



Heart's Desire : A Collection of Their Most Touching Love Stories

By Jayne Ann Krentz, Linda Howard, Linda Lael Miller

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Indulge your *HEART'S DESIRE* with your most beloved authors in this very special collection. Selected from the heartwarming anthology *Everlasting Love*, these remarkable tales are treasures to cherish -- and reminders that love is always just a heartbeat away....

Jayne Ann Krentz

"One of the hottest writers in romance today" (*USA Today*) continually lends her master touch to tales of grand passion laced with intrigue. Here she again delights readers with her "tremendous talent" (*Detroit Free Press*), as in modern-day Washington, treachery ignites an unlikely affair of the heart in "**Connecting Rooms**"....

Linda Howard The celebrated author who "knows what romance readers want" (*Affaire de Coeur*) and whose "unforgettable novels [are] richly flavored with scintillating sensuality and high-voltage suspense" (*Romantic Times*), now whisks you to a bewitching country "**Lake of Dreams**," where a woman is lured into a dangerous embrace....

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In "**Resurrection**," the writer whose "talent knows no bounds" (*Rendezvous*), travels back to 1880s Montana, where an abandoned bride searches for a love she thought forever lost in a story that makes it easy to see that "the sweetest kind of magic comes from the pen of Linda Lael Miller!" (*The Literary Times*).

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Jayne Ann Krentz is a *New York Times* bestselling author of contemporary romantic suspense novels. She also writes historical romance under the name Amanda Quick and paranormal romance under the name Jayne Castle. Jayne loves to hear from her readers and can be found at [Facebook.com/JayneAnnKrentz](https://www.facebook.com/JayneAnnKrentz).

Linda Howard is an award-winning author whose novels include the recent *New York Times* bestsellers *Shadow Woman*, *Up Close and Dangerous*, and *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, as well as the Pocket Books releases *Kill and Tell*, *Now You See Her*, *All the Queen's Men*, *Mr. Perfect*, and *Open Season*. She lives in Alabama with her husband and two golden retrievers.

The daughter of a town marshal, Linda Lael Miller is the author of more than a hundred historical and contemporary novels. Now living in Spokane, Washington, the "First Lady of the West" hit a career high when all three of her 2011 Creed Cowboy books debuted at #1 on the *New York Times* list. In 2007, the Romance Writers of America presented her their Lifetime Achievement Award. Visit her at LindaLaelMiller.com.

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Chapter One from *Connecting Rooms*

No one ever said that the devil couldn't have a rose garden, Amy Comfort thought. It just seemed a trifle out of character. On the other hand, the rose garden of the old Draycott place was no ordinary one. And Owen Sweet, Amy had decided, was no ordinary gardener.

"Are you, or are you not, a private investigator?" Amy demanded.

"Depends," Owen Sweet answered. With the lethal precision of a fencer, he used a pair of garden shears on a clotted mass of evil-looking vines.

"What does it depend on?"

"On whether or not I feel like working at it." Owen took hold of the severed vines with heavily gloved hands. He ripped the old vegetation away from the window with a single, powerful motion. "I'm a little busy at the moment."

"Yes, I can see that."

Owen took no notice of her sarcasm. He seized another tangle of vines and dispatched them with ease.

Amy watched, morosely fascinated. She couldn't help it. She liked watching Owen Sweet.

The vegetation he was attacking with such diligence had grown so thickly over the windows of the old house that it had effectively blocked all sunlight from reaching some of the rooms.

Not that sunlight was a common commodity here on Misplaced Island, Amy thought. The forgotten little

patch of land located off the coast of Washington sat squarely in the middle of a rain shadow. A perpetual mist shrouded the island on good days. Dense rain poured down the rest of the time.

The local joke was that the island had earned its name when its original discoverer had temporarily misplaced it in the fog. Whatever the truth of that story, there was no doubt but that one had to be determined to find Misplaced Island.

And, Amy thought, one had to have either a powerful motivation or an extremely odd sense of whimsy to make one's home here. She wondered which of those two possibilities applied to Owen Sweet.

"Owen, this garden went wild years ago, just like the house." Amy was growing increasingly exasperated. Time was running out, and she needed Owen Sweet. "It can wait a few more days before you tame it."

Owen paused briefly to look at her. His sea-green eyes gleamed in the misty gray light. "I'm in the mood to do it now."

Sweet was definitely a misnomer, Amy reflected, not for the first time. As far as she had been able to discern, Owen was anything but sweet, in either nature or temperament. She suspected he was yet another result of a baby having been switched at birth. Happened all the time, they said. Amy wondered what Sweet's parents had thought when they discovered that they had been given a little green-eyed, black-haired demon to raise.

He was proving to be stubborn and thoroughly irritating, but there was something about the man that fascinated Amy. She did not know him very well, even though she had sold him the Draycott place. No one on the island really knew Owen Sweet.

He had moved to Misplaced Island two months ago. Amy had met him when he walked into the real estate office she operated out of the parlor of her cliffside cottage. She had been stunned by her reaction to him. Hunger and longing and a singing sense of joyous discovery barely began to describe it.

She had tried to squelch the feelings. True, she was a struggling romance novelist on the side, but Amy was far too pragmatic to believe in love at first sight. On the other hand, she trusted her own instincts when it came to people. They had stood her in good stead in the real estate business, and she saw no reason to discount them when dealing with members of the opposite sex. One thing was for certain. Those instincts had never reacted with such overwhelming intensity to any of the handful of men she had dated.

Owen had appeared oblivious of her carefully concealed response to him. He had announced without preamble that he'd already toured the island on his own and had checked out the available properties. He had decided to buy the Draycott place.

Amy had been horrified. Everyone on the island knew that the old Draycott house, a Victorian monstrosity, was a disaster from foundation to roof. She had dutifully done her best to steer Owen toward other real estate opportunities, but he had refused to listen to her advice. In the end a sale was a sale. Amy had reluctantly written up the deal.

The only good part about the transaction, she had told herself, was that Misplaced Island was a very small community. She would see Owen Sweet again. She could only hope it wouldn't be in the course of a lawsuit over the Draycott sale. Some buyers tended to blame the real estate agent when they discovered they had made a bad bargain.

But Owen had appeared to be content with his new home when, to her secret delight, Amy had begun to encounter him with increasing regularity at the post office, in the checkout line at the island's only grocery store, and at the tiny bookshop. One of the few facts that she had gleaned concerning him was that he was a voracious reader. At the rate he ordered books from Mrs. Akers, the owner of the bookshop, he would single-handedly keep her small store in the black during the coming winter.

But last week had been the real turning point. After running into her at the post office, Owen had invited Amy to join him in a cup of coffee at the town's one and only café. The conversation had concerned such riveting matters as the weather, the latest novels they had each read, and the limited ferry schedule. Amy had walked on air all the way back to her cottage. Hope had bloomed within her.

She stifled a small, wistful sigh as she watched Owen free another window from its shroud of clinging vines. There was a lean, supple strength about him that captivated her senses. While it was true that, objectively speaking, Owen's grim features could have been created by someone who would have been equally adept at designing junkyard dogs, Amy found him strangely compelling. Which probably said far too much about the limited social life on Misplaced Island, she told herself.

Then again, she had not even been aware of a lack of a social life until Owen had arrived.

She watched him now with brooding determination. This was the first time she had paid a call on Owen Sweet since he had moved into his crumbling abode. She had come on business, not for social reasons. She needed this man. She needed him badly.

It wasn't as if she had a lot of choice. The small sign on the front door of the old Victorian ruin Owen called home said it all. It read SWEET INVESTIGATIONS.

Owen Sweet was the only private investigator on Misplaced Island. There was not a lot of call for his type of work in the small community. Amy was quite certain that since his arrival he had yet to get a single case. She had naively believed that he would be thrilled to have work. Obviously, she had been mistaken.

Amy braced one hand against the garden's stone wall and drummed her fingers with simmering impatience. Unaware or uncaring of her irritation, Owen Sweet went about his work among the grotesquely tangled rosebushes which clogged the garden.

The roses had been abandoned along with the crumbling ruin of a house years ago. Instead of dying off in a bittersweet, genteel manner, they had gone wild, with a vengeance. They climbed the garden walls as though bent on escaping a prison. They formed impenetrable thickets across the cracked paths, choked the empty fishpond, and had apparently been intent on marching up the steps and into the sunporch. Owen Sweet had arrived in the nick of time.

"Can I take it from your attitude that you are not interested in working for me?" Amy asked bluntly.

"Yeah." Sleek muscles moved easily beneath Owen's black T-shirt as he shifted an armload of defeated vines to a growing pile in the center of the garden. "You can draw that conclusion."

"Very well then, you leave me no choice." Amy removed her hand from the stone wall and straightened in resignation. "I shall have to find someone else."

Owen's mouth curved slightly. "Good luck. The last time I looked in the phone book, I was the only PI on the

island."

Amy brushed her hands together and started toward the sagging gate. "I had hoped to give my business to someone local because I believe in supporting the local economy. But since you're not interested, I'm sure I can find someone in Seattle who will be happy to take my money."

"Seattle?"

Amy was aware that Owen had gone very still behind her. She did not turn around. "If I hurry, I can catch the afternoon ferry."

"Damn. Hold on just a minute."

Satisfaction surged through Amy. She had been in real estate long enough to sense when a buyer had undergone a quick change of heart. She paused at the gate to smile at Owen with polite inquiry.

"Was there something you wanted, Owen?"

He scowled ferociously, an expression which did nothing to soften his harsh face. "Yeah. Some answers."

"Sorry, I don't have time to chat. The ferry leaves in a couple of hours and I haven't finished packing."

"Let's get real here." Owen stripped off his gloves as he strode toward her along the garden walk. "What does a woman like you need with a private investigator?"

"A woman like me?"

"No offense, Amy, but you're hardly the type to have the sort of problems that require the services of someone in my line of work."

"What would you know about my problems?"

Owen came to a halt in front of her and planted his fists on his hips. "You're not exactly a mystery woman. You've been living on Misplaced Island for nearly a year. During that time you've opened a real estate agency and published a romance novel. Before you came here, you worked the condominium market in Seattle. You aren't exactly rich, but you did all right in your own real estate investments."

Amy was taken back. "Good grief. How did you -- "

"Everyone on the island seems very fond of you," Owen continued ruthlessly. "I seriously doubt that you have any enemies around these parts. You are thirty years old and have never been married. You do not flirt with married men, so the local women have no reason to dislike you. You are not dating anyone at present, so you have no reason to employ an investigator to tail an errant boyfriend."

Amy gazed at him with mingled anger and amazement. "Are you quite finished?"

"No, not quite. You appear to live like a cloistered nun, Ms. Comfort. Therefore, I find it difficult to believe that you have got yourself into a situation which requires an investigator."

"You seem to have done a fairly thorough job investigating me. May I ask why?"

Owen wiped his sweat-dampened forehead with the back of one muscular bare arm. "That should be sort of obvious."

"Well, it's not obvious to me."

He gripped the top of the drooping gate and contemplated her with narrowed eyes. "No, I can see that."

"I don't know what this is all about, nor do I have the time to find out. If you're not going to accept my case, I've got to find someone else. Please excuse me."

Amy tried to open the gate. Owen took no notice of her effort. Instead, he leaned heavily back against it and folded his arms across his chest. He looked annoyed but resigned.

"Okay, tell me about it," he said.

"Tell you about what?"

"This problem of yours. The one that requires an investigator."

Amy fixed him with a frosty glare. "It's a confidential matter. I see no reason to discuss it with someone who is not going to be working for me."

"Hell, I'll take the case. Now tell me what's got you in such an uproar."

"I don't think that I care for your unprofessional manner."

"Sorry, it's the only manner I've got." He considered her thoughtfully for a few seconds. Then he came away from the gate and took her arm. "Come on, let's go inside. I'll make you a cup of coffee and you can tell me all your problems."

"I'm no longer sure that I want you handling my case."

"Don't be silly. A few minutes ago you were practically begging me to take your precious case."

"I was not begging you. And furthermore, I've changed my mind."

"So have I."

Amy thought about digging in her heels, but her options were extremely limited. It would take time to hunt up an investigator in Seattle. And money. She did not possess unlimited quantities of either. She allowed Owen to lead her up the steps.

The interior of the house was as run-down and abandoned-looking as the garden, but at least nothing appeared to be actually growing on the walls or springing up through the floorboards.

Threadbare velvet curtains that had faded to a peculiar shade of maroon flanked the grimy windows. An atmosphere of gloom and decay hovered over the front parlor. Several pieces of heavy, claw-footed furniture

clustered near the black-marble fireplace. There was very little paint left on the walls and the wooden floors were raw and scarred.

A pang of guilt went through Amy, temporarily erasing her irritation. "I did try to warn you that this was a fixer-upper."

"A fixer-upper?" Owen gave her a derisive look. "It's a life sentence. Wiring's shot. Plumbing's rusted out. Roof needs repair. I'll have to replace the furnace before winter sets in, along with all the appliances."

"Don't you dare blame me. I made you read every single word on the seller's disclosure statement. You knew what you were getting into when you bought this place."

"Did I? That's debatable." But Owen appeared perversely satisfied with his purchase. "Have a seat." Not ungently, he pushed her toward a high-backed, velvet-covered sofa. "I'll get the coffee."

Amy sat down gingerly and surveyed the shabby interior of the parlor. She shook her head in amazement. It was true that she had sold him the house, but she had no idea what he was doing here in it. Why had he come here to Misplaced Island, she wondered.

Owen reappeared a few minutes later carrying a tray laden with a French press coffeepot and two cups. He set his burden down on the battered old coffee table.

"All right, tell me what this is all about." He sank into the depths of one of the massive wingback chairs.

"It's a very straightforward case," Amy said crisply. "My aunt, Bernice Comfort, has recently announced her engagement. I want you to investigate her fiancé, Arthur Crabshaw."

Owen looked up as he poured coffee. "Why?"

"Because there's something about Crabshaw that I don't quite trust. I met him a couple of weeks ago, and I have the distinct feeling that he's hiding something. He appeared out of nowhere a few months after her husband, Uncle Morty, died, and immediately swept Aunt Bernice off her feet."

"You write romance novels, don't you? I would have thought you'd have approved of Crabshaw's technique."

"If you're not going to take this case seriously, please tell me now so that I can find another investigator."

"I'm serious. You have no idea just how serious."

She glowered at him. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Forget it. Why are you suspicious of Crabshaw?"

"My aunt was left quite comfortably well off after Uncle Morty died two years ago," Amy said carefully. "She lives in a small town on the coast. Villantry, Washington. Know it?"

"I've heard of it."

"It's the sort of town where everyone knows everyone else. Crabshaw lived there himself at one time, but he

left the place some thirty years ago. Now he's back."

"And you think he returned because he heard that your wealthy aunt is available?"

"Let's just say that there's something about Crabshaw's appearance on the scene which smacks of opportunism," Amy said.

"What exactly is it about Crabshaw that worries you?"

"It's hard to explain." Amy frowned. "He seems nice enough, and Aunt Bernice is obviously mad about him. But I sensed something a bit shifty beneath the surface."

"Shifty."

"Yes.

"*Shifty* is a rather vague term, Amy."

"I can't be any more specific. I just know that there's something not quite right about that man. I have very good people instincts, you know."

"Is that a fact?"

"Yes, it is," Amy retorted. "Look, I'm going to drive to Villantry this afternoon. Just a social visit, as far as Aunt Bernice is concerned. I'll be staying at the Villantry Inn for a couple of days, because my aunt is having her house remodeled. I want you to come with me."

Owen looked baffled. "What the hell do you expect me to do?"

"Check out Arthur Crabshaw, of course. Surely you don't need me to tell you how to conduct a simple investigation."

"You'd be amazed at what I need."

Amy scowled. "I want you to rummage around in Crabshaw's background. Find out if he's on the level. But I don't want my aunt to realize what you're doing. If he's legit, I'd rather she didn't know that I hired you. It would be embarrassing and awkward."

"Embarrassing and awkward." Owen nodded sagely. "That's me."

Amy blushed. "I didn't mean that as a personal remark."

"Right." Owen leaned back in his chair and stuck out his legs. He crossed his booted feet and regarded Amy with a truculent expression. "I'm supposed to go to Villantry with you, but no one is supposed to know who I am or what I'm doing there, is that it?"

Amy gave him an approving look. "Precisely."

"Villantry is a very small town. I'm not going to be able to hide very easily."

"I don't intend to keep you hidden."

"Just how do you plan to explain my presence?"

Amy smiled a trifle smugly. "Don't worry, I've got it all worked out. I'll pass you off as my fiancé."

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