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INTRIGUE®

JAN
HAMBRIGHT

BODYGUARD
of the **MONTH**

A man and a woman are shown in a romantic pose. The man, wearing a blue denim shirt, is leaning over the woman, who is wearing a plaid shirt. They are surrounded by warm, glowing Christmas lights, creating a festive and intimate atmosphere.

CHRISTMAS
COUNTDOWN



INTRIGUE

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FOR EVERY MOOD™

Spotlight on

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See the next page
to enjoy a sneak peek from
the Love Inspired® Suspense
inspirational series.

*See below for a sneak peek from
our inspirational line, Love Inspired® Suspense*

*Enjoy this heart-stopping excerpt from
RUNNING BLIND*

*by top author Shirlee McCoy,
available November 2010!*

*The mission trip to Mexico was supposed to be an
adventure. But the thrill turns sour when Jenna Dougherty
and her roommate Magdalena are kidnapped.*

“It’s okay. I’m here to help.” The voice was as deep as the darkness, but Jenna Dougherty didn’t believe the lie. She could do nothing but lie still as hands slid down her arms, felt the rope around her wrists.

“I’m going to use a knife to cut you free, Jenna. Hold still.”

The cold blade of a knife pressed close to her head before her gag fell away.

“I—” she started, but her mouth was dry, and she could do nothing but suck in air.

“Shhh. Whatever needs to be said can be said when we’re out of here.” Nick spoke quietly, his hand gentle on her cheek. There and gone as he sliced through the ropes on her wrists and ankles.

He pulled her upright. “Come on. We may be on borrowed time.”

“I can’t leave my friend,” Jenna rasped out.

“There’s no one here. Just us.”

“She has to be here.” Jenna took a step away.

“There’s no one here. Let’s go before that changes.”

“It’s dark. Maybe if we find a light...”

“What did you say?”

"We need to turn on the light. I can't leave until I know that—"

"What can you see, Jenna?"

"Nothing."

"No shadows? No light?"

"No."

"It's broad daylight. There's light spilling in from the window I climbed in through. You can't see it?"

She went cold at his words.

"I can't see anything."

"You've got a nasty bruise on your forehead. Maybe that has something to do with it." His fingers traced the tender flesh on her forehead.

"It doesn't matter *how* it happened. I'm blind!"

Can Nick help Jenna find her friend or will chasing this trail have Jenna running blindly again into danger?

Find out in RUNNING BLIND, available in November 2010 only from Love Inspired Suspense.

FROM #1 NEW YORK TIMES
AND USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
DEBBIE MACOMBER

Mrs. Miracle on 34th Street...

This Christmas, Emily Merkle (just call her Mrs. Miracle) is working in the toy department at Finley's, the last family-owned department store in Manhattan.

Her boss (who happens to be the owner's son) has placed an order for a large number of high-priced robots, which he hopes will give the business a much-needed boost. In fact, Jake Finley's counting on it.

Holly Larson is counting on that robot, too. She's been looking after her eight-year-old nephew, Gabe, ever since her widowed brother was deployed overseas. Holly plans to buy Gabe a robot—which she can't afford—because she's determined to make Christmas special.

But this Christmas will be different—thanks to Mrs. Miracle. Next to bringing children joy, her favorite activity is giving romance a nudge. Fortunately, Jake and Holly are receptive to her "hints." And thanks to Mrs. Miracle, Christmas takes on new meaning for Jake. For all of them!

Call Me Mrs. Miracle

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“I have no right to want you this much.”

Emma pushed back and stared up at him, her whiskey-colored eyes bright in the gloom of the cavernous barn. “No right? You have every right, Mac.” She reached up and brushed her fingertips along his scarred jaw. “I don’t care about this.”

He closed his eyes and fought the overwhelming urge to jerk away. To put a stop to the soul-stripping deprivation her assessment generated in his mind.

“It changes nothing. You’re honest and good. You protect people and a horse, and you save lives. You’ve sacrificed more than the average person ever has and you deserve to be happy.”

He opened his eyes, reached up and locked his hand on hers. Staring into her face, he pulled her hand away, severing the intimate touch. He released her fingers, but his push back didn’t seem to faze her.

A slow smile bowed her sexy, swollen lips and she stepped back. “I’m fixing supper tonight. I’d like you to come,” she said, then left the barn.

He stared after her. How was it Emma always seemed to know what he needed, even if he didn’t?

JAN
HAMBRIGHT

CHRISTMAS
COUNTDOWN



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If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as “unsold and destroyed” to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this “stripped book.”

I have it on good authority that there are horses in heaven.
So, to all of the equines I've had the humble pleasure of
saddling up to ride, and brush and love,
this one's for each of you: Smokey,
Peggy, Whiskey, Moccasin, Brownie, Mid-Bar Dandy,
Honey, Starr, Ophelia Mine and Texas.

ISBN-13: 978-0-373-69500-3

CHRISTMAS COUNTDOWN

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Printed in U.S.A.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jan Hambright penned her first novel at seventeen, but claims it was pure rubbish. However, it did open the door on her love for storytelling. Born in Idaho, she resides there with her husband, three of their five children, a three-legged watchdog and a spoiled horse named Texas, who always has time to listen to her next story idea while they gallop along.

A self-described adrenaline junkie, Jan spent ten years as a volunteer EMT in rural Idaho, and jumped out of an airplane at ten thousand feet attached to a man with a parachute, just to celebrate turning forty. Now she hopes to make your adrenaline level rise along with that of her danger-seeking characters. She would like to hear from her readers and hopes you enjoy the story world she has created for you. Jan can be reached at P.O. Box 2537, McCall, Idaho 83638.

Books by Jan Hambright

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Mac Titus—He's ex-Secret Service, turned bodyguard to a horse? Can he overcome the indignity and the ghosts from his past in time to save the magnificent colt, his determined owner, Emma Clareborn, and eventually the Bluegrass region?

Emma Clareborn—She's got spunk and one shot at pulling Firehill Farm back from the brink of bankruptcy. But putting her trust in the hands of a brooding bodyguard could prove dangerous to her heart.

Navigator's Whim—He's a big bay colt with the speed and training to win the Triple Crown. That is, if his bodyguard, Mac Titus, can keep him safe.

Thadeous Clareborn—He's been raising Thoroughbreds for fifty years and he knows Navigator has "the look of eagles" in his eyes—knowing, confident, fierce.

Sheikh Ahmed Abadar—Absent owner of the horses Victor Dago trains.

Victor Dago—He's the horse trainer for Sheikh Abadar, who Emma has leased her stud barn to, but Victor doesn't seem to know much about horses.

Agent Renn Donahue—Always suspicious, he knows he's on to something big at Firehill Farm.

Sheriff Riley Wilkes—He's one of the good guys who's always looking out for the horsemen of the Bluegrass region.

Rahul, Karif, Omar, Siraj and Javas—Horse trainer Victor Dago's stable crew. But where do their loyalties really lie?

Chapter One

Mac Titus raced for the horse barn with the echo of a woman's scream still reverberating inside his head. He was two hours late, thanks to an accident on the freeway from Louisville.

Was it Emma Clareborn, the woman he'd been hired as a bodyguard to protect? If it was, he'd already blown his assignment.

He ran through the massive doorway into the stable and slid to a stop, prepared for a fight.

The familiar smell of fresh shavings raked his senses, but didn't dull the blade of caution sawing back and forth across his nerves.

All these years he'd wanted to see Firehill Farm again, but not like this. Not with the grip of caution squeezing deep in his chest.

The cavernous stable was dark, the only light emanating from the open door of the tack room in the right-hand corner.

Was she there?

He started to turn for it, but saw a flash of movement to his left.

Pivoting, he saw a man sprint out of the shadows and head for the exit. He was wearing a bandanna to disguise his face and a stocking cap pulled low on his forehead.

Mac bolted and tackled him three feet from the door.

The thug fought hard, rolled over and chucked a handful of sawdust into Mac's face.

Blinded for an instant, Mac snagged the thug around the ankles on the way down and pulled him to the floor.

His captive kicked like a mule, wrenching a single booted foot free from his grasp, and slammed it into Mac's face.

A gash opened. Hot liquid streamed across his cheekbone.

He let go, hoping for another chance to apprehend the thug from a standing position.

Scrambling to his feet, he made another lunge for the bandanna-wearing perpetrator, but the other man beat him by a second, dodged left and ran out the barn door into the night.

Mac shook off the mental annoyance at being a step behind. That's why he was here. That's why he'd been relegated to this detail. To refine his skills again.

Wiping a hand across his face, he cleaned some of the debris out of his eyes and turned back into the barn.

"Miss Clareborn!" He stepped forward, trying to make form out of the shadows. "Emma Clareborn!"

The excited shuffle of horse hooves drew his attention to the first stall where a nervous Thoroughbred paced around inside the twenty-by-twenty-foot square.

He reached his hand through the upper railing to touch the horse's muzzle.

"Get away from him!"

Jerking back he flattened against the wall of the stall, prepared to take on another attack, but the decisive ting of metal boring into wood locked him in place.

"Who are you?" A woman stood in front of him, her eyes wide, her breath coming in gasps that accentuated her state of agitation.

He was glued to the wall where the pitchfork she'd knifed

at him had skewered the folds of his shirt, barely missing the concealed weapon holstered to his belt. He didn't like feeling pinned like a moth to an insect board in science class.

Determination set her features and glimmered in her eyes.

"Mac Titus, your Solberg Agency referral. I'm the body-guard you hired to protect you from thugs like that."

Her shoulders drooped for a second and she let out a sigh, but the leery stare still haunted her dark eyes. "You have ID?"

"In my wallet."

She didn't move. "Toss it here."

Mac dug into the back pocket of his jeans with his left hand, pulled out his wallet and lobbed it on the ground next to her.

Reaching down, she scooped it up without taking her eyes off of him. Flipping it open, she did a quick comparison. "You look better without blood on your face."

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine." She closed his wallet and dropped it on the ground. Stepping up, she grasped the handle of the pitchfork in both hands and worked it out of the wall, freeing him.

"It's the second time this week someone has tried to get to my horse. That bandanna-wearing bastard woke me up when he tried to jimmy the latch on the stall door."

Almost on cue the horse in the stable behind him thrust his head over the gate and bobbed his head up and down several times.

"But I'm not your assignment Mr. Titus. Navigator is." She pointed at the horse.

Mac sputtered, dragging the residual particles of sawdust up onto his tongue where he wiped them off with the back of his hand.

"I'm in the business of protecting people, not horses."

“Solberg assured me you could handle this assignment. He claimed you have lots of experience with racehorses.”

Navigator bobbed his head again as if he were in some sort of conspiratorial agreement.

Another protest churned inside of him, but he held it in, taking in the subtle shade of sleep deprivation tinting the skin under her expressive eyes, and the cot made up next to the stall gate with a thick sleeping bag to keep out the chill in the December air.

“You’ve been sleeping out here?”

“Yeah. Every night since I received an anonymous threat over the telephone the day after Navigator won the Clark Handicap at Churchill Downs two weeks ago.”

“That’s impressive, Miss Clareborn. But he’s just a horse, and I usually protect those standing on two legs.”

Her eyes went wide, her body stiffened; he’d insulted her.

“He’s not just any horse. He’s going to win the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness and the Belmont Stakes. The Triple Crown, Mr. Titus.”

Navigator bobbed his head.

Amusement glided over Mac’s nerves. It wouldn’t serve to insult her again, and from the set of her jaw to the surety in her sexy dark eyes, he knew she was certain. He’d seen the obsession before, experienced its destructive power firsthand. People with that much belief in something they couldn’t control belonged in Gamblers Anonymous.

“Do you have any idea who’s behind the threats against your Thoroughbred?”

“I didn’t recognize the voice on the phone and my caller ID registered it as an unknown number. It could be from half the farms in Fayette County, anyone with a Derby prospect. They’ve been slinking around my practice track, clicking their stopwatches from behind the bushes since early this