

*Running With  
The Wind*

by  
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**BY THE LEE**

Corrie looked at the front door of the Newport Yacht Club, then back toward her car. It would be so easy to just drive home, so easy to make up a story: traffic, a flat tire, food poisoning. Heaven knew her stomach felt sick enough—looped up and twisted like a mess of fouled lines.

She turned her attention back to the door, to the shiny brass knob set into the freshly painted wood. Walking away now meant contending with the disappointment of her parents, but even more importantly, Will would know that she couldn't handle it. He'd get that infuriating big-brother grin on his face, the one he always flashed at her whenever she was acting like a spoilsport. *It's not whether you win or lose...*

No, she had to be gracious—gracious and congratulatory and polite, to both her brother and Denise, despite the fact that the woman who had been her lover was going to be her sister-in-law in less than a year. Who was she kidding? Will had the right to gloat. He'd won and Corrie had lost, and if she had to shell out a single penny for alcohol tonight, she was just going to damn the torpedoes and go home.

She turned the handle and stepped swiftly inside before she could change her mind. There was the familiar mahogany wood paneling; there was the curving staircase and the podium set to one side. Nothing had changed and nothing ever would. Not here, not with the good ole boys in charge. A member of the club staff whose name she couldn't recall looked up from the podium and gestured toward the door to her right.

“Good evening, Ms. Marsten. The party is just through there.”

“Thanks,” Corrie said. She walked to the door and pushed it open. Almost immediately, her mother's voice floated across the room.

“Corrie, darling, over here!”

Corrie jammed her hands into the pockets of her slacks and made her way between the tables, nodding at so many familiar faces. At least

## NELL STARK

---

no one else knew the sordid story. Denise's reluctance to come out to her parents had spared Corrie public humiliation. She stopped beside her mother's chair, nodded at the cousins arranged around the table, and leaned down for a swift kiss on the cheek.

"Hello, Mom." She frowned slightly. "Where's Dad?"

Cecilia Marsten sighed. "On the dance floor, acting like a fool." Gold hoop earrings jangled as she shook her head. "If he re-injures his back, it's his own fault!"

Despite her dark mood, Corrie smiled. She squeezed her mother's shoulder and looked out toward the small space that had been cleared for dancing. Sure enough, there was her father, trying to do the Swim to Britney Spears. It really wasn't working. At once mesmerized and mildly horrified, Corrie failed to notice that someone had come up behind her until a strong arm encircled her shoulders and a set of knuckles roughly mussed her hair.

"Argh!" she yelped, twisting away and spinning to face her assailant.

"William," her mother said in an exasperated voice, "please do not turn your sister's hair into a bird's nest before the photos."

The sight of Will grinning mischievously, his offending hand now resting on Denise's slender waist, was enough to make Corrie want to slug him. She grabbed for the back of the nearest chair instead. *You're smarter than him*, Corrie reminded herself. *Smarter, and you fuck better*. She'd managed to wheedle that much out of Denise the last time they saw each other. What a blowout that had been. Denise hadn't admitted it in so many words, of course, but Corrie could read between the lines. Which made her marrying him even more egregious.

"Hey, li'l sis, glad you could make it," Will drawled, pulling Denise closer and caressing her possessively from her hip up along the side of her ribcage and back again.

Corrie's gaze followed his fingers before she finally looked Denise in the face. Those perfectly plucked eyebrows had drawn close together into a frown, and suddenly, Corrie remembered how smooth and soft they had felt as she had traced them with one forefinger in the aftermath of their lovemaking. She remembered the awe, the joy, the love bursting beneath her skin overflowing the borders of her eyes, and how Denise had clutched at her, looking up at her as if she were some kind of goddess.

## *Running With The Wind*

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Now, her dark brown eyes were guarded. Wary. That hurt.

*Never again*, Corrie thought for the thousandth time. *I will never be that gullible again*. Denise playing turnabout had been bad enough. But engagement? Marriage? *Un-fucking-believable*.

“Will,” she said flatly. “Denise. Congratulations. Please excuse me. I’m going to get a drink.”

“William,” she heard, as she walked toward the open bar, “why do you always have to antagonize her like that? You’re not teenagers anymore. Look, now you’ve made her upset.”

She didn’t need to hear Will’s answer to know what it would be. *I was just fooling around, Mom. Just having some fun. Just teasing*. And his excuses had always worked, too—ever since she was old enough for him to push around.

“You don’t know the half of it, Mom,” she said under her breath.

The bartender noticed. “Talking to yourself already?” he asked in a far too chipper voice. “That can’t be a good sign.”

Corrie pretended she hadn’t heard and settled onto one of the shiny black stools, resting her elbows on the lacquered wood. “Shot of Ketel One and a light beer to chase, please.” She stared down at her hands as the bartender moved away. There were still faint red lines across her palms from where they had bitten into the metal of the chair. *So fucking angry. And for what? What will it get me?*

“Corrie?” A soft, hesitant voice at her elbow made her blink and spin on the stool. The young woman standing nearby was looking at her with a hopeful expression as she ran one hand through her short, dark hair.

“Storm? Sarah Storm?”

Storm’s answering smile rivaled the glittering disco ball hanging from the rafters. “You remembered. Wow!” She shuffled her feet slightly. “I really thought you wouldn’t.”

“Aw, now, why’s that?” Corrie leaned back against the bar. Suddenly, she felt better. Much better.

Storm shrugged self-consciously. “I dunno. It’s been awhile.”

“Only a few months,” Corrie said. “Besides, I wouldn’t forget you. You were the superstar of your session.”

Storm blushed a deep red. Her skin had lost its summer tan, but freckles still liberally sprinkled the bridge of her nose. And she was wearing a tight, silvery top that did nothing to hide the contours of her

## NELL STARK

---

arms. *Sailors always have the best biceps.*

The bartender, at that moment, set the drinks down on the bar.

“Just a sec,” Corrie said, before expertly throwing back the shot. Cool and clear and easy down her throat, followed by the smooth bitterness of the beer...she looked up into Storm’s admiring eyes and felt the knot between her shoulders ease. “Anyway, this is a nice surprise. What’re you doing here?”

“Oh,” said Storm, as her fingers idly twisted the hem of her shirt. “Your parents sponsored mine to join the club. They’ve become friends, I guess.”

Corrie nodded and took another pull off her bottle. “And sailing? How’s that going? Several schools were recruiting you, if I remember correctly.”

“I, uh, picked Yale.”

Corrie’s eyebrows arched involuntarily. “Top school for women’s sailing in the country this year. You should be really proud.”

“Yeah,” Storm said and fidgeted some more. Corrie hid a smile behind her beer. “So,” Storm said, after an awkward pause, “how are you?”

“Fine, just fine.” Which was a lot closer to the truth than had been the case five minutes ago. “I’m doing the grad school thing over in Wakefield, and I’ll be head of sailing instruction there this summer.”

“Awesome! So awesome. Really great!”

Corrie just nodded and sipped. Essence of cool. The kid kept asking her questions, and she kept answering—deflecting them back once in a while, but mostly just enjoying the attention. The crush. Because that’s what it was, even if Storm couldn’t recognize it, and Corrie had a strong feeling that she couldn’t. Or wouldn’t.

She sure did have a nice body. Lean—almost wiry, but not quite. Full breasts, and that tight shirt showed off a hint of six-pack abs, and—*Why the hell am I checking her out? She was my student this summer.*

The crackle of a microphone interrupted her self-recrimination. “All right, ladies and gentlemen,” the DJ began, “please take your seats. It’s time for some bride and groom trivia!”

Corrie frowned. “Trivia? What the fuck?”

Storm shrugged and looked guilty for not knowing what was going on, as though it were somehow her responsibility to have the answer to Corrie’s rhetorical question.

## *Running With The Wind*

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“Hustle, hustle, hustle!” the DJ said. “I have a prize sitting right here for the person who first calls out the correct response.”

Corrie rolled her eyes. “Looks like we’d better get back to our seats.”

Storm nodded and smoothed the folds of her short black skirt. It showed off her legs—strong and shapely. “It was really cool. To see you again, I mean.”

Corrie reached out to touch her arm. Storm’s skin was hot, even as it puckered into goose bumps. When she arched one eyebrow, the kid blushed.

“Likewise,” Corrie said, pitching her voice low. “Good luck with school and sailing.” She squeezed lightly before moving off toward her family’s table. She didn’t look back, but even so, Storm’s gaze was a palpable warmth on her neck.

The glow wore off almost immediately as she sat down next to her mother and across from Will, who had his arm around the back of Denise’s chair. As they watched the DJ’s goofy antics, his fingers stroked lightly across her shoulders. Corrie’s jaw tightened, and she tried to ignore the sight by leaning over to her mother to chat about—something. Anything.

“So, Mom—”

“Let the fun and games begin!” the DJ boomed out.

“Oh, not now, dear,” Cecilia murmured as she surveyed the crowd of friends and family. “I want to pay attention to the trivia.”

Corrie sat back with a sigh and folded her arms beneath her breasts. *Hell*, she thought. *This is my own personal hell.*

“Let’s start with a few easy ones. Who can tell me—what’s the groom’s favorite baseball team?”

“The Yankees!” shouted one of Will’s best friends. A chorus of groans, boos, and hisses reverberated throughout the room.

“That’s slander!” Will yelled back.

Corrie could tell he was struggling not to give his buddy the finger. She grinned faintly. The right answer was the Red Sox, of course, and the lucky winner received a small flask of liquor in the shape of a boat. The damn thing even had a sail, on which was proudly emblazoned: *Marsten and Lewis.*

Cecilia lightly patted Corrie on the knee. “Aren’t those cute? I picked them out from the bridal store downtown.”

## NELL STARK

---

“Very cute,” Corrie managed, barely resisting the urge to massage her temples. Definite headache coming on.

“Next question!” said the DJ. “What is the bride’s favorite color?”

*The color of my eyes*, Corrie thought. Denise had told her that once while on a picnic at Brenton Point. She risked a quick glance across the table. Denise was whispering something into Will’s ear. He nodded, and she gave him a kiss on the cheek. Corrie’s stomach rolled.

“Yes, green. Exactly right,” said the DJ, handing off another flask to one of Denise’s cousins. “Now here’s a tricky one—how did the bride and groom first meet?”

Corrie’s chair scraped against the floor as she surged to her feet. “Bathroom,” she said tersely when her mother looked up, startled by the sudden movement. “Back soon.”

She hurried out the doors and down the hall, past the host and down another corridor. That question, that goddamn question. She could remember, down to the taste of sea salt in the air and the sound of her own voice, how she had proudly introduced her family to Denise Lewis, her crew for the Olympic Development Regatta.

“Corrie!”

A mere two steps away from the sanctuary of the women’s restroom, Corrie stopped, sighed, and turned around, only to see Storm jogging awkwardly toward her, her dress shoes clicking loudly against the polished wood floor. She struggled to wipe the frown off her face. The poor kid didn’t know what the hell was going on, after all.

“Hey again,” she said as Storm came to a halt. “What’s up?”

“Well...” Storm hesitated, then finally dared to look directly at Corrie. “I know it’s none of my business, but...you look upset.”

Storm’s earnestness, the sincerity in her voice, loosened the pit in Corrie’s belly. “I’m not having the best day ever.”

Storm nodded. “I just—well, can I help, in any way?”

The question was sweet and wistful, charged with Storm’s clear and simple longing to comfort. To make it better. And she would do anything; Corrie could tell. Desire flared—bright and sharp—burning away the self-pity, the shame. The weakness. A hot knife cauterizing the wound, closing it off. *Fuck you, Denise. Fuck you and your bullshit. I’m done wallowing.*

And in that single, perfect moment, she saw herself—a sleek ship running free before the wind, leaving behind the tangled mess of sails

## *Running With The Wind*

---

and line that had very nearly pulled her into a broach. As the pressure in her chest eased, she took a slow, deep breath and looked down into Storm's clear, almost colorless eyes. The decision was so easy.

"How old are you?"

Storm blinked at the unexpected question. "Nineteen. Why?"

"Then you can help." Corrie firmly took Storm's hand and led her into the bathroom, then locked the door behind them.

"Wh—what are you doing?" Storm asked as Corrie gently pushed her back against the door.

But Corrie didn't speak. Bracing herself on the wood, she leaned down and kissed Storm, swallowing her little gasp of surprise, teasing her innocent lips apart with light strokes of her tongue. It didn't take long before Storm was kissing her back, clumsily but enthusiastically. Corrie felt tentative hands skate along her sides to clutch at her waist. Finally, she pulled away just far enough to focus on Storm's dazed eyes.

"You okay with this?" she asked softly. When the kid nodded, Corrie brushed one thumb across Storm's swollen bottom lip. "I really want to touch you. How's that sound?"

Storm's swallow was audible and her entire body trembled. "Good."

"Yeah?"

Another nod.

The triumph was so sweet. "You think I'm your hero now?" Corrie murmured as her hands drifted beneath Storm's top. "Just you wait."

And then she was easing the bra up to cup Storm's breasts, and Storm banged her head lightly against the door as Corrie squeezed and pinched and twisted. Every tiny movement forced another small sound of need and pleasure from Storm's throat. This, this was a buzz, a rush far more potent than alcohol. Creating this need, holding it in the palm of her hand—trapped, desperate for release, totally dependent on her will.

She kissed Storm again as she let her touch wander down beneath the waistband of Storm's skirt and stroked the muscular abs with her knuckles. "You have an amazing body," she whispered into Storm's ear before curling her tongue around the sensitive lobe. Storm's hips bucked involuntarily. "I want to fuck you."

Storm froze. Corrie pulled back a little, but kept her fingers where they were, still lightly stroking.

## NELL STARK

---

“I—” Storm struggled to speak, wetting dry lips with her tongue. She cleared her throat. “I’ve never...I mean...”

“I won’t if you don’t want me to,” Corrie said steadily. She kept her gaze focused intently on Storm’s swirling, dilated eyes, like the restless summer sky before the first thunderclap. *Give in to me*, she urged silently. *Let me feel you*.

“I want you to.” Storm trembled again.

Corrie kissed the side of her neck, laving the spot with a gentle tongue. “I’m glad,” she said against Storm’s hot skin. Her kisses trailed down to Storm’s collarbone as she gradually hiked up the skirt with her right hand until she was touching the narrow strip of cloth resting in the hollow between Storm’s hip and thigh. Corrie nudged Storm’s legs further apart with one knee and slowly followed the hem in toward the centerline of her body, in and down.

She bit down lightly just as her fingers brushed Storm’s swollen clitoris through the fabric.

“Oh—” Storm called out, releasing her grip on Corrie’s waist to press her hands back against the door.

Corrie returned her lips to Storm’s ear. “Feels good, doesn’t it? Shall I do that again?”

“P—please,” Storm stuttered, her hips shifting vainly.

Corrie’s blood thrilled to the sound of that word—the needy, helpless plea. *Right now, she needs me more than she needs to breathe*. So what if Denise didn’t want her, didn’t need her? There were so many who did. Who would. This kid was just the tip of the iceberg.

Corrie stroked her with one light fingertip until Storm was whimpering with every breath, her head twisting against the door, eyes squeezed tightly shut against the unbearable pleasure. And then Corrie slipped beneath the scrap of cloth to dip into Storm’s wet folds with her middle finger, her wrist tendons straining as she simultaneously pressed her thumb against Storm’s clit.

Storm cried out wordlessly and Corrie could feel her body tighten, gathering itself for the leap into ecstasy. Ignoring the slight cramp in her palm, she circled harder with her thumb and slid just the tip of her finger inside, and then Storm groaned her name as sensation took over, as she shivered helplessly and flooded Corrie’s hand.

Corrie kept still until Storm’s breathing began to settle. She eased her underwear back in place and lightly kissed Storm’s trembling lips,

## *Running With The Wind*

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then moved away to rinse off her fingers. Oddly enough, she felt no desire to be touched in return. Her own pleasure had somehow flowed and ebbed with Storm's.

Someone knocked at the door. Storm's face drained of color, but strangely, Corrie felt no panic, not even a whisper of butterfly wings unfurling in her gut. The debilitating anger of just a few minutes ago had passed. She was calm. Empty.

"I'll handle this," she said, stroking Storm's arm lightly before opening the door.

Denise.

Corrie glanced back at Storm. "I need to talk to Denise for a minute," she said. "See you back in the hall."

Storm nodded, slipped over the threshold, and was gone.

Denise stepped inside, straightened to her full height—which still meant that the crown of her head only came up to Corrie's chin—and put her hands on her hips. Corrie leaned nonchalantly against the doorframe.

"What the hell are you doing, Cor? She's just a kid!"

Corrie shrugged. "She's legal, and I didn't hear her complaining."

"What if her mother had been on the other side of this door—instead of me?"

Corrie rolled her eyes. "Look, D, I don't need your approval, and I sure as hell don't need you telling me what to do. You forfeited your right to be involved in how I live my life when you fucked me over for my brother."

"You're being juvenile about this."

"Maybe so, but at least I'm not a slut!"

Denise pulled away, surprise and anger warring on her face. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

Corrie laughed sharply. "That's what they call people who sleep with two different family members in the same month."

Denise flushed down to her neck. "I do love him, you know," she protested. "I love him in a way I never loved you. You and I...I mean, I'm not—"

"I've told you before and I'll say it again," Corrie snarled. "I don't want to hear your 'explanation.' The two of you deserve each other."

"And you deserve casual fucks in the bathroom?" Denise's heart-shaped face grew softer then, and she reached one hand out as though

## NELL STARK

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to touch Corrie's cheek. "Come on, Corrie. Can't we move on, here? Move past this?"

Corrie evaded her touch and pushed off the wall. "Believe me when I say I'm not punishing myself over you. You don't want me—fine. There are dozens—hell, hundreds—of people who do. Just keep out of my way."

Denise sighed and lowered her hand. "I still care about you," she said softly. "You know that, right?"

"Oh, yeah." Corrie's lips twisted. "You've got a great way of showing it." She pushed open the door, walked out, and didn't look back.



Quinn sighed as her ball headed straight for the gutter yet again, and she turned her back on the pins. "I think I'm hopeless without the bumpers," she said, trying hard to keep her tone light. *It's just a dumb game. Not a big deal.*

Drew patted her on the shoulder when she sat down in the bucket seat next to his. "No worries, Quinn, no worries. Next time for sure."

She reached for her soda in an attempt to hide her frustration. This entire night was going exactly as she had known it would—badly. Or, she reconsidered after a few sips, maybe not badly so much as just not fun.

Krista stepped up to the lane, which prompted Drew to elbow Quinn in the ribs. *Ow!* Quinn nearly lost her cool and scowled. Instead, she shifted away from him and half-heartedly took his hint.

"All right, Krista. Here we go. Time for a strike!"

Krista smiled in reply but turned and grinned affectionately at Megs. There really was a huge difference between a smile and a grin, Quinn reflected, especially if you'd been halfway hoping that you'd be getting one and were instead seeing the other. Not that she'd ever really expected anything to come of this, but, *hope springs eternal*. And she had to give Drew credit for finding someone she was actually interested in this time. His last attempt had been an unequivocal disaster: Allergic Allie, who had started sneezing the second Quinn had walked in the room. She'd turned out to have histamines to pretty much every animal on the planet. Not exactly the kind of person a vet student could date comfortably—or at all.

## *Running With The Wind*

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Krista, on the other hand, had a cat. She was working on her Master's degree in Drew's department—electrical engineering—and in her spare time, she liked to read historical fiction. Quinn knew all of this about her because they'd chatted over lunch the week before, and for the first time in perhaps ever, she had actually felt comfortable talking with someone she didn't know very well. As an added plus, Krista was attractive without being stunning. Beautiful women made Quinn nervous.

So yes, okay, she'd had some hopes for tonight. Maybe not high hopes, but she could definitely see herself becoming friends with Krista, and she'd even thought once or twice or five times about what it would be like to kiss her, and—

Seven pins clattered to the floor. Impressed, Quinn clapped. Drew shouted something goofy like “Yeehaw,” and Megs wolf-whistled. Krista blushed slightly, looked over her shoulder, and winked.

*I really should try to get rid of those extra ten pounds,* Quinn thought for the millionth time. Megan's physique was nothing if not enviable. Her gray shirt stretched tightly across strong shoulders that tapered to a narrow waist. A swimmer's body. Or perhaps more accurately, a windsurfer's body—that was her sport of choice according to Drew, who worked with her at the boathouse during the summertime.

Another clatter of pins and a cute little whoop of pleasure announced that Krista had bowled a spare. Megs jumped up to give her a high five. Their hips bumped lightly as Krista returned to her seat.

“Nice one,” Quinn said with feigned enthusiasm, studiously ignoring the lurching of her stomach. She sipped at her soda again and tried to just enjoy the night—the banter of Drew's group of friends, the cheesy eighties music blaring from the bowling alley's speakers, and the occasional exultant holler of someone who'd just managed a strike. But the trouble was, she didn't really know Drew's friends very well, and she wasn't good at small talk anyway. And to be honest, she'd been a little kid in the eighties and couldn't tell Pat Benatar from Cyndi Lauper. Not to mention the fact that every time someone got a strike, she felt like an idiot for not being able to roll a bowling ball in a straight line.

As the night plodded on, Quinn watched how Megs touched Krista often in light, almost teasing ways—a few fingers resting briefly on her arm, the slight brush of their shoulders, the gentle press of their thighs as they sat side by side. How very animated Megs was—how she

## NELL STARK

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nodded and gesticulated as she told funny stories, and how captivated Krista was by her display.

*I'm just not exciting, she realized. The only stories I have are about school and animals, and even if they were interesting, I'd be too introverted to tell them. It was like that in high school and college. Why should now be any different?*

It was sad to see Krista slipping away, but on the other hand, it was a relief. Krista wouldn't be able to say, "You never want to go out," like Quinn's short-lived high school boyfriend, Brian, had claimed. And she'd never be able to accuse her—as Sue had in college—of caring more about her studies than about their relationship. Life was simpler this way. Easier.

"Hey, guys," said Drew after their second game finally ended. "Anyone up for going to the diner?" He waggled his eyebrows. "Milkshakes, spicy fries, quadruple bacon cheeseburgers..."

Quinn looked around. Almost everyone was nodding. She stood up quickly. The idea of spending more time with other human beings was about as appealing as...well, as that quadruple bacon cheeseburger. Fortunately, she had just the excuse.

"I need to head out," she said as the others collected their jackets, wallets, and purses.

"What? C'mon, Quinn."

She cut off his wheedling plea with a swift shake of her head. "I need to run over to the humane society and check on a few kittens." Which was a lie, but it sure did sound good. No sane person wanted kittens to be neglected.

Drew huffed a loud sigh. "Fine." He grasped her shoulders gently and smiled down at her. "I'm really glad that you hung out with us tonight. You should tag along more often."

"I had a good time," Quinn lied again, glad that it was so easy. And then she walked to the door and pushed it open, zipping up her coat against the chill October air. She didn't look back.