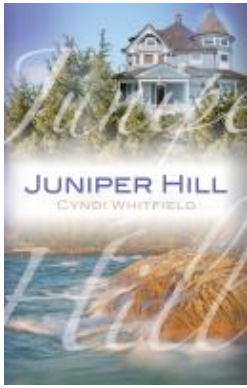


JUNIPER HILL

CYNDI WHITFIELD



When Tessa Stevens inherits a Victorian home in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, it seems the perfect place to disappear while recovering from a divorce. But after meeting her elderly neighbor, Henry, the season takes unexpected turns. Tessa finds herself caught up in Henry's life story, involving World War II hardship, deep family secrets and the power of true love. What Tessa doesn't realize is how the story of Henry's life will, ultimately, change her own.

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Juniper Hill

Cyndi Whitfield

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One of the main characters in this book, Henry Deffler, is based on the author's friend, Raymond Percival. The portions of this book relating to World War II, both in the United States and in Europe, are based on actual accounts of Raymond's experiences during that time. All other characters are fictitious and any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

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CHAPTER 1

Tessa Stevens kept a firm grip on the rail as she walked down the long flight of stairs leading from the Oakland County Courthouse building. She kept her head high, concentrated on calmly putting one foot in front of the other. On reaching the bottom of the stairway, she walked quickly to the street, crossing over to the parking lot.

She found her blue Chevy Equinox and hit the key fob to unlock the door. Sliding in, she started the engine and backed out quickly, turned onto the first street she came to in the maze of government buildings. She followed the street until it led to another and then another. It didn't matter where she was going. She was in no shape to be driving anyway. She saw another parking lot coming up on her left and pulled in, skidding to a stop in the first parking slot.

Putting the car in park, she threw her arms around the steering wheel, put her face down on them and burst into tears.

Her world started to crumble six months before. Mark, her husband of seven years, was an Ob/Gyn at Crittenton Hospital in Rochester Hills, Michigan, where they lived. He was extremely attractive, with blondish hair and green eyes and she'd fallen for him soon after they met. Her friend, Carmen, introduced the two of them at a party she threw over Christmas during their senior year in college. They began dating and were married just over a year later.

Once Mark completed his residency and was established, he'd told Tessa she wouldn't need to work anymore. He was certainly bringing in a nice income on his own and Tessa immediately quit her job as administrative assistant at an insurance agency in Rochester Hills.

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She spent the next three years volunteering at various local organizations and was grateful that she was able to give of her time without worrying about a paycheck.

God knew things had been tight for a long time while Mark was in medical school. They'd lived in a one bedroom apartment, spending her paycheck only on rent, food and bills. There was no room in the budget for more than that.

But Tessa still believed those were the best years of their marriage. They sometimes didn't see each other for a couple days at a time when he was working a 20-hour shift. But when they had an evening together, they would hole up in the apartment and make love for hours or watch old movies and eat popcorn. She was madly in love with him and he with her.

Once he'd established himself, they bought a house in Rochester Hills, a beautiful colonial with a living room, dining room, office and four bedrooms.

That was when Tessa brought up the subject of children. She'd been biding her time for six years knowing they could never afford a baby on her salary. But once they had the house and Mark's income, she was more than ready.

Mark, unfortunately, was not. In fact, he told her he wanted to wait a few years. Tessa was disappointed, to say the least, and they began arguing. Sometimes they didn't speak for days on end and it made for a tense marriage. Several years passed and she began to lose hope they would *ever* start a family.

One day, six months ago, she'd come home from volunteering at the Baldwin Center. She'd opened her laptop to find an email from Mark. He said he didn't want to be married anymore. He'd found someone else and had already moved his things out while she'd been gone that morning.

Tessa had run from the den to their bedroom upstairs. Throwing open his closet, she saw it was true. He'd emptied it out completely. He'd even taken his old record collection.

She called his office and left a message for him to call her, but he never did. She tried repeatedly to get hold of him on his cell

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phone, with no luck. Tessa received divorce papers the following week and today the divorce had been finalized.

Sitting in her car in the middle of a half empty parking lot, she finally stopped crying. God, she was pitiful. She had nothing left. Well, except the house. She'd been able to keep that in the divorce settlement and Mark had been fine with it. He would even continue making payments each month until it was paid off in another twelve years.

But, although she'd had six months to think about it, she was no closer to deciding what she wanted to do. Mark had been taking care of her financially, but soon she would need to get a job. She had her secretarial skills to fall back on and knew she could earn enough to keep up with bills and a car payment. But she'd been a little unfocused for a while now. In fact, to be honest, she'd been a mess for the last six months.

Friends rallied around her for the first few months, but anger and depression had taken turns with her and only her closest friends still called anymore.

Tessa pulled a package of tissue out of her purse and blew her nose. She could really use a shot of confidence right now; it was in short supply these days.

'The other woman' turned out to be a nurse Mark was working with at the hospital. She'd had to force that much out of him.

He finally returned her call, almost two weeks after he left with his shirts, pants and record collection.

"Who is she?" Tessa had screamed into the phone.

"Tessa, calm down. That's not important. Whether or not I'm with her is unimportant. I just want a divorce."

"But why?" Tessa knew she sounded like a whining child, but didn't care. He had hurt her and she deserved to know why.

Mark sighed, but his voice grew gentle. "Tessa, you and I want different things. You want a family and I don't. I like being free and easy, putting my money into cars, vacations, fun. Not into playpens and orthodontists. Things were so tight for so long and now I can afford so much. I want to spend my money on things I enjoy. I can tell you're ready to nest and, frankly, I'm not. I gave it

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a lot of thought before I ever met Peggy and then when she started at the hospital, well..." he trailed off.

"Peggy? Her name is Peggy?"

"Yes, Tessa," he said, as though talking to a small child. "Her name is Peggy. Peggy LaRue."

"LaRue?" laughed Tessa. "My God, is she a stripper?"

Mark sighed again. "Tessa, being vindictive doesn't become you. Calm down."

Tessa shook her head. "You sent me an *email* telling me you wanted a divorce. An *email*! You didn't even have the decency to sit down with me and break the news. You really don't understand how I'm feeling, do you? And you don't want to know."

"My lawyer will be in touch, Tessa. Take care of yourself." Mark hung up.

Her friends, Kate and Elise, had been with her through everything since middle school and they picked her up over and over again through the next six months.

Mark left in November and Christmas that year was horrendous. Kate had plans to drive down to Ohio to stay with her parents and she'd insisted on bringing Tessa. Her parents, Doug and Beverly, had been kind and understanding when Kate explained the situation. Tessa still felt they were relieved when she and Kate left before the new year to drive home. Who needed a gloomy gus around?

Tessa was so angry those first months, she was thankful they hadn't owned a gun. She truly believed that if they'd had one in the house she would have shot Mark AND Peggy to put them both out of her misery.

At other times, the sadness overwhelmed her. She was alone. They had been so happy together. She'd encouraged Mark and supported him all through medical school, had worked her tail off to bring in enough money to keep them in the tiny apartment they'd had. How dare he do this? And then she was back to anger.....

She stared at her reflection in the mirror a lot. No wonder Mark left her. Who wanted a wife with mousy brown hair and average, every day looks? She wondered what Peggy LaRue looked

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like. She was probably a natural blond with smoky blue eyes or maybe a redhead with eyes of emerald green. One of those women you always envied with the beautiful, auburn tresses.

Thinking along these lines was never good and usually managed to depress her even more.

Tessa's cell phone rang and she glanced at the screen. It was Kate. She hit a button and put the phone to her ear.

"Tessa? Are you okay?" Her friend sounded a little frantic. "You were going to call me when you left the courthouse. Hello?"

Tessa sighed. "I'm fine, Kate. I just pulled over into a parking lot to have a bit of a breakdown, but I'm okay now."

"Poor kid!" Kate sympathized. "Let's go to dinner tonight. My treat."

"No. I'm not in the mood."

"Okaaaay, how about I bring in Chinese? I'll call Elise and she can join us. We'll watch old movies. But only ones where the wife kills her husband and goes on to get rich and live happily ever after."

Tessa laughed weakly. "Okay."

"Seven o'clock. See you then!"

Over chicken lo mein and shrimp fried rice, the three women sat cross-legged on the floor around Tessa's living room coffee table.

Kate and Elise were the exact opposite in looks. Kate was a natural blond, her hair cut into a cute bob around her face. She had beautiful blue eyes and a tall, lanky frame. She'd been on the track team in high school and still looked every bit the athlete. She loved tennis and played on a league as well as with Tessa almost every Saturday morning.

Now Kate held up an eggroll and pointed toward the ceiling with it.

"I do believe this is the best part of the meal," she crooned.

Elise, taking a sip of the margarita she held in her hand, laughed.

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“Why are we drinking margaritas with Chinese food? Shouldn’t we be drinking saki?”

Elise had black hair, cut short and spiked in the front. She had white skin and beautiful big brown eyes and looked like a china doll. Unlike Kate, Elise was only five feet tall and about thirty pounds overweight.

“Saki?” asked Tessa. “That’s Japanese!”

All three laughed. The margaritas were loosening them up and they were enjoying the evening together, even if it was in response to Tessa’s divorce being finalized.

When the laughter died down, Kate put her head back against the couch behind her and grew serious.

“I think you should do something out of the ordinary, Tess. Do something you never thought you’d do. Travel to some foreign country or.....I don’t know....bungee jump or something.”

Elise tilted her head to one side, her eyes narrowed in thought.

“I think a trip to Europe would be nice. A tour through England, France and Germany. Wouldn’t that be fun?”

“Believe it or not, guys, I’m not in the mood to do any of that. I just want to sit in this house and lick my wounds for a while. I told the Baldwin Center I’d be back next week to volunteer, so I have five days to hang out and do nothing.....and try to come up with a plan for my life.”

The thought was overwhelming and, without saying a word, they all took another swallow of their margaritas.

CHAPTER 2

Six weeks later, Tessa was still at a loss. She was tired so often and had little energy. She knew it was a sign of depression.

Kate and Elise had been keeping in touch as much as they could, but both were still single and working full time. They had full schedules and Tessa couldn't expect them to come running every time she felt lonely.

Kate was a gym teacher in the nearby city of Troy and kept busy over the summers working for the Parks and Recreation Department in putting together sports camps for kids in the area. Elise owned a small boutique in downtown Rochester called Daisy House. It was packed with all types of gift items from stationary and unique office accessories to earrings and purses. It was fun to walk through and check out all the different displays.

Kate and Tessa helped Elise realize her dream of owning her own boutique by helping to paint and wallpaper the store space when their friend leased the property. Together, they turned it into the space she'd always wanted, complete with daisies painted on the walls, giving it her signature trademark.

That was over a year ago and Elise seemed to be making the boutique a success. Tessa had helped her friend at the store in the beginning by ringing up customers and helping them make selections. But since the divorce, she'd worked only at the Baldwin Center.

In fact, her entire world now revolved around helping out at the Center, where she answered phones and entered donations made to the center into the computer. She'd started out volunteering one day a week, but since the divorce, she'd taken on a second day. She enjoyed helping out and the center made her feel useful.

The Baldwin Center offered meals from their soup kitchen to the residents of Pontiac, a depressed area just twenty minutes from where Tessa lived. Residents were given access to computers

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where they could work on a GED and job search, and Tessa helped out with getting can goods donated for Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets each year. Hundreds of families benefitted from the food that was given.

Tessa worked hard at the center, but afterwards, when she came home, the sadness enveloped her once again. She trudged on, one day at a time, wondering where her life was headed.

Now, finally out of desperation, Tessa went online and started checking out travel packages to Europe. Maybe her friends were right and she needed to get away and do something totally out of the ordinary. At some point, she would have to look for a job, but she wasn't up for it yet. Mark seemed okay with her staying in a volunteer status for a while and if his guilt paved the way for her, she could accept that.

It was on a cool, rainy morning in mid-May when something happened to shake her little cocoon.

She was sitting at the kitchen table having toast and coffee at nine in the morning when the phone rang. Lately, she'd taken to staying in her robe for breakfast unless she needed to be at the Baldwin Center that day and now she pulled the robe more tightly around her to ward off the chill in the room. She took another sip of her coffee, then answered the phone.

"Is this Tessa Stevens?" asked a male voice.

"Yes. Who's calling?" she asked tentatively.

"I don't know if you remember me. This is Andrew Bennett, Grace Bennett's son."

Tessa remembered him. But his mother, Grace, was someone she knew much better. Grace had married Tessa's dad eleven years ago and became Tessa's stepmother. Tessa and Andrew stood up for their parents' civil ceremony wedding. She remembered Andrew as being extremely good looking with curly brown, longish hair, a tall athletic build and a quick smile.

"Yes, Andrew, I remember you. How is Grace? I haven't talked to her in a couple months."

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"I'm afraid I have bad news," he told her. "My mother passed away yesterday."

Tessa caught her breath. "Oh, Andrew, I'm so sorry! What happened? Was she sick? I just spoke with her in March."

"I don't know if you were aware she had a weak heart. She'd been feeling worn and tired and last night, her heart just gave out. She was sitting in her chair in the living room reading the paper and it just stopped. She'd had the heart condition for a few years, but it was still unexpected. A neighbor went over to visit and found her."

Tessa sighed, a lump forming in her throat. "I knew she had a heart problem, but you're right. It still comes as a shock. I'm so sorry, Andrew. I really loved your mom."

"I know you did. She loved you, too."

Tessa felt her throat constricting. She had really loved Grace. Tessa's own mother died of congestive heart failure when Tessa was only fifteen years old. Her parents had given up on the idea of ever having children when they married in their late thirties and couldn't get pregnant. But Hannah Scott had given birth to their only daughter at the age of forty-six.

When she passed away at only sixty-one, Tessa's father, David, had been devastated. When he met Grace four years later, they fell in love almost instantly and married within the year. Tessa had been happy for both of them.

But their time together was short-lived. David had a massive heart attack that took his life six years later. And now Grace had followed.

"Andrew, is there anything I can do? Are you having a funeral?"

"She'll be laid out tomorrow night and the funeral is on Friday."

He named off the funeral home and gave her directions.

"Tessa," he started hesitantly. "If you're planning to come to the visitation tomorrow, I wondered if we could have dinner together afterwards. I need to talk to you about something important."

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“Oh...sure. I’ll plan to be there around four o’clock.”

They hung up soon after. Tessa spent the rest of the evening wondering what Andrew wanted to talk to her about. Maybe Grace had something of David’s she wanted Tessa to have. Or maybe Grace left her a piece of jewelry. In any case, she’d just have to wait until the next evening to find out.

Kate and Elise insisted on coming to the funeral home, too, but decided to drive separately so Tessa could go to dinner with Andrew.

Tessa wore a black suit to the funeral home and decided on small pearls in her ears. It didn’t seem appropriate to wear more color and black suited her fine these days.

Thinking back on her last conversation with Grace, Tessa was feeling guilty. She’d talked at length about Mark leaving her and moaned about how her life would be changing, how she was so lonely.

Grace had taken it all in stride and consoled her stepdaughter, telling her life would get better and that she was too young to give up on love. Tessa had cried on her shoulder for almost an hour when Grace should have been crying on *hers*.

How selfish I was, she thought. She never said a word about not being well and I was so caught up in my own problems, I didn’t really ask.

She saw Andrew the moment she walked in. He looked the same, just a little older, with a bit of grey in his hair near the temples. Why was it men looked distinguished when their hair started graying? Women just started to look old. She noted he still had that athletic look about him and she still found him to be extremely good looking. He was tall and broad-shouldered with a finely chiseled face.

Only a few other people stood about in the large room.

“Tessa,” he greeted her warmly, and gave her a hug. When he pulled away, she saw Grace lying behind him in a coffin of cream

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colored satin and wearing a beautiful lilac-colored dress. Lilac had been her favorite color.

Tessa moved to the coffin and knelt down. Tears stung her eyes as she looked at this wonderful woman who had made her father so happy. She said a silent prayer and then stood up. Andrew was still behind her and when he saw her face, pulled a hankie out of his suit pocket.

Tess tried to laugh. "Shouldn't I be handing *you* a hanky?"

"Oh, I've had my moments. But I know Mom is in a better place now and that means a lot."

"You're a bigger person than I am. I'd just like to have her back."

Andrew smiled and hugged her again.

They heard a small commotion coming from the door and both turned to see Kate and Elise coming in. They, too, gave their condolences to Andrew and hugged Tessa. They had only met Grace once or twice, but knew she had been loved by David and Tessa.

More friends and family continued to come in and Tessa, Kate and Elise found a few seats to sit and talk. After an hour or so, her friends left and Tessa wandered around the room, looking at the beautiful sprays of flowers and family pictures that had been placed around the room.

She found the large vase of tiger lilies she'd sent with a card. They were Grace's favorite flower. There were a number of pictures in frames that featured David and Grace and a couple of them included Tessa or Andrew.

Seven o'clock came and went and the last remaining people departed for their cars. She watched as Andrew made one last trip to the coffin and, bending over, kissed his mother on the cheek. He then walked over to Tessa and offered her his arm. They walked out to their cars and Tessa followed Andrew to a restaurant several miles away.

It was an upscale family restaurant and not too busy at this time in the evening.

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They both ordered spinach pie and a salad with coffee and when the waitress disappeared, Andrew leaned forward.

"Tessa, I wanted to meet with you tonight because of something unusual that has come up."

Tessa's eyebrows went up. "I have to admit, I've been curious about why you wanted to talk to me."

"It's my mom." He waited for a moment and when he just got a blank look from Tessa, went on. "You may remember my mother was always well organized." He smiled when Tessa nodded. "She and my father made up a will years ago, but when she developed her heart condition, we talked about a few things and she made some changes. That was just a little over a year ago. As her only child, I'm her executor."

Andrew hesitated, then chose his words carefully.

"You called my mother a couple months back and told her you were going through a divorce." He looked at Tessa for confirmation and she nodded.

"She said you were obviously very upset and she was concerned about you."

Tessa looked down at her lap. "I am so sorry, Andrew," she said quietly. "I didn't mean to burden her with all my problems. I feel terrible."

"No, Tessa!" He waited until she looked up at him. "That's not what I'm trying to say." He blew out a huff of air. "Maybe I'm just not getting to the point fast enough. You see, my mom questioned me on whether or not I wanted to keep Bennett Cottage when she passed. It's been our family summer home for almost twenty years now. Are you familiar with it?"

"I haven't been there, but I know *of* it. Your mom invited me and my husband....well, my ex-husband now, to come out and visit several times when she and my dad were out there, but it was quite a long drive and we never seemed to have the time. I know your mom and dad bought it years ago. It's in the Upper Peninsula, isn't it?"

Andrew smiled. "Yes. It's in Cedar Springs near Whitefish Point. Tessa, Mom wants you to have Bennett Cottage."

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He watched her face closely as it changed from confusion to surprise.

Tessa just looked at him. "Bennett Cottage? Me? I don't understand."

The waitress chose that moment to bring their food and they stopped talking until she left. Andrew didn't even glance at his plate, keeping his eyes on Tessa.

"Mom wants you to have Bennett Cottage," he repeated. "It's paid for and it's yours. You can move up there and live in it or use it as a cottage as my mom did. She said she loved the seclusion of the house because she could go up there and think and not have interruptions. She could contemplate life. It gave her peace. And that's what she wanted for you."

Tessa studied Andrew's face. He didn't seem to be kidding.

"She was going to offer it to you herself and tell you to take it over right away about a year ago, but she was afraid you wouldn't accept it. Then, over the last few months, her health was declining. When you told her about your divorce, she was more adamant than ever that the house go to you and not be sold outside the family."

"But what about you? You're her son. Why would you just give it up? Didn't your mother want *you* to have it?"

"When she asked me about it, I had to be honest and tell her no. I travel constantly with my job and I would never make it up there to spend any time. Honestly, I do love Bennett Cottage, but I'm out of the country with my work more than I'm home. I would have to pay someone to keep it up for me and probably visit once or twice a year if I was lucky."

Andrew reached for her hand and his voice grew soft. "My mother was right in giving it to you. I don't know you very well, but you seem like a kind person and my mother really loved you. This is her way of showing you how she felt and I would be content to know that you were there taking care of the place."

Tessa was overwhelmed. She had a million questions to ask but didn't even know where to begin. She took a moment to think and added cream and sugar to her coffee.

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Andrew tried a bite of his spinach pie, then took a sip of his coffee. He remained quiet, probably understanding how Tessa was feeling.

Taking a sip of her coffee, Tessa finally spoke up.

"Tell me about the house. I don't even know where Whitefish Point is."

Andrew pulled a pen out of his suit pocket and grabbed a napkin from the table. He drew the lower peninsula of Michigan which resembles a mitten and then drew a narrow, oval-shaped area above it.

"This area is the Upper Peninsula, right?" he asked pointing to the oval-shaped area.

"Yes," she agreed.

"Well, you just follow I-75 up from the Lower Peninsula to the Upper Peninsula and head straight for the top of it. It's almost exactly straight up from the Mackinac Bridge. The house is right on Lake Superior."

Tessa's jaw dropped. "Right on the *lake*?"

"Well, the house itself is up on the bluff, but there are stairs my dad built years ago that lead down to the beach and the water. It really is a beautiful place."

Tessa let that register for a moment and tasted her salad.

"What about the house itself? When I think of a cottage, I think of the one my great uncle had on Lake Huron. It had a tiny kitchen and living room and two bedrooms and it smelled like sand and mildew."

Andrew laughed. "This cottage will be a little nicer, I think." He thought for a moment about how to describe it.

"It's a Victorian house," he told her. "It was built in the 1890's. The outside of the home is still very Victorian, but the inside.....well, that's another story. When my parents bought the place in 1995, they started renovating. They weren't up there all the time, of course, but they would go up for a couple weeks at a time and replace the carpet in all the bedrooms or paint a couple rooms. Slowly, they updated the place. About ten years ago, they had the

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kitchen gutted and put in granite countertops and refinished all the original pine flooring throughout the house. It's beautiful."

Tessa shook her head. "This is just too good to be true. I feel like you're going to tell me this is all a joke."

Andrew leaned forward. "This is not a joke, Tessa," he smiled. "My mother knew you would probably react this way, so she asked me to wait to tell you until she was gone." He smiled. "That way you wouldn't argue with her about it."

Not knowing what to say, she cast about for more questions. "What about the legal ramifications? Do we need to have papers signed?"

"I've already checked into that. I need to file form 709 with the IRS to report that the home was gifted to you for a certain amount. That certain amount is almost \$600,000."

"That's what the house is worth?" Tessa asked, her voice squeaking.

Andrew nodded. "I had it appraised so I could do the paperwork. Now, taxes still need to be paid on it each year and they aren't low, due to the location."

He pulled a sheet of paper out of his breast pocket. "This is the tax information."

He handed it to her and she looked at the bottom line. Certainly not insignificant, but still worth the cost if the house was paid off.

He smiled at her. "You're getting a lovely home, Tessa."

Grinning sheepishly, she shook her head. "I guess this *isn't* a joke. I still don't understand, though, how you can be okay with this. The house belonged to your mother and father."

"Tessa, I travel. A lot. I'm in importing and exporting and I travel to different parts of the world on a regular basis. I just got back from India a week ago and I'm off to Hong Kong next week. It would be difficult for me to spend much time in *this* part of the state, let alone the Upper Peninsula. You really would be doing me a favor to take the house and enjoy it." Andrew smiled. "I know you'll love it."

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Tessa shook her head and sighed. "This is crazy, but I accept. I'll take the house. Maybe I'll spend some time up there this summer and decide what to do after that."

"That sounds like a great idea. You really will be getting away from it all," he assured her and they both laughed.

They finished their dinners and were having a last cup of coffee when something occurred to Tessa.

"What about furnishings? You can't be planning to leave *everything*. Will you go up to the cottage to clean it out?"

Andrew leaned back in the booth, a surprised look on his face.

"Strange, but I hadn't thought of that. I suppose I should look through some of my mom's things, maybe pack up a few boxes. Would you mind if I showed up one weekend over the summer to do that?"

Tessa laughed. "Under the circumstances, I feel perfectly fine with it! You're entitled to take whatever you want, no questions asked."

"Well, I'll have to see when I can get up there. Do you have a cell phone I can reach you on? I'll give you a call before I come."

Tessa wrote her number down for him and he gave his number to her.

"I'm not sure what to do with all my mom's clothes," he said quietly. "I'll need to clean her closets out."

Tessa, feeling sorry for him, spoke up.

"Would you like me to clean out her clothes? Did you want them donated?"

Andrew shook his head. "I don't know." He thought about it for a moment and then added, "I guess if you wouldn't mind going through her things, keep whatever you want and donate the rest. Leave all of her jewelry, though, until I get there. She has some pieces that belonged to my grandmother and I'll need to decide what to do with them. Are you okay with that?"

Tessa assured him she was, then added, "Andrew, you haven't mentioned a wife, but if you're married you might want to give everything to her."

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Andrew shook his head again. "Nope. Never been married. I'm never home long enough to get serious about anyone."

He didn't seem to be too upset about it. Reaching into a suit pocket, he pulled out a key ring with two keys attached.

"The gold one is the house key. The silver is for the shed out back. The lawn mower and snow thrower are kept in there with other tools you might need."

"Aah," Tessa commented. "Reality strikes. Even this beautiful old Victorian home has a lawn to be cut and a driveway to be shoveled."

They both laughed.

He reached back into the pocket and pulled out an index card, handed it across the table.

"Here's the address with directions on how to get there. Now I think you're all set."

Tessa just looked at him and smiled. "I feel like I've won the lottery!"

When they were ready to part in the parking lot, she grew serious.

"Thank you so much, Andrew. I will never forget what you and your mother have done."

She reached up to hug him and he hugged her back.

"I'll see you tomorrow for the funeral," she told him and got into her car. Pulling out of the parking lot, everything seemed surreal. She was so saddened at losing Grace, but excited about Bennett Cottage. It seemed like something Grace would do. If someone was hurting, she would comfort them. Tessa could imagine her stepmother trying to think of some way of helping her through her divorce. She'd certainly come up with a plan!

Tessa had a fifteen minute drive home. She knew the route and could have driven it blindfolded. Her thoughts, therefore, returned to Andrew's description of the house...*granite countertops...beautiful, original pine flooring....a Victorian home...completely paid for....unbelievable.*



When Tessa Stevens inherits a Victorian home in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, it seems the perfect place to disappear while recovering from a divorce. But after meeting her elderly neighbor, Henry, the season takes unexpected turns. Tessa finds herself caught up in Henry's life story, involving World War II hardship, deep family secrets and the power of true love. What Tessa doesn't realize is how the story of Henry's life will, ultimately, change her own.

Juniper Hill

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