

I DIDN'T KNOW SHE WAS MARRIED

STORY TWO

BY ELIZABETH

“Cruising the French Riviera was a fabulous idea, Jack,” Erica said as she cuddled up against her new husband as the sun shone through the porthole.

“Yes, I just wish we could have brought the *At Last* instead of renting another ship. It definitely holds some very special memories for me. Next time, we will stay closer to home so we can make a few more,” Jack replied suggestively as he gently stroked Erica’s fingers and slightly raised his eyebrows.

Erica immediately knew the memories Jack referred to and simply said, “Why wait for the *At Last*?” She reached up and slowly began to nuzzle Jack’s neck right under his ear. He, in return, held her close to him and turned so that she was comfortably positioned on top of him. Jack knew that he and Erica would have years to form these memories and he was so happy that all of his dreams had come true.

Hours later, Jack and Erica had finished eating breakfast together, getting ready to disembark and continue on the honeymoon of a lifetime. (Of course, Erica had a few more to compare it to, but who was counting?) Jack watched Erica as she deftly applied her makeup and slid her dress over her head. The task of becoming “Erica Kane” was amazing to watch, and no one appreciated the lengthy morning routine better than Jack did.

“Did I smear mascara all over my face or something?” Erica asked when she noticed Jack staring with a slight grin on his face.

“No. I just can’t help but watch you. I am always amazed by the time you dedicate to making yourself look beautiful, when so many people go out of their way to look like you.”

Erica gave Jack a mischievous smile and turned to complete her transformation. When she had finished, the happy couple walked onto the deck and looked at the beautiful sights on the shores of the French Riviera.

Erica slid her hand into Jack's as they walked towards the waiting limousine. After supervising the removal of Erica's luggage and adding his two bags to it, Jack climbed into the back of the vehicle. Jack and Erica pressed against each other as the limo took them through the beautiful streets of Nice until it finally pulled up in front of the Palais Maeterlinck and they prepared to check into the hotel.

"You go to the desk and get us checked in," Erica told Jack. "I will meet you by the elevators." After a few minutes had gone by, she suddenly noticed a gentleman watching her. Assuming he was simply fascinated by her celebrity, Erica gave him a quick sideways smile and a slight wave before walking to meet Jack at the elevators.

"Is everything all right?" Jack asked as Erica walked towards him, looking back over her shoulder.

"Of course it is. I am here with my new husband and no children to interrupt...anything," Erica said with a noticeably suggestive tone. Even the bellboy understood the insinuation and had a coy little grin on his face.

Jack tried to ease Erica away for just a minute and leaned over to remind her that they were not yet alone, but that gave her the perfect opportunity to pull him to her, kissing him passionately and beginning what they knew would be the best part of their trip. Jack suddenly forgot what he was about to remind Erica of and immediately began to respond to her actions.

As the elevator doors slowly began to open, Jack and Erica stepped out into the hallway and waited for the bellboy to open the doors to their suite. The couple strolled into their rooms glancing around before turning to tip the bellboy. As soon as he left, Jack reached out and pulled Erica into a passionate kiss. It still amazed him that after so many years she could still elicit so many different feelings in him at once. "Do you know how much I love you, Mrs. Montgomery?"

"I think I do, but I wouldn't mind you showing me. Don't forget that I do have a severe problem with insecurity where men are concerned," Erica smiled as she saw the look that Jack gave her when he knew exactly the response that she was trying to invoke crossed his beautiful face.

Jack swept Erica into his arms and carried her into the bedroom, softly laying her onto the beautiful four-poster bed. He leaned down and claimed her lips with his own. Erica wrapped her fingers around Jack's neck, running her fingers through his hair. His hands began to caress the skin of her back, immediately above the zipper. Slowly they began to lower it, easing it down her body as she began to unbutton his shirt. Her lips then explored his chest, causing Jack to throw his head back, closing his eyes and trying to concentrate on his own next moves. Erica pulled Jack to her as she lay back onto the bed.

A few hours later, Jack and Erica lay wrapped up in each other's arms. Erica looked up at Jackson as he dozed, loving the fact that this time, this wouldn't end. He was hers forever and she finally believed that forever was possible. No other man had ever been able to give her the security and hope that Jack did and she loved him for it, probably more than he would ever realize. Feeling such peace in the safety of his arms, Erica laid her head on his chest and drifted off into a contented sleep.

As the rays of the sun shone through the window, Jack watched his wife as she lay beside him. He had watched her awake so many times over the years, but now she was his wife and he would never have to worry that each morning was his last chance to watch her open her eyes. Jack lightly stroked Erica's cheek and leaned over to gently kiss her. Her eyes fluttered open and reflected the love she felt for this beautiful man. The sun was hitting his gorgeous blond locks, making them shine. "Good morning, Mr. Montgomery," Erica whispered.

"Good morning, Mrs. Montgomery. Did anyone ever tell you that you are absolutely beautiful?"

"Well, I do think that I have heard that before, but I must admit that it sounds much better coming from your lips," Erica purred as she snuggled closer to Jackson.

"I thought we might do a little sightseeing today. We promised Reggie and Lily a souvenir from each of our honeymoon spots." Erica made the faintest whimper, causing Jack to let out an unexpected laugh. He pulled her closer and kissed her forehead.

"Well, I think that we have a little time before we have to start our day," he said

huskily.

When room service knocked on the door a few hours later, Erica slipped on her robe and went to open it. As she did, she noticed the same gentleman from the lobby the day before walking towards her from the elevator. She avoided eye contact, not wanting to be approached for an autograph while on her honeymoon. Quickly, Erica tipped the waiter and retreated back into the suite. She knew that fans would go out of their way to get her autograph, but it bothered her a little that this man seemed to know her room number. Filing it away in the back of her mind, she went to finish preparing for her outing with Jack.

“Where would you like to go now?” Jack asked after exiting the most recent shop. He didn’t realize any place could have so many couture shops, or that any one person could spend so much time shopping in them.

“I think I have finally finished shopping for the children. I suppose we can come back another day to do my personal shopping.”

“I can’t believe that you went into so many shops and bought nothing for yourself,” Jack said, more than somewhat shocked.

“Well, actually, I did make one purchase for myself. I am just not sure whether it is a gift for me or you.”

“And what exactly did you buy that you or I could use?” Jack said, already sensing that he knew the answer, but enjoying the teasing too much to stop.

“I am sure if you think about it, you can figure it out, but just in case you don’t . . . I promise that I will show you just as soon as we finish our dinner and get back to our room.”

After returning to the hotel, Jack and Erica sent their packages up to the room with the bellboy and went into the dining room for dinner. As the couple strolled

into the room, Erica suddenly remembered an urgent call she needed to return from a fellow board member of Cambias Industries. She apologized to Jack and went quickly into the lobby to make the call. Erica wrapped up the conversation promptly and started to return to the table. Turning abruptly, she tripped and bumped into a man walking away from the front desk. She glanced up and noticed that it was he again. Politely, she apologized and prepared to continue into the dining room.

“Ms. Kane,” the gentleman said. “What a pleasure to finally meet you. I have been trying to see you since I noticed you in the lobby yesterday, but I have been unsuccessful in catching up to you.”

“Well, I must say that I am flattered that you went to so much trouble,” Erica said with a little shake in her voice. She wasn’t sure why, but this man seemed a little more interested in her than the usual fan which made her somewhat nervous. “Please leave your name and address with the desk clerk and I will be happy to send you an autographed photo when I get home,” she said, trying to sound cool while slowly edging towards the door. She was ready to get back to Jackson and as soon as she had the chance, she turned into the dining room, leaving the gentleman standing alone in the lobby.

“What took you so long? You don’t even have much to do with Cambias Industries,” Jack said, a little irritated that his honeymoon had to be interrupted by such unimportant business.

“I am sorry that it took so long, Jackson. I had contacted a few of the other board members to put the word out that I wanted to sell my remaining shares of Enchantment. One of them called me back to make an offer. Now, I am totally free to turn my attentions to other business ventures.”

“Why didn’t you offer them to one of your daughters instead?” Jack asked, a little confused.

“I just didn’t want Kendall any more involved with the Cambias men than she already is, and, as for Bianca, she said that she had enough of the business without buying into specific holdings.”

Jack could tell that something was bothering Erica, but he didn’t press the matter, sure that she would tell him when she was ready. Erica didn’t want to upset him unnecessarily; and knowing she was probably overreacting to the encounter, she

was eager to turn her attentions to other matters.

“If you are finished with your dinner, I am ready to show you what I bought today. Oh, yes, and I decided that it is a mutually rewarding gift. You get to look at it, and I get to enjoy its effects on you,” Erica purred, taking Jack’s hand in hers and leading him to the elevator.

The following day the couple was once again on the streets of the city ducking in and out of shops. They walked hand in hand, looking at all of the sites and enjoying their time alone. At home there were always interruptions, but now they did not have to worry about that.

“Haven’t you bought enough, Erica?” Jack asked, knowing that they had already sent two car loads of bags back to the hotel.

“Well, you didn’t have any complaints about my purchases last night,” Erica replied with a seductive smile. She loved to catch him off guard in her comments, but Jack refused to be outdone.

“I think I recall several noises coming from those beautiful lips that must have meant that you enjoyed last night as much as I did,” Jack reached for Erica, wrapping his arms around her slender waist and pulling her against him.

“Jack, we are in the middle of the street,” Erica began just as Jack’s lips pressed against hers. Her earlier objections forgotten, she found her hands slipping around his neck, her fingers in his hair. “Okay, I think that I have bought everything that I need for now. Let’s go back to the hotel so that we can get ready for dinner.”

“We have hours to get ready for dinner Erica. Just how long do you need to get changed?” Jack asked, clearly exasperated that her suggestion didn’t seem to include what he had in mind.

“Well, I thought that maybe we could start with a hot bubble bath. I remember how much you always enjoyed them. Then, we can just see what happens next.”

Jack realized that Erica and he were on the same page after all and he quickly flagged down a cab. "It isn't that far to get back to the hotel," Erica said.

"Well, I wanted to get there as quickly as possible," Jack whispered into her ear.

As they got off of the elevator, Jack swept Erica up into his arms, causing her to squeal in surprise. He clutched her to him, kissing her passionately. After going into the room and setting Erica upright, Jackson went into the bathroom to run the water for the bath.

Erica picked up the phone to call room service and was surprised to hear a voice already on the other end of the line. "Hello, Ms. Kane. I am sorry to bother you, but we met last night in the lobby," the deep voice said.

"Yes, I remember," Erica managed to choke out, thinking this man was getting much too close to her personal life. "What can I do for you?"

"My name is Jean Luc Guimbre. You may have heard of the Palais de la Mediterranee. It is the largest casino in Nice. I am one of the owners and would like to extend an invitation to you. The presence of someone with your international reputation would be an honor."

Suddenly Erica felt very foolish. This man had simply been trying to extend a welcome to her, and she had brushed him off as some kind of stalker. "Oh Mr. Guimbre, the last time I met a man who owned a casino, he turned out to be somewhat bothersome, but I am sure that you could salvage my opinion of casino owners. I would be happy to come." Erica was so good at smoothing over her awkward behavior and could win over anyone when she turned on the charm.

Mr. Guimbre informed her that he would have a car sent for her later that evening and a personal account would be set up for her at the tables. Erica said her goodbyes just as Jack slipped up behind her from the bathroom.

"What took you so long?" Jack whispered in her ear as he simultaneously slid his hands up her body, letting them rest on the curves of her hips.

"It will take a little bit of explaining, and I think that it can wait," Erica managed to say as Jack's hands began to unzip her dress and gently shove it from her

shoulders, his warm tongue traveling across her now bare shoulders. Erica felt the chill bumps rising on her skin as his warm breath blew against it. Jackson let his hands fall back to her hips, turned her to face him, and lifted her off of the floor. He pulled her naked body close to him while she began to unbutton his shirt, slipping her hands into the folds and massaging the large muscles underneath.

Slowly, Jackson made his way towards the waiting tub. Setting her down on the counter, he allowed her to finish removing his shirt. Then, he shivered as he felt her hands begin to unbutton his pants. When she had finished, she pushed them gently and they fell to the floor. Erica leaned in and kissed Jackson, licking his lips with her tongue. His mouth immediately opened under hers and allowed her entrance. Jackson deftly lifted her into his arms and walked towards the waiting bubbles. Once he had placed her into the water, he lowered himself into its warmth.

“Come here,” he whispered, as Erica slid towards him. Her tongue began to explore his chest, while Jack slowly let his fingers graze the wet skin of her leg. They both became lost in the moment and any thoughts of the previous phone call had long ago slipped out of their memories.

Several hours had passed, and Jackson and Erica lay wrapped up in each other's arms as the sun began to slide below the waves outside of their window. Jackson was gently rubbing Erica's face and looking at her with eyes full of love.

“Come here,” he said huskily. Erica scooted closer to her husband and contentedly rested her head on his chest. Looking up at him, she felt very satisfied in knowing that she had finally found the happiness that she had always craved.

“I suppose we should get dressed for dinner,” Erica said with a distinct tone of regret.

“Well, the room service menu would be perfectly fine with me for tonight, sweetheart.”

“Normally, I would feel that way too, but I told Mr. Guimbre that I would make an appearance at his casino tonight.”

Jack gave his wife a curious look and asked, rather irritably, "Just exactly WHO is Mr. Guimbre?"

"Oh, I forgot that we never got around to discussing the phone call earlier. He is the owner of the largest casino in Nice and he personally invited me to come and play his tables. He is supposed to send a car for us and said he would have a house account set up."

"I see. And just exactly where did you meet this man, Erica? I don't recall you ever mentioning his name before." Erica's lips formed a slight smirk, loving that something so insignificant could make Jack so jealous.

"Feeling a little jealous are we, Mr. Montgomery? I have run into him a few times over the past few days," she said innocently, not wanting to mention her initial uneasiness about the man.

"I am not jealous. I just don't like for you to spring public appearances on me without warning, particularly on my honeymoon." Jack knew Erica was right, just as he also knew he had not fooled her with his adamant denial of the charges.

When the couple had finished dressing, Erica slipped up behind Jack and reached around his waist. "I love you, Jackson. I hope you know that."

"Of course I do, but I love the ways you find to prove it. Now, let's hurry to the car so that we can finish this 'appearance' as quickly as possible." Jack turned to face Erica, but just as he leaned in to kiss her, she stopped him, reminding him of her perfectly applied lipstick. Jack leaned forward and kissed her tenderly on the forehead and turned to escort her to the car.

When the car pulled up in front of the Palais, the driver rushed around to help Erica out. He had a silly little grin planted on his face and seemed to be holding her hand a little longer than Jack liked. "Excuse me buddy, I think I can take it from here," Jackson said as he patted the chauffeur's chest. Erica grinned up at him and took his arm to be escorted into the building.

Once inside, a gentleman from VIP services approached Erica. "Ms. Kane, my name is Robert. I am here to make sure that you have everything that you will need while at our establishment," he said, giving a little nod.

“Thank you. My husband and I are looking forward to playing a few of your games,” Erica responded, gesturing towards Jack.

“Oh, I am sorry. I didn’t realize you were not alone. Of course, we will be happy to set up an account for Mr., um, I didn’t catch your name?”

“Montgomery,” Jack said, a little peeved at being a tag along in the invitation. As soon as Robert was out of earshot, Jack leaned over to Erica whispering in her ear, “Just exactly what did you tell this Mr. Guimbre about your traveling arrangements? He seems to be under the impression that you are alone.”

“Oh, Jack,” Erica giggled lightly, “I just assumed he would have heard about our marriage by now. The papers back home were full of it.”

“Well, I guess he must not read the papers,” Jack shot back, putting his hand on Erica’s back to lead her to the tables. The couple sat down at the blackjack tables and Erica simply watched as Jack concentrated on the game.

As he played, she would very calculatingly lean over his shoulder to look at his hand, while allowing him to feel her warm breath on his ear. It didn’t take long for Jack to become very distracted. “Erica, I can’t win anything if all I can do is think about what we could be doing at this moment,” he whispered.

“Well, I thought we had made enough of an appearance for the night,” she whispered back seductively. “How about you go and call for our car while I go and get my wrap.”

As soon as Jackson had left the table, Mr. Guimbre approached Erica. “Oh, Ms. Kane. I am so glad that you could make it,” he commented smoothly. “Please allow me to give you a personal tour.”

“I am sorry. I was just about to return to my hotel, but thank you for the offer.” Suddenly, she heard a loud scream as guests began to run in her direction. Mr. Guimbre reached out and grabbed her arm, pulling her to him. He put his arms firmly around her, while guests were pushing past.

When everything had settled down, Erica gently pushed him away, thanking him

for the protection, but letting him know that it really was not necessary. Just as Mr. Guimbre was releasing her, Jack came up with a firm scowl etched on his face.

“Just what do you think you are doing with my wife?” he asked as he approached.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know she was mar...,” was all that Mr. Guimbre was able to say before Jack placed a fist right in his gut.

“Oh, Jack. What are you doing?” Erica squealed. Jack didn’t respond but took her by the arm and made his way for the door stepping over the stunned casino owner as he left.

Once the couple was back in the car, Erica took the opportunity to release her anger on her still seething husband. “Why did you do that, Jack? He was simply trying to keep me from being trampled in the mob. I can’t believe you attacked him without giving either of us a chance to explain.”

“I saw the look in his eyes and he was certainly taking his time releasing you from his embrace. Not to mention the fact that I think he was still under the impression that you were a single woman. Just didn’t get around to filling him in on that fact, I suppose.”

When the car pulled up to the curb in front of their hotel, both of them were still furious. They got out of the car and went up to their suite. Once they entered the room, Erica once again started yelling. “I see that you still don’t trust me. How many times am I going to have to prove that I love you before you stop with the whole jealousy thing?”

“I am not jealous. I just don’t like being relegated to the position of simply being your escort while some Frenchman has you wrapped up in his arms. You never did tell me how exactly you met him, by the way. He isn’t some old lover I knew nothing about?” Jack asked accusingly.

Just as the words passed through his lips, he stepped to the side, allowing Erica’s spiked heel to fly past him out of the open window. Jack turned to Erica to make some offhand comment, when suddenly the absurdity hit them both. They dissolved into laughter and rushed to embrace each other.

Jack leaned down to plant a firm kiss on Erica's lips, knowing that this had been the first big argument they had shared since their wedding. The fact that it was so easily forgotten gave him a wonderful feeling. They had always been very verbal about their feelings, but he knew they would be able to put them behind them, just as they always had.

"Jack," Erica cooed, "please go and get my shoe. I can't have only one of a pair." He gave her an exasperated look, gave her another light kiss and turned to find the grenade she had just launched at him.

Erica remained in the suite, calling the desk and ordering room service. She quickly changed into a black silk teddy, piled her hair in a loose knot on top of her head, and settled in to wait for the love of her life to return. After about twenty minutes, she began to worry. Just as she was going to call the hotel security, the phone rang. She picked up quickly, thinking maybe Jack had gotten into some trouble.

"Hello," she answered sharply.

"Oh, Ms. Kane. This is Jean Luc Guimbre. I just wanted to call and apologize for the misunderstanding at the casino tonight."

"I am sorry too," she said sincerely. "Jack tends to be a little hot-headed sometimes, but I think it would be best if you didn't call anymore."

"I thought that maybe you wouldn't mind having lunch with me tomorrow. I am sure that you haven't had a thorough tour of our beautiful city."

"I don't think Jack would really be up for a tour of the city with you as our guide. I am sorry, but thank you for the offer."

"I didn't say anything about your husband accompanying us, Ms. Kane. I doubt that he will be back so soon," Mr. Guimbre said with a snicker.

“What do you mean he won’t be back? Just exactly what did you do to him?” Erica asked frantically.

“Oh, nothing really. I simply had him arrested for assault. The French police don’t like tourists that attack its citizens. I am sure they are being fairly gentle with him, but it may be a day or two before he returns. Plenty of time for you and I to get better acquainted.”

“You have got to be kidding. Do you really think that I would go sight-seeing with you while my husband was being held in some French jail?”

“I might be persuaded to hasten his release if you will agree to spend this time with me.”

“I will take care of that myself,” Erica snapped back. “You have chosen the wrong woman to push around, Mr. Guimbre.” Erica quickly slammed the phone back down, picking it back up to contact the desk clerk. “I need to know where the police station is, now.”

A few hours later, Erica sat waiting in her hotel suite. The desk clerk had arranged to send someone to take care of Jack and she was anxiously waiting for word about his safety. *Why didn’t I trust my instincts about this man to begin with*, she was chastising herself. *I knew I got a strange vibe from him. I should have just told Jack about it to begin with.*

Suddenly, the silence of the room was broken and Erica was snatched from her thoughts. The air was filled by the strum of violins, making her rise to go out onto the terrace and see where the origin of the sound was.

As she watched the small ensemble from the balcony, her mind drifted back to Paris and all that she and Jack had been through to get to this point. She couldn’t believe that it had taken seventeen years for Jack and her to marry. They were so happy then, their yearning for each other erupting and catching them both by complete surprise. Neither of them had ever known passion that deep before and it connected them forever.

As Erica’s mind reveled in thoughts of the past, she became too immersed in

them to notice the man that had entered the suite. When he reached her position, his hand reached out to brush the bare skin of her low cut dress. Surprised, she whipped around, not sure who would be standing there. Her eyes immediately met the most beautiful pool of blue she had ever seen. She threw herself into Jackson's arms, inhaling the scent of him. He let out a little chuckle, enjoying the idea that she was so worried about him.

"If I had known the reaction I would get if I was arrested, I would have arranged it a long time ago. Did you like my surprise?" Jackson asked, already knowing where the music had taken Erica.

"Oh yes. I think it definitely brought back just the memories you hoped it would," she cooed back.

Jackson reached for Erica and swept her up into his arms. "I think that I once told you that we would be better off silent."

"I do remember a conversation about that, as a matter of fact. I also recall your suggestion to occupy our mouths."

"I am so glad that you do, Mrs. Montgomery. Having you in my arms all night and waking up with you is just what I want to do on our last night in this beautiful city, but I certainly hope that we don't run into any more amorous admirers in our next stop."

"I don't know. Watching you blow your top reminds me of how sexy you are when you are being the bad boy." Erica reached up to kiss Jackson, kindling the passion that had been ignited so many years ago in a small Paris hotel room.

He lifted her into his arms, heading into the future with the knowledge that they would never sleep alone again. Their love would always be there to comfort them and give them strength. Everyone always knew Erica needed that, but most people didn't realize that Jackson needed the same support, no one, but the person who knew him down to his very soul.