

"A professor and yacht captain, Devon Janssen charts her course between present desire and a Lenape woman's 1616 story. The Morality of Love entwines passion, history, and the intoxicating freedom of love discovered late in life."

The Morality of Love
By Nancy VanDermark

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THE
MORALITY
OF
LOVE



Nancy VanDermark

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Chapter One

Devon Janssen was a lanky girl from a working-class family in Scranton. She was awarded a pin each year of her childhood for perfect attendance at Sunday School. By the time she graduated from high school, she knew very little except that she escaped being “knocked up,” the catastrophic end of every young girl’s dream. She maintained her virginity throughout high school and gave it up a month after graduation, with the captain of the football team on a hot summer night in 1975, in the back seat of a ‘69 Thunderbird.

Devon’s father was a Pennsylvania coal miner; her mother the quintessential 1950s homemaker. William Janssen had survived the death of his mother when he was twelve, an alcoholic father, and seven years in the coal mines that began when he was fourteen.

William had been the eighth-grade valedictorian, in Johnson City, New York, in 1929—a year before his mother died from pneumonia. His father began drinking and moved William and his three siblings to Scranton. William and his father worked from five o’clock in the morning until five in the evening blasting coal with dynamite a mile below the surface of the earth. He joined the army at the start of World War II in 1940.

Giovanna Janssen met William through friends in 1953. She was the seventh child of Erina Vergilio, who emigrated from Italy in 1914. Giovanna's father entered the coal mines in 1916, fathered eight children, and died of black lung disease when he was thirty-six, leaving Erina alone to raise her family. The church was the foundation of the family's life.

The Second Presbyterian Church was founded by Reverend Andrew Turco and a group of Italian immigrants who converted from Catholicism to Protestantism in 1910. The service was conducted in Italian and English, with traditional Presbyterian hymns sung in their native tongue from an Italian songbook. The church provided immigrant families with a strong religious and social structure upon which to raise children with a strict set of cultural and societal norms that would give them the backbone to assimilate into Anglo-American culture.

For Devon, these social norms included consistent counsel from William that women who smoke cigarettes are whores. When she was twelve, right after her first period, Giovanna sat Devon down for a quiet talk. She wanted to make sure that her family would never experience the shame of an illegitimate pregnancy. "Devon, you must never engage in sex before marriage. Only whores have sex before they are married." After their talk, Giovanna went into the bathroom, closed the door, and lit a cigarette.

Devon took a year off after graduating from high school to work as a clerk typist where she became friends with Ellie Bufalino.

Ellie was an executive secretary to the president of a chain and cable manufacturing company. She was strikingly beautiful, sophisticated, and incredibly sexy. Ellie reminded Devon of her aunts, Erina's four daughters, who wore tight skirts, stiletto heels, and smoked cigarettes.

One morning, after Ellie knew Devon had spent the weekend with her boyfriend, she asked about birth control. Devon admitted she was afraid of getting pregnant and had, to this point, considered herself lucky but not real smart. Ellie called a doctor, whose office was just a few blocks from work and made an appointment for Devon that afternoon.

Dr. Augustino was well known around town as a pill pusher. He had generously prescribed valium for lonely, depressed housewives, uppers and downers for struggling executives, and birth control pills to every woman for whom sexual pleasure took priority over procreation. He gave Devon her first internal examination, tweezed a long hair off her breast, and sent her away with a year's supply of Norlestrin. Devon was eighteen years old when she took control of her body and her destiny.

Within a few months, Devon had broken off her relationship with the football captain and applied to Vassar. In August 1976, Devon Janssen packed up her Chevy Vega, said goodbye to her family, and drove to Poughkeepsie alone.

By the time she was twenty, Devon had crossed the Lackawanna, Susquehanna, and Hudson Rivers—alone. Her

experiences near and on vast bodies of water had only just begun and, although unprepared for the challenges, she acquired the knowledge and wisdom to navigate the shallow and deep.

Chapter Two

Millions of years ago, the glaciers receded, creating what are now the Delaware River, Elk River, and Bohemia River. The land where the ocean retreated formed the Susquehanna/Chesapeake Bay estuaries and a glacial moraine known as the Delmarva Peninsula. Ten thousand years before the first Europeans arrived, indigenous people traveled between the two bays.

Native Americans who occupied the area were known as the Susquehannock on the Chesapeake side—the Lenape on the Delaware. They were often at war. When they weren't fighting, they traded—traveling the major game paths.

The first Europeans arrived in the early 1600s when Captain John Smith explored the Chesapeake and Henry Hudson sailed up the Delaware. By the 1630s, the Dutch had colonized Delaware and called it Zwaanendael. They were soon replaced by the Swedes, who renamed the land New Sweden, but they were overthrown by the returning Dutch. The game trails were used as trading routes between the two colonies.

In 1633, twelve-year-old Augustine Herman sailed across the Atlantic from the Netherlands, arriving in New Amsterdam, where he used his newly acquired surveying skills to assist in

the mapping of territories acquired through treaties with the Lenape. The land agreements had been orchestrated by William Penn and elders from the Lenape nation.

Herman sailed from Manhattan to Delaware and began charting the Chesapeake Bay area. In 1659, he requisitioned Lord Baltimore for the money to build a canal across the Delmarva Peninsula, connecting the Chesapeake Bay to the Delaware River. The proposed canal would cut more than three hundred miles from the trip, bypass the Atlantic Ocean, and create a commerce stream unparalleled in the northern hemisphere.

Although Lord Baltimore denied the request, Herman continued to believe in the possibility of a canal between the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays for the rest of his life.

Proposals continued for the next hundred years and included Benjamin Franklin as a major proponent. In 1826, construction of the C & D Canal began with 2,600 laborers digging by hand. In 1829, the canal was completed with four locks.

By 1852, steamboats and barges carried goods from Baltimore to ports in Philadelphia and New York in record time. Towns flourished with the construction of hotels and shops. As canal traffic and commerce increased, proposals to widen the canal were presented to the federal government, which now controlled marine traffic and tolls—thereby providing an unprecedented revenue stream.

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Initially, the C & D Canal was built adjacent to the northern border of Lum's Pond in Bear, Delaware. It began in Chesapeake City at the Back Creek branch of the Elk River and ran east to Reedy Point at Delaware City.

In 1920, a hydraulic train bridge was constructed, and the canal was rerouted to allow the constant flow of goods via the Norfolk and Southern trains without obstruction.

When the canal was expanded in width, it was diverted creating an abandoned, virtually useless tributary in its original location.

The canal has been expanded and redesigned several times, with the old bend in the route straightened and the bed dredged to accommodate larger vessels.

Today, the C & D Canal is the busiest in the United States and third busiest canal in the world, saving navigators more than 300 miles. It is thirty-five feet deep, 450 feet wide, and fourteen miles long. More than 25,000 vessels use the canal each year, including cargo ships, car carriers, and recreational boats.

In the 1920s, the remaining abandoned tributary became the Delaware City Marina, which provided a safe haven for boats traveling along the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. In the 1990s, a group of investors leased the land from the State of Delaware and developed *Old Canal Marina*, located within Lums Pond State Park.

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With lush vegetation surrounding it on three sides and a narrow entrance from the canal, Old Canal Marina has been declared a “hurricane hole” by the United States Coast Guard.

This safe harbor offers protection, a sense of community, and a stimulating environment for awakening.

Chapter Three

Devon Janssen, tenured professor of U.S. History at Smith College, had written two books on female mariners and a best-selling memoir. She was, in fact, captain of her own vessel, the *Restless*—a vintage '43 Hatteras motor yacht. Her navigation skills were perfected by a concentrated study of the stars, charts, and technology.

She lacked the mechanical savvy one might expect from a captain but knew enough to maintain and repair the basics. The boat had two large engines, twin Cummins naturally aspirated 903 diesels, that made the *Restless* both seaworthy and dependable.

In the autumn of 2021, Professor Janssen requested a sabbatical to research the history of quarantine facilities for incoming ships on the east coast of the United States following the Covid-19 outbreak. Upon the granting of her leave, she departed from the Port of Boston, reaching Delaware City by July.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA] issued a hurricane watch for the mid-Atlantic on July 18, 2022. Hurricane Isis had become a Category Three storm in Florida—its projected path a direct hit on the Delaware coast. This would

be Devon Janssen's first experience aboard the *Restless* in the direct path of a major hurricane.

Her *Guide to Cruising the Chesapeake Bay* manual indicated that Old Canal Marina had been declared a hurricane hole. She called and reserved a slip for the remainder of the summer, realizing that the location not only provided protection but was in close proximity to Reedy Island once the home of an infamous quarantine facility.

Old Canal Marina was the place to go for added safety in a slip. There are floating, full-finger docks, with high pilings, and the ability to tie up on each side. Extra lines can be added for bad weather thereby alleviating the stress from increased winds and tidal shifts. Like ducks on a pond, the boats rise and fall with the tide.

There are high embankments of dense trees along most of the shoreline that wrap the boats nearly a full 360 degrees, encircling them like a safe hug.

The marina office directs those who do not already know they must hug the rock jetty on the approach to the marina, cutting the corner risks running aground. Once in the marina, there is plenty of space, but it feels narrow compared to the wide expanse of the canal.

Tall white poles to the south warn of shallow waters by the shoreline. Dingy red inflated balls warn of underwater dredge

pipes, currently secure along and not across the thoroughfare. Most of the boats on the T-head of each finger dock have fenders dangling along their exposed side as well as holding them off on the dock side. This is a good indication other passing boats have come close or even hit boats under similar passing.

The marina is host to a spectacularly diverse array of wildlife from herons, ducks, cormorants, beavers, eagles, turtles, and turkey buzzards to smaller critters such as squirrels, cats, rabbits, smaller birds, and spiders. Residents and guests will observe a single heron, standing tall as a soldier on watch, waiting for fish intruders from the Lum's Pond runoff.

Looking out from the bow of the *Restless*, Devon knows she is at sea level, but when she walks the ramps between docks at various times of the day, she also feels the undercurrent, as well as the rise and fall of the three-foot tide.

Devon finds it amusing that in the suburbs, big cities, and The Hamptons, people pay absurd amounts for distressed wooden furniture. Here, sun and time soften the woods naturally to a rough gray and cream. The surrounding greens are not one shade of green. The sky blue is not one blue. The wood tones are varied, muted, and somewhat disappear into the adjacent dirt. Nature is a pallet, not a color. Function and form take priority over aesthetics, yet the view is pure beauty.

Devon observes a turtle popping its head through the surface of the water. She sees the growth of natural slime on the shell and wishes she had a good way to clean it without disrupting the balance of nature. Several more turtles are sunning themselves on the jet ski float.

Devon has chosen a slip on “B” dock, a good distance away from the entrance of the marina where large vessels create a mini tsunami as they navigate a turn in the canal. When winds are from the west, they funnel in the marina opening and cause the greatest swells. From any other direction, the winds are dampened as they weave through the surrounding foliage.

Because of the direction of the docks, the boats rock the most when winds are from the north or south. As the wind builds, the chink chink of loose halyards against sailboat masts rises to a crescendo. Sails slap and flap along with loose grill covers, cushions, and flags.

Boating and water sports are congenial and rely on constant observation. Radios are routinely used but horns, whistles, and lights still play an important part in communicating intentions and danger.

Power gives way to sail. Small and agile gives way to large and laborious. Cruisers give way to race participants. “Red right returning” is taught as one of the first basic navigation rules to take the red channel markers to starboard when returning inland.

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There is a constant buzz of activity as workers toil and boaters entertain or enjoy their primary or secondary home on the water. The dock services include water and power—only on-board generators are permitted. Smaller boats are usually stored in a garage and taken by trailer to the water for day use. Large industrial boats do not fit at Old Canal Marina so there is no noise associated with commercial and industrial docks.

From the *Restless*, the sight of hundreds of boats is predominantly white. As an integrated mass, the boats appear as a three-dimensional impressionist painting. A small patch of bright red here, a large swipe of royal blue there. A splash of vibrant yellow beside sophisticated tan or calming gray. There are swathes of navy blue everywhere—white all around—as a backdrop for polished stainless and stained wood trim and frame.

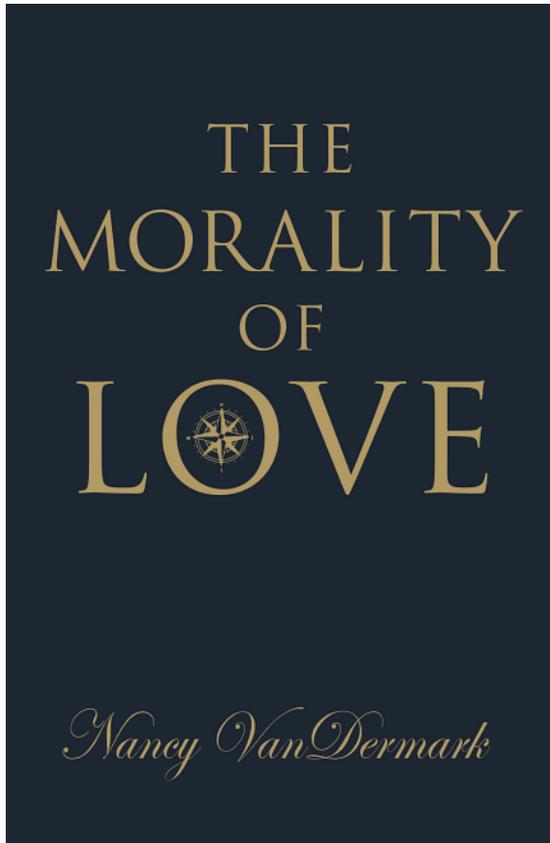
From the marina restaurant, Heron Hideaway, there is a panoramic view with a cement switch back that connects to the boat slips in the middle of the marina. On the weekends, boats arrive throughout the day to dock and dine. The restaurant hosts bingo and trivia nights as well as live music every day during the summer months.

Bikers, walkers, and joggers enjoy the Mike Castle Trail, a paved path along the canal that heads out both east and west from the marina. The path is almost entirely flat just inland from the water's edge. Every quarter mile or so is a park bench to rest, meditate, or watch the passersby. Mile markers are

stamped in bold numbers on the pavement. One may count progress by bench, mile, or telephone pole or immerse themselves and get lost in the simplicity, gentle rush, and calm.

Rainy days are quiet here. Days before storms are busy with owners checking their boats for preparedness. On warm, summer weekends, the docks are busy with transient boaters, slip holders, their guests and children carrying coolers, towels, and sunscreen.

The village atmosphere gives Devon a sense of home and belonging.



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