

## **I Didn't Know She Was Married**

### **Story One by Mary**

Erica awoke to the sound of the waves lapping gently against the side of the yacht. Opening her eyes, she saw the early morning sun peeking gently through the blinds. She stretched slightly and turned in her husband's arms. Jack was still sleeping and she took the opportunity to study him as he slept. She still couldn't believe that they were married. As she traced his familiar features with her eyes, she let her mind wander back to their wedding day. Words couldn't describe how perfect that day had been as they exchanged vows under the banyan tree with their family looking on. She smiled in remembrance as she reached out to brush a lock of sun-kissed hair off Jack's forehead. The smile turned to a cry of surprise when her hand was suddenly imprisoned in a powerful grip that pulled her onto Jack's chest.

"Well, good morning, Mrs. Montgomery," Jack murmured, smiling at her seductively.

"It is a good morning," Erica agreed. "And it was a wonderful night."

"Yes, it was, particularly the part when we got back here to the cabin," Jack said, stroking her bare arm. "In fact, I'd say it was the highlight."

"Without a doubt," she replied. "One of many."

"Honeymoons should be full of highlights," Jack told her. His other hand wound into her hair, gently bringing her closer. His breath fanned her cheek as his lips traveled along her jaw to just behind her ear.

"I thought we were going ashore this morning," Erica said teasingly, pretending to move away.

"We are," said Jack, "but I don't remember saying exactly when." He rolled them over in one smooth movement so that she was now under him, her dark hair a striking contrast against the yellow sheets.

"You said you'd tell me where we are," she reminded him.

"So I did," Jack agreed. "And I will. But first-"

"Yes?"

"First, I have to tell you how happy - no, happy isn't the word - how ecstatic I am - that you are my wife," he told her softly, looking deeply into her dark eyes.

"Oh, Jack," she said, reaching up to caress his cheek. "I still can't believe it. I'm the one who's ecstatic."

"Well, I guess that makes two of us," Jack laughed. "Seriously, sweetheart, I want you to always hold on to this feeling. Promise me that no matter what happens down the line, we will always find our way back to this place."

“I promise,” Erica whispered, bringing his head down to hers and meeting his lips with her own. Her mouth parted at the first touch of his lips and the kiss quickly deepened.

“When did you say we have to be ashore?” Erica asked breathlessly, reluctantly tearing her mouth away from his.

“Whenever we want to be,” Jack answered, bending his head to trail kisses down her neck to her shoulder. He pushed the strap of her nightgown off her shoulder and continued his descent.

“Good,” Erica said, “because I suddenly have no desire to leave the boat this morning.” She tugged on his hair until his mouth returned to hers. Her open mouth was an invitation for his tongue. She met it with her own as he covered her body with his. The nightgown and his boxers were quickly discarded in their desire to feel one another’s bare skin. The boat continued on its course as they lost themselves once again in their love for each other.

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Erica stepped on to the deck of the yacht and joined Jack at the railing. He was casually dressed in cream-colored pants and a white gauze shirt. The first few buttons were open, revealing skin that was deeply tanned from their days in the sun. With his hair even blonder than usual, he literally took her breath away.

“I thought you were never going to be ready,” he said, his eyes twinkling.

“Well, I wanted to look my best,” she said coyly, twirling so that her red sundress spun around her.

“Mission most definitely accomplished then,” he told her, capturing her hand in his and raising it to his lips. “You look beautiful.”

“So, where are we?” Erica asked.

“A place that I know you’re going to love,” Jack told her. “Last night, as we were, uh, sleeping, we left the Gulf of Mexico and we are now heading up the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet.”

“Okay,” Erica said somewhat uncertainly. “You know the geography of the southeastern United States is hardly my strong suit, Jack.”

“Yes, sweetheart, I know,” Jack laughed. “But it is my old stomping grounds. And - here’s the catch. I know you’ve been here before but this is our chance to experience it together.”

As Erica stared at him, completely perplexed, the boat left the narrow channel and turned into a huge, bustling harbor. Erica stared at the city before her and then turned back to Jack. “New Orleans?” she exclaimed excitedly. “Oh, Jack, I haven’t been here since my modeling days.”

“I remember you saying that you wished you had been able to see more of the city,” Jack said. “So now is your opportunity. Lucky for you, more than a few days of my misspent youth occurred here.”

“Just how misspent?” Erica asked, suddenly feeling a twinge of jealousy. “We’re not going to run into old girlfriends of yours all over the city, are we?”

“I do believe you’re jealous,” Jack said softly, putting his hands on her shoulders and drawing her close.

“Don’t be ridiculous!” Erica denied heatedly.

“You’re the one who’s being ridiculous,” Jack said with more than a hint of laughter in his voice. “Not that I’m not enjoying it.” He bent and kissed her lingeringly. “You, as you well know, are the woman that I love - the only woman that I love.”

Erica looked somewhat appeased. “So what are we doing first?”

“Well, since we seem to have missed breakfast, I vote for lunch,” Jack waited for her nod of approval and continued. “While you were getting ready, I made reservations for us at Cafe Gumbolaya. It’s on the river in the French Quarter and we can sit in the courtyard and check out the goings-on in the French Market.”

“That sounds wonderful,” Erica said enthusiastically. “And then?”

“Then I thought we would walk over to Jackson Square,” Jack suggested.

“You certainly did make an impression,” Erica replied teasingly.

“I think we have to credit the other Andrew Jackson for that,” Jack smiled. “And tonight, dinner and dancing at Arnaud’s, which has some of the best jazz music in town.”

“This is going to be an absolutely perfect day,” Erica said as they walked down the ramp to the dock with their hands entwined. “I can just feel it.”

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The afternoon sun was hot but there was a slight breeze from the river as Jack and Erica strolled through the cobblestone streets of the French Market. After a long and lazy lunch, they had decided to take their time as they made their way to Jackson Square. The market was a dazzling array of colors, sights and sounds. They had already passed numerous artists, merchants, and shops. There was so much to see that Erica didn’t know where to look.

Jack smiled at the slightly bemused look on her face. “I do believe you’re not sure what you want to do first,” he said, artfully guiding her around a juggler who suddenly appeared in their path.

“I don’t,” Erica said with a laugh, looking up at him. “You decide.”

“When you see something you want to do, we’ll stop,” Jack said obligingly. “How’s that?”

A display of vibrant watercolors lining a wrought-iron fence captured Erica's attention and she led Jack over to them. A dark-haired young man was putting the finishing touches on a painting propped on his easel. As Erica and Jack got closer, they could see that it was a watercolor of the harbor. The young man looked up as they approached and his smile widened when he noticed Erica.

"Your paintings are beautiful," Erica said, admiring the picture of the harbor.

"I am honored that such a beautiful woman likes my paintings," said the young man, putting down his brush and taking Erica's hand. He ignored Jack as he led Erica over to the fence, explaining the significance of each watercolor in an animated voice.

Jack sighed inwardly and glanced at his watch. He recognized the look on the young man's face only too well. If he didn't put a stop to this, he thought, it would take them all day to make it to Jackson Square. Walking over to Erica and the artist, he took Erica's elbow in a firm grip and smiled politely at the young man. "Perhaps you could give my wife your card," Jack suggested. "We could contact you about your paintings once we get home. We'll be having a large house to decorate very soon."

Appearing slightly crestfallen at the revelation of Jack's relationship to Erica, the young man quickly regained his composure and smiled at them. "Of course," he said, reaching into his pocket and offering Erica his card. "It would be my pleasure."

Erica took one last look at the painting of the harbor as she and Jack started walking again. "I can see I'm the one who's going to have to watch out for the competition," Jack remarked as they lost themselves in the crowd once again.

"Now, you're being ridiculous" Erica insisted with a laugh. "He was just being polite."

"Mmmm hmmm," Jack replied skeptically. "Sure he was, sweetheart."

They continued on their way until Erica noticed a cloth-covered table placed in the welcome shade of an overhanging balcony. Jack groaned to himself as he read the words emblazoned on the sign above it.

Palms Read ~ Tarot Cards ~ Tea Leaves

"Sweetheart, you're not serious," he protested as Erica dragged him closer. "These people are complete charlatans." His opinion didn't change when he saw the crystal ball and tarot cards spread out on the table.

"Jack, I've always wanted to do this," Erica pouted. The old woman sitting behind the table watched them approach. Her face was brown and wrinkled from the sun but her blue eyes were friendly as she looked at the couple before her.

"So, you want me to tell your fortune?" she asked in a lilting accent that was impossible to identify.

"I don't," Jack quickly asserted, "but my wife apparently does."

“Ah, a skeptic,” the old woman said. “Not unexpected from someone with such a logical mind.” Erica and Jack exchanged a quick glance.

“Okay,” Jack gave in. “I need to make a quick phone call, anyway. Stay put and I’ll be right back.” He gave Erica a kiss on the cheek and, with a dubious look in the fortune teller’s direction, dug his cell phone out of his pocket and set off down the street. The old woman silently gestured to a chair in front of the table and Erica complied, perching on the edge of the chair. For some reason, she was suddenly nervous.

“I am Madame Louisa,” announced the old woman. “There is no need for you to be nervous.”

Erica smiled slightly. “I’m not,” she protested. “Well, not really.”

Madame Louisa smiled back and Erica felt herself relax. “Do you wish for me to read your palm or the tarot cards?”

Erica cast an uncertain look at the tarot cards. “My palm, I think. I’m not sure how much time I have until my husband returns.”

Madame Louisa took Erica’s left hand in hers and studied it intently. “The left hand represents your childhood,” she said. She was silent for a few moments and then she looked back up at Erica. “I see much sadness in your childhood,” she stated. “I see feelings of insecurity and abandonment.” Erica nodded somewhat reluctantly. “I also see a truly horrible experience, something that shaped your life for years to come.”

Madame Louisa continued. “But there was always a strong person beside you, someone to guide you and help you, even when you didn’t think you needed it.”

“My mother,” Erica said quietly.

Madame Louisa nodded. “You miss her.” She put Erica’s left hand on the table and picked up the right one. “You have had an interesting life,” she said. “A most interesting life. Many men, many careers.” She traced a line on Erica’s hand with her finger. “For years, you were unhappy. The old nightmare came back to haunt you. But you fought it and won and now you are happy, happier than you have ever been. This man you are with, your husband,” Madame Louisa added. “He is responsible for most of this. You have been a part of each other’s lives for years and he has always been there for you.”

“That is true,” Erica acknowledged. “And the future?”

Madame Louisa brought Erica’s hand closer. “Ah, the future.” She studied Erica’s palm for a long moment and looked pleased with what she saw. “I see much happiness,” she stated. “With your career and your new family. There is something you have left to share with your husband, something that you thought the time for had passed...” Her voice trailed off and she released Erica’s hand. “That is all I see.”

Erica looked up to see Jack’s familiar blond head coming toward her in the crowd. Even after all these years, her heart still skipped a beat when she first saw him. “Something left to share?” she repeated. “What could that possibly be?”

Madame Louisa shrugged her shoulders. "I've told you all that I have seen."

"So, what does your future hold?" Jack asked, looking amused as he joined them.

"Just as I suspected, a blissfully happy life as Mrs. Jackson Montgomery," answered Erica.

"Well, I could have told you that," said Jack teasingly. He waited patiently as Erica thanked and paid Madame Louisa. A few moments later they once again joined the crowd heading toward Jackson Square.

"Why are we hurrying?" Erica asked as she doubled her pace to keep up with Jack's long strides.

"I want to get to the square without any further interruptions," Jack replied, his arm firmly around her shoulders. "Between your fascination with fortune tellers and the local artists' fascination with you, it will be dark before we get there and there's something I want to do."

Shortly after, Jack and Erica rounded a bend and emerged in the square. Erica gasped in delight. Everywhere she looked there was lush green grass and flowering shrubs. Tourists strolled along the intersecting paths, stopping to sit on one of the many benches. Couples on blankets enjoyed picnic lunches while children played nearby. In the center of the square was the famous statue of Andrew Jackson on horseback and behind that the majestic steeples of Saint Louis Cathedral.

"You like?" Jack asked with a grin, leading her down the path to the statue.

"Like? I love! It's beautiful," Erica replied.

They passed the statue and headed toward the cathedral. "I think you'll love this too," Jack told her. As they rounded the corner of the cathedral, Erica was thrilled to see a line of horse-drawn carriages winding down the street.

"Oh, Jack, this is perfect," she said excitedly as Jack paid the driver and helped her into one of the carriages. She relaxed in her seat and laid her head against Jack's shoulder with a sigh. "I can't believe how tired my feet are."

"Maybe if you'd worn appropriate shoes, they wouldn't be so tired," Jack pointed out, eyeing her strappy high-heeled sandals with amusement. Erica smiled, knowing that he wouldn't expect her to wear anything else.

The carriage headed down Decatur Street and into the French Quarter. For the next half hour, Jack pointed out various landmarks as Erica sat enthralled. Finally, with dusk approaching, they headed back toward Jackson Square.

"Thank you, Jack, this was beautiful," Erica said, lifting her head from Jack's shoulder to smile at him.

Jack tucked a stray tendril of hair behind her ear. "So are you," he responded, lowering his head to kiss her. Their lips had barely met when a loud voice interrupted them.

“Miss Kane! Miss Kane!” Erica realized the carriage had stopped and that someone was calling her name. As soon as she turned toward the voice, a flashbulb blinded her. She could barely make out the photographer on the sidewalk before several more flashes went off.

“What the hell?” Jack was out of the carriage before she could stop him. “Do you mind?” he asked in a deceptively measured tone as he approached the photographer. “We happen to be on our honeymoon.”

“Hey, I don’t mind at all,” replied the photographer. “How about some pictures of the happy couple?”

“How about you leave now while you still can?” Jack suggested. Erica quickly alighted from the carriage and reached Jack’s side.

“What my husband means,” she said, putting her hand on Jack’s arm, “is that we’d appreciate some privacy.”

“Oh, come on, Miss Kane,” laughed the photographer. “Privacy is something you gave up when you became a celebrity.”

“I’m going to give you 10 seconds to leave,” Jack said and there was no mistaking the anger in his voice. “And if you don’t-”

The photographer looked from Jack’s narrowed eyes to the clenched muscles of his arm still in Erica’s grip. “Okay, Okay,” he finally said, “I’m outta here.” He turned and started down the street, muttering a few choice words about celebrities under his breath.

Erica ran her hand up and down Jack’s arm. “Jackson, please, calm down,” she said pleadingly. “It’s just something we have to deal with.” After a long moment, Jack slowly let out a deep breath and took Erica’s hand in his.

“That’s it,” he announced, as they started walking back through the square. “I’m done with scenic New Orleans. We’re going back to the yacht to change. Then we’re having a quiet, romantic dinner and I pity the poor fool who tries to bother us.”

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Erica watched Jack across the table as he studied the menu. Now that they were seated in the elegant dining room at Arnaud’s, she was determined that they end the day on a positive note. Jack had been fairly quiet back at the yacht and during the cab ride to Arnaud’s. But now, with the melodic sound of jazz music drifting into the dining room from the adjoining bistro and the delicious aromas wafting from the kitchen, he seemed more relaxed.

“So, what are you having?” Jack put down the menu and smiled at Erica.

She smiled back. “I’m not sure but I’m glad to see your mood has improved.”

Jack looked somewhat defensive. “Okay, I know you think I went overboard.” He paused expectantly but Erica didn’t comment. “Look at it this way. I’ve waited 17 years for this.

Seventeen years. And as much as I love our family, I have a pretty good idea of what's waiting for us when we get home. Living in the loft with two teenagers while we look for a house, you busy getting New Beginnings off the ground, me busy at Cambias and God only knows what Kendall and Greenlee will be up to by the time we get back. So you'll have to humor me if I want you all to myself right now with no interruptions."

"When you put it like that, I feel incredibly lucky," Erica said, picking up his hand and lacing her fingers through his.

"So do I." Jack lifted her fingers and kissed them before putting her hand back down. "While you decide what you want, I'm going to go and make sure we have a table waiting for us in the Bistro after dinner. We can't leave New Orleans without enjoying some jazz music."

Erica was intently studying her menu when a deep voice with a French accent broke her concentration. "Excuse me."

Erica looked up into a pair of flashing dark eyes. The gentleman standing in front of her was handsome in a roguish sort of way. The crisp white shirt he wore complimented his dark hair and skin. Tucked under his arm was what appeared to be a saxophone. "I cannot permit such a beautiful woman to sit here alone," he said smoothly.

"Oh, I'm not -" Erica started to explain but the gentleman continued. "You must be my guest in the Bistro."

"Really - I can't," Erica tried again.

"I insist," said the gentleman. He gestured to the saxophone. "I will play beautiful music just for you."

Erica's mind raced as she tried to think of a way to politely get rid of this latest interloper before Jack returned. Knowing full well the mood her husband had been in earlier, she didn't even want to contemplate his reaction to this situation. Before she could speak, the man had drawn her to her feet. Looking at her admiringly, he bent to kiss her hand. Erica's heart sank when she heard a familiar voice behind her.

"I'm only going to say this once," Jack's voice was calm but Erica wasn't deceived. "Get your hands off of my wife."

Erica's admirer looked over Erica's head and dropped her hand when he met Jack's glacial stare. "Your wife?" he stammered. "Please - you must excuse me. This is a misunderstanding." He looked at Erica accusingly and then, back at Jack. "I didn't know she was married."

"Well, now you do," Jack said, "So I suggest you be on your way."

The musician stepped back as Jack moved forward slightly. "Yes, yes, have a good evening." He turned and hastily left the dining room without looking back.

Before Erica had a chance to react, she felt her arm taken in a firm grip as she was propelled toward the door. She heard Jack exchange a few curt words with the maitre'd

and then felt the cool evening air hit her when they reached the sidewalk. As they approached one of the cabs lining the street, Erica found herself hoping that her honeymoon hadn't just come to an untimely end.

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Jack swung open the door to the cabin, crossed the room and dumped Erica unceremoniously on the bed. He had scooped her up as soon as they exited the cab at the ramp to the At Last. Her attempts at speech had been met with silence. Now as she watched Jack throw off his jacket and loosen his tie, she tried again.

"Jack, really, you're overreacting," she said. "There's no reason that we couldn't have finished dinner."

"I give up," Jack responded. "I mean it. I admit defeat." He undid his cufflinks and rolled back his sleeves. "I'm not letting you out of here again."

"You mean never?" Erica purred. "What if we run out of things to do?"

"I swear our next stop will be a deserted island," declared Jack.

"Will we have to wear clothes?" Erica asked seductively.

Jack ignored her. "I still can't believe it." He ran his hands through his hair in exasperation. "I had this perfect day planned for us -"

"It was perfect," Erica insisted. She managed to reach out and grab Jack's hand as he paced in front of her. "Come here," she said softly. He didn't resist as she drew him down on the bed beside her. "It was a beautiful day, Jack." She sat up on her knees behind him and began to massage his shoulders. After a few moments, she felt his muscles begin to relax under her fingers. "I'm not about to let a few minor interruptions ruin our honeymoon." When she was fairly certain that Jack was less tense, she lightened her touch so that her fingers were more of a caress. "Is that better?" she asked softly, her lips close to his ear. Before he could answer, she suddenly noticed a beautifully wrapped package on the bureau. She quickly darted off the bed and across the room. "Where on earth did this come from?" she asked, picking up the package and turning to Jack.

Jack smiled at her, looking much more relaxed. "Why don't you open it and find out for yourself?" he suggested.

Erica tore off the paper and gasped when she saw the watercolor of the harbor. "Jack! When did you-?"

"Let's just say that when you were having your fortune told, I ran a little errand. Your artist friend was only too happy to have it delivered to you here," Jack explained. "I thought you deserved a housewarming present. Now we just have to find the house."

"Oh, Jack, I love it," Erica said, placing it on the bureau so she could admire it. She walked back over to the bed. "And I love you. Thank you." She bent to kiss him and he pulled her down on top of him.

“A thank you would be most appropriate,” he agreed, “Especially in light of the day that I’ve had.”

Erica unbuttoned the first few buttons of his shirt and slipped her hands inside. “I’m sorry that we had so many interruptions,” she said, sliding the shirt off his shoulders.

“I guess it’s the price to pay for being married to the most exciting woman in the world,” Jack said, closing his eyes as she touched her lips to his chest.

Erica undid the last buttons of the shirt and tugged it from the waistband of his trousers. “Just tell me how I can make it up to you,” she said, starting to kiss her way down his chest.

“Well, you’re heading in the right direction,” Jack told her, his breath quickening as she trailed her tongue across his stomach. He felt her smile and pulled her up and into his arms. “This may take all night,” he warned her, his hand going to the zipper on the back of her dress.

“I hope that’s a promise,” Erica said softly.

“Most definitely,” Jack responded, his hands brushing against her bare skin as he removed the dress. Erica shivered as he ran his hands down her arms to her waist, then back up to her neck, winding his hands in her hair. She closed her eyes as she felt his lips travel along her neck to her ear. Her senses started to spin with the familiar but always exciting sensation of being close to him. By the time his lips reached hers, her breath was coming in short gasps. Jack took full advantage of her open mouth, exploring it thoroughly until she met his tongue with her own.

Jack groaned as Erica fumbled with his belt. He moved her so that she was under him and quickly shed the remainder of his clothes. Their lips and bodies entwined as he rejoined her on the bed. “I love you, Erica Montgomery,” Jack said, pulling away from her for a moment. “So much.”

“I know,” Erica responded. “And I love you.”

As the yacht left the twinkling lights of New Orleans behind, they gave in to their endless desire, knowing that their love would only grow stronger as they began their new life together.

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Author's Footnote: This story will more than likely be read by someone whose life or the lives of people they love have been affected by Hurricane Katrina. Therefore, I gave a great deal of thought to changing the setting of this story. Although I've never had the pleasure of visiting New Orleans, I've always been fascinated by this exciting city and thought it was the perfect location for Jack and Erica's honeymoon story.

The story was more than half done when Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. For the first few weeks immediately following, it was impossible to concentrate on the story so I

took a break from writing while I considered changing the location. Ultimately, the research I had done on New Orleans convinced me that I should pay tribute to this great city by keeping it as the backdrop to the story. My heart goes out to the people of New Orleans and people elsewhere who were affected by this tragedy. They continue to be in my prayers.