

A collection of novellas inspired by
Shakespearean romantic comedies

Much Ado about
ROMANCE



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Published by Scrivenings Press LLC
15 Lucky Lane
Morrilton, Arkansas 72110
<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Printed in the United States of America

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Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-366-9

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-367-6

Editors: Regina Rudd Merrick and Heidi Glick

Cover by Linda Fulkerson, www.bookmarketinggraphics.com

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Inspired by *The Tempest*
by William Shakespeare

The Tempest
IN THE BAY

a novella by
Susan Page Davis

ONE



Barney Scott entered the café and looked around. There she was. He glanced down at his jeans and frayed shirt cuffs. Probably should have put on something a little more presentable. He gulped and started toward the woman, feeling underdressed and outclassed.

Natalie Wrenn looked every bit the sophisticated publisher that she was. When she requested a meeting with Barney, he'd been shocked, even more so when she agreed to drive way up here, more than a hundred miles north of the city, just to talk about his brother. Paul's books were valuable to Wrenn Publishing, but still ...

Barney had only met her once before, at a New Year's party his brother and sister-in-law had thrown twelve years ago, but he should have remembered how classy she was when he agreed to meet her for coffee. Too late to change now.

"Ms. Wrenn."

She didn't stand, but she smiled and extended her hand.

"Mr. Scott. Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me."

"Not sure what I can do." He shook her hand briefly, noting

her perfect manicure, and dropped into the chair opposite her at the glass-topped, wrought iron table.

She already had a cup of brew in front of her, half full.

“Guess I should have put in my order.” He glanced toward the counter.

“What would you like?” She put up a hand and fluttered her slender fingers.

Barney had never known a server to come to the table to take the order in this place, but sure enough, here came the cute waitress with her hair in braids. Penny, that was it. Her folks owned the café.

“What can I get you, ma’am?” she almost gushed. Her nametag was pinned to the front of faded overalls. She shot Barney a sidelong glance and nodded.

“Whatever Mr. Scott would like this morning,” Ms. Wrenn said.

“Oh, uh, black coffee, Penny. Thanks.”

“Coming right up.”

Natalie gave him a smile that was only a little stiff. “Do you come here often, Mr. Scott?”

“Some. It’s Barney.”

She nodded. “Barney.”

“You wanted to talk about Paul? Because, like I said on the phone, he won’t come back.”

“Why are you so certain?”

Barney shrugged. “I’ve been out there a few times. He doesn’t want to leave the island.”

She frowned. “I don’t mind if he wants to continue living in isolation, provided he’ll send me a manuscript now and then. It’s been what—ten years?”

He was certain she knew exactly how long it had been.

Penny placed a mug in front of him. “Can I top off your mocha, ma’am?” Penny held up a bronze and black coffeepot and arched her eyebrows at Ms. Wrenn.

Mocha. That was the sweet smell.

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“Yes, thank you.” Ms. Wrenn slid her cup a few inches toward Penny. When it was full and Penny had retreated, she looked over at Barney and pulled out that smile again. “He is still writing, isn’t he? I can’t imagine Paul sitting anywhere this long and not writing.”

“Maybe. He doesn’t discuss it with me.” Barney recalled his last attempt to talk to Paul about his living situation. It was one thing for his brother to be a hermit, but it wasn’t fair to Paul’s daughter. Violet deserved to know what the rest of the world was like—but no way was Barney going to bring up that sore point with Natalie Wrenn.

“What *does* he discuss with you?” she asked.

“Not much.” Barney took a sip of his coffee. “I think he’s just enjoying nature.”

“He’s all alone out there?”

“No, his daughter’s with him.”

Ms. Wrenn’s forehead wrinkled. “I seem to remember him bringing her to the office once or twice. She was quite small. How old is she now?”

“Must be twenty?” Barney wasn’t really sure. Violet had seemed all grown up last time he’d laid eyes on her, but he hadn’t calculated it out.

“And is she content to live out there offshore?”

“She must be. She’s still there, so far as I know.”

She took another sip from her mug and set it down. “Mr. Scott, when Paul moved to the island, I assumed he would keep on working and sending me his manuscripts. That hasn’t happened. To be frank, I *need* his work. He was our top-selling author. But that’s not the only reason I’d like to reconnect with him. We were friends, or I thought we were.” She looked away.

Her cheeks flushed a little. It made her look prettier, but it surprised Barney. Was she interested in Paul romantically? He cleared his throat.

“Paul and Violet moved to the island after his wife died.”

“Yes, I know.”

“I figured he just needed time and space. But he really loves it there. Last time I visited, he didn’t say one word about coming back.”

“And you don’t know if he’s still writing?”

Barney pressed his lips together. He’d seen stacks of paper on Paul’s desk and piles in a bookshelf nearby. He’d assumed they were new books. But if Paul didn’t want this woman—his old publisher—to know, then why should Barney tell her? Maybe Paul was submitting his work to a different publishing house, although he hadn’t heard of any new releases.

“Have you talked to him since your last visit to the island?” she asked.

“Talked to him? No. You gotta understand. They don’t have phone service out there. They only have lights because they’ve got a generator.”

“Sounds primitive.”

“Maybe a little, but it’s a big generator. They have heat and a stove and washing machine, all that stuff. But no phone or Internet.”

“Hmm.”

“So, no, I haven’t talked to him. I did get a note in the mail a while back. I made him promise with me to touch base at least a couple of times a year, so I’d know he and Violet are okay.”

“How long ago was this last note?”

Barney shrugged. “Four months? In May, I think.”

She sat in silence for a bit, and Barney finished his coffee.

“Well, if there’s nothing else, ma’am?”

She pulled in a breath. “Oh. I was thinking ... could someone do a wellness check, maybe?”

“Well, there’s Darrell. He goes out there once a month in his boat, to take them supplies. He carries any mail they have and brings outgoing back to shore for them.”

“So, Paul does receive mail.”

“Yes, ma’am. If there was something marked ‘urgent,’ Darrell would probably make a special trip.”

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She nodded slowly. "They don't even go ashore to shop?"

"I don't think so. Not much, anyway."

"Hmm. This Darrell. How would one contact him?"

"I'm not sure. He lives in Pinecone Harbor, the closest shore community."

"Do you know his last name?"

"Uh ... Clipton, maybe? Or Clifton." Barney pushed back his chair.

"May I contact you again, Mr. Scott?"

"Sure. You've got my number. But I don't really see how I could help you."