



A Season in the Highlands

By Jude Deveraux, Geralyn Dawson, Jill Barnett, Pam Binder, Patricia Cabot

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Jude Deveraux is the author of forty *New York Times* bestsellers, including *The Scent of Jasmine*, *Scarlet Nights*, *Days of Gold*, *Lavender Morning*, *Return to Summerhouse*, and *Secrets*. To date, there are more than sixty million copies of her books in print worldwide. She lives in North Carolina. To learn more, visit www.judedeveraux.com.

Geralyn Dawson is the critically acclaimed author of more than a dozen novels, including *My Big Old Texas Heartache* and *My Long Tall Texas Heartthrob* (both available from Pocket Star Books). A three-time RITA finalist, Geralyn has won numerous awards, including the National Readers' Choice Award and a Career Achievement Award from *Romantic Times*. She is an active volunteer for the Making Memories Foundation and lives in Forth Worth, Texas, with her family. Visit her website at www.GeralynDawson.com and watch for the first novel in her Bad Luck Brides series, *Her Bodyguard*.

Jill Barnett is the *New York Times* bestselling author of fifteen acclaimed novels and short stories. There are more than five million copies of her books in print in seventeen languages. Her work has earned her a place on such national bestseller lists as *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, and *Publishers Weekly*. She lives in the Pacific Northwest. Visit her website at www.jillbarnett.com.

Pam Binder says she believes in happier-ever-after endings. Married 32 years, with three grown kids, she has had a good life with an understanding mate, one who has supported her lifelong writing habit.

"I've always loved to write." says Pam, an Issaquah, Washington resident and office manager at Chinook Middle School. "Poetry, short stories...I cannot remember a time when I didn't like to write or read."

Binder's path to her destiny was circuitous. As she raised her children, she put her writing career on hold. But old-fashioned diligence and a chance meeting with a receptive agent, changed her life.

When Pam Binder was a kid, a fifth grade teacher told her mother: "Pam's reading too much. She's reading during recess." Her mother retorted that she didn't consider her daughter's love of reading grounds for complaint.

About ten years ago, Pam decided she wanted to start writing again in earnest. She went to a Romance Writers of America conference. Then she signed up for the commercial fiction writing sequence at the University of Washington's extension division.

It was there that things fell into place.

Jack Remick, one of Pam's teachers in the UW program, referred to a book called. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* by Christopher Vogler. Based on the teachings of Joseph Campbell, the book teaches that most compelling stories, from the screenplay of *Pretty Woman* to Homer's *The Odyssey*, have the same elements:

- 1)The Quest -- the physical or emotional journey taken by the protagonist.

2)The Dragon -- the conflict the main character must endure, or surmount.

3)A resolution that comes back to the beginning of the hero's quest.

Pam learned that a story is "not a straight line, but a circle." When a character returns to his or her starting point "they're completely different, emotionally transformed."

"It was like a light bulb went off," Pam said. After traveling to Scotland on vacation with her husband, a story fermenting in her imagination suddenly came together and began to gel. The result was *The Inscription*, a time travel romance set in 16th century Scotland. Her book features a clan of immortals and a modern American teacher named Amber MacPhee who is pulled into their world of mystery, romance and adventure.

Pam's next class at the University was taught by the owner of a small regional press. P.R. Goodfellow bought Pam's work-in-progress, printed 2,000 copies of it in 1997 and sold them all.

If that were the end of the story, this would be a respectable happier-ever-after piece. It's not.

In 1998, Pam took the Goodfellow Press edition of *The Inscription* to the Pacific Northwest Writers' Association summer conference. More or less at random, Binder took the book to Liza Dawson, a New York literary agent. Dawson "patted my hand," Pam recalls, took the book on the plane and called her Monday morning.

"I can sell this," Dawson told Pam.

Dawson says she has a test for any book: "Am I having a really, really good time?" She recalls her immediate reaction to *The Inscription*: "I so much enjoyed reading that book. It's a bear of a trip from Seattle to Newark. I found myself laughing, enjoying it...it came as a surprise because I hadn't had any expectations." Though Dawson enjoys mixing with authors at such conferences, finding a saleable one is a relatively rare event.

Dawson sold *The Inscription* and another book by Pam Binder, *The Quest*, to Pocket. *The Quest* will be released in August 2000 under Pocket/Sonnet. It is also a time travel: A Celtic sorceress needs a warrior to free her mother; however, when she cast a spell, the man who appears is, Kenneth MacKinnon, a professional football player from the 21st century. For the first time in his life he is not in control of the situation.

What is this lesson in this happy ending?

Endurance, perhaps. Pam says she has a quality that approximates the "cone of silence" of Maxwell Smart on the old *Get Smart* television show -- she can block out anything and write anytime, everywhere. Writing on a regular legal pad, she writes during her lunch break. After work, she goes to Barnes & Noble and writes there. She credits her UW instructors for teaching her that you don't have to write in sequence. Write an adventure sequence when you feel like it -- write romance when the spirit moves you.

In fact, not a lot has changed since that fifth-grader was chastised for reading during recess. Pam's need to read and write endures. "I look at it as small steps", she says. "As a writer, you need to look at the long term."

The Inscription received 4 and a half stars and a *Romantic Times* Top Pick award in their February Review: "...Readers will be drawn in by Pam Binder's magic touch for blending the natural with the supernatural and creating a spellbinding tale with many subplots, wonderful historical backdrop and color, and the added attraction of the Highlander immortal. This is truly a love story for the ages."

Patricia Cabot is a critically acclaimed and prolific author. "It is a true joy to listen to Patricia Cabot's unique voice," raved *Romantic Times*. She is also the author the *New York Times* bestselling Princess Diaries series, which she writes as Meg Cabot. Patricia Cabot lives in New York City with her husband.

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Chapter One

Tyler Stevens set her coffee cup down on the glass-topped table, then dropped her head back against the wrought-iron chair, closed her eyes, and let the sun warm her skin.

"Playing Aunt Tyler again today?" came a voice she knew well.

"Yes!" Tyler said, smiling, but not opening her eyes.

"And wouldn't you rather saunter downtown to Union Square to pick up some fresh fruit and homemade muffins? Or wander about Central Park on this glorious day?"

"No," she said, then looked across her terrace at Barry. When she'd bought her apartment three years ago, she'd been concerned because her terrace was separated from her neighbor's by only a foot. Like the New Yorker she'd become, she was worried about privacy. But for a year she'd never even once seen the little old man who owned the apartment, and then he moved to Scarsdale to live with his daughter. When the apartment had been purchased by an unmarried man, Tyler had been concerned. Was she going to be fending off the attentions of some guy who wore gold chains? Or would he be a computer nerd and Tyler was his fantasy?

But when she'd seen Barry and saw that he wasn't going to be interested in *her*, she'd been enthusiastic in her welcome. Barry owned a tiny, exclusive florist shop downtown, and within three months after he'd moved in, his terrace was lush with roses and greenery.

Then, about seven months after he'd moved in, he was sued by a young man who'd worked for him, and, even though it wasn't her field of expertise, Tyler had handled the case. The suit hadn't taken much of her time, and she wanted to be friendly with her neighbor, so when Barry had asked for her bill, Tyler had waved her hand. "Don't worry about it," she'd said.

Two weeks later, she'd returned from a business trip, and when she looked across her living room onto her terrace, she saw that it had been transformed into a beautiful garden of flowers, greenery, and even little trees in pots. Openmouthed, she was standing in the middle of the garden, staring, when Barry had leaned over the railing and said, "Like it?"

That had been the beginning of their friendship. Even though she'd been his lawyer on the case (and had won it), she'd kept her professionalism and they had shared little talk of their personal lives. But after Barry had transformed Tyler's boring terrace into a wonderland, they'd become friends. And after Barry had seen that Tyler didn't know how to take care of a garden, Barry

had had a tiny bridge, complete with railings, made. He could slip the bridge into place so he could walk across to Tyler's terrace and weed and water. It wasn't long before the bridge never came down and they were taking care of each other's mail and even phone calls while the other was occupied.

Since, like so many New Yorkers, they were from other parts of the country, in a short time, they each became the only family in the city that the other had.

But that was until six months ago when Tyler's cousin, Kristin Beaumont, had moved to New York. Krissy's father was Tyler's mother's older brother, but, more than that, he was their "savior." Or at least that's what Tyler's mother always called him. When Tyler's father had been killed in an accident when Tyler was six, it was Uncle Thaddeus who'd stepped in and taken over. Tyler's father had been too young to think about such things as life insurance, so he'd left behind a penniless wife and child.

But Uncle Thad had opened his heart and his bank account. He'd paid for everything while his little sister went back to school and got her degree in elementary education. And years later, when young Tyler had shown interest in Uncle Thad's law profession, he'd encouraged her, and when she said she wanted to go to law school, he'd paid for every penny of her education.

So now, Uncle Thad had asked Tyler to "keep an eye on" his daughter when she moved to big, bad New York. Once a week Tyler went to Krissy's apartment for Sunday dinner. Tyler very much enjoyed the time spent with her young cousin. However, there was one teeny, tiny drawback: Krissy was the worst cook on the face of the earth.

"So what's on the menu today?" Barry asked, a watering can in his hand.

"Rocks, for all I know," Tyler said, shaking her head in disbelief. "The girl can take the finest cut of meat in the world and turn it into granite."

"No luck in introducing her to carry-out?"

"None. She says that if she wants to be a wife and mother, then she must learn to cook."

"Still on that, is she?" Barry asked as he stepped up onto the bridge, then walked over and began to inspect Tyler's plants. "No hope in...?"

"If you mean, is there any hope of turning her away from her obsession with her boss? As far as I can tell, there's no hope at all!" Tyler picked up her coffee cup again, saw that it was empty, then put it down. Uncle Thad had used his influence to obtain a high-level position for his beloved daughter as the personal assistant of Joel Kingsley, the founder and owner of the chain of DIY stores called Home Stores. Almost immediately after starting work, Krissy had decided that she was madly, passionately, and insanely in love with her charismatic boss. Never mind that Joel Kingsley was in his forties and Krissy was just twenty-three. And never mind that as far as Tyler could find out, Joel Kingsley didn't seem to think of Krissy as anything except an employee; Krissy still believed she was in love with him.

And as a result, Joel Kingsley was all that Krissy talked about. All. That's it. There had been three dinners in which not a word was uttered about anything other than Joel Kingsley.

Tyler had now spent twenty-four Sunday dinners with her cousin, and while trying to eat

Krissy's inedible food, she'd had to hear everything there was to hear about Joel Kingsley.

For the first three visits, Tyler had tried to reason with her young cousin. She'd smiled indulgently. Krissy's gushing about her new job and, especially, about her new boss had made Tyler feel much, much older than her thirty-five years. "I'm sure that Mr. Kingsley" -- she used the *Mr.* to emphasize the age difference -- "is dashing compared to someone from back home, but -- "

"Oh, Tyler," Krissy had gushed, "you've never seen him. He's so...so wonderful. He walks like...I mean, he...And he...Oh, you just have to see him to understand."

Tyler gave a weak smile. In her field of domestic relations -- a "divorce lawyer," as she was more commonly called -- she'd seen lots of men who walked like...And were so...But she'd also seen the way these dynamic men tried to leave the women with nothing after the divorce.

"And how many times has he been married?" Tyler asked quietly as she used the serrated knife to saw at the meat that Krissy had served her.

"Once, but that's all," Krissy said quickly. "Except for one other time."

"Does that mean that he's been married twice?" She was still trying to cut the meat but was having no luck.

"If you want to get technical, it does," Krissy said defensively, "but I'm not sure that first marriages count."

"They all count in a courtroom." Tyler's index finger was bending back painfully so she gripped the knife handle in her fist.

"You're too much like Daddy. You're too cynical. Would you like a spoon for that?"

"Spoon?" Tyler said, looking up, not understanding.

"For your macaroni and cheese," Krissy said as though Tyler were stupid.

Tyler looked down at the slab of black on her plate. "This is -- ?" she started, then stopped herself. She put down her knife and fork. "Krissy, honey, I know that New York must be exhilarating to you, and I'm sure that a self-made man like Joel Kingsley must be wildly exciting, but -- "

"He's *not* exciting," Krissy said. "He works too hard to have time for anything except business. He never takes time off, and he does everything, oversees everything. If you saw him in the office...There isn't anything anywhere that is too small for him to notice."

Control freak, Tyler thought but didn't say. She couldn't help but look down at her plate. Macaroni and cheese? she thought, trying her best to see if she could make out the curve of the pasta. How did one get cheese to harden like that? She'd heard of blackened fish, but blackened *cheese*?

She looked back at Krissy. "There are a couple of young men in our office who I'd like you to meet."

At that Krissy angrily stood up, removed their plates, and disappeared into the kitchen. Her father had purchased his "baby" daughter an apartment. That the apartment cost more than Tyler's and that it had been professionally decorated, while Tyler's furniture had mostly come from auctions and estate sales, did rankle a bit. "Makes you, as Scarlett said, 'Pea green with envy,'" Barry had said when Tyler first described the place. "Of course if you didn't do so much *pro bono* work, you could afford an apartment like that," Barry had added fondly.

After that first Sunday luncheon, Tyler had done some research on Joel Kingsley. Unexpectedly, she'd found out that he seemed a nice enough guy. The truth was, that Tyler had expected to be told that he preyed on young and innocent girls. But, as Krissy had said, Joel Kingsley had been married when he was in college, but the marriage had broken apart just a year later. He'd remarried two years after he'd graduated and that liaison had lasted for fifteen years.

Tyler had called someone who had given her the number of someone else, so she'd gradually found a person who knew a little bit more about Joel Kingsley than was written in *Forbes* magazine. According to her informant, after fifteen years of being a "business widow," Joel Kingsley's second wife had divorced him and run off with her personal trainer. "Kingsley was generous in the settlement," Tyler had been told. "But Celeste Delashaw has her hands on him now."

"And who is Celeste Delashaw?" Tyler had asked.

"You aren't in the museum set, are you?"

"If you're asking me if I spend my free time going to thousand-dollar-a-plate benefits, no, I don't," Tyler had said more snappishly than she'd meant to.

"Neither do I, but I *read* about them," her informant had snapped back.

Tyler didn't reply to that. She hadn't much time to spare for reading about "society." And, besides, too many of her cases dealt with women who'd put men through school, while raising their children almost single-handedly. Finally, when the kids were out of the house and the man was a success, the wife was ready to enjoy what she'd worked for, but too often, the man then dumped her for a younger woman. Tyler had seen too many of these fifty-something women who were facing bleak futures alone.

"Celeste Delashaw is the former wife of Maximilian Aldrich. You have heard of him, haven't you?"

Tyler had looked at her watch. She was due in court in fifteen minutes. Thank heaven she was on her cell phone; she picked up her pace. "Sure. Steel."

"As in cars, boats, and planes."

"All I want to know is the character of this man, Joel Kingsley. My young cousin works for him and she has a serious crush on him. Is he likely to take advantage of her?"

There was a pause on the other end of the phone. "I haven't heard those terms since I left Iowa. 'Crush.' 'Take advantage of her.' Are you asking that if she looks at him in invitation, is he likely to tell her that he loves her just so he can screw her on top of the copy machine?"

"More or less," Tyler said, her lips tight at such a thought about her beloved cousin.

"Not as long as Celeste Delashaw is after him, he won't."

"What about *him*!?" Tyler said in exasperation. "Not her. Him!"

"Keep your shirt on. I haven't heard anything like that about him. His wife left him because she never saw him, not because he was making the secretaries. However, he is a man. What's your cousin look like?"

Tyler didn't want to answer that. "Thanks," she said. "I owe you one"; then she pushed the "end" button on the phone and cut off the connection.

But, honestly, after that conversation Tyler wasn't much better off than she had been before. Joel Kingsley might be a good guy, but he was rich and powerful and he was probably surrounded with girls like Krissy who adored him. He wasn't married, but he was dating a rich woman who seemed to be protective of her "property."

"So why don't you take some food with you when you go?" Barry was saying now.

"I tried that. She puts it in the refrigerator and serves what she's cooked. Barry, what am I going to do about this? Uncle Thad expects me to oversee my cousin, but she's developed this infatuation with a man nearly twice her age. Krissy has always been so sheltered. She has no idea what can happen to her in this world."

"And you do?" Barry asked cynically. "It seems to me that you two are at opposite ends of the world. Your little cousin thinks that men can do no wrong, while you spend your days dealing with men whose only concern is how much wrong they can do."

"You aren't going to start on my love life again, are you?" she said, picking up her coffee cup, then standing. She was still wearing her heavy terry-cloth bathrobe.

"Can't start on something that doesn't exist, can I?" Barry called after her as she went inside the apartment.

Once inside her apartment, Tyler looked at the clock. There wasn't time to have another cup of coffee and to continue exchanging gibes with Barry. She had to get dressed to go to her cousin's for Sunday dinner.

Forty-five minutes later, Tyler was standing outside Krissy's apartment door and ringing the bell. The doorman had let her up, but now Krissy wasn't answering. Like the overprotective aunt Barry accused her of being, Tyler was instantly worried. Digging into her handbag, she removed the key to Krissy's apartment that she kept there for "emergencies."

Once inside, Tyler saw that there were no lights on in the apartment and there was no smell of burned food coming from the kitchen. In fact, when Tyler went into the kitchen, it was clean and neat, with no signs of food preparation. But the perfectly clean kitchen only added to Tyler's fears, for Krissy was a very conscientious young woman. If she invited someone to dinner, she'd not forget.

When Tyler heard a sound like a kitten mewling coming from the bedroom, she began to run down the hall, her heels clicking on Krissy's inlaid hardwood floors.

When Tyler pushed open Krissy's bedroom door, she gasped, for there was Krissy lying in bed, her face pink with what looked like fever. Around her were three boxes of tissues, with a pile of used tissues on the floor. On the bedside table were four brown plastic bottles of pills, a thermometer, and two bottles of water.

When Krissy looked up at Tyler, she said, "I'm sick," in a congested voice.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Tyler said, annoyed but relieved to have found her cousin at last, as she felt Krissy's forehead. It was warm but not burning. "Why didn't you call me earlier? I would have come over and taken care of you."

"I know how busy you are, so I called Daddy and he sent a doctor to me."

Tyler looked at Krissy in disbelief. "You called Uncle Thad and he flew a doctor to New York?"

"No," Krissy said, weakly lifting her hand. "He got a doctor in New York to come to my apartment. The man was ever so nice, but he said that I have the flu and that I must stay in bed, so I can't go."

Tyler was still recovering from the shock of hearing that her Uncle Thad could get a New York doctor to make a house call. "Of course you can't go anywhere. You're to stay in bed and I'll take care of you. My law firm owes me about fifty weeks or so of vacation time, so I'll take some time off and I'll...I know, I'll introduce you to New York food delivery."

"But you can't!" Krissy said, then she put her hand to her head and flopped back on the bed. "You have to go to Scotland this afternoon."

Sitting down on the edge of the bed, Tyler picked up the medicines and read the labels. She wondered which drug was making her cousin delirious?

Putting the bottles down, she smiled sweetly at Krissy. "No, dear, I'm not going to Scotland this afternoon. Nor to Valhalla or even to Brigadoon. I'm going to stay right here with you, and -- "

"No!" Krissy said, again rising out of the bed. "You have to go. It's the only way. Joel needs you. Me. He needs me, but I can't -- "

Tyler pushed Krissy back against the bed. "Now calm down. Why don't I order in something for us to eat and after you've eaten, you'll feel much better. How about some fresh-squeezed orange juice and some bagels? Or maybe some chicken soup. Kosher. I know a superb deli that -- "

"We don't have time to eat," Krissy said, and there were tears in her eyes. "You have to get on a plane and go."

Tyler's voice was exaggeratedly calm. "Why don't you give me the name and number of that doctor Uncle Thad found for you so I can call him?"

"I'm not crazy," Krissy said, then she began to cry for real. Grabbing a handful of tissues from the box nearest her, she wiped her eyes, then threw the lot onto the floor.

Tyler looked at the other tissues on the floor. When you had the flu, you didn't usually have

sinus drainage that called for this many tissues to be used. "Have you been crying?" Tyler asked. "Is this what all these tissues have been used for?"

Krissy opened her mouth to answer, but instead, she grabbed another handful and covered her eyes.

All her life, Tyler had been a sap about her pretty, young cousin. There was twelve years difference in their ages, and Tyler had first seen Krissy when she was just three days old. Tyler had changed Krissy's diapers and helped her learn to walk. Many times, Tyler's mother had chided her daughter for saving her allowance and spending it on her young cousin, buying her things that Krissy's parents could easily afford to give her. But Tyler had so very much loved to see her cousin's dimpled smile when she opened her gifts.

When Tyler was fourteen, she'd started baby-sitting the two-year-old Krissy and the bond between them had strengthened. Tyler had been a serious child and she'd hated high school, with the girls backbiting each other as they competed for boys Tyler didn't want in the first place, so spending time with Krissy had been an outlet for her.

Tyler's mother had worried about her daughter, wanting her to socialize with her peers more, but Uncle Thad had watched his niece playing with his daughter and said, "Tyler listens to her own drummer. Quit worrying about her because she doesn't spend her life obsessed with boys and clothes."

So, in the end, Tyler's mother had given up trying to persuade her daughter to be a "normal" teenager and had instead used the time that Tyler was with her cousin to take up square dancing. And it was in the square dancing classes that she'd met the man who became her second husband.

When Tyler had gone away to a university to study law, the bond between her and Krissy had been stretched, for Krissy was as social as Tyler wasn't. The first year at college, Tyler had been worried about Krissy, thinking that she would miss her a lot, but at Christmas Tyler had seen that Krissy had already made many new friends.

As Tyler had stood by, watching Krissy playing happily with six other little girls, Uncle Thad had put his arm around her. "Aren't you a little young to be having empty-nest syndrome?"

"I'm glad she has friends," Tyler had said, but there was a catch in her throat.

Eventually, Tyler had become involved in her law studies and there were a couple of young men in college who interested her, but they'd received job offers in different states and neither relationship had held up over time and distance.

In the years since she'd passed her bar exam, Tyler had lived in New York and practiced domestic law. During that time, she had two serious relationships and had lived with one man for two years, but they'd split up because Tyler was doing better than he was. It hadn't been money that had angered him, but the fact that Tyler was always winning her cases. The final straw came when they had been on opposite sides in a courtroom and Tyler had trounced him.

So when Uncle Thad had called and said that Krissy was moving to New York and would Tyler look out for her, Tyler had been quite happy to do so. Aside from the food, Tyler enjoyed being with her young cousin. "Frustrated motherhood," Barry had said the first time Tyler had

told him about her long relationship with her cousin.

Now, Tyler looked back at Krissy. "I so much wanted to go with him," Krissy said as she blew her nose, again throwing the tissues onto the floor. Of course "him" meant Joel Kingsley.

To hide her frown, Tyler bent over and picked up the tissues and put them into the wastebasket, but they wouldn't all fit, so she went into the kitchen to get a grocery bag. On the counter by the sink was an open notebook. "Tell him the truth about Delashaw," was written at the top of the page. "Take the black teddy and the red heels," was on the next line. "Pretend you like lawnmowers," was on the third line.

Tyler's frown was deeper when she returned to the bedroom, and when she saw Krissy struggling to get out of bed, her lips tightened into a thin, hard line. "Just what do you think you're doing?"

"I have to go," Krissy said. "He needs me. My date book has all the telephone numbers he needs and he depends on me."

"Down!" Tyler ordered as she pushed her cousin back toward the bed. Krissy's chest was hot, and she was sure that Krissy's eyes were more red than they had been a few minutes ago. "You aren't going anywhere. And I'm sure that Kingsley can find someone else to go with him."

"Not now," Krissy wailed. "Not at this late date. At least not...But even if he could, it doesn't matter. You have to go. You're the only one."

Tyler was tucking her cousin into bed, twisting the coverlet about her so tightly that she wasn't able to move. "Don't be ridiculous. What do I know about home...things?" she finished. Truthfully, even though Joel Kingsley's stores were all over the U.S., she'd never been in one of them, so she had no idea what they sold.

Krissy grabbed Tyler's arm. "Oh, Tyler, you have to do this for me. If I can't go, then Mr. Kingsley will call Marilyn, and she has the hots for Mr. Kingsley so bad that it's embarrassing. And she's really pretty. She changed her name to Marilyn because she looks like that other one, the old one."

It took Tyler a moment to think who Krissy meant. "You mean *Marilyn Monroe*?"

"Yes, that one. She wants Mr. Kingsley for her own, and she'll do something awful if she goes with him on this trip."

Stepping back from the bed, Tyler looked down at her young cousin. "How many of you in your office are after Kingsley?"

"Why, all of us, of course," Krissy said as though Tyler had asked a rhetorical question.

"And what about Ms. Delashaw?" Tyler asked. "Isn't Kingsley engaged to marry her?"

Krissy waved her hand in dismissal. "Oh. Her. She's *old*. In another six or seven years she's going to be forty."

Tyler had to turn away before she said something that would make her sound hurt. In a mere five years she was going to be hitting the big four-oh. She turned back to Krissy. "So you want

me to go to Scotland to keep this Marilyn from getting her claws into your boss? You want me to save him for *you*?"

Krissy didn't seem to be aware that Tyler was being sarcastic. "Yes!" she said happily, glad Tyler at last seemed to understand the situation. "That's it exactly. I want you to go to Scotland in my place and make sure that that Delashaw woman doesn't do anything drastic and -- "

"Such as?" Tyler asked in her lawyer-voice. *Drastic* was a word that frightened her. In her profession *drastic* could mean taking a chain saw to the living room furniture rather than letting the spouse have it, or it could mean kidnaping the children. *Drastic* was not a word that she liked.

"Marry him!" Krissy said in a near-shout.

"But maybe if he got married, then you girls -- " Tyler began, but Krissy's screech cut her off.

"Could what?!" Krissy said in a voice that sounded full of pain. "Live without him? How could we do that? If you'd only meet him, you'd see what I mean. At least I think you'd be able to imagine. It's not as though he's *your* type, but he's the type of every other red-blooded female on this earth."

"Would you mind telling me exactly what that means?" Tyler asked, tight-lipped. "Exactly what *is* my 'type'?"

Krissy was not one to grasp subtlety. She took people at their word, not at their tone. "Oh, you know," she said, waving her hand in the air. "Like all those boyfriends you used to bring home. You know, uptight and rigid. Afraid to have any fun."

Tyler's back straightened. "I have no idea to whom you're referring," she said stiffly.

"Chester, Marshall, Phillip, and...What was that other one's name?"

"Brighton," Tyler said, narrowing her eyes at her cousin. How could such a nice little girl have grown up into such a -- She stopped her thought as the door-bell rang, and, gratefully, she nearly ran from the room to answer it. "No *fun*!" she muttered. "How absurd!" Of course she'd had fun. Maybe not as much fun as someone like Krissy, who had studied what her father called "the home arts" in college, had had, but then Tyler had been working toward a profession and --

Opening Krissy's apartment door, she was greeted by a very handsome man: tall, broad-shouldered, beautiful eyes. For a quick moment she thought that he was Joel Kingsley come to visit his ailing assistant. But this man was too young to be Kingsley. A quick glance downward and she saw that he was carrying a black leather bag.

"You're the doctor?" Tyler asked, incredulous.

"Yes," the young man answered; then Tyler saw his face turn red. "I, uh, I came by to, uh..."

"Check on your patient," Tyler said brightly, smiling as she stepped aside to open the door wide. And as she looked at this young man, she understood everything. Obviously, Uncle Thad was also worried about Krissy's growing attachment to her much-older boss. But instead of lectures and admonitions, he had used the opportunity of Krissy's illness to put her in contact

with another man, a younger, more suitable man. "Right this way," Tyler said, still grinning.

In the bedroom, Krissy was out of the bed and standing in front of her closet. Even from the back she looked so weak that she might faint at any second.

"What are you doing out of bed!?" the doctor thundered, then went across the room in two strides, where he swept Krissy into his arms and carried her back to the bed.

Tyler stood to one side, watching with her eyes so wide open they hurt. In her entire life, no man had ever swept *her* into his arms and --

"I have to get up," Krissy said weakly as she looked up into the doctor's big brown eyes. "I have to get on a plane and go to Scotland because Tyler won't go for me."

At that the young doctor turned eyes that said, "How could you be so selfish?" toward Tyler. Instantly, her lawyer's instinct made her want to defend herself against this injustice. But as Tyler was thinking that she could not do this absurd thing of going to Scotland, she remembered how stubborn Krissy could be. Tyler wouldn't have put it past her cousin to, the minute after Tyler left, indeed get on a plane to Scotland. And if Tyler made her miss this flight, Krissy would just take another one.

On the other hand, if Krissy was left alone with this beautiful young man, maybe he could persuade her to forget about Old Man Kingsley.

"I, uh..." Tyler began. Both pairs of eyes were on her. "I'd have to pack and, uh...The tickets are in your name," she said.

"Actually, I called Daddy this morning and we talked about it, so..."

When Krissy didn't finish her sentence, Tyler, following her glance, looked toward the top of the dresser and picked up the two packets of plane tickets lying there. One was in Krissy's name, the other in Tyler's. Once again, Uncle Thad had accomplished the impossible.

"I know that you always carry your passport with you, so I took a chance," Krissy said. "And you don't have to pack. You can take my suitcase. We're close enough in size that you can wear my clothes. Everyone's always said that we look alike. Don't we, Jeff?"

The doctor looked Tyler up and down, and it was obvious that he did not think that she looked much like Krissy. In fact, if Tyler went by what she saw in this young man's eyes, she was ready for the glue factory.

"Sure," he said slowly. "With a little..." He shrugged as he turned back to Krissy. "I can't see you wearing clothes like that."

Frowning, Tyler looked down at her Sunday clothes: baggy khakis, a big loose-knit shirt, white tennis shoes. She spent all week wearing prim little suits, so on weekends she wanted to be comfortable. And, yes, she'd been told more than once that she dressed to be off-putting to men. And maybe they were right, but she wasn't interested in getting a man, so --

As she looked at the doctor bending over Krissy, Tyler had the idea that if she weren't in the room, that in another minute they'd be kissing.

"She isn't going to do this for me, so I have to get up and go," Krissy said, sounding as though she were a dying swan. "I can't let him down. I have to -- "

"All right!" Tyler said. How could it be that she could go up against some of the biggest attorneys in New York and stand her ground, but her little cousin could wrap her around her finger? "But I really *must* go home and get my own clothes and -- "

"There isn't *time!*" Krissy said with passion. "The plane leaves in two hours. You're barely going to make it to the airport and be able to check in. It is an international flight, you know."

Since Tyler had never been out of the U.S., no, she didn't know what Krissy meant. "I can't --" Tyler began again, thinking about the cases she had and what she needed to do on Monday and whom she had to see and whom she had to call. But then she looked at the two young people staring up at her. Krissy's eyes were pleading, while the doctor's were skeptical, saying that Tyler couldn't and wouldn't do it.

There was a suitcase on the floor, and she assumed it was Krissy's, packed with expensive clothes that Uncle Thad had paid for. To Tyler's knowledge, Krissy had never bought anything on sale in her life. "You just don't have the choice that you do when the clothes are first put out on the racks," Krissy had said often. "But you don't have the bills that you do when you buy on sale," Tyler had replied.

"Stop thinking about all the bad things that could happen and just *go!*" Krissy said.

"I can't possibly..." Tyler said under her breath, still thinking about all the reasons why she couldn't do this thing. But one of her hands was on the suitcase and the other held the tickets and Krissy's itinerary.

She hadn't had a vacation in four years, not since she and Phillip had gone to Arizona together. But then, as Krissy said, Phillip hadn't been much fun. In fact, he'd eaten something bad the first night and spent most of the week throwing up.

"Mr. Kingsley booked three suites," Krissy said softly. "One for her, one for him, and one for me." She lowered her voice. "In a castle. The rooms are in a castle."

At dinner one evening, when Krissy was just four years old, she'd asked her father to buy Tyler a castle because all the books Tyler read to her were about castles. "She really, really, really wants one," Krissy had said to her father. As for Tyler, she'd been so embarrassed that she'd wanted to slide under the table. After that it had become a family joke. "Read any good castles lately?" her relatives would ask. Then her grandmother would turn it around and ask, "So when are you going to get a knight to live in the castle with you?"

Now, Tyler stood blinking at Krissy. She knew she was too old to be enticed by the thought of what was really just a building made of stone. But when she thought of her current cases and how her assistant could take care of everything...And when she thought of spending a few days in a real castle...

"Built in 1306," Krissy said, her voice barely a whisper.

Tyler started to say something sensible, but the next moment she closed her mouth, grabbed the suitcase, and ran from the apartment with only her hand raised to say good-bye. In the taxi on

the way to the airport, she used her cell phone to call people and tell them that she had to go away for a few days on family business. "Emergency," she said and left it to their imaginations to conjecture what tragedy had called her away.

At the airport she bought a biography of William Wallace; then, when she boarded British Airways, she found to her delight that dear Uncle Thad had booked her a first-class seat. Smiling, Tyler settled back into her seat, took out her book, and read while sipping champagne.

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