
THE ONLY MAN FOR MAGGIE

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CHAPTER ONE

Maggie Rawlings looked out the window of the taxi at the soft green haze that clouded the bushes alongside the narrow highway, and sighed in contentment. A month ago, when she'd left, it was still winter. Now spring had spread promise across the land.

"It's good to be home," she said, almost to herself.

The driver glanced from one side of the road to the other, and then cast an incredulous look at her in the rear-view mirror. "Home?" he said. "Where?"

Maggie laughed. Even though they were just a mile from the nearest town, the place did look like the outside of nowhere to a stranger's eyes--a twisting country highway without a building in sight, just a ramshackle wrought-iron gate off to one side of the road. "It doesn't look like much, does it? It's impossible to see the house from here. You don't need to go all the way in; just drop me at the gate, please."

The cab slowed. "You mean this gate?"

Maggie was already gathering up her possessions--the leather briefcase which held the laptop computer that went everywhere with her, the soft-sided weekend bag, the brightly-colored pizza box. She paused with her hand on her wallet and studied the gate in question.

Maggie could understand the cabby's skepticism. It had been a long time since she'd really looked at the gate, and familiarity had worked its softening magic. Now she saw that the wrought-iron archway leaned even more than it had when she'd last paid attention, and one gate was hanging askew from a broken hinge as if someone had run a car into it while she'd been gone. Not that it mattered, really; Maggie didn't know anyone who remembered the last time the gate had actually worked. But the wrought-iron was old, solid, and intricate, and despite the damage it was still beautiful.

"This very gate," she said firmly, and slid out as soon as the cab halted. She slung the computer case over her shoulder by its strap, set the weekend bag down on the verge of the road, and balanced the pizza box on top while she tugged an assortment of bills out of her wallet. The worst thing about living at Eagle's Landing was the cost of getting home from O'Hare Airport, she thought philosophically.

The cabby surveyed Maggie slowly and thoroughly, his eyes roving over her slim, angular body and appraising her clothes. Her tweed jacket and tailored wool slacks were a bit crushed from her long flight, but the look in his eyes said that even when she was crumpled from travel, Maggie Rawlings looked better than average.

"I had you figured to live in one of those new condo developments," he confided.

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"Woman like you--all style and polish and with looks like a model--it doesn't seem right for you to live at the end of nowhere."

"Well, everyone miscalculates now and then," Maggie said coolly. She added a tip and held out the cash.

The cabby counted it thoughtfully. "You know, I'm supposed to get three times the amount on the meter for trips this far out in the sticks."

"And mistaking me for a greenhorn is your second miscalculation," Maggie added. "Of course, if you'd like me to take it up with the transit authority, I'll be happy to give them the number of your license."

"I'm just trying to make a living," he grumbled, and pulled away so fast that the smell of burning rubber hovered in the air.

Maggie shook her head. Why, she wondered, did so many men believe that if a woman's face and figure weren't hard on the eyes, she had no brain worth mentioning? Though perhaps it was no wonder if they thought that, for even the smartest of women could be incredibly gullible sometimes. Maggie had been, once--and she was still paying for it three years later.

She picked up her bag and the pizza and started up the drive. It was long, narrow and curving, and a pleasant walk after the hours she'd spent sitting in an airplane. Along the edges of the road the green spikes of daffodil leaves poked through the rich cool earth in dense clumps. There were fewer of them this year than in the previous two springs when Maggie had watched the garden stubbornly come to life. But then no one paid much attention to the flowers any more.

Maggie rounded the corner, and the house called Eagle's Landing came into view. It was a tall, slate-roofed Tudor revival mansion, so perfectly proportioned that it was hard to believe how enormous it really was. The earth-brown brick walls and deep green slate roof blended perfectly into the landscape, and the dark timbers and cream-colored stucco accents which trimmed the top two floors made it look like a gigantic gingerbread house with its narrowest side facing the drive. It looked as if it had always been there--as if it had simply grown, like the mature oaks and maples which nestled around it.

Maggie couldn't help smiling at the sight. The house was unusual, full of fascinating idiosyncracies--so different from the plain, perfectly rectangular apartments where she'd lived before. That fact alone would be worth the time and money she spent commuting, even if the rent hadn't been low enough to compensate.

It was just as well she hadn't asked the taxi to take her to the door, because the side entrance was blocked by a contractor's van. A tall ladder leaned against one of the chimneys, and at the very top, a man poked at the intricate brickwork with some sort of

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tool.

From the ground, Maggie couldn't see what he was doing. Odd, she thought, that the owners would be fussing with the chimneys. None of the tenants used the fireplaces any more; in fact, they'd been blocked off long before Maggie moved in. She'd have thought the landlords would be more interested in improving the water pressure. That had been the subject of the last letter the tenants had sent, just the week before Maggie had left on her business trip.

That was the difficulty with absentee owners, she thought. If they'd been occupying one of the dozen apartments themselves, she'd bet there wouldn't be any lack of water pressure.

She gave a philosophical sigh. At least there weren't a lot of problems at Eagle's Landing--though the credit for that went to the manufacturing baron who had built the house so solidly in the first place, not to the current owners for their maintenance policy.

She nodded politely to the two workmen on the ground at the base of the ladder and went in the side entrance. The hallway was dim, as it usually was on even the brightest days, since the doors to all the rooms were closed and the only natural light crept through the beveled glass in the front and side doors. Sometimes Maggie wondered what the house had looked like when it was new, when a single family lived here and light and air had circulated freely through the whole house. But now the two big drawing rooms were a separate apartment, and the old dining room and kitchen formed another, and the library and music room were yet a third--and so the doors were always closed to give privacy to the renters.

Her own apartment occupied the entire top floor. It was the largest and in Maggie's view the most luxurious apartment in the entire house. Fortunately for her, few people agreed with her that the sheer space made up for the lack of an elevator, so her rent had remained reasonable.

As usual, she was breathing a little harder than normal by the time she reached her own door. But as soon as she turned the lock and pushed the door open, she forgot the climb and the weight of her bags in pure enjoyment of space and light.

The apartment was more like a loft, actually; it was basically one huge room with windows on all four sides, tucked into the high-pointed gables--so even in the most oppressive heat she always had a breeze, cooled by the rustling trees. The ceiling followed the irregular steep slopes of the roof, extremely high in the center peak but so low in the corners that Maggie could hardly stand straight. The variations of the wings and gables formed odd nooks and angles which gave the illusion of separate rooms. And when it rained, the patter of water drops on the slates formed a lullaby.

Before Maggie had ever seen the place, the rental agent had warned her that the

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apartment was unusual. It predated the transformation of the rest of the house into rental units, since it had been set up originally for a grown son who had wanted his own space. "He was very eccentric," the rental agent had almost whispered. "In fact, I understand he was downright odd."

Perhaps she was right, but the unknown, long-gone son had been Maggie's kind of odd. She'd known it the moment she'd walked into the apartment and saw the worn oak floors, the faded chintz curtains, the deeply carved mantel, and the bookshelves on each side of the fireplace. She hadn't even bothered to check the kitchen and the bathroom; she'd signed the lease on the spot, and thanked her guardian angel that she'd been able to find something so unusual for so little money. Of course it would be nice to have more water pressure--but overall the quiet, the space, and the view from her windows more than made up for the mechanical details.

The apartment smelled damp and musty from being shut up for four long weeks, so Maggie dropped her bags right inside the door, set the pizza box on the kitchen counter, and went to open all the windows. The outside air was growing brisk as evening approached; it wouldn't take long to banish the stale smell.

She heard the ladder rasp against the slate roof as it was removed from the chimney, and wondered once more what that was all about. It was an unusual time of year to be checking the heating system, that was sure.

On the small drop-leaf table in the kitchen nook was a stack of mail; Maggie flipped idly through it. It was mostly junk; there was nothing which couldn't wait till tomorrow. She changed her low-heeled pumps for walking shoes and went down a floor, to the apartment which had once been the master bedroom and nursery. But there was no answer to her knock; the neighbor who always looked after Maggie's plants and her dog while she was gone must have taken Tripp for a walk, or else the Yorkie would have heard her by now and be raising Cain.

The air had cooled even more in the few minutes she'd been inside, and the sun had dropped noticeably. The workmen were obviously getting ready to leave; as Maggie left the house, the man who'd been inspecting the chimney was leaning into the back of the contractor's van, and the other two were lifting sections of the ladder to the rack on top of the vehicle.

Maggie paused. "Is something wrong with the chimney?"

The man inside the van didn't turn around. "A lot of loose brick inside. Nothing else that I could see."

His voice was like molasses on a warm day--rich and soft and deep, with a husky undertone that made him sound as if he'd just woke up. He was utterly wasted on a construction job, Maggie thought. He ought to be in radio; with a bedroom voice like that,

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even if all he did was read the Chicago telephone book, he'd have the highest ratings in the business.

"Is it going to collapse on some unlucky passerby anytime soon?" Maggie's tone was a little crisper than normal.

He drew his head out of the van and turned to face her, a tool box in one hand. He was a bigger man than he'd looked atop the ladder; the sheer size of the house must have diminished him. But in fact, he was a good eight inches taller than Maggie, who was no pygmy herself. His shoulders were broad enough to strain the dark blue t-shirt he wore, and she could see the ripple of muscles in his arms and chest as he set the heavy box down.

His eyes were the precise shade of the t-shirt; Maggie wondered if he'd chosen the shirt for that reason, or if the color was reflected. His jeans fit like a second skin, but with the ease of long wearing and multiple washings, not vanity. His hair was light brown, a little too long, and kissed with blond streaks as if he spent a lot of time in the sun. His face was tanned, and just craggy enough to be interesting rather than conventionally handsome...

She didn't realize she was staring until he smiled and said lazily, "Well, hello there."

Not radio, Maggie decided. Give him a television show, and women would not only cancel every other engagement on their calendars to watch the tube, they'd wait in ticket lines for weeks in order to be part of the studio audience. Not, of course, that Maggie Rawlings would be among them. Recognizing a man's attraction was one thing, but letting it mess up her judgment was another, and she wasn't about to make that mistake again.

He was looking her over pretty closely too. The cabby's almost-leering inspection had annoyed Maggie, but it hadn't upset her; she'd run into his kind before. In contrast, this man's appraisal made her uncomfortable in a much more elemental way, as if her internal thermostat had suddenly gone awry and her blood was growing warmer by the moment.

His gaze returned to her face, and Maggie braced herself for some kind of slick line. She'd asked for it, of course-- approaching him like that. But whatever he said, she would put him promptly and firmly in his place and move on without giving him a chance to follow up.

The corner of his mouth curved up slightly, as if he'd read her mind and had no intention of playing by her expectations. "I shouldn't think it's likely. Do things collapse on people's heads a lot around here?" he asked.

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Maggie had to pull herself together before she could even remember what he was referring to, and before she'd found her voice his smile had turned into a full-fledged grin, complete with a mischievous sparkle which made his eyes appear an even brighter blue.

That was quite enough of that, Maggie thought; it was past time to remind him that he wasn't there to flirt with the residents. "Not chimneys, at least," she said crisply. "The water pressure, on the other hand, is always falling at the least convenient moments. I hope the owners suggested you do something about that."

He shook his head regretfully. "Not a word about the water, I'm afraid."

"Pity," Maggie said. "I suppose the tenants' association will have to write another letter." She gave him a dismissing nod and crossed the drive toward the wooded area which stretched down to a little lake at the far end of the property. She was uncomfortably aware that he did not immediately return to work but stood easily with one hand propped against the open back door of the van, watching her. At the far edge of the driveway she turned to face him once more, hoping to discourage him with a disdainful look of her own. "By the way," she said coolly, "I do not appreciate being rudely stared at."

The rebuke bounced off him. "Oh, I wasn't staring rudely. My mother taught me never to do that. I was just enjoying the scenery--and you must realize you're well worth a second look. Besides, if you weren't doing a little observing of your own, how did you know I was watching?"

Maggie refused to dignify that remark with an answer. She spun round on her heel, swinging a curtain of blue-black hair over her shoulder, and stalked away.

He laughed, and Maggie's blood grew even warmer. Life might be easier, she thought, if she gave up femininity altogether. Perhaps if she cut off all her hair and dressed in shapeless tents and horn-rimmed glasses...

A shrill bark ripped the air, and a small bundle of brown fur flashed out from among the trees and flung itself at Maggie, yipping madly. She bent over, trying to pat the Yorkie, but the wiry little body was in non-stop motion, tail wagging frantically, tongue swiping at anything that might be his mistress' fingers. Finally Maggie got a hand under the dog's stomach and picked him up, but even with all four legs off the ground Tripp wriggled as if he were running, and twice he nearly twisted out of Maggie's hands as he lapped at her face.

"What a darling," she cooed as she stroked his silky fur. "I've missed you, too, precious. And wait till you see what I brought you from a doggy boutique in San Francisco--"

"You know," the construction worker called, "this is the first time I've ever seen a toupee get so excited to see someone."

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Maggie glowered at him. Her Yorkie was small and shrill and wildly enthusiastic, and Maggie might sound silly for talking to him as if he were a baby--but calling Tripp a toupee was going a bit too far.

A woman in her mid-thirties came out of the shadow under the trees. "Maggie! Thank heaven you're home!" She cast a look of pure dislike at the construction worker, seized Maggie's arm, and pulled her away as if she'd been standing atop a nuclear waste dump. "You haven't been talking to him, have you?"

The construction worker grinned.

Maggie's eyebrows soared. "What happened, Libby?" she asked as soon as they were inside the house. "Did he give you an up-close-and-personal inspection, too? I should have remembered it's useless to try to put that kind of Neanderthal in his place. He probably treats every woman that way."

"Not me."

"Oh? Then why did you give him that look of intense distaste, as if he's done something unforgivable? Did he kick Tripp?" Maggie stopped in the middle of the hall, poised for a further confrontation. If that... person... had assaulted a helpless dog--

Libby shook her head impatiently. "Oh, it's nothing like that. Not that I'd blame the dog for biting one of them, but it's not the workmen's fault, they're just the flunkies. They're just here, you see, and it's getting on everyone's nerves. The ones who are left, I mean."

Maggie frowned. Libby usually wasn't quite this incoherent. "Would you tell me what the heck is going on?"

Libby's eyes widened. "Don't you know? Haven't you read your mail yet?"

"I just got home ten minutes ago. Which reminds me, I brought a pizza, and it's getting very cold. Do you and Dan want to come up, and we'll sort this all out over dinner?"

"I'll come, but Dan's working overtime. I hate having him gone all the time, but heaven knows we'll need the money." She started up the first flight of steps.

Maggie lagged behind. "Is that an announcement?" she asked carefully.

"Of what?"

"Well, I thought maybe you were telling me there was going to be a little Montgomery after all."

"Not a chance." Libby sounded impatient.

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That was strange; normally, any turn of conversation which reminded her of the baby she couldn't seem to have would bring Libby to the brink of tears. Whatever had taken her mind off that problem must be a difficulty of enormous dimensions, Maggie thought. Well, it could wait another couple of minutes; the busybody who lived in the second-floor back was, as usual, peeking around the edge of her door and trying to overhear every word.

Inside the top-floor apartment, Tripp scrambled for his water dish and waited impatiently while Maggie filled it. She shivered a little and closed the kitchen windows. "I guess I did too good a job of airing the place out. This is the kind of evening when I wish the fireplace worked. Wouldn't it be nice to curl up beside a roaring blaze?"

Libby didn't answer; she went straight to the kitchen table and started sorting through the stack of letters while Maggie closed the rest of the windows. "I thought I left it on top so you'd see it right away."

"I dug through the pile and probably mixed it all up. I didn't find anything I thought was important, though. What's going on?"

Tripp slurped the entire dish of water and flopped on his belly on the rug in front of the kitchen sink, as if to say it was nice to be home. It was his favorite spot in the whole apartment--largely, Maggie was convinced, because he was most in the way there. She dug his new chew toy out of her handbag and offered it to him. Tripp surveyed it suspiciously for a moment, then dragged it back to his rug and lay down with his chin atop the bone-shaped chunk of rawhide.

Libby held up an envelope. "Here."

Maggie stepped over the dog to get to the oven. "Let me just stick the pizza in to warm first. I'm starving--lunch on the airplane was worse than usual."

She came back to the table and took the letter out of Libby's hand. It was an ordinary business envelope, with the return address--Elliot Development Corporation--printed in the corner. She'd missed it because it looked like a typical direct-mail offer to sell her something she neither wanted nor needed, but now that she'd looked at it more closely, the name sounded vaguely familiar.

"What's Elliot Development, anyway?" she asked.

"The people who built the row of townhouses on Westfield Drive, and the condo development along Rock Road, and the enormous apartment block on Elgin Avenue--"

"Aren't those the apartments that used to be a warehouse?"

Libby nodded.

"Now it just looks like a prison with a bad facelift. Are they trying to take over the

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whole city of Eagleton or what?" She turned the envelope over. "You haven't even opened this, Libby. How do you know what it is?"

"Everybody in the building got one."

"What are they trying to sell? The condos?" Maggie reached for a knife and slit the envelope. "You know, the cabby who brought me home from O'Hare thought I was the condo type. If he'd known me any better, I'd have taken it as an insult."

Inside the envelope, instead of the brightly-colored brochure she'd half-expected, was a single page of stationery. A personal letter, in fact, informing Miss Margaret Rawlings that Elliot Development Corporation had purchased the house and property known as Eagle's Landing and was invoking clause seven, paragraph two of the lease agreement to notify her that she had thirty days to vacate her apartment...

Maggie's fingers went numb, and the paper slipped from her hand. Tripp raised his head to watch it flutter to the floor, decided it wasn't interesting enough to chase, and put his chin down on his toy.

"I'm being evicted?" she said shrilly.

"We all are. I told you, everybody got letters."

"They can't do that!"

"They've done it, Maggie."

"But it's not legal. We've got leases!" She'd signed a new one almost a year ago--but where had she filed the darned thing?

"It doesn't matter. Dan's read the whole lease a dozen times, and that clause says they can."

"That's utterly ridiculous! What's the good of having a lease if the landlord can pitch you out at the merest whim?"

"It's not exactly a whim," Libby said. She sounded as if she was making a great effort to be fair. "The clause says if it's necessary to end the lease early, the landlord will offer equivalent housing."

"Like what?" Maggie said suspiciously.

"Choice of the townhouse development or the condos--"

"That's what Elliot Development considers equivalent to this?" Maggie flung a hand out as if to encompass the entire room.

Libby smiled for the first time since Maggie had come home. "Or the prison-block apartments, if you'd prefer."

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Maggie didn't bother to comment on that. "At the going rate, I suppose. What do those things cost, anyway?"

"Actually, that's the one thing they're being decent about--for the remaining period of the lease, the rent will be no more than we're paying here. Afterwards, when the existing lease is up, it'll be negotiable--"

"Which is to say, higher."

"Of course. That's why Dan's working tonight, and every minute he can. It's not a bad deal, and our lease has another ten months to run, but--"

"I've only got two," Maggie said gloomily.

"That's a tough break. At least we're lucky to have some breathing room. But we don't want to have to move a second time, you see, so we need to save up a down payment so we can buy the townhouse and never be put in this situation again."

Maggie stared at her in utter disbelief. "You can't mean you're going along with this!"

"I don't see that we have a choice. Mr. Kelly downstairs is already gone, and Mrs. Harper is moving tomorrow."

Maggie shook her head. "I can't believe you're all being such wimps."

"You do have to look at it from their point of view," Libby said reluctantly. "Mr. Kelly can't drive any more, and Elliot's apartment block is within walking distance of downtown. And you know Mrs. Harper's air conditioning gave her all kinds of problems last summer and it's not fixed yet--so I can't blame her for looking forward to a condo that's nice and new."

"And full of construction bugs to be worked out," Maggie said direly. "Believe me, I know all about those. All right, I can see why some of the tenants might think it's a good deal. But they could at least have waited till the time was up before they caved in."

"It is up, Maggie. The last day of the month is next Wednesday. We've got less than a week."

"It says thirty days!" Maggie scrambled to pick up the letter. "Right here--"

"And it's dated more than three weeks ago."

Maggie stared at the letter, and then looked up at Libby. "You didn't let me know?"

"Maggie, nobody knew for sure where you were! You sent postcards from California, Maine and Florida, but you never put a return address on them."

"And you didn't think of calling the magazine? I checked in with the office every

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few days."

Libby's eyes widened. "Oh. That was dumb of me, wasn't it? No, I honestly didn't. I was so stressed out I just didn't think."

Maggie supposed there was no point in making a fuss about it, because the damage was done. Or perhaps it wasn't--the fact that she hadn't gotten the full notice period might end up working to her advantage. "It doesn't matter now. We can still fight this. Just stand firm, Libby, and don't agree to anything."

"I don't know," Libby said doubtfully. "Dan sort of wants things settled, and so do I. I mean, it would be nice to know what our address will be next week."

Maggie wasn't listening. She was scanning the rest of the letter, absorbing the details she had been too stunned to notice before. "It doesn't say anything about why they want this place," she observed.

"I shouldn't think they'd have to tell us."

"Even though they're throwing us out? What does Elliot Development want with Eagle's Landing, anyway? A hundred-year-old house split into a dozen apartments is hardly their kind of property."

Libby shrugged. "Nobody seems to know. The workers who are hovering around don't have much to say."

Maggie thought of the one she'd encountered, and muttered, "Not about that subject, anyway. As far as other things are concerned--"

"I should think by now you'd be used to male whistles, Maggie. Mr. Kelly tried to get hold of the previous owners, but they're out of the country."

"Spending the proceeds of the sale, I suppose."

"No doubt. And the people at Elliot Development were willing to talk about everything except their plans. Dan even called Mr. Elliot himself, but all he'd say was something about a great demand for upscale housing."

"That's it? 'A great demand for upscale housing'?"

"I think that's what Dan said."

Maggie sniffed resentfully. "So they want us to take up space in their precious condos instead of living here? Oh, that makes a lot of sense." She sniffed again, more deeply, and leaped up, knocking over her chair in her haste to get to the oven. Smoke seeped from it and billowed out in a cloud the moment she opened the door. On the oven rack lay the blackened ruin of her pizza, twisted and charred.

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"That does it," Maggie said under her breath. "That's the last straw. It's bad enough that this development person--what's his name?"

"Karr Elliot," Libby said helpfully.

"Now he's not only trying to throw me out of my home, but he's ruined my dinner too. And I'm going to see that he answers for it!" She dumped the smoldering pizza in the garbage and went straight to the telephone.

"I think I've got some TV dinners in the freezer. Maybe I'll just run down and pop a couple in the microwave."

"Are you too chicken to stick around? Libby, I'm only going to call the man. I probably won't even shout much."

But Libby had already vanished. Maggie flipped the directory pages till she found Elliot Development. When a woman answered the telephone, Maggie asked if Karr Elliot was in.

"Who's calling, please?" the receptionist asked.

"Does it make a difference?" Maggie asked sweetly. "I should think either he's in or he's not, and who I am shouldn't change that fact."

The receptionist was unflustered. "He's not."

Maggie glanced at her watch. Tomorrow would do well enough; in fact, it might even be better. She could look up her lease tonight and read that clause for herself so she'd be better prepared. "Tell him Margaret Rawlings called. In case he doesn't recognize that I'm one of his new tenants at Eagle's Landing, you might mention that I'm also the associate editor of a magazine called Today's Woman, and I'm quite interested in the way he's going around illegally breaking perfectly valid leases."

"I'm sure you'll be hearing from him soon, Miss Rawlings."

"You know, I'm sure of it too," Maggie murmured. She put down the phone and dusted her palms together. That, she thought, should make Mr. Hot-Shot-Developer Elliot sit up and take notice. She'd think all her arguments out tonight, and tomorrow morning, when he called...

She tried to ignore the twinge of panic at the pit of her stomach. She'd find a way to get around this; she had to. There weren't many places where she could live as inexpensively as at Eagle's Landing, and she needed that financial edge right now. Two more years and she'd have her debts repaid and her head above water again. But right now...

She put the tea kettle on and unpacked her weekend case. It wasn't much of a job,

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for she'd taken the bare minimum for her long trip, and almost everything needed to go to the cleaners. She'd just finished washing out her lacy undies and hanging them up to dry in the bathroom when there was a knock on her door.

Maggie glanced at her watch. That would be Libby, no doubt, with her hands full, trying to carry a couple of hot TV dinners. The woman really was a sweetheart, always trying to cheer up a friend even when she felt rotten herself.

Maggie flung the door open. "Come on in--"

Then she realized that it was not a petite young woman on the landing but a tall, broad-shouldered construction worker in a dark blue t-shirt and jeans.

She stared up at him, mouth open. He wasn't smiling yet, but though Maggie hadn't known him long, she had no trouble recognizing the signs of his dawning amusement--his eyes had started to sparkle wickedly, and the corners of his mouth twitched.

"Now come on," she said heatedly. "If you think I was issuing an invitation to get better acquainted--"

"Oh, but you did, Miss Rawlings." He swept her a bow, a courtly gesture which was surprisingly graceful, considering the jeans and t-shirt. "I'm Karr Elliot, and you asked to speak to me specifically. Now, just what is it you wanted, I wonder?"