ago. In twenty-five years, I was never with any other women and had not had sex since about six months before her passing away. I let my physical needs outweigh my emotional needs, and after we finished making love, it felt as if I had cheated on her. Counting you and my wife, I have had carnal knowledge of two women in my entire life. I thought it was a good time to start anew, but the reality is I still love my wife and am finding it hard to move on to other relationships." Again, he pointed out it was no excuse to behave badly toward me the past week but I understood his anguish.

When he finished his discourse on his unhealthy conduct for the past week, all I could do was hug him. We spent the next few hours talking about his wife, and I found it interesting he always referred to her in the present tense. He entertained me with the story of how they'd met including that she was the boss's daughter and pretended not to like him. She'd told him that he was