

ROBIN JONES GUNN

waterfalls

a novel



THE GLENBROOKE SERIES

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MULTNOMAH
BOOKS

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*To my dad,
Travis Garland Jones,
with all my heart.*





A Visitor's Guide to GLENBROOKE

Kyle &
Jessica's
Victorian
Mansion

Madison Hill

Glenbrooke
Community
Church

Hidden House
Bed &
Breakfast

Brady
Alissa's House

PARKER
DELIVER
SERVICE



Teri's
House

Ida's
House

GREEN
HERB
GIFT SHOP

LEGAL
MILANO
ATTORNEY

FOURTH ST.

THIRD ST.

GLENBROOKE
GAZETTE

TRAVEL

RESTAURANT

CONCRETE
STORE

WASH

HVY 14

GAS

TO
EDGEFIELD

5

*“Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers have swept over me.”*

PSALM 42:7

Chapter One



Meredith Graham ripped open the sample-sized pouch of Sweet Avocado Bliss facial mask and read the instructions aloud. “Apply generously to face and neck. Let dry for fifteen minutes or until mask begins to harden and crack. Rinse with warm water. Pat dry.”

Gazing at her image in the guest-bathroom mirror, Meredith began to follow the instructions, using upward motions from her throat to her chin. She had heard once that all lotions and cleansers should be applied with upward motions as an act of defiance against gravity. Not that her twenty-four-year-old face was ready to wage war with gravity. Meredith just liked to think she had some control over her looks.

That’s why she colored her hair. She had for years. One of her three older sisters, Shelly, had teased Meredith a few weeks ago, saying she was a recovering brunette. Shelly’s husband, Jonathan, had added, “Yeah, she keeps re-covering the brunette roots.”

Meredith didn't care. At this very moment, she had the alarm on her watch set for twenty-five minutes and wore a perky blue plastic cap over her short, soggy, dyed locks. Her face was now covered in a subtle shade of lime. And she was enjoying every minute of this royal treatment.

She raised her eyebrows and watched the lines forming on her forehead. It resembled the way her mother looked when she was worried, and Meredith didn't like that. To her, people who walked around with wrinkled, worried foreheads were people who had no imaginations.

Meredith tilted up her chin and checked on the goopy green lotion rapidly drying on her neck. She tucked the blue plastic bonnet behind her right ear and made a gruesome face in the mirror as the drying mask cracked across her cheeks. With her best cackle, Meri squinted her left eye and said, "I'll get you yet, my pretty!"

The country-western music floating from the portable radio came to an end on her third cackle, and Meredith listened closely. "It's 8:42 on this gorgeous first Saturday morning in May," the smooth voice of the female announcer said. "We're looking for a high today in Glenbrooke Valley of seventy-eight degrees. Lows tonight around sixty with some partially cloudy skies tomorrow morning. Highs tomorrow near seventy."

"Perfect," Meri muttered, her lips beginning to tighten at the corners. "I'm wearing shorts."

The radio began to blare out a song with repetitious lyrics about a girl, a pickup truck, and a dog. Meredith flipped the "off" switch and rummaged in her cosmetics bag for her travel-sized toothpaste and soap. Not that she needed to use her own. Jessica and Kyle had provided plenty of everything for the guests who were staying at their restored Victorian home for the big weekend event.

The room assigned to Meredith was the Patchwork Bedroom. Some of the women of Glenbrooke had made the patchwork quilt that graced the large brass bed. A framed square of patchwork fabric over the bed was part of a quilt made by a pioneer woman who had migrated west on the Oregon Trail more than 150 years ago. Jessica had been given the treasured piece by the pioneer's great-great-granddaughter.

This turret room was originally a storage place until Jessica transformed it into another guest room. Kyle had recently built on this small adjacent bathroom where Meredith stood, checking the timer on her watch. Four more minutes until she could hop into the shower.

The big kickoff at the camp wasn't until noon, but Meredith had promised her sister Shelly she would show up early to help with all the preparations. Shelly and her childhood sweetheart, Jonathan, had married in Seattle a year ago this weekend. They moved to Glenbrooke, where they worked side by side to develop a conference center in the woods. Kyle and Jessica owned the property and had had the original vision for the camp. About six months ago, in a broad stroke of generosity and trust, Kyle and Jess turned the whole project over to Jonathan and Shelly. And today was the grand opening of Heather Creek Conference Center.

Meredith squirted some toothpaste onto her toothbrush and made another wild Martian grin in the mirror. As the sample packet had promised, her face felt cracked. Time to hop into the shower.

Right before she turned on the water, Meredith realized she didn't have her clothes in the bathroom because she had been trying to decide what to wear. She had made the bed all sweet and tidy, almost as if she were afraid her mother would come in to check on her and scold her if it wasn't made yet. Then

Meredith had tucked her luggage neatly in the corner of the room and decided that if Mom did come in for a room check, she would have nothing to criticize.

Meredith stuck the toothbrush in her mouth and began to scrub her teeth, grinning at her own gruesome appearance in the mirror. The blue-tinted “skull cap,” lime green cracked face, and foam now dripping from the corner of her mouth added up to quite a sight. If Mom checked on Meredith now, she would be in for a life-altering shock.

Opening the bathroom door, Meredith stepped into the guest room and headed for her suitcases in the corner. The cooler air of the bedroom chilled her legs under her big blue nightshirt as her bare feet padded across the room. She unzipped the bag with both hands, sucking on the toothbrush in her mouth, and pulled out her underwear, a white cotton shirt, and a pair of shorts.

Rising with her arms full, Meredith was starting back to the bathroom when she froze in place. She dropped her shorts and unwillingly swallowed the toothpaste foam in her mouth. She couldn’t move. She couldn’t scream. All she could do was stare.

A man was asleep on her bed. He had on all his clothes—even his shoes—and he looked as if he had dropped on the bed in a dead faint with his arms straight out to the sides and his palms up.

The man opened his eyes, then closed them. Suddenly his large brown eyes sprung open again. He shot straight up in bed. He stared at Meredith and let out a wild yelp that sounded like an animal caught in a trap.

Meredith screamed, too.

“Who are you?” he yelled.

“Who are you?” she yelled back, grasping her toothbrush like a dagger.

“What are you doing in my room?” The poor guy’s face looked terrified.

Meredith realized her face looked, well...“This is my room!” she shouted. “What are you doing in my bed?”

In a confused stupor, the man tumbled from the bed and frantically grabbed his garment bag by the door. With one last bewildered and horrified glance at Meredith, the Avocado Alien, the tall, sunny blond male scrambled out the door.

For dramatic effect she slammed the door and locked it with a snap. She stood still, her back to the door, listening. Waiting. Her heart pounding. Wondering if anyone had heard them or if he would come back. She scanned the room for any more of his belongings. It appeared he had taken everything.

As soon as her pulse slowed down, she moved away from the door and gathered up her strewn articles of clothing. *I can’t believe that just happened! I probably shouldn’t have yelled at the poor guy. He looked awfully confused. What am I saying? He invaded my privacy! I should have thrown something at him.*

Marching into the bathroom, Meredith turned on the shower with a twist of the handle. Her hands were still shaking. *It really was my fault. I should have locked the door. But how could he have gotten the wrong room? And why would he be asleep at nine in the morning?*

Meri adjusted the shower curtain so the water wouldn’t drip on the tile floor. *What if he was waiting for me? Maybe he does landscaping around here, and he heard that a lovely young princess was staying in the corner turret, and he wanted to meet me so...*

Meredith looked at herself in the mirror, and the fanciful fairy tale vanished with a poof. She smiled. Then she let loose her silvery, wind-chime laughter, spilling it all over the bathroom floor. “Look at you, Meri Jane Graham. You are a fright to behold! You scared that poor guy to death.”

She slipped into the warm shower still laughing. It felt great to rinse out the cold, smelly hair coloring and to liberate her cracked face.

He didn't exactly look like a landscaper. Meredith thought about the intruder's hair. The color was too nice to be natural, she decided. The sun streaks and flecks of gold couldn't have gotten that way this early in the year without a little help from a peroxide bottle. Unless he lived someplace where the sun had already been working its mischief. He did seem pretty tan. She tried to remember what he had on. Jeans. Sloppy, camel-colored loafers with no socks—she remembered that part of his outfit. And a short-sleeved cotton shirt with an island print. She liked the shirt. Maybe he lived in Hawaii. Or the Bahamas. Jonathan's parents lived in the Bahamas. Maybe this guy had come from the Bahamas with Jonathan's parents.

Wrapping a towel around her hair and stepping out of the shower, Meredith realized something painfully inevitable. She would see this man again today. He was obviously friends with Kyle and Jessica; otherwise he wouldn't be here. And he most likely was friends with Shelly and Jonathan or he wouldn't be here this weekend. He was possibly even a relative on Jonathan's side. She didn't remember seeing him at the wedding, but then if he was a lifeguard in the Bahamas, maybe he wasn't able to take the time off from the resort.

No, not a lifeguard. That would be too teenish for this man. He had a certain polished look, even in his frenzy. The resort golf pro. Yeah, that was it. He was a golf pro at a remote island resort, and he used to work for the CIA.

Meredith stopped drying her legs and wondered why that sounded familiar. She was quite comfortable with the way her imagination kept her endlessly entertained with story lines. They were usually far-fetched, fantastic tales loosely based on all the plots she consumed daily in her job as an acquisitions

editor. For a year and a half she had filled her noodle with the creativity of hundreds, maybe thousands, of writers who had pitched to her their best ideas for children's books. The huge amount of input had taken its toll, and she was experiencing her first occupational hazard. She was never alone. A story line was always within her grasp to amuse her or confuse her. In this case, it confused her.

But this wasn't a children's story. This was a plot from a movie. She knew this plot. The CIA agent tries to get back his normal life; so he hides on some ritzy island at a French resort where he is hired as a golf pro. Then that new actress...what's her name?...the blond one with the thin lips, comes to the resort and...

That's it—Falcon Pointe! I loved that movie! The Goldilocks guy in my bed looks like the actor in that movie. It was the shirt. The CIA guy in the movie always wore shirts like that.

Meri took the towel off her head and checked her roots in the mirror. Not a pinch of brown showed through.

Recovering brunette, am I? Well, no one needs to know. Especially when my hair turns out this good. I have to remember this shade. Honey cream. I'm buying this one again.

Meri gave her face a careful examination. The mask didn't appear to have helped or harmed. Maybe that was the best anyone could ask from an experiment.

She began to comb out her hair and had a sudden pleasant realization. The mystery man might not recognize her. They would inevitably see each other again, but she might be introduced to him, and he wouldn't even know she had been the screaming creature under the blue bonnet. It was possible. Maybe. Hopefully. At least in her imagination.

He was pretty good looking, for a man who was in the middle of a freak-out. Meredith dressed and then coaxed her dried hair into place with a part on the side. She smoothed the sleek ends

under with a curling iron and smiled at the results. She loved rare days like this when her hair came out perfect. The makeup was a snap. A little brown eyeliner, some mascara, a quick swirl of the lipstick tube, and she was ready. All she needed was her hiking boots and socks, and she was on her way to Heather Creek Conference Center.

Unless, of course, she ran into some poor, distraught houseguest wandering the hallways. Some tall, brown-eyed male in a tropical-print shirt who had a frightening story to tell about a creature from the green lagoon who had so rudely disrupted his nap. Then she would stop to listen sympathetically and suggest a cup of coffee to chase the nightmarish thoughts away.

Meredith smiled to herself. It wasn't every day she got to be around men who reminded her of movie stars. And she had a thing for movie stars. It started in elementary school when she used to sneak a peek at her friends' movie-star magazines. She had used her hard-earned allowance to buy posters from her friends, and then she had had to hide them from her father, the respected minister, who wouldn't approve of such items being in the house.

She loved movies, too. Now that she lived alone and worked out of her home office, Meri took herself to the movies at least once a week to get out of the house. She remembered how much she had liked *Falcon Pointe* when she saw it four months ago. The star magazines at the grocery-store checkout line had touted the new, unknown actor in that movie as "the next Tom Cruise." What was his name?

Meri had just finished lacing her boots when someone knocked on the door. *Come back to apologize, have you? Apology accepted. Now how about that cup of coffee?*

"Who is it?" she called out sweetly before unlocking the door.

“Meredith? It’s your mother.”

Meredith rolled her eyes as she unlocked the door. As she grasped the knob and was about to open the door, the name of the actor leaped before her. She yanked open the door and excitedly spouted to her mother, “Jacob Wilde! That’s his name! The guy in my bed was Jacob Wilde!”