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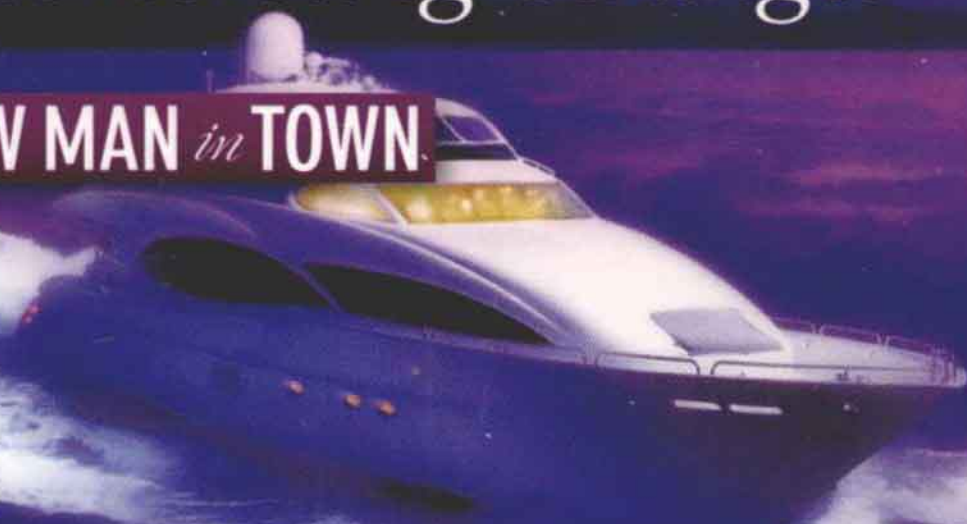
SUSPENSE

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**JENNIFER  
GREENE**

*Mesmerizing Stranger*

**NEW MAN *in* TOWN**





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*See below for a sneak peek at  
our inspirational line, Love Inspired®.  
Introducing HIS HOLIDAY BRIDE  
by bestselling author Jillian Hart*

Autumn Granger gave her horse rein to slide toward the town's new sheriff.

"Hey, there." The man in a brand-new Stetson, black T-shirt, jeans and riding boots held up a hand in greeting. He stepped away from his four-wheel drive with "Sheriff" in black on the doors and waded through the grasses. "I'm new around here."

"I'm Autumn Granger."

"Nice to meet you, Miss Granger. I'm Ford Sherman, from Chicago." He knuckled back his hat, revealing the most handsome face she'd ever seen. Big blue eyes contrasted with his sun-tanned complexion.

"I'm guessing you haven't seen much open land. Out here, you've got to keep an eye on cows or they're going to tear your vehicle apart."

"What?" He whipped around. Sure enough, mammoth black-and-white creatures had started to gnaw on his four-wheel drive. They clustered like a mob, mouths and tongues and teeth bent on destruction. One cow tried to pry the wiper off the windshield, another chewed on the side mirror. Several leaned through the open window, licking the seats.

"Move along, little dogie." He didn't know the first thing about cattle.

The entire herd swiveled their heads to study him curiously. Not a single hoof shifted. The animals soon returned to chewing, licking, digging through his possessions.

Autumn laughed, a warm and wonderful sound. "Thanks,

I needed that.” She then pulled a bag from behind her saddle and waved it at the cows. “Look what I have, guys. Cookies.”

Cows swung in her direction, and dozens of liquid brown eyes brightened with cookie hopes. As she circled the car, the cattle bounded after her. The earth shook with the force of their powerful hooves.

“Next time, you’re on your own, city boy.” She tipped her hat. The cowgirl stayed on his mind, the sweetest thing he had ever seen.

*Will Ford be able to stick it out in the country  
to find out more about Autumn?  
Find out in HIS HOLIDAY BRIDE  
by bestselling author Jillian Hart,  
available in October 2010  
only from Love Inspired®.*

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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***“You’re not remotely tough as nails.”***

He turned, just far enough so she could see his glower. “And quit looking at me that way.”

“What way?”

“You think I won’t bite your head off—I will.”

“Go for it,” she urged him. “Bite.”

Suddenly he grabbed her. His hands were rough on her shoulders. He yanked her closer. His mouth slapped on hers, communicating pressure and dominance. He was one pissed-off kahuna, all right.

Still, she didn’t back off and she didn’t kick back. She did what any other lunatic of a woman would do.

She melted. Right into him. Feeling the rush of sensation when his kiss darkened, deepened, took.

When he suddenly jerked his head up, she just might have fallen if he hadn’t still been holding her.

“My God, you’re trouble,” he grumped.

“Watch it. Compliments go straight to my head.”

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Dear Reader,

In real life my kids were lucky to survive my cooking. One time, just trying to boil water, I nearly burned the house down. Another time I tried a new recipe that even the dogs wouldn't eat.

But in fiction I get to play...and this story gave me a chance to play with fabulous, interesting food. My heroine's knowledge of food enables her to identify a murder—even if no one else could see it. And my hero, of course, never knows what hit him from the time he first meets her.

This story was so much fun to write—murder, mayhem, Alaska, gourmet delicacies and a hero and heroine who are so, so positive they couldn't possibly belong together.

I hope you enjoy.

Jennifer Greene



# JENNIFER GREENE

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*Mesmerizing Stranger*

ROMANTIC

SUSPENSE



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SILHOUETTE BOOKS

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MESMERIZING STRANGER

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*Hot to the Touch* #1670

*The Soon-To-Be-Disinherited  
Wife* #1731

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## JENNIFER GREENE

lives near Lake Michigan with her husband and an assorted menagerie of pets. Michigan State University has honored her as an outstanding woman graduate for her work with women on campus.

Jennifer has written more than seventy love stories, for which she has won numerous awards, including four RITA® Awards from the Romance Writers of America and both their Hall of Fame and Lifetime Achievement Awards.

You're welcome to contact Jennifer through her Web site at [www.jennifergreene.com](http://www.jennifergreene.com).

To Lil

I wish you all were so lucky as to have someone  
this uniquely special  
in your life.

Love you, Lil. In the next life, hope I can be  
more like you.



## *Chapter 1*

In the army, Harm Connolly had developed a reputation for trouble. Not for getting into it, but getting out of it, and he was most attracted to trouble when the odds were against him.

Temporarily, though, impossible problems didn't strike him as any fun at all.

For the first time in his life, he couldn't find his guts. He really, *really* wanted to disappear in a deep, dark cave under an assumed name where no one could possibly find him.

It was the boat.

Since he'd arrived in Juneau yesterday, the rain had gushed down in thick, drenching sheets, and still showed no sign of letting up. The rain didn't bother him. That he was cold and soaked didn't bother him, either.

But standing on the dock, staring at the 103-foot

yacht—ironically named Bliss—Harm reflected gloomily that he'd rather suffer a burst appendix, get married again, face a firing squad—*anything* but climb aboard.

He'd never liked boats. Didn't matter if it was a dingy or a luxury yacht. The idea of being trapped on one for the next two weeks was enough to give him shudders... and the funny part of it all was that the boat trip had been his idea.

The gray, relentless rain blurred any chance of clear visibility, but Harm still kept his gaze homed on the four men climbing aboard ahead of him. They were all brilliant—a ton smarter than him—yet they'd become his employees a mind-boggling few weeks ago.

They'd sucked up to him from the get-go, but with each other... Hell. This morning, typically, none were speaking to each other. Enough friction sizzled among the four to fry a hole in the ozone. The silent anger pouring off the men was so toxic that it was bound to combust unless Harm somehow found a way to identify and defuse the source. Soon. Damn soon.

The yacht staff—captain and mate—greeted each of the men and ported their gear. Harm was last by choice. He wanted to board that boat like he wanted to cuddle up with a hornet's nest. Still, if he had to find something positive about this incredible mess...at least there were no women around.

When push came to shove, Harm didn't doubt his ability to handle financial crises or catastrophes or unexpected avalanches.

He was pretty good at handling most anything but estrogen.

“Mr. Connolly—Harm! Welcome aboard!” The captain, in full rain gear, surged forward and extended his hand. “Hope your trip into Juneau was pleasant. Nice weather for whales, huh?”

Harm was beginning to recognize Alaskans’ unique brand of humor, and even wet and raw, the captain’s smile was deferential. Harm got mighty tired of people treating him as if he walked on water, but in this case, he didn’t mind the wary respect. Naturally, he’d thoroughly researched Ivan Gregory before signing on for this trip.

The captain was thirty-eight, of Lithuanian descent, a man’s man with a history of hard drinking, womanizing and maverick morals—but Harm didn’t mind a man’s faults as long as he knew what they were. The critical factor was Ivan’s experience. The captain knew the seas around Admiralty Island like the back of his hand, and had an unbeatable track record for sailing his way through rough weather, always bringing home passengers and boat undamaged.

“It was good to meet your men.” Ivan grabbed his duffel before Harm could reach for it. “Interesting group. My crew is especially looking forward to this trip... we’ll get your gear taken below, give you some time to wander about and get familiar with the ship...”

“That sounds fine. Thanks.” Harm tuned out the captain’s small talk as he stepped aboard.

He’d seen pictures, done his homework, of course, but was still startled by the reality of the boat’s interior.

Peeling off his wet hood and jacket, he noted the aft deck was big enough to hold a board meeting. Double doors led into a spacious salon, the inside wall paneled in wild cherry, the cabinetry done in a rich burl. The leather seating clustered midroom was framed by bookshelves, all stuffed with books and references on Alaskan lore. Harm was just leaning closer to study the signed oil painting on the inside wall when his head suddenly shot up.

For an instant, he thought he heard a soprano. A woman's voice, emanating from the next room off the passageway—the entrance to the dining area.

But his attention was immediately distracted by the shock of hearing laughter from his team. His four guys were all peeling off their wet-weather gear, same as he was, but they were suddenly talking, clearly surprised and enthralled with the comforts of the yacht, sounding animated about the trip ahead. Harm wanted to hold his breath. He had no illusions the camaraderie would last, but it was a beginning—the whole reason he'd put this trip together. All four of them, he believed, were good men. Or had been good men, once upon a time. This trip was a chance to see if there was a prayer he could pull them back together.

Ivan pushed up his captain's cap and was clearly trying to channel the group's attention. "Okay, everyone, Hans here is my first mate." He motioned at a spectacled, gray-haired man who looked like a quiet grandfather type. "Cate's our chef this trip. You'll meet her shortly. Hans, in the meantime, will take you below, help stow your gear and then give you a tour of the ship. The



only place off-limits is the crew's quarters. Otherwise, you're free to go anywhere, and explore all you want. I'll be topside for a few minutes, calling the harbormaster. We'll lunch in the dining room at twelve-thirty and do some Q & A, fill you in on the schedule, safety features and all that. A-OK?"

Cate? Harm's head whipped around again. There'd been no woman's name on the crew roster. He was positive.

And then he saw her.

Actually, what he precisely noticed was her shrugging off the captain's attempt to cup her fanny as she hiked past him into the main salon.

She dodged the captain's move, smooth as silk, but Harm's gaze still narrowed. Since she was female, she was inherently a problem. The captain's behavior hinted there could be an additional awkward problems between employer and employee. Yet, determining how much difficulty she was likely to add to the trip was confounding because her looks didn't remotely fit the picture.

Her hair was blond, paler than wheat, and she wore it razor short, spiked up every which way. Maybe she'd gotten around to brushing it last year. Her clothes revealed the flat figure of a kid—skinny jeans, mocs, a long-sleeved T-shirt with the slogan *Forget Love! I'd Rather Fall In Chocolate!* If she reached five-three, Harm would be surprised. With no makeup and a patch of freckles on her nose and a downright stubborn chin, she looked young. twenty-four, twenty-five? And far more like a scrapper than a siren.