

Turnagain Love



Nancy Radtke

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To my husband, Walt,
for making me the
“happiest girl in the whole U.S.A.”



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Chapter One



“How could that woman call this place ‘livable?’ It hardly qualifies as a place,” Jennel Foster muttered to herself as she dropped her suitcases on the rocky path in front of the old house.

No wonder the wealthy lady had shuddered when she begged Jennel to make the place over. The contrast between the sparkling new, but overstuffed luxury of Mrs. Van Chattan’s New York apartment and this ramshackle old house on a rocky island was beyond imagination. If only the woman had described it better!

“It’s not my idea of a second home, but my husband loves it,” Mrs. Van Chattan had said. “As if he cares. He’ll be working in places like California while I’m sitting on some heap of rock in the middle of Puget Sound.” The woman had dabbed at moist eyes as she continued. “It’s so isolated there. I’ll be stuck in that house for days on end. You just have to make it over for me.”

Mrs. Van Chattan's many snapshots of the ancient house had not shown the decay. In the photos, the dwelling looked empty and rambling... but livable.

In reality, it sagged with age, mildew and neglect. Fir trees towered over it, one-hundred-fifty to one-hundred-eighty feet tall, blocking out the late afternoon sun. Branches and needles covered the roof with a thick black carpet. To add to the problem, careless builders with a hodge-podge of styles had changed and altered the original Victorian lines through the years.

Just looking at the outside made Jennel want to cry. It was vitally important that this job have no hitches. Yet even as her courage faltered, she welcomed the challenge. It wasn't her way to tackle just simple projects. The hard ones stretched her creative talents and made her grow as an interior designer.

If she hadn't been desperate for work, she would never have accepted a redecorating job sight unseen. It wasn't wise—she knew that—but at the time she felt justified in taking the risk.

Now, five weeks and three thousand miles later, she stared in disbelief at the old house she had agreed to restore. It was worse than her client had described.

Much worse.

Leaving her three bags on the pathway, Jennel tiptoed as lightly as possible up the broken steps

and across the wide veranda, both covered with black slime mold.

A quick backward step to regain her balance punched a small round hole in the softened wood. She hoped the floor wouldn't collapse under her weight, light though she was. She hadn't paused very long during her all-day trip from Boston, and still wore her wine colored traveling suit and new high heels. Her new suit gave her an aura of style and competency—but it was designed for business meetings, not exploring.

She could just picture herself, legs flying out from under her as she skidded across the black mold, so she cautiously tried each step before transferring her weight. If she wasn't careful she could easily end up on her fanny, putting a much bigger hole in the sagging veranda floor.

“You never do anything halfway, do you?” Jennel asked herself as she sought stronger wood footing close to the wall. It was what her mother always said whenever Jennel impetuously took on more than she could handle.

At least this time she'd get paid. She had accepted a down payment on her last job and used her own money to redecorate it, then been informed that the owner had declared bankruptcy.

In contrast, Mrs. Van Chattan had agreed to pay as Jennel went along, starting with eight hundred dollars for travel expenses. Jennel considered the amount generous at first, but after buying two

plane tickets and then chartering a boat for the last leg of the journey, she changed her mind. She had just spent the last ninety dollars on groceries, and from now on would have to use her own limited cash until she reestablished contact with her client.

Mrs. Van Chattan had been desperate to get someone to fix it up to her tastes. “You simply have to help me, Jennel. You know what I want. Something like this.”

Her well-manicured hands had fluttered in helpless appeal to indicate pink lace curtains and white satin pillows, French Provincial furniture and white pile rugs. “Please, Jennel. Otherwise, I’ll go absolutely mad.”

“Of course, I’ll do it,” Jennel had assured her. “But you must realize I can’t give you an estimate until I’ve actually seen the house.”

“I don’t care about an estimate. I’ve seen two other homes you’ve done. I know how good you are. I’m willing to pay whatever is needed to make this house into a home for me.”

In the end, they had signed a contract giving Jennel carte blanche to draw on an account Mrs. Van Chattan would set up after she cashed in some bonds. Jennel was to write checks on it, adding a large percentage for commission as she progressed. She had three more days before the account opened. Three days in which to settle in.

What would the interior be like? She was

almost afraid to look.

The old front door protested loudly. An odor of decay and mildew engulfed her as she stepped inside the cold damp room.

It confirmed her worst fears. She had advertised herself as a “restorer” of old homes, but this island house was well beyond what she’d ever done before.

She’d have to hire help just to keep the roof from collapsing. A carpenter or two. Probably an electrician to rewire it. It might be best to call in a professional to do a complete structural analysis.

It put her at a disadvantage since she didn’t know anyone on the West Coast; particularly people in construction. Perhaps Clyde Brekley, the Friday Harbor charter captain who had brought her to Turnagain Island, might recommend someone. By the time the carpenters finished the structural repairs, she could have all her designs and supplies ready.

“Both water and electricity are available,” Mrs. Van Chattan had said. “It was lived in up to last year. You’ll be able to stay there.” Based on that, Jennel had planned to make one room habitable for herself, then work around it. But whoever used to live here must have been a hardy soul.

Because Mrs. Van Chattan had said the real estate agent called his office from here, Jennel looked around for a telephone.

“Okay phone, where are you hiding?” she

asked the empty rooms, searching for a telltale phone jack.

Upstairs, downstairs... she searched carefully, getting a general picture of the house as she did so, but becoming more and more concerned.

Her search ended where it had begun, in the kitchen.

No jacks. No phone.

The agent had probably carried a cellular telephone with him. Jennel realized that Mrs. Van Chattan paid no mind to things, critical or not. No phone, no carpenter.

Then a graver thought struck her.

No phone, no nothing.

Without a phone she couldn't get Mr. Brekley to come back to pick her up. She was stranded on this small desolate island in the northwest corner of Washington State.

With a sense of foreboding, she flipped the light switch up and down.

No response. Still... the bulb could be burned out. Hopefully, she plugged in a small electric hot plate and held her fingers over the element. It stayed cold. The rest of the kitchen used gas, but she had no propane with her.

Fighting back a rising surge of panic, she ran through the house searching for the master switch. Sometimes tenants broke the main circuits as a precaution when a house was left vacant.

The panel was by the basement door, with all

switches closed. Frustrated, she flipped them a couple of times: open and closed, open and closed—a futile gesture; the basement light didn't respond.

Where did the electricity come from anyway?

Nothing in Jennel's twenty-five years had prepared her to handle a situation like this. There had always been people around. Instant communication. Lights always went on when she flipped the switch, telephones always worked... or else a repairman was available to fix things.

The total isolation, treated with the uneasy respect of one who had never lived more than a mile away from someone else, suddenly imposed itself heavily upon her conscious.

Being alone took on a new dimension.

Emptiness, the emptiness of the western United States, meant miles and miles without another soul in sight, and sometimes days spent alone. A friend who had driven across Utah, Wyoming and Montana had described it to Jennel. Distance had suddenly come crashing down upon her during an unexpected snow storm when there had been no one but herself to rely on.

Jennel sympathized, but had not understood. Now she did.

Isolation was a tangible thing. It could be felt... creeping up on a person, undermining one's defenses.

Jennel glanced over her shoulder as the old

house creaked loudly. If someone had been with her, she would not have noticed. She took a deep breath to steady her nerves.

She could not allow the isolation to take over her emotions. It would require all her courage and stubborn determination to complete this job.

She'd be warm enough. She had a sleeping bag. Fireplaces stood in several of the rooms... but she'd be unwise to use them until she had all the chimneys inspected. Although she had not planned to literally "camp out," it looked like that was what she was going to do. Her groceries lay in her boxes of supplies, stacked on the dock.

"It can't get any worse."

Cautiously she walked down into the basement and looked around. The musty odor of concrete pervaded the stale air. Spider webs hung profusely, denying her access.

A new surge of panic hit as she spotted a long canvas covered object on a rack just past the bottom of the dark basement stairs. "Calm down," she told herself. "That's too long to be a body... or even a coffin." She took a step forward, fighting an instinct to run. "You've got food and shelter. You won't die of starvation. What else do you need?"

Drinking water.

Not bothering to explore further, Jennel sprinted up the stairs and turned on the kitchen faucet.

Nothing.

Idiot! Why hadn't she checked things before letting Brekley's boat leave?

She knew why. Mrs. Van Chattan's convincing descriptions and her own eagerness to get started had left her feeling secure—neither being an excuse for not checking conditions first. Once again Jennel regretted her impulsive nature.

"It's like being in the middle of one of those situation comedies," she groaned wryly, trying to find some humor. "Any minute now and the skunks'll come in!"

She had to get help. The water around the island was salt, not fresh. Even the thought made her thirsty.

The sun was setting, but with the long twilight there should be light for an hour. Her father was a captain in the Navy, so Jennel knew that three of anything was a signal for help. Three fires were too big a project for tonight, but three white pieces of cloth spread high on some rocks might flag down a passing boat. It was worth a try. There seemed to be plenty of them, cruising to and fro across the saltwater... ships and barges and boats of all sizes.

Opening her suitcase, she yanked out the largest white items she could find: her fluffy bathrobe, a long white skirt, a slip and three white blouses.

Gathering them into a large bundle, Jennel picked her way down the steep bank to the rocky

shore, pausing only long enough to take off her high heels to keep them clean. Leaving them by a tree trunk, she picked her way carefully across a narrow band of barnacle-covered rock. It was like walking on broken glass and she almost turned back. There wasn't much sand on the steeply sloping shoreline.

Not very optimistic, she nevertheless spread the clothing out over three boulders, tucking in the edges so they looked like large white circles.

To the west, across the inland sea, was Vancouver Island. It was barely visible, with the sun setting behind it. There were several ships in the channel, but they were far away.

The ships passed slowly, leaving Jennel staring wistfully after them. Then another boat appeared, a small one, having rounded the southern end of Turnagain Island. It turned and came toward her, close to shore.

It looked as if... maybe... it was coming in!

Leaving her things, Jennel dashed gingerly over the rocks, up to the path and then down onto the dock... a newly built and sturdy dock.

The brand new dock was another reason Jennel hadn't asked the boatman to stay. It was solid, with neatly jointed sections; bearing the careful mark of a craftsman. If it had been falling apart, she might have been more cautious.

Two enterprising raccoons were doing their grocery shopping in her boxes of supplies, sorting

and selecting like all good housewives. As Jennel ran up they backed off, one carrying a package of hot dogs and the other a loaf of bread. She shrieked threateningly at them, but they dodged her easily. Not alarmed by her intrusion, they moved off a short distance to begin their free meal, leaving a mess of scattered food behind.

Worried that the boat might not stop, Jennel concentrated on attracting the owner. Hopping up and down, she waved her hands wildly. "Here! Over here! Help!"

It turned toward her; at least a twenty-six foot enclosed pleasure boat, sleek and white and fairly new. It drew closer, skimming the waves, then slowed. The sound of the powerful engine being cut was as calming as quiet music.

A man emerged from the sunbridge, setting out several white protective fenders. He had thick eyebrows and a determined-looking chin... facial features squared but not heavy. He looked to be in his early thirties, and was dressed warmly against the cold March weather.

Used to estimating rooms and sizes, Jennel put the stranger at six-foot three, and his gray wind-breaker and heavy wool sweater were at least an extra large to cover the width of his broad and powerful shoulders.

He stared intently at her as she stood beside her boxes of supplies, as if not quite believing what he was seeing. There was also a faint flicker

of male interest, a gleam of appreciation which shone past the other emotions.

Again the uneasy sense of isolation swept over Jennel.

She was alone. And her rescuer? He was probably okay. He looked more puzzled than threatening, but looks could be deceiving.

The neatness of his boat allayed some of her fears. The words on the side read "Bayliner Ciera," a model she had never seen in Boston. She didn't have any choice, so moved to meet him.

Running down the ramp to the floating section of the dock, Jennel caught the bow line as he threw it. Quickly she tied it to a post, then ran to catch the stern line and tie it also.

The floating dock swayed as the tall man leaped onto it. Behind him came a huge black Newfoundland, who immediately bounded up to Jennel, his head as high as her waist, thrusting his cold wet nose into her outstretched hand.

Comfortable around small dogs, she froze at the size of this one, letting him get her scent for future reference. He was quickly satisfied, and put his nose to the dock to investigate its story. With a few barks he put the raccoons to flight and finished off the hot dogs and bread himself.

His master had observed the exchange and now stepped closer, his silence and open stare spurring Jennel into nervous speech.

"Boy, am I glad you stopped!" she stammered.

“Why? What’s wrong? Where’s your boat?” The stranger’s puzzled voice was deep toned and clear. He sounded as nice as he looked. If she had known they grew them like this in Washington State, she would have come out sooner.

“I’m stranded,” she responded, giving him a rueful smile as her hands waved vaguely at the miles and miles of water around the island. “Stuck!”

Her answer took Zachery Waylan by surprise. When he had first seen her running down the dock, he had assumed her to be another of the trespassers he’d chased off—people who had decided the island was deserted and a good spot for camping. Zack gazed quickly around, then surveyed again the young woman standing alertly in front of him, letting his eyes rove with appreciation over the trim curves of her body.

Miss High Society, he immediately labeled her. Dressed for a country club tea. She stood about five-foot five without heels, but her slender bone structure and touch of high class made her appear fragile and helpless. Her head had a lofty crown of braided black hair, giving her an appearance of nobility. It wouldn’t be hard to be alone on the island with her. No hardship at all.

Her cheekbones were high and well-defined, chin slightly pointed, lips full and generous... but the feature that hit him so unexpectedly was her candid blue eyes, unusual in one with such a dark

complexion. They were an intense cobalt blue, shading towards ultramarine; the color of a Steller's jay. Zack had never seen such a vivid color before. A man could get hypnotized staring into them.

Which was something he'd have to watch. It made her just that much more challenging when combined with the air of helplessness.

Which she probably wasn't. He'd learned that helplessness was an act some women cultivated to cloud a man's mind. They were the takers, not the givers, and once a man had given them all he had, they left.

Miss Society had a mouth that probably tasted as sweet as it looked. Gorgeous and appealing. Everything about her demanded his attention and quickened his interest. He wouldn't refuse anything she had to give, but luckily he'd been inoculated against her kind. He'd be able to stay emotionally aloof.

Her New England accent and pinned up hair made her a carbon copy of the New York socialite who had married an associate of his. It hadn't lasted, of course, Tony was as much of an outdoors man as he was. In less than two years Tony's "helpless" wife had filed for divorce, taking all of Tony's assets before running home to mama.

Shifting his weight, he looked at her as if she were a space alien. "So then, how'd you get here?"

Jennel resented his question. He didn't own

this place, so what made him so suspicious? She certainly hadn't dropped from the sky.

"I hired Mr. Brekley to ferry me across from Friday Harbor, and now I'm stuck. No phone, no nothing. I need to get in touch with him." She brushed back the few hairs that had come loose from her braid and now drifted irritatingly across her face.

The tall stranger ruffled his short hair. His voice stressed both wonder and disbelief. "Clyde left you here?"

"Yes."

"Odd. He knew what it was like. He knew no one but me was coming." Pausing he glanced at her and her supplies again, then demanded, "Didn't he say anything?"

"No," she replied, now equally puzzled. Clyde Brekley had helped unload her gear and hurriedly taken off, barely pausing to say goodbye. He hadn't said one word about the old house or warned her about the shape it was in... even after she told him her plans to live in it while fixing it up.

If he knew the conditions here, and let her go in, not warned and unprepared, maybe he wasn't the one to help her after all. If nothing else, he had a warped sense of humor that couldn't be counted on. Plus, if he knew this man was coming, he should have said something.

"That's funny. That's not like Clyde at all." The man looked down at the new deck, shaking his

head as if totally mystified. "Are you sure...?"

"Of course I'm sure."

"It wasn't someone else?"

"It better not have been. I wrote the check out in his name."

"This is really strange. I passed Clyde on the way here; even talked to him on the radio. He didn't mention you."

"He didn't?"

"No."

By now she was as puzzled as he. "He didn't mention you, either. Who are you?" she demanded.

His hair, the color of dark walnut, was somewhat ruffled by the breeze, but it only added to his attraction. He answered with a proud lift to the carriage of his head. "Zachery Waylan."

He said his name as if it might mean something. Maybe he was well known on the West Coast, but she had never heard of him.

"Who are *you*?" Gruffly, he threw the question back at her.

"Jennel Foster." Even to her own ears, she realized she had said her name as proudly as he had his. She didn't think she'd done it intentionally, but....

The salty breeze was getting stronger, further ruffling Zachery Waylan's hair; while Jennel was getting colder, hungrier and more than a little tired. "Could you give me a lift back?" she asked.

"Sure," he agreed, adding with a bland smile,

“But it’s too late to go anywhere tonight. No one travels these waters in the dark. Too many rocks just below the surface. Even with charts and radar, it’s risky.”

“I understand.”

“I could take you off... tomorrow?” His eyebrow flicked up as he spoke, making the sentence into a question.

“Thank you,” she said, wary of the implied meaning. “Tomorrow will be fine.”

He nodded, yet his eyes still lingered on her, making her body grow warm against the chilling air. Had she misread him at first? Was he dangerous? Or would he allow her to keep her distance... if she wanted to?

There was a dynamic, far-seeing vision to his eyes, a hint of high intellect in his broad forehead. A man going places. He acted as if he knew it.

Confusion romped its way though her. She didn’t plan to spend the night with him, even if his darkly lit eyes and mobile mouth were inviting... and made her want to search out the fiber of this man and get to know him better. She found herself wanting to encourage him and quickly clamped a lid on her feelings.

The cruiser was lovely; it was large enough to sleep six, but she would stay in the old house. Sleeping on a boat with another person was too intimate, amid the cozy atmosphere created by a boat’s close quarters. She would be wise to forego

its comforts.

Jennel half-smiled at the argument taking place within her mind. Amorous advances she had handled before, although usually she did not have to argue with herself about it.

In contact again with another human, she felt more in control. Jennel hadn't been a sheltered child, but she had always lived in an urban setting. The island's emptiness had shaken her. That was all.

She still had a job to do. Now she had the means to do it. If she could get water and propane from Zachery, she wouldn't have to leave. She could ask Clyde to bring her a radio or cell phone along with a list of potential carpenters, or she could rent a boat. Then she wouldn't have to depend upon the not-so-dependable Mr. Brekley. In addition, she wouldn't feel so isolated.

"You came well-equipped," Zachery observed with a questioning uplift of his thick brows; but before she could answer, she saw his gaze sweep down her long legs to her ankles.

"Yes." She wanted to believe he was referring to her supplies. But in his eyes she saw the look of aroused male interest and again felt her heartbeat quicken in response. He was near enough she could smell a hint of after-shave, adding its spice to the scent of the pines, the wind, and the salty spray. Altogether, an exciting combination.

"A man wouldn't go hungry," he commented,

his amused tone implying he had registered her reaction.

She refused to see any double meaning and replied, "Quite right. But I didn't bring any water."

"I did. Lots of these islands don't have water. This one does."

"It does? Where?"

He ignored her astonished question. "This is private property here, you know. The whole island; even if it does look abandoned right now."

"Oh, I know," she was quick to assure him. If she hadn't known before she came, the "No Trespassing" signs decorating the dock would have told her. "It's all right. I have a key to the house and—"

"A key?" he thundered, rounding on her so sharply she took a hasty step backwards. "Where did you get—? Why the stranded sailor routine?"

"I was stranded. I couldn't get off or get any messages out," she snapped. He sounded just like her father, dressing her down like a lowly seaman. Then remembering that she was begging help from him, she added a little more graciously, "I'm awfully glad you spotted my signal."

Zachery glanced around at the upper dock with its untidy pile of boxes and torn wrappers; frowned, and then stunned her by asking, "What signal?"

"Why, the one over there... on the shore." Jennel pointed at the tiny bundles.

“Oh, that?” Blinking, he peered through the dusk at the three circles of white, now barely visible, and shook his head. “I didn’t see that; the dock was in the way.”

Icy strands of doubt again wove their tenuous way through Jennel’s body, shortening her breath and stiffening her backbone. She could feel the prickling tightness around the tiny hairs at the back of her neck, the gathering tension in her abdomen.

If he hadn’t seen her signal, then what was he doing here?

Chapter Two



“Where’re you from, Mrs. Fostah?”

“Foster. With an ‘r.’ And it’s ‘Miss!’” She paused, intrigued at how slickly he had elicited her marital status. He wore a watch but no ring, same as she. Married or not? A lot of married men didn’t wear a ring. How did a woman tell unless she asked, outright—like Clyde had asked her? “I’m from Boston. Why?”

“That explains the accent,” he commented dryly, a slight grin tilting up a corner of his lips.

“I don’t have an accent. You do.” Yet even as she said the words, Jennel regretted them. She was mentally as well as physically exhausted from her long journey to this small island in the San Juans, but that was no excuse for being rude.

He shrugged, unperturbed. “All what you’re used to. What’re you doing here?”

“Looking over the house. What about you?”

“This trip? Laying the telephone and power cables.”

Her apprehension lifted immediately at the information. This sharp-looking man was here to help her, not do her harm.

The name of his boat was the Cheryl C. Sudden inspiration hit her, and she remarked, “Cheryl. That’s a pretty name. Your wife’s?”

“No. My mother’s. I’m not married, either.” He smiled as he said it, his half-closed eyes telling her he had given the information deliberately.

She smiled back, experiencing a sudden happiness, plus a sharpening of interest in this attractive stranger. Now that she knew equal personal information about him, they could continue where it was dry. A few drops of rain had given the strong March sea breeze an even sharper bite.

Standing in the rain made no sense, with her freezing while he stayed snug and warm in his windbreaker and heavy sweater. Turning toward the house, she offered him some information as she started up the ramp. “I’m staying here for a few months to—”

“A few months? That’s impossible!” he exploded, immediately stopping her by his reaction. His eyes narrowed in anger as he viewed her down his long straight nose; but before he could demand an explanation, she spoke quickly and decisively, cutting him short as she rubbed her cold hands together vigorously.

“I’m ‘legit.’ I have a key and permission...” She interrupted herself with a violent shiver as

she saw his face harden with resolve... and with something else that made her feel the cold even more. He did not look like a man who had much tolerance for anyone who got in his way.

His touch of arrogance, even though more felt than seen, was enough to stiffen her resistance. It was the same determined hardness her father showed whenever she had balked at his orders, and she was not about to give in and answer Zachery Wayland's suspicious questions until she reached a more comfortable place to talk.

She was in the right. She was the one who had the priority claim here.

"We can talk later," she announced decisively. "Right now I'm freezing. I'm going to get my things inside before they're soaked."

Jennel stalked up the ramp before he could demand more explanations, realizing with the first step that she hadn't done herself any good on the barnacle-covered rocks. Her feet were not only cold; they hurt!

Grabbing her largest box, she carried it up the steep trail to the house. Her rescuer followed, picking up three of the remaining four, carrying them without apparent effort.

Jennel grimaced to herself. Zack possessed strong arms and powerful legs and an inward certainty of his own ability—a masculine combination that attracted her physically and emotionally. Even when she didn't want attention, her unspoken

interest somehow subtly encouraged his type to pursue her further. It looked as if it was about to happen again, and Jennel didn't need that complication right now.

She had dated several men who were ruggedly virile. It had always ended in a fight for her survival as an individual and her escape from their overly protective personalities.

Zachery looked as if he fit the mold perfectly. All commands and orders. No give and take. Just like her father. It had been a struggle to break away from his strict dictates. She had done it while he was at home, not taking the coward's way out and waiting until he was off at sea.

Once free, she had not dared to tell him about her financial troubles, avoiding his help; for in accepting it, she'd have to give up her dearly-won freedom... which included the freedom to fail, as well as to succeed.

She could hear Zack's footsteps behind her, confident and steady, as he climbed the steep path. She wouldn't ask for his help either. She wasn't about to give him any hold over her.

He possessed an aura of self-assurance that almost every successful man carried about him—a man of leadership and vision; used to making decisions. Such men liked strong lines, thick carpets and lots of wood. She could design a room for them blindfolded.

“What happened here?” he asked, when she

stopped at her luggage to get her coat. Her bags lay open, clothes scattered every which way, for in her haste to get a signal made, she'd not taken the time to re-fold them.

"Nothing." It was none of his business.

"But it looks like someone ransacked your things."

"I did. I used white clothes for my signal," she explained, embarrassed, as she searched through the box for her flashlight. The new batteries gave a bright light as she flicked it on.

"I still don't see what the flap was," he said, using the amazed tone men use when a woman has just done what to them seems illogical. "All you had to do was start the generator. And the canoe in the basement is in good condition. As long as you had a key, you were in fine shape."

Jennel stopped gathering her clothes to stare at him. *Canoe? Generator?*

"I'll go start it up," he announced, casually plucking the flashlight from her chilled fingers. "It's around back in a little shed. There's plenty of fuel. Are you a... a relative of the Van Chattans?" The last sentence was thrown back in afterthought as he rounded the corner of the house.

"No!"

Why hadn't she thought to look around more thoroughly? No wonder she had puzzled him; jumping up and down and hollering for help when she hadn't needed it. For that matter, why hadn't

Clyde mentioned a generator and a canoe?

She sat back on her heels, breathing deeply of the moist, pine-scented air. Of all the tough luck; the first halfway interesting man to come her way in two months and she'd acted like a complete fool.

Her sense of the ridiculous sprang alive and she chuckled at the image she must have created; dancing on the dock. A great first impression... the stranded maiden who wasn't stranded. Although she still needed water and propane. Those were essential.

She should have gone with him to see where the generator was and learned how to start it.

Who was he, this tall, capable man who swept through difficulties as if they didn't exist? They probably didn't—for him. He was good-looking in a rugged sort of way; the adventurous type who would accept a challenge just for the joy of overcoming it... especially when that challenge was a woman.

He knew his way around this place, which meant he wasn't a stranger here. Maybe he had checked the place out after agreeing to lay the utilities. By the way he talked, Mrs. Van Chattan hadn't sent him.

It was dry, but dark under the Douglas firs. Jennel had to re-pack her bags by feel. Her heart did a momentary skip when she heard a loud rustling in the bushes; then, recalling the raccoons,

she yelled “Shoo!”

Instead the rustling charged closer and a cold nose poked into her face. Just in time she remembered the big Newfoundland and squelched the beginning of her scream into an unladylike squawk. Muttering abuse at herself, she gave the huge animal a friendly pat on its back as it flopped down beside her. Actually his presence was welcome, helping her to relax. With this huge dog around, who would be afraid of the dark?

Lights began to show as Zachery walked through the house, then the veranda lit up with a bare bulb which revealed three small items of lacy lingerie she had overlooked.

Quickly she threw them in, closed her bags and carried the smaller two over the slippery boards and into the house. Putting them down just past the door, she turned to retrieve the large duffel bag stuffed full of work clothes.

Zachery had held the door open and now handed the flashlight back with a satisfied smile. “Here y’go. This floor’s filthy. You ought to put your shoes on.”

“They’re on the beach,” she said, taking time to stretch her tired muscles. “I took them off so’s not to damage them.”

“Don’t forget and leave them there. Tide’ll get ’em,” he remarked offhandedly, walking away to flick on the kitchen lights.

The tide? Oh no! With her vivid imagination

leaping to the fore, Jennel lunged out the door, traversed the slimy boards in one long skid and jumped off the edge. Zachery yelled something after her but she paid him no attention as she hurried down the steep trail as fast as her flashlight would let her.

Of all the...! He was the most nonchalant person she'd ever run across. Telling her something so vitally important in a tone usually reserved for giving the time of day.

She'd hunted all over New York for those shoes; they'd cost twice as much as what she usually paid, but were a perfect match for her suit. She wasn't going to lose them to any tide.

The flashlight kept her from killing herself on the ridge of rocks, but it was hard on her feet again. She should've paused at the house long enough to dig her old tennis shoes out of the bottom of her duffel bag. The urgency of her mission kept her going and she picked her way recklessly over the rough terrain to her things.

When she reached them, she stopped in disgust. The tide *wasn't* coming in and the rain had stopped—so there was no cause to hurry. Muttering an exclamation of annoyance, Jennel gathered up her sandy clothes and her lovely wine-red shoes and hobbled back across the rocks, this time using her bobbing light to search out the best path.

Away from the trees there remained enough

twilight to make out Zachery, standing on the dock, totally at ease, viewing her halting progress with fascinated curiosity.

“You kind of tend to stampede, don’t you?” he remarked, his deep voice carrying easily to her. “If you’d waited even a second, I’d have told you... the tide isn’t due to change for another hour.” He wasn’t actually laughing at her, but his expressive voice contained a thread of puzzled amusement that couldn’t be hidden.

An hour? Was that what he had yelled at her as she ran out the door? Again she’d acted impulsively. When would she ever learn?

Clenching her teeth, she limped forward, trying to pick her way through the scattered rocks. The ridge was just ahead.

“Why not come around by the ladder. Rocks make the going hard,” he added matter-of-factly.

Jennel flashed her light toward where he stood. She didn’t see—

“Other side,” he suggested, and again that thread of amusement was there, dancing in his voice.

The dock was high enough to walk under easily. Sure enough, the south side had a sturdy ladder attached to it, allowing access to a more sandy area of beach.

Jennel grumbled to herself as she neared the base.

Resentment was growing. If she’d have known

about things—the generator, the ladder, the tide—she'd have acted differently. Tiredness made her overly sensitive and the newness of her surroundings had hindered her normal reactions.

She wasn't at her best, but under these circumstances, nobody would have been. She didn't blame him for her ignorance. But he didn't have to rub it in.

He was a big man, much heavier than she—although she doubted any of it was fat—but maybe, just maybe, he'd fall through those rotten veranda boards. That might take him down a notch.

A crooked grin lit her face as she realized that she'd probably be the first one to fall through the boards, considering the way she'd just skated across them.

Rolling her things together and bundling them into her robe, she tied the belt and looped it over one arm. Even then, she couldn't get her hands free enough to grab the ladder rungs. It was almost impossible to climb with her arms full.

“Toss your things.” He was standing at the top, staring down at her.

“But...” The bundle would be hard to throw.

“Come on,” he commanded impatiently.

She threw them, hard, but they fell short and he had to come down a couple of rungs to catch her second try.

“Ready for the light?” she asked when his face

didn't appear at the top again.

"Don't throw that!" He seemed astounded she had even considered doing so. "If nothing else, carry it up in your teeth."

Oh great. It was big and metal. Not normally what you carried in your mouth. Somehow Jennel got a clamp on it and hung on, jaws protesting as she climbed, her temper building with each step upward.

Almost at the top, she had to stop and take it out. Her lips quivered with strain as resentment flared.

"Here, I'll take it." His large hand plucked it out of her fingers. He sounded disgusted with having her anywhere around. Tough luck! If she hadn't needed the ride tomorrow....

Jennel pulled herself up, then nearly toppled backward in fright as a wet tongue swiped across her face. Again she had forgotten the Newfoundland and hadn't seen its black form in the darkness.

"Get that dog out of my way!" she yelled, taut emotions exploding at last.

"Keep your shirt on." His voice was heavy with disapproval. "Come'ere, Brutus."

Leaving her things piled on the dock, he walked down the ramp to his boat, the big dog following at his side. He called back, casually, as if the information mattered little, "You've only got one shoe there."

Zachery had taken her flashlight, so she could not see anything except a forlorn heap of white garments dumped on the decking. She was going to have to go back and search for her shoe when what she desperately wanted to do was yell at him. Or have a good cry.

What was he doing with her light?

Jennel plunked herself down on the dock, tired from the trip and from the overwhelming pressure of responsibility to transform the ramshackle old house into a success. Her fledgling business depended upon it for her survival.

Most of all she was tired of that man who wasn't hungry or tired and who acted as though he barely tolerated her presence. Him, she could do without... after she was once again in contact with Mr. Brekley.

Her braid had come unpinned and was hanging down her back like a long pigtail. She tried to coil it around her head again, but couldn't make it stay. Brutus wandered back, tail wagging, and she gave up the effort and hugged him around the neck, comforting herself as well as making the enormous dog happy.

"I'm sorry, Brutus," she murmured softly as she stroked her fingers across his jet-black coat, clean and thick and silky soft. "I like dogs, really, and you are a pleasant chap. You scared me, that's all." She would apologize to the dog, but never to the master.

She watched him rapidly unload boxes of things out of his boat. She didn't go near to help. He acted competent, let him do it all himself.

Anyway, she wanted her light back so she could find her shoe.

Brutus left as Zachery came back up onto the main dock and rejoined her. He had a huge flashlight in his hand with a beam strong enough to make hers resemble a match-glow.

Moving to the ladder, he flashed the light around, revealing her shoe lying on the sand a few feet from the bottom. Before she could move he was down and up again. "Here's your shoe... and your light," he spoke, his pleasantly deep voice brisk as he pulled her small flashlight out of his pocket.

Jennel smiled into the darkness. His little act of kindness—done at the precise psychological moment when she needed it most—helped snatch her back from the ragged edge.

Zachery didn't have to retrieve her shoe, but he had. It had been an easy enough job for him, but in her present emotional condition the small task had seemed enormous... the proverbial last straw. Her resentment fell away as if it had never existed. "Thanks."

"It's okay," he replied with a smile. "Sorry I snapped at you earlier. Clyde's leaving you here threw me. I hadn't counted on company."

"Neither had I." A quick grin flashed across her

face and her eyes became animated once more as the tiredness eased its zombie-like grip upon her brain.

Maybe he was a nice guy after all. She wasn't one to nourish ill will.

Her spirits and her chin lifted—a small lift, but it reversed the downward plunge of her spirits. Jennel felt ready again for the challenge of this job. “I'd best get the rest of my things inside.”

She re-coiled her hair and this time the braid stayed. Piling her clothes on top of the last box, she carried it in one trip. He needed three trips for his boxes of stuff, hauling it all into the kitchen and placing them beside hers.

His were full of groceries, neatly packed, plus, some bottles of propane, one of which he hooked up to the gas line. Was he planning to stay awhile, too? If so, why?

Who was he? He seemed at home on the island, prepared for its way of life. With the urgent matter of survival out of the way, it was time to find out.

“Mr... What was your last name? I forgot.”

“Waylan, but folks call me Zack.”

Moving with the sure grace of one accustomed to the task, he turned on the stove, lit it, then filled a kettle with water.

She watched the water gush from the faucet for a moment before realizing what was happening. “I couldn't get any water out of there,” she said in amazement.

Placing the kettle over the flame, he replied, “Electric pump. There’s a tank to catch rainwater. That’s all. It’s clean enough. I’m surprised Clyde didn’t tell you.”

“He didn’t tell me anything.”

Now that he understood the full extent of Clyde’s misdeeds, Zack shook his head, puzzled. His voice softened in sympathy. “I don’t know what got into him. Usually he tells everybody everything.” He would have a good talk with Clyde next time they met and ask him what the devil he thought he was doing. If Zack had not been able to make it to Turnagain Island today, Jennel would have had a tough time. Despite his dislike of “High Society” women, he would not want her left stranded without water.

“Maybe he had a lot on his mind,” she suggested.

“I don’t think so. He had plenty of time to chat with me when we met.” He took off his coat, laying it over the back of a chair, then picked up a cast iron fry pan and started heating it.

She had been right, Jennel decided; his shoulders were broad, effectively filling out his steel-gray wool sweater. Very impressive. She ran her eyes over his slim hips and waistline and nodded. He would pass her inspection any day.

As he began to unload his boxes, she asked: “Do you have a cellphone in there?”

He didn’t bother to glance around. “No, I use the VHF radio on my boat. I’ll start laying phone

cables tomorrow. That's one of the first things I hook up; telephone and electricity. Almost impossible to get along without 'em. How d'you like your steak?"

"Steak? Well-done, thank you."

"Okay." He laid two good-sized slabs of red meat on the pan. They started to sizzle, the aroma making Jennel's mouth water.

If he was supplying the steak, she could supply the salad. Going over to her own groceries, she began to pull out items needing refrigeration. "The telephone line and the electricity. You have to lay them under the water?"

"Yes."

"They'll sure make things easier here," she remarked pleasantly, setting aside the lettuce, tomatoes and hunting for a bowl. Again she felt a lift to her spirits. Things were definitely looking up.

Perhaps he was a little late getting things hooked up for her; that would explain why no one had mentioned the conditions here. He was certainly a welcome addition to the island. With his organized, take-charge ways, he'd have the place ready for her to begin work in no time.

His presence and self-assured movements gave Jennel a feeling of security. All her fears had fled. He treated her with an easy, almost offhand manner, as if he'd recognized her earlier fears down on the shore and was going out of his way to assure her

he was harmless.

He glanced her way as he turned the steaks for the first time. “My crews would balk at not having enough electricity to run all their equipment. This generator isn’t large enough—”

“Your crews?” A sudden suspicion that he wasn’t going to leave once he put in the power sent a wave of puzzlement through her.

She looked at all the food in his boxes.

“What crews?” she demanded warily, moving closer to his imposing figure. “Who are you, anyway? I mean... what do you do, exactly?”

He put some French fries under the broiler, answering with pride, “I’m an architect and a builder. I specialize in homes that compliment the environment. What d’you do?”

“I’m an interior decorator. I specialize in restoring old homes. That’s what I’m doing here. I’ve come to fix this place up.” She said the last with an emphatic nod of her head as she gestured toward the decrepit rooms around them. That should impress him.

Impressed or not, it got his attention. “*What?*” His first verbal explosion, down on the dock, was nothing compared to this. His total bearing altered, transformed from a companionable host to an incredulous adversary... as if her words had thrown a switch and reversed his nature. Had she said something wrong? Or had he misunderstood?

Smiling brightly, Jennel tried to clear it up. “I

said, I'm an interior decorator."

"I heard that."

"I'm here to make this house livable."

"That's impossible!" he bellowed, shaking his head like an outraged bear. "This is my house."

"Yours?" she asked, her dark brows arching upward.

"Yes, mine."

Maybe she was the one who had things wrong. Was she on the wrong island? "I... I thought it belonged to the Van Chattans."

"It does."

"Oh! Well then—"

"I'm here to remodel this house," he countered, pointing the meat fork at himself, then wagging the tines up and down at her as he added, "Not you. That's what I meant."

Jennel exploded in her own way. "How could you?" she challenged, confused by his claim. "I've got a contract for this place!"

Scowling fiercely, he pronged the steaks and flipped them with a snap, making the hot grease sizzle. "Is this your idea of a joke?"

Her temper flared and she met his angry stare with a defiant one of her own. Setting her mouth, she declared, "No. I agreed to do a job on this house and I'm going to do it. Just lay your power lines, thank you, then be off so I can get started."

He straightened, hazel eyes challenging as he rapped out the rest of his devastating information.

“You still don’t understand, do you, Boston? Mr. Van Chattan hired me—not you—to turn this derelict into a home.”

Chapter Three



Jennel sat down hard on the old kitchen chair, her hands gripping the table edge for support. A swirl of blackness came and went, leaving her faint and shaken. Signing the contract with Mrs. Van Chattan had assured a new beginning for Jennel's fledgling business. She had moved here, making major changes in her life.

The contract was a sure thing. Signed and sealed. "What... what are you talking about?" she asked, as soon as she could speak.

"I was hired to re-do this place. By John... Mr. Van Chattan, himself."

Her mind refused to accept his words. No one had ever mentioned Zachery Waylan. Not her client, nor her granddaughter, whom Jennel had met for a day's shopping. "When?"

"Last summer. As soon as he decided to buy it. What on earth ever gave you the idea...?" His brow lowered as he scowled at her, a tenacious line forming his mouth. "Who hired you?"

It wouldn't be pleasant to make an enemy of him, and yet Jennel couldn't see any way to avoid it. They were two dogs after the same bone.

She felt like a terrier facing a mastiff. Not very big, but determined. "His wife. She hired me."

"Huh?" It was as if someone had unexpectedly swiped his bone. For the first time, she saw a measure of uncertainty enter his eyes, wiping away his air of absolute self-assurance. It gave her a small amount of satisfaction. He jerked his head towards her, his puzzlement now matching hers. "*Mrs. Van Chattan?*"

"Yes."

He shook his head. "What'd she do that for?"

Jennel shrugged. He sounded as mystified as she felt. "She likes my work."

"No.... That's not a reason. No one hires two people to do the same job."

At once the logical answer came to Jennel and she was quick to say, "Maybe she didn't know about you. That could be the reason—"

"No—no." He swiftly corrected her. "Not that. John checked my plans with her. He told me so. Said she had approved everything."

"I see." Jennel hesitated, then admitted, "I never met him. She was visiting at a house where I was redecorating, and begged me to do this job. I really didn't want one so far away from Boston, but—"

"You've had a wasted trip. I've got things well

in hand.”

Looking around at the dirty rooms, Jennel commented acidly, “Really? It doesn’t look like you’ve done much of anything. For someone with nine months on the job—”

His head snapped up, hazel eyes hard as granite. It had been the wrong thing to say; it threw him on the defensive again. “Now look, lady,” he barked. “There’s a lot I had to do before we could actually start construction: blueprints, permits, materials and the like.”

“Permits?” Again she felt confused. This was like trying to put a puzzle together with half the pieces missing. “What for? I mean, what are you planning to do?”

“I’ll be removing trees, remodeling this house, redecorating it, *and* putting in a pool and sauna.” He paused, all laughter gone from his expressive eyes. There was no give in him as he continued to drive his points home. “And I had to put in a new dock before we could start. Now tell me, Miss Boston, what exactly were you planning?”

Shaken by the totally unexpected list of things Mr. Van Chattan wanted done, Jennel shifted on the old chair in silence.

She stared at the cracked and worn out kitchen floor. The curled and frayed linoleum tiles would have to come up, the floor cleaned and new flooring laid.

That job she could do. But the magnitude of the

work he outlined was far beyond her expectations... and capabilities. A swimming pool and sauna? None of these things had been mentioned to her.

Had Mrs. Van Chattan consulted her husband? Had she given any thought to what she was doing when she signed Jennel's contract?

Apprehension swept through Jennel, cutting away at her confidence and pride. What would become of her job... and her business?

"Well?" He glared at her, as immovable as part of the house, silently yet forcefully demanding an answer to his question.

"I don't know," she stammered. "Nothing like that! I just got here—"

"Then it'll be real easy for you to leave." His voice just missed being sarcastic, as if he barely refrained himself from savoring his triumph.

"But—"

"I'd take you out now, this minute, but I don't have the equipment needed to travel these waters at night. Besides, I need to be here first thing in the morning when my crew arrives. You'll have to wait 'til one of them can take you back, but the planes leave Friday Harbor off and on all day. You'll be on your way back to Boston in no time."

"I can't..." Her voice trailed off in chaotic thought. With her apartment sublet to two single girls, she didn't even have a home to return to. She'd left most of her things behind for them to

use. The girls were paying extra rent for them, and Jennel had already channeled their first month's rent into paying off one of her creditors. They had moved in three days ago. There was no way she could ask them to leave.

Zack frowned. "What'd you mean, you can't? Of course, you can." Not knowing her situation, it probably seemed reasonable to him. "You haven't even started the job yet."

As if to conclude the matter, he yanked the pan off the burner and flopped the steaks onto two paper plates, rescued the fries before they scorched, and dumped some beside each steak.

Her eyes widened as she tried to think. He was pushing her to leave, and she wasn't willing to consider it. "I'm here to do a job."

"I've spent eight months getting things lined up for this place, drawing wages that Mr. Van Chattan's been paying. I don't see where you're coming from." Grabbing knives and forks, he handed a set to her and plopped himself down opposite, and started to eat.

"I'm not sure either... anymore," she confessed, staring at the filled plate in front of her as if it might contain some answers. Maybe while he ate, he would shut up long enough for her to seriously consider her options.

She still had a contract. She clung desperately to that fact as her mind reeled from the unexpected assault. She would get some payment if it was

broken. But it had to be Mrs. Van Chattan who broke the contract, not Jennel.

She had to stay here, she realized, feeling her face drain of color, or else she'd be out everything. Had she been suckered two jobs in a row? She didn't even have enough money to return to Boston. Her gaze swung up to meet his.

"A shock, huh?" His attitude softened, his voice quieted as he viewed her distress. His eyes changed from green granite to emerald, the color of sea waves in sunlight.

"Yes." Her tears swelled at his gentle inquiry, and she hastily wiped them away. It proved easier to stand firm when he was angry with her.

Looking uncomfortable, he attacked his steak with knife and fork. "Too bad. But it's gotta be faced."

Jennel observed him silently, wanting to scream a denial at everything he had said. What should she say? Do? He seemed moved by her tears, but she had never resorted to those types of tactics.

When she remained silent, he stopped cutting and gestured with his fork. "Eat up. You'll feel better with some food in you." As if to reinforce his suggestion, he took a bite.

She preferred fish and salad, but since this "meal" was already fixed, with her salad makings sitting untouched on the counter, Jennel picked up her knife.

The steak looked as appetizing as it smelled. Trying not to penetrate the paper underneath, she cut it carefully. It ran red, making her shudder. She picked it up and carried it to the stove, returning the pan to the burner. Her fries were soaked pink and a little too salty, but she ate those hungrily while the steak finished frying.

By now her stomach was a tight knot. She didn't know how well the food would digest... if at all.

Feeling betrayed, Jennel stared at the sizzling meat.

What was going on? Her mind raced over her dealings with Mrs. Van Chattan. The lady had never mentioned Zack in all the time they'd spent looking over ideas and furniture and talking about Mrs. Van Chattan's requirements. She'd given Jennel lots of information about the island and about her husband, John, and herself, but never Zack. Why not?

Forced to attack since retreat was cut off, Jennel glanced over where Zack was lounging in his chair, eating unhurriedly. She began to explain as calmly as possible. "I can't leave because I've already started the job, too."

"What do you mean?"

"Mrs. Van Chattan had pictures of the house, and I made preliminary sketches that she approved. I even chose some furnishings in New York to compliment some of her pieces."

He waved his hand disparagingly, his mouth

tightening. “That’s too bad, but you’ll have to leave. There’s no way you can do what’s planned—”

“I could hire laborers also,” she interrupted, knowing even as she said it that she would have to hire someone more skilled than a laborer. She would have to hire someone with Zack’s knowledge and that would be impossible. Anyone with his knowledge would already be working for himself or for a company. And Zack had a contract, too.

He choked on a laugh. “Do you know what you’re saying?”

“I just told you.”

“Honey, you don’t even know how to start a generator.”

Jennel bit her lip. “I’d have it figured out in time.”

She was angry again, a cold hard anger that refused to see anything amusing in her present state. Zack was no longer the most presentable man she had met. The boatman, Mr. Brekley, had been much nicer, even if he had stranded her.

“After you pulled your arm off trying,” Zack retorted.

“I’d have managed,” she defended herself, showing a brave face even as she wondered: didn’t generators have batteries?

He grinned. “Like you’ve managed everything else since you’ve been here. Admit it. You were a wreck when I arrived. You’d better go back home to Boston.”

He looked so sure of himself, so amused by her claim, as if she was some schoolgirl fresh out of high school.

Well, she'd been out of high school a long time.

"I just need to revise my plans."

"You need to do more than that. John wants the dining room enlarged into the living room, which involves knocking out a wall. I'm to install a bathroom off his study and put in a new living room with large greenhouse windows—guaranteed not to leak. He also wants a whirlpool and a sauna inside. Do you know how to build them so a house isn't filled with steam?"

"No. I'm an interior decorator, not an architect. My talents are different than yours."

"Quite. I both build and design."

His unyielding attitude re-ignited her temper, which had been slowly building. "People like my work. I've never had a dissatisfied client."

"Great... but there's no room for you here. John asked me to oversee everything, even the furnishings. My designs don't need another interior decorator."

"You think not?" she challenged.

"I know not. It's totally unified. So why not call it off and forget about this job? There's plenty of others out there." Having summarily disposed of her, he finished his steak and potatoes and dumped the paper plate into a plastic garbage

sack. Opening the refrigerator, he began to put his perishables inside, his jerky movements betraying the agitation of his thoughts.

Turning off the burner, Jennel returned to the table with her well-done steak and cut it thoughtfully, fighting down a swelling fury at his off-hand dismissal. She had her contract, too. And there weren't many jobs out there... without a line of credit to fall back on.

Jennel had checked out three other jobs. Those customers all wanted to make a down payment and then pay again after most of the work was done. Just like the man who had filed bankruptcy to avoid paying her. With no credit, she couldn't work that way.

Only Mrs. Van Chattan was willing to pay up front... and pay well.

The steak, tender and a prime cut, helped fill her hollow empty stomach. She did feel better. Almost fighting fit. Ready to challenge him again.

It was perhaps time to change tactics. It wasn't the best military strategy, but if you couldn't beat 'em, you joined 'em.

"Would you show me what you planned?" she asked with forced cheerfulness, her lips forming a cardboard grin. "I'd like to see it." Afterwards she could show him her sketches. Maybe they wouldn't be too far apart.

"Okay." He agreed easily enough. Clearly, he wasn't afraid of the competition. "I have to get

some measurements off them anyway—and you’ll be able to see the size of this job.” He sauntered out, confident and at ease, taking his large flashlight.

Jennel refrained from throwing something after him and slammed her fist against the table instead. She forced her teeth to unclench long enough to finish the steak in her mouth, and choke it down.

His departure removed the need to act braver than she felt. Her backbone went limp and her shoulders sagged. With head bowed upon her hands, she closed her eyes tightly, as if to keep things out a little longer.

The worst thing was to have come so totally uninformed. It was like packing a swimsuit and flippers for a vacation at the beach and finding yourself stranded on the ski slopes.

If only she could show Zack how good she was. Then maybe she could talk the good-looking beast into turning over the interior work to her. Maybe she could even fan that flicker of interest into something stronger. At least strong enough to let her stay and do the interior.

Who was she trying to kid? He didn’t want anyone messing with his house. He had his contract... and probably a smart lawyer in tow.

She had run into the type before—her father and several others. Their way was always the only way, their opinion the only opinion. Self-possessed, assured, decisive. Secure in their strength,

unafraid of taking life in their hands and wresting whatever they wanted out of it.

Well, she wanted this job. He wasn't going to take it away from her—as long as she had her contract—whatever he thought. Since hers was of a later date, that might make it more binding. She had to figure out some way to stay here and finish this job.

Zack was still shaking his head as he approached his boat. Miss Society certainly had a few sparks in her, he thought as he patted Brutus on the head. Imagine, claiming she was going to re-do that house. She hadn't the foggiest idea what the project entailed.

He descended the ramp easily, noticing that its slope grew less steeply pitched. The incoming tide had raised both boat and float closer to the level of the dock. If she had left her shoes on the beach, they would have floated away by now.

They were nice shoes, and he could understand why she had not wanted to lose them. It took time to find a pair you really liked. He should have given her more information about the tide when he first mentioned it, but he never thought she would take off like she did.

Jennel appeared to be an impetuous creature, which was probably why she'd landed herself in this fix. It was unprofessional to take a job without knowing everything about it.

She carried herself with an air of authority that

challenged him. She didn't question his professional ability—she was way over her head there—but him as a man. He felt driven to prove himself to her, to protect her; and she probably didn't need protection.

Intriguing. She stirred his emotions—first one way, then the other. She was a feisty little thing. He admired her spunk even as he denied her right to be here.

He didn't doubt her claim to be an interior decorator. She was artistic from the top of her lofty coiled hair to the tips of her slender toes, the nails painted to match her suit. Even her outfit proclaimed her creativeness. That snazzy suit exuded high fashion. Not exactly the right clothes to be wearing on this island. Proud as a queen.

He brought himself up short. Tony's wife, Jennifer, had been like that; one of the original Mayflower descendants, determined to get her own way. Their names were even similar.

He'd never forget Tony's lesson, especially when he looked into Jennel's indigo blue eyes; luminous eyes that changed expression as fast as the flicker of light upon moving water. Eyes that flashed defiance. Lips that held his gaze when she moistened them while eating, arousing his desire to kiss them. She was temptation personified.

He needed to step carefully, or she would seduce him into letting her take over his job. Or part of his job. It would be tempting to allow her

to decorate the house just to keep her around, but Jennel would be a distraction. Furthermore, he owed it to his lifelong friend, John Van Chattan, to present him with his best work.

When Zack had needed help meeting some pressing bills, John had invested in his company. It was at a time when John was just getting started, too, and didn't have the kind of money he was making today. Friends like him and Clyde were hard to find, even if they did persist in vetting your girlfriends.

Entering the boat, he stowed away the tidal chart and map of the islands he had used on the way over. A quick check around showed all was shipshape.

Picking up his metal carrying tube, he paused, listening to the radio traffic. Why hadn't Clyde mentioned dropping off Jennel? He had brought the Van Chattans over with the real estate salesman, so he knew the condition of the house. Clyde also knew Zack was fixing it up.

Was it possible he had forgotten to mention her? With *her* looks? Zack doubted it. What was his friend up to?

Activating the radio, he tried several times to call Clyde. No answer. It wasn't important. But since Clyde had brought her here, maybe Clyde should be the one to take her back. He left the boat to walk back up to the house, stopping to throw some sticks for Brutus.

The island night was peaceful. He enjoyed being alone, just him and the dog, relaxing after a busy day. He had been looking forward to spending some time fishing after his crew left. Then, when his mind was at ease, he would do some preliminary designs for a new client.

He threw another stick, realizing as Brutus charged off into the darkness that the pleasure had gone out of the simple game. What Zack really wanted to do was go back into the old house and see Jennel again.

He had to send Miss Boston home.



Jennel finished her steak and looked down at her sore feet. They were so cold they were almost numb, but she decided against putting on some warm socks until she had washed off the dirt. Although reluctant to walk around barefoot on the dirty floor, she didn't want to stay sitting still, looking like a whipped puppy when Zack returned.

He had cooked the food; therefore she'd wash up, refusing to give him complete possession of the kitchen.

All that needed washing was the fry pan and the utensils. After putting away her perishable goods in the rapidly cooling refrigerator, she dug out her small box of detergent and washed the

knives and forks in the sink, using cold running water. The water on the stove was almost to a boil and would work for rinsing.

The fry pan was small but heavy. As soon as the cold water touched it, it split—instantly—from lip to lip, separating into two pieces just as Zack re-entered the room.

She stood there, mouth open, holding on to the half with the wooden handle while the other clattered into the sink, the sections divided as straight and clean as if sliced with a sharp knife.

Shock mingled with dismay. What had she done?

“Don’t you know anything?” Zack exploded for the third time that night—and this time the loudest of all. “You never put cold water on hot iron!” Angrily he shoved past her, pushing her aside, and turned off the tap.

“But—”

“Lady, the sooner you’re out of here, the better.” His voice was heavy with disgust as he appraised the damage. “My favorite pan!”

“But...” She hesitated, unable to think of anything to say. It had been off the burner all the time she was eating; it should’ve cooled off long ago. She tapped the metal gingerly and found it still hot. “I’m sorry....”

“Sit down! And dry your hands!” He thrust a towel at her, having a hard time getting the words out without biting them off. “You can look at

these. I'll stay with you, so they'll survive."

She stopped feeling sorry about the pan. "I know how to take care of house plans, but I've never washed a cast iron skillet before. How was I to know it was so sensitive? My aluminum pans aren't."

"Cast iron holds the heat."

"I'll buy you another," she snapped, drying her hands with vigorous thrusts of the towel as she tried to dampen down the anger she felt at herself. She was doing a wonderful job destroying any favorable impression she might accidentally have made.

"Don't bother. I just want you out of here. Look at these if you wish." He threw a long carrying tube upon the clean table.

Jennel's comeback left her mind when she saw the plans. Pages and pages of plans. The house, the swimming pool and cabana, a guest house, and workers' quarters. Even a boat house... all with the same roof lines, the same rugged design.

As he unrolled the plans in front of her, her artist's eye was caught by the graceful loveliness of the house. This was a home she could live in. Right away she could spot the underlying structure of the old house, left intact, yet re-shaped into a more useful entity. The Victorian lines were left, the ugly additions swept away. The small covered swimming pool nestled between the house and the sea, dropped a level so that it wouldn't obstruct the view.

Carefully she looked through the rest of the plans, examining each section closely. No wonder he was proud of his work. Zack was extremely talented. He was going to make this house and its surroundings into someone's prize-winning dream home.

But not Mrs. Van Chattan's.

That was the only thing wrong with his design. Jennel told him so, being as blunt with him as he'd been with her.

"You've designed a beautiful home, Zack, but this is a man's home, from its roof of cedar shakes to the basement gun room. There is no place in it for someone as totally, uncompromisingly feminine as Mrs. Van Chattan."

"Anyone could live in this," he declared, his voice rising in protest, and for most clients his statement would have been valid.

Jennel gazed directly at him, her carefully chosen words underlining her deep conviction as she spoke, slowly and concisely. "I could and you could, but not Mrs. Van Chattan." He started to protest, and she stopped him with a question. "Have you ever met her?"

"No. No, I haven't, but John said she'd like it." He met her look with the bold confidence of one who's been designing successfully for years. He didn't need her to tell him about houses. "This is exactly what he ordered. For both of them."

"Then he doesn't know her very well," she

argued confidently, her tone daring him to contradict her.

“And I suppose you do?” He was becoming sarcastic, his heavy brows almost meeting as he scowled at her. He picked up the tube, ready to re-roll the plans.

She stood her ground, knowing herself to be right. “Yes, and don’t look so skeptical, Mr. Waylan. That’s my greatest area of expertise.”

“So?”

“So I can tell what people really want—sometimes even when they’re telling me the opposite. I’ll show them what they asked for, then show them what I think they really want; and they fall in love with it, every time.” Jennel wasn’t bragging... it was a proven fact... and her voice said so.

Zack pondered her statement but did not question it. “And Mrs. Van Chattan?” he asked, frowning skeptically, viewing her from half-lowered lids. His voice was cautious, as if he knew he wasn’t going to like her answer.

She knew he wasn’t. Jennel smiled within herself, almost gleeful as she rammed her point home: “Pink lace and satin pillows.”

Grimacing as if from a bad taste, Zack lowered his weight onto the edge of the table, carefully avoiding the spread out plans. “Ugh!” His broad forehead wrinkled in dislike, his dark hazel eyes set in a scowl. “No way! That’s completely opposite from his requests.”

Unable to sit still, Jennel sprang to her feet, banging her fist on the table as she stressed her position. "Which is precisely why she hired me!"

This time she got her point across. He stared down at the torn and dirty linoleum, effectively silenced for the moment, then shot her a doubtful look from under thick brows. "I hope not... although she must've had some crazy notion or she wouldn't have sent you all the way out here."

Jennel breathed in deeply. At last! He was giving her statements serious consideration. At least his flare-ups were brief. She had learned that much about him.

"She's a very emotional person. She reacts strongly to light and colors. I don't think she could stand to live with what you've planned."

"Then why didn't she say so?" he thundered.

"I don't know."

"Crazy!"

"I don't think she's very rational," she explained, remembering the lack of information the older lady had given her.

"She doesn't sound like it. I've known John for years. He can't stand pink lace."

He sounded thoroughly disgusted. In her mind, Jennel pictured this place tied up like a gingerbread house in pink lace and white bows, and suddenly found it difficult not to laugh. "I wouldn't blame him, either... but she does have to live in

it. So she should be considered, too, don't you think?"

He glared at her before taking a deep breath and expelling it. "I suppose so!"

It was a reluctant admission, but one Jennel had thought she would never hear from him. Some people could not admit they were wrong. A tickle of pleasure bounced though her as their eyes met—for once in complete agreement—lifting her spirits anew. Maybe he was approachable, after all.

Sitting back down, she looked again at the plans, at the same time lifting one foot to rest it on the chair in front of her. "There are some other things she requested that you haven't—"

He interrupted suddenly, dropping the tube onto the table with a clunk. "Boston, what have you done to your feet?"

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Nancy Radke

A former school-teacher turned writer, Nancy grew up on a wheat and cattle ranch in the Blue Mountains of Southeastern Washington State, then lived in Alaska and Hawaii before settling near Seattle. Still a farm girl at heart, she surrounds herself with flowers, fruit trees and vegetables, and a horse and dog or two. She has two married children: a daughter whose dry humor pops up at the most unexpected times, and a son who is looking forward to selling his first novel. Her husband of over three decades is an enthusiastic supporter of her writing.

Her love for traditional romances started when she picked up a Lucy Walker novel at a library in Waikiki. The more she read, the more she wanted to write. In 1987 she sent off her first story and has been writing a book a year since. Most of her books have been romantic suspense, but starting with *Turnagain Love*, she will try a few more with humor.

She has been an active member of the Seattle chapter of RWA, and served as chairman of the Emerald City Writer's Conference. You can email her at rom.author@juno.com.



Nancy Radke

Turnagain Love is a wonderful study of contrasts, and romantic opposites.

Affaire de Coeur

First she was stuck on the island and couldn't get off; then she clung to the island and wouldn't get off...not after Jennel Foster discovered that her "rescuer," handsome Zachery Waylan, wanted her to leave immediately.

Both had been hired to remodel the vacant house on Turnagain Island in Washington state, he by the husband, she by the wife. Unable to reach their employers, they must settle things between themselves.

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