



Ashes and Lace- Song of Erin- Book 2

by B.J. Hoff

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New York City, 1839

“Jack!”

He stood there, tall and dark, filling the doorway like a lean black bear. Under one arm was tucked the day’s copy; in his free hand, he held a small bouquet of fall flowers.

Samantha stared, her gaze going from his slightly smug smile to the bouquet. Flustered, she couldn’t seem to find her voice.

Even now, after months in his employ and despite the odd—and often confusing—sort of friendship that had developed between them, Jack’s presence still unnerved her.

To say the least.

His smile widened, as if he found Samantha’s discomfiture highly gratifying. “It seems that I’m your messenger boy today,” he said smoothly, extending the bouquet. “May I come in, Samantha?”

Samantha stared at the bouquet without making a move to accept it. “Oh—well, actually, I don’t know that that would be a good idea.”

She thought she had long since passed the time when Jack Kane—or any other man, for that matter—could make her stammer like a schoolgirl, but even as she struggled to regain her composure, Samantha felt her mind go to mush....

She supposed she should invite him in; despite the difficulties of their relationship, he was still her employer, after all. But if her landladies downstairs, the Misses Washington,

should learn that she had allowed a man inside her apartment, even for only a moment, they would be scandalized.

She suddenly realized that Jack was watching her with a decidedly amused expression, as if he knew exactly what she was thinking.

“No doubt you’re anxious about offending your delightful landladies,” he said. “You needn’t worry. I believe the dears actually find me rather charming.”

Samantha stared at him.

“Oh, I met Miss Rena and her sister on the way in,” he said, as if in answer to her unspoken question. “They were bringing in the flowers from the stoop—they seem to think we’ll have frost tonight, you see—and I offered to help. I explained that my call is rather urgent and strictly business, and they were most understanding. And very helpful,” he added, still smiling cheerfully.

“So, you see, Samantha, it’s perfectly all right to have me in. We’ll leave the door open, of course, but I assure you that both Miss Rena and Miss Lily have the utmost confidence in me. Apparently, I look every bit the gentleman to them.”

He looked, Samantha thought worriedly, like a pirate. A pirate in a perfectly tailored suit, as it were, and with a white posy in his lapel.

But a pirate all the same.

Again Jack extended the bouquet, and this time Samantha practically yanked it out of his hand. “All right, then, I suppose you might as well come in.”

“Why, thank you, Samantha,” he said, making a quick little bow and then breezing by her. “I was hoping you’d ask.”

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