

# THE MAGIC OF ROSE COTTAGE

## Chapter One

As the early morning sun crested over the vineyards of La Bella Rosa, its brilliant yellow light caressing the budding fruit with delicate fingers of warmth. Jessie Graham sat on her wooden porch railing, her foot tapping against the post rail, keeping time to the soulful melody wafting out of her bagpipes and across the family compound.

When the last sorrowful note faded away, she opened her eyes and waved at her tall, handsome, silver haired grandfather marching across the lawn toward her. With any luck she'd look that good when she was seventy-two.

"Jessie, are you trying to sour our entire grape harvest?"

Jessie let the mouthpiece drop from her lips and smiled. "Good morning, to you too, Gramps. Isn't it a glorious day?" She waved toward the sun warmed vineyard.

"It was until you started strangling cats over here at the crack of dawn." Gramps ducked under the porch railing and took a seat at the table across from her.

"I was practicing for your fiftieth wedding anniversary party. You said you wanted me to play, remember? "

"Yes. On the piano or guitar or even the accordion."

"I don't play the accordion, Grandfather."

"I have news for you Granddaughter, you don't play the bagpipes either."

"Which is why I was practicing." She clicked her tongue against the roof of her mouth, put the mouthpiece between her teeth and took a breath.

Gramps pulled a folding knife out of his back pocket and waved it at her bagpipes.

"Everybody's a critic." She let the bagpipes slide to the floor beside her.

"Is it dead?" He poked at the leather lump of a bag with his foot.

She pulled the rubber band out of her hair and shook her head, letting her long copper curls spill over her shoulders. "Gramps. Did your father go to Rose Cottage after his accident?"

"Yes, he did." He peered over the bridge of his nose at her. "What brought that up?"

"I dreamed about his accident again, last night." She threaded her fingers through her hair and rubbed the circulation back into her scalp. "His friend Reed brought him to the cottage, didn't he?" She stared into space, watching the dream play across her mind's eye again.

"Reed Leighton." He nodded. "From what Pop said, Reed pretty much kidnapped him and hauled him to the cottage, cussing the whole way. Pops said that was the year he gave up on Rose Cottage and her solstice magic and

vowed he'd never go back again. Reed had other ideas."

"Did you know him?"

"Reed?" Gramps shook his head. "No. I never met him. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know. I was just curious," Jesse shrugged. "Great-grandma Anni used to talk about him, but other than a bunch of pictures and some old concert videos of Renegade, I don't really know anything about him." She wasn't about to tell him how often Reed visited her dreams or how many hours she'd spent at Renegade Studios watching those videos.

"That was the summer Renegade officially broke up and Pop just wouldn't talk about it. "Hey." He slapped her leg. "Speaking of Rose Cottage—" Gramps slid a sideways glance at her.

"Is that what we were talking about?" She stared into his light green eyes, the mirror of her own and waited to see what kind of mischief he had up his sleeve this time.

"I need you to go there this week instead of next week. I've hired a handyman to do some work before the party and I want someone there to help him."

"Gramps, send the boys. I have—"

He held up his hand. "You know I wouldn't ask if I had other options."

Jessie shook her head. "I have a deadline to meet. And a whole season of cartoons to write. Little kids get vicious when you make them wait for their favorite characters. Nope. I'm sorry. I value my life too much to take off an extra week to go babysit some handyman."

"Ha! You haven't done a thing since you arrived at the compound. It's been three months and all you've done is mope and wander the fields torturing the poor grapes with that thing." He pointed to the bagpipes at her feet."

"That's not true. I've gotten a lot of work done."

Gramps snorted.

"I have."

"And that's the beauty of being a writer." He grinned. "You can take your work with you wherever you go."

"Gramps, no, I—"

"It really is important, Jessie. Besides, it's only a week until the solstice. Maybe you'll meet your one true love." He wiggled his eyebrows at her.

She humphed at him. "What a load of crap."

"What?" He reeled back and made a cross of his fingers. "You don't believe in the magic of Rose Cottage? You don't believe in your own family's history? That's blasphemy."

Jessie leaned over and kissed the top of his head. "Gramps, you're a dear. A little gullible, maybe, but still a dear." She patted the spot she kissed a moment before and smiled. "I believe Great-Grandma Anni was a very talented writer. I believe she spun wonderful tales. But, they were just that – stories.

"I certainly don't believe she traveled through time to meet Great-grandpa

Jesse on the bridge at Rose Cottage. I don't care what our family legend says. And I do not believe Rose Cottage will bring my one true love to me if I spend the summer solstice there."

"Child, people have been burned at the stake for spouting less heresy than you just uttered."

"My fiance eloped with my best friend three months ago." She looked down at the white line on her left finger. "Tell me again about true love."

"If he was your true love, he wouldn't have dumped you."

"Ouch." She frowned up at him. "Dumped is such a harsh word."

"If you'd just give Rose Cottage a chance, you—"

"Okay, okay," she held up her hands to make him stop. "I'll go. But if I miss my deadline, I'm blaming you."

"Whatever makes you happy." He stood and pulled an envelope out of his pocket.

"What's this?"

"Your hotel reservations. I've instructed Capt. Max to have the jet ready for a six AM at LAX, so I booked you into a hotel for tonight. A car will be waiting for you when you arrive in Marquette. And I put in some cash too." He handed the envelope to her.

"Gramps, I have money. You don't have to give me any." She tried to give the envelope back.

"You never know what you'll need." He slid under the porch railing, heading back the way he came. "Have a good trip."

Jesse stared from the envelope in her hand to her retreating grandfather. "Awful sure of yourself, aren't you?"

"Call when you get there. And, don't forget your bagpipes." He waved over his head as he continued walking.

Jessie heard him laugh. "Smug old man."

He knew all along she'd go. She grinned in spite of herself and opened the envelope. Her eyes almost popped out of her head at the wad of green stuffed inside. She did a quick thumb through. "Gramps! Are you kidding? There must be five thousand dollars here. What am I supposed to do with five thousand dollars?"

"Give me back what you don't spend and I want receipts for what you do spend." He yelled back.

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Jessie was out of her seat and collecting her gear the second the jet taxied into the family's private hanger in Marquette, Michigan. With a wave and a thanks to Capt. Max and the always wonderful Sam, the jet's one man cabin crew, she ducked out of the hatch and rocked to a stop at the top of the steps.

"Gigi!" She grinned at the 1968 white convertible Mustang parked on the other side of the hangar. "He left Gigi for me." She let out a low whistle and ran to the car. This trip might not be so bad after all. "How ya doin', old girl?" She dropped her bags beside the rear tire and stroked the canvas roof.

Once upon a time, this gorgeous lady belonged to her great-grandfather. Now, she was Gramps' baby. Nobody drove Gigi except him. No one. Ever.

“So why is she waiting for me?” Suspicion crept in behind her elation. “What are you up to, Grandfather?” She reached for the phone in her pocket. “On second thought, if I call and ask, he'll probably change his mind and make me take a taxi to the cottage. Nope. Don't look a gift Mustang—and all that—” She changed directions, reached inside the open window and flipped down the sun visor. She caught the keys and headed for the trunk.

Sticking the key in the lock, she leaned down and traced the letters of the vintage Michigan license plate.

J.E.G. Her initials. Gramps' initials. *His* initials. Jesse Erik Graham. The man they were both named for.

She finger kissed the old license and popped the trunk open.

“What on earth?”

A bright yellow poster board lay on the spotless carpet. Neon green letters screamed:

IF YOU WISH TO REACH THE RIPE OLD AGE OF 30, GRANDDAUGHTER  
DO NOT IN ANY WAY, SHAPE, OR FORM HURT GIGI.  
REMEMBER: YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON THIS.

Have fun. Gramps

“Jeez, Gramps. Don't beat around the bush. Tell me exactly how you feel.” She snorted and tossed her things on top of the sign.

It took all of five minutes for Jessie to peel back the convertible top. She ran her hand over the back of the driver's seat and closed her eyes as she slid into to the bucket seat, luxuriating in the buttery soft leather upholstery. She felt for the ignition, inserted the key and gave it a gentle bump to the right. The 428 Cobra Jet engine rumbled to life. She grinned and fanned the gas pedal. The big cobra under the hood roared.

Do cobras roar? If they do this is what they sound like.

She ran her hands over the leather wrapped steering wheel. “Oh baby.” She slipped the gearshift into drive and let out a banshee wail, squealing the tires out of the hangar.

Radio blaring, she sped down the open highway toward the tiny town of Slover, in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and Rose Cottage.

A half hour later, she turned off the highway, onto the deserted two lane road that would take her the final leg of her journey. She glanced at the thick woods bordering each side of the road and smiled. She used to play in these woods with her sisters. Princesses riding dragons to rescue knights in distress. Silly boys. They always needed rescuing.

“Oh crap.” She slammed on the breaks and cranked the steering wheel. “And that's why you don't day dream and drive, Jessie Erika.” She hung a U-turn and back-tracked to the narrow dirt drive she missed – as usual.

Jessie sucked in a breath. There was rain in the air. She looked up at the

bright sun filtering through the trees and shook her head. No rain here, but it was close. Maybe tonight. She turned into the narrow dirt drive, her heart fluttered, beating faster and faster. Almost there. Most kids counted the months and days until Christmas. She always counted the days until the summer solstice and her return to Rose Cottage. She parked in the wide grassy area in front of the stone cottage and sighed. Home. Sweet Home.

She grabbed her phone and dialed Gramps' number. His voicemail picked up. "I'm here. Thanks for Gigi! No scratches so far. Talk to you soon." She disconnected and retrieved her bags from the trunk.

Once inside the the rickety old fence, she dropped her bags on the doorstep and took a quick look at the the English-style garden surrounding the two story cottage. The garden was a riot of early summer color. Jessie inhaled the heady scent of the wild flowers and turned to the brass plaque set into the wall beside the door.

"I'm home, Rosie." She sighed and feathered her fingers over the clear rock crystal rose inlaid in the center of the plaque.

The crystal rose flashed bright white and a hard shock shot up Jessie's arm.

Jessie cried out and fell against the door. Cradling her limp arm to her chest, she squeezed her eyes shut and gulped air, willing her stomach to stop churning,

"Jeez, Rosie." She finally managed to squeak when the rushing in her ears quieted. "I know I've been gone a while but did you have to try and electrocute me? What happened to the little tingle I usually get?" She rubbed the back of her neck trying to reconnect her buzzing brain to the rest of her body. Cradling her tingling arm, she pushed open the door with her shoulder.

When the spinning slowed, Jessie opened her eyes a slit, ready to slam them shut again if the world so much as twitched. First thing tomorrow she'd get someone out here to remove the wiring on the plaque. Who in the world thought wiring the plaque was a good idea in the first place? It's never been wired before.