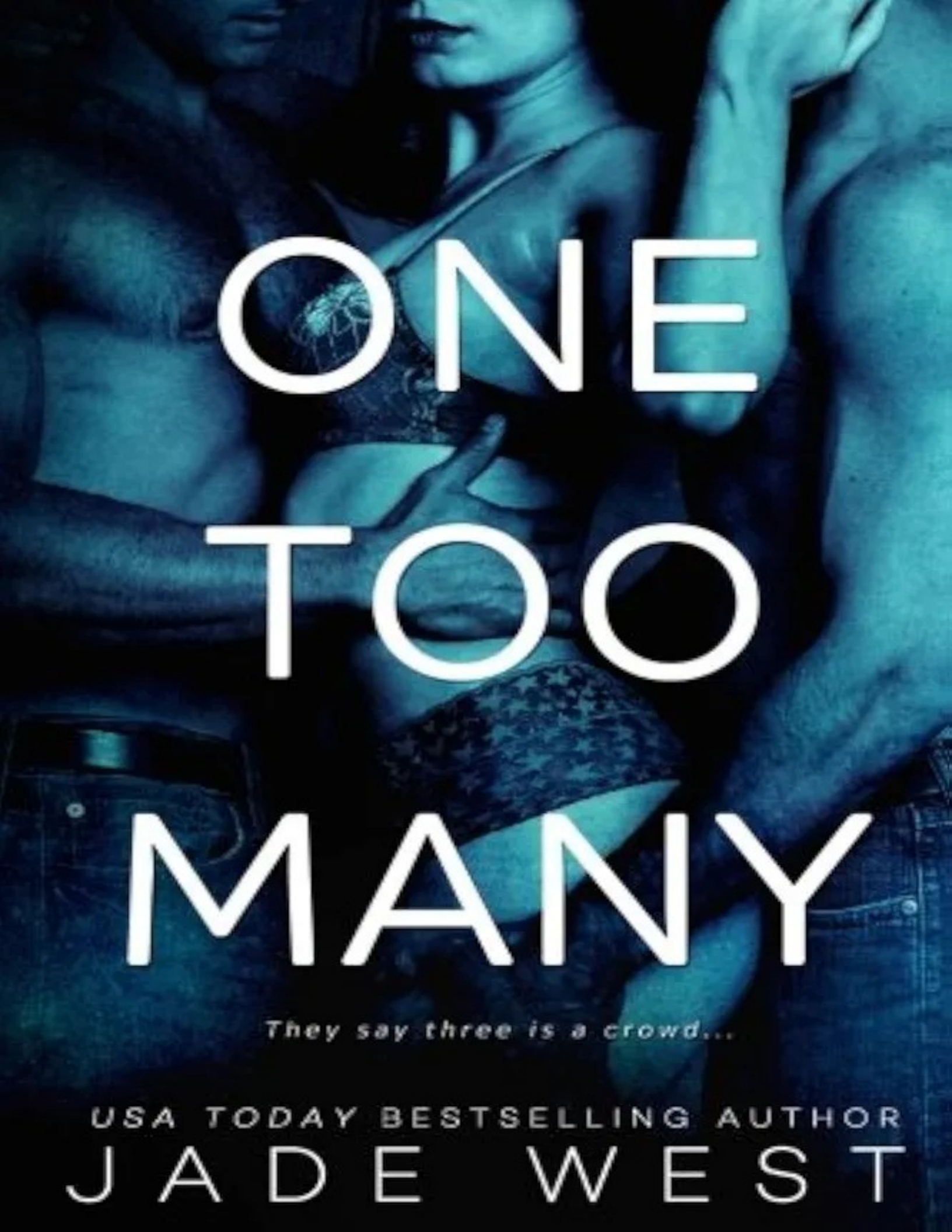


A teal-toned photograph of three people in an intimate embrace. A man's arm is visible on the left, a woman's face is partially visible at the top, and another person's arm is on the right. The woman in the center is wearing a patterned top. The overall mood is sensual and intimate.

ONE TOO MANY

They say three is a crowd...

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
JADE WEST

ONE TOO MANY

JADE WEST

One Too Many copyright © 2018 Jade West

The moral rights of the author have been asserted.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the email address below.

Cover design by Letitia Hasser of RBA Designs <http://designs.romanticbookaffairs.com/>

Edited by John Hudspith <http://www.johnhudspith.co.uk>

All enquiries to jadewestauthor@gmail.com

First published 2018

Contents

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)

[Chapter 42](#)

[Chapter 43](#)

[Chapter 44](#)

[Chapter 45](#)

[Chapter 46](#)

[Chapter 47](#)

[Chapter 48](#)

[Chapter 49](#)

[Chapter 50](#)

[Chapter 51](#)

[Chapter 52](#)

[Chapter 53](#)

[Chapter 54](#)

[Chapter 55](#)

[Chapter 56](#)

[Chapter 57](#)

[Chapter 58](#)

[Chapter 59](#)

[Chapter 60](#)

[Chapter 61](#)

[Chapter 62](#)

[Chapter 63](#)

[Chapter 64](#)

[Chapter 65](#)

[Chapter 66](#)

[Chapter 67](#)

[Chapter 68](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

To Letitia. You are amazing.
Thank you not just for the cover, which I love. But for the title and the seed
of an idea it brought me, too.
I'm glad we've worked together on so many. There'll never come a time
when you've designed me One Too Many.
See what I did there? Yes it was cringe, but still. I love you. You are an
incredible talent, and it's an honour to work with you.

Chapter One

BRETT

It was one of those strange, outlandish moments that stick with you for a lifetime. A hyper awareness as I looked across at my wife and saw the cold, hard damage our failing hotel venture was doing to the woman I loved.

Our bar was almost empty that evening and so were our glasses, clinked with a token *happy anniversary* amidst the stress of another final demand letter in our to-pay pile. Our handful of residents had left with nods and smiles, all of them none the wiser as they thanked us for a *lovely* evening and headed upstairs, and my Grace had smiled right back at them, only not with her eyes.

She's never been a good liar, I'd just chosen not to see it that winter. Chosen not to hear the sadness in the silence in bed at night. Chosen not to feel the exhaustion in her sigh as the alarm went off every morning.

In that one strange moment on the evening of our tenth anniversary, I saw everything.

Her dark hair was curled at the bottom and sprung up from the nape of her neck, maybe for my benefit, even though I hadn't noticed, not that day. Her dress was a ruched, tight, navy blue, her knees crossed tightly on the barstool. Her eyes were smoky, lips darkened just a touch from their natural rosy-beige — as she liked to refer to it.

While the makeup would be good enough for the casual observer, it didn't hide the truth from me.

It didn't hide the tension in her jawline, or the way her eyelashes fluttered downcast. It didn't hide the way her fingers tapped the stem of her glass, or the swish of her foot below.

Her pale throat looked choked and vulnerable. Her shoulders braced against an invisible weight, elbows angled like spiked cordons on the bar top, protecting her heart.

My wife was a beautiful woman, but the moment her misery hit me with full unspoken force was the ugliest moment of my life.

I felt it in my gut. My spleen. My spine.

Anger, and guilt, and resentment. Disillusion.

Grief.

All of it.

Apathy and fervour competed for my soul as I swigged back the last of my wine.

I placed my empty glass on the bar top and leaned across just a touch, but it was enough. Enough that she flinched away from me, as though the tiny gesture of closeness would be enough to topple her.

“I can’t believe this is happening to us,” my wife told me, and her voice was barely more than a breath.

I gritted my teeth, not at her, but at myself, cursing the promise of the dream that had brought us grinning like fools to the back end of the Welsh coast for this *great new life*.

An easy life. A happy life. A meaningful life running a venue all of our own with the waves crashing out front and gulls cawing overhead. Without suits and bustling city commutes and corporate meeting rooms.

A place for sunset walks hand in hand along the coastal track, and laughter through the evenings with travellers from all over. *Paying* travellers.

A place for a couple of dogs maybe. A couple of kids, too, just as soon as our new life was worn in nice and steady.

Only nice and steady never found us.

It was only a whispered rumour that saw the previous Cliff House B&B owners sell up quick sharp and cite a craving for pastures new, but it didn’t reach our ears until it was far too late. There was no hint of the budget hotel chain taking over one of the rambling spa resorts two miles down the road and pricing us clean out of business when we signed the contracts last spring

and moved on in, but it didn't take long for word to sweep through the village and up to our door.

So, there we were on our tenth anniversary. Sipping cheap house red at the hotel bar, shackled to the property which had taken every scrap of the inheritance from my father and then some. We were mortgaged up to the hilt. In debt up to our eyeballs. Credit cards maxed out on Grace's expensive decor choices, but now wasn't the time for that.

She hadn't known.

We hadn't known.

"It'll be alright," I hiss-whispered, despising how gruff my voice sounded in the quiet. "We'll offer a discount on rooms, spring break with breakfast included. Take some more pictures of the front when the sea's up high. The bookings will come with the weather."

She was shaking her head before I was even finished, fingers to her temples as if my words were too much to bear.

"It opens in March, Brett. *March*." She gestured to the emptiness behind her, the cleared tables so neat and orderly. *Vacant*. "We're fucked *now*, we'll be well and truly screwed when fifty budget rooms open a mile down the fucking road and you know it. You know it just as well as I do."

Her eyes spat fear and fury, but were only ignited for a heartbeat before she slumped back down on her stool.

"What, then?" I asked her. "We sell up and head back to Bristol with our tails between our legs? Like anyone's gonna buy this fucking place. Want to skulk back on the event hosting circuit, do you? I sure as hell don't want to go back

to fucking recruitment. I'd rather stay down here and take a fucking bar job at the poxy new piece of shit hotel down the road."

I towelled down the side to illustrate, well aware that she was staring at my pitted brow as I scrubbed at an imaginary stain.

"We won't get through the month," she whispered. "Not even if we lose Elaine and do the laundry ourselves. I called the bank myself earlier, when you were doing the barrels, and they said..." Her voice trailed off and she took a breath, shunting her glass over for a refill.

I grabbed a fresh bottle of the cheap stuff from the rack. Like one paltry bottle was gonna make a difference to our finances.

"The bank said what?"

"They said we're fucked," she told me in a sing song voice that grated down my spine.

My fingers looked so big against hers as I handed her glass over. Hers were shaking as she took it, gripping tight to raise it to her lips and swig back a decent mouthful.

It was one of the things I always loved about Grace — her being so slender and delicate. Fragile and feminine and gorgeous enough to hitch my breath, even after all these years. She'd always made me feel so big. So strong. Such a protector.

Such a man.

But not anymore. Not for a while now.

I watched her swallow her drink down through the eyes of a man looking at a woman afresh.

Grace still looked like the girl I married in every way that meant something, even though she'd turned thirty a few months previous. Even through her misery, her lips beckoned mine and promised to fit just fine for kisses. Her cheekbones were high and pixie-like, her brows shaped with the same high arches and downward flicks. Her cleavage was pinched tight in the swathes of pretty fabric, hinting deliciously at the perky pair underneath.

I tried to recall when I'd last fucked her like I meant it. One month? Two? Three?

Five at least.

It had been five whole months since I'd fucked my wife like I really meant it.

I wasn't thinking lights-out-missionary after a few drinks when the bar had done for the night, or the cheeky number we'd done before breakfast in the shower when we were cutting it fine to get the tables downstairs laid out a few weeks back. I was thinking nights like we'd had in the city. Nights where there was only her body and mine, insatiable and needy. Craving skin on skin and sweat and whimpers. Seeking out heat and depth and the slam of flesh against flesh.

And now nothing. Just tiredness. Aches and gruelling days begging the bookings to chime through from the online booking system. A simmering of nerves below the surface every time we totalled up the profit and loss for the months just gone.

"What?" she asked me, her eyes narrow on mine. "What are you thinking?"

I couldn't tell her.

There's no way I could switch up the desolate mood by explaining my search for happier times. Hornier times.

I couldn't share my last memory of fucking her the way she deserved it, right there on that spot. Her back arching against the beer pumps as I slammed her in our brand new venue last spring. She'd laughed and screamed and begged for more. Told me this was *ours, all fucking ours, forever*.

Forever.

So many promises of forever seem to fall flat on their faces. Ours was one I couldn't face, not just the hotel, but *us*. We were bleeding down the drain with the capital investment, years of love and life dripping away with our failing dreams.

"We'll make it," I said out loud, not completely sure it was for her benefit more than mine. "We'll get through this month and we'll pick it up. We'll fucking pick it up, Grace, even if I have to grab the assholes from the beach and drag them in here myself." I felt the tick behind my eyes, full of desperation to relieve hers. "I'll borrow the money from that seedy lender in Tenby. The one who charges gross high interest. And if not him, I'll find someone, I'll find *anyone*. Fuck the fucking bank, we won't need them. We'll find someone else."

"Who else?!" she seethed. "Credit cards, bank loans, a few grand from my sister... who else is going to pitch into this sad mess, Brett?" Her eyes pierced mine, dark and wild. "No lender worth shit is going to bail us out of this. Not a single fucking one."

She was right.

I hated how right she was.

Hated the beautiful place we'd carved our dreams around, only to watch them rot and fester. Hated how the strain of this place was straining us, straining everything we'd ever stood for.

In that heartbeat I wondered if we were too late already. If the rot had worked its way too deep inside and we were all but fucked and done. If the rings on our fingers were circling nothing but the empty hope that we'd hold on tight for all time.

Did she still love me?

Were we really so fucked up that I needed to ask the question?

It was on my tongue even then as she shook her head and braced her palm flat on the bar top. Her wedding band was right there for the viewing as if answering my fears, its perfect circle still sitting snug where it belonged. At least for now.

"We need a way out of this," she whispered, and those fingers reached out for mine. "We can't carry on like this, Brett. It's killing us."

"I'll find a way out," I promised, even though I had no fucking clue where I'd go looking. No idea where we'd find the thousands we needed to make it through the imminent final demand pile, let alone set us up to make it through to the spring trade.

"Where?" she asked. "Who is ever going to give us a way out of this shit? What have we even got to offer besides a business that's draining us dead?"

And that's when he cleared his throat, the figure stepping up to the bar.

The figure I hadn't noticed in the room with us, and barely remembered serving the whisky to earlier.

The figure who'd clearly heard every word we'd said and still opted to venture closer.

That either made him an asshole or an alcoholic, and I knew which my money was on given that I'd served him three times that evening tops.

My wife's face drained to pale as I felt my own embarrassment flare, but his smile wasn't one of pity or apology, not even of sympathy at eavesdropped troubles.

He was confident, reeking of pride, shoulders tall and straight as he took a seat a few down from my wife like he owned the place and us along with it.

Yep, an asshole, and a slick one at that. Suited and styled like one of those rich city dicks, with geek-chic glasses which didn't hide his rugged jaw and his perfect features.

The guy knew he was a handsome bastard, and his smirk told me he knew I knew it too. And so did my wife.

My whole body despised him even before he'd said a word.

His gesture was strong and easy as he put down his empty glass and looked from Grace to me and back again.

I felt a twist deep in my gut when I saw the way his eyes fixed on hers.

"I've got a proposition for you," he said, and his eyes moved right across to mine.

Chapter Two

GRACE

I'd been the one to check him into the best room in our hotel this morning — Mr Thomas Heath from some swanky address in North London — the man who sat himself down at our bar like he knew our whole life story and then some.

Brett was scowling and *sure*, I felt it too — exposed and embarrassed and mortified all at once. But, unlike my husband, I engaged my common sense and struggled on regardless to beam out a polite hostess smile.

I could've strangled Brett and the way his pride stood off our guest without so much as a move to offer him a refill, but the guy wasn't asking, only staring. Right at me.

My cheeks flushed as his eyes dug into mine. They were green flecked with hazel, just like my own, only a whole world more self-assured. They held for too long to be comfortable, but I didn't shift or break the contact.