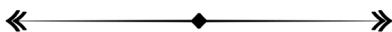


Heart

RESTORATION



Ren@Vations Inc. * 1

REGINA RUDD
MERRICK



Scrivenings
PRESS

Quench your thirst for story.

www.ScriveningsPress.com

Copyright © 2023 by Regina Rudd Merrick

Published by Scrivenings Press LLC

15 Lucky Lane

Morrilton, Arkansas 72110

<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy and recording— without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Second Edition

Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-322-5

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-323-2

Cover by Roseanna M. White

(Note: This book was previously self-published through the Mosaic Collection and was re-published “as is” in agreement with the author.)

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.comThe “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

All characters are fictional, and any resemblance to real people, either factual or historical, is purely coincidental.

*To my parents, Richard and Wanda Rudd,
who both instilled in me a love of home from day one and were never
afraid to try something just because it was hard. I miss you.*

Theme Verse

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out all fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.

1 John 4:18-19 (NKJV)

Chapter 1



July

“**D**el Reno, I could kill you.”

When her brother broke his leg the week before, Lisa Reno should have canceled all their upcoming Reno Renovations projects.

But no. She had to be the super-sister that could do it all. After all, she was a designer, wasn't she? She could figure out this contractor stuff. Didn't she help him make all the most important decisions, anyway? In the heat of the moment, she was invincible. In the cold light of day, she knew she was in over her head.

Sure, she had building cred. She had watched more home improvement for her twenty-seven years than most girls her age. A degree in Interior Design and a DIY resume that went back to watching Bob Vila from her daddy's lap should be worth something. Shouldn't it?

Yes and no. She closed her eyes and shook her head. The last thing she needed was the local contracting community

looking at her as “daddy’s little girl.” She was twenty-seven years old and a partner in a design/build firm with her father and brother. And yet, around here she knew everyone thought of her as that red-headed, freckle-faced daughter of Steve Reno’s. One of these days everyone would find out she was nothing more than that.

She finally released the huge sigh that seemed to engulf her. Better go in and see what she’d gotten herself into. Walking up to the front porch of the dilapidated farmhouse, she started taking mental notes. Windows to be replaced or restored. Porch floor? Almost non-existent. Pull off the aging vinyl siding and see what’s under there. Rip off the dull aluminum trim. That was the worst.

But then she saw the landscaping. Gotta love plastic flowers stuck in the ground. It was springtime year-round, here, it seemed. She did a double-take, laughing. Nope. It was Christmas year-round. The plastic flowers were faded poinsettias.

Better to laugh than cry, Mama used to say.

If she were on one of those renovation shows she enjoyed, this would be where the door would open, and the host would laugh about how nasty it was. Then they would point out this and that feature that could be highlighted. They would have, on hand, a computer rendering of their vision for the entire property. In less than an hour, the new homeowners were amazed as they were led on a tour of a completely renovated house, inside and out.

From experience, she knew that those one-hour renovations took months to complete. And this one? This one looked as if it could take years.

Standing inside the foyer of the 1910 Craftsman farmhouse, she noted mounds of trash holding who-knew-what kind of vermin nests, sagging stairs, uneven floors, layers of wallpaper,

and cracked ceiling plaster. And the smell. She couldn't quite put her finger on it.

It was so nasty that when she felt the vibration in her pocket, she almost jumped out of her skin, thinking a critter had made its way into her pocket.

She pushed the button to open the face-to-face call, shaking her head when she saw her brother's face, a little worse for wear. When she saw "BigBro Del" flash on the screen, she shook her head before she answered. "Del, you scared me to death."

"What did I do?" He seemed as confused by her attitude as she was by the enormity of this project.

"Never mind. Have you actually been in this house?" She continued walking through the lower floor of the house. "I mean, seriously. There is junk everywhere. It's a trash-heap. Look at this stuff." She turned the phone so he could get a good look at it.

He laughed. "Ah, Sis, it's a jewel in the rough."

"Rough being the operative word, here."

"Yeah, I was in there with the owner a while ago. I planned to get out there yesterday to start clearing out the debris, but you know how that worked out." She saw him shrug his shoulders, grinning.

She took a deep breath. "I know. Sorry. I didn't mean to whine, but you could have warned me about the smell in here."

He winked at her on the screen. "No worries. I'm used to the whining. I didn't notice anything stinky last time I was there, but it's been a few months."

"Either it's a recent addition to the ambiance, or your sniffer needs to be checked." She walked into the kitchen. "Look at the windows in here." She showed him the full bank of windows facing into the backyard. "Did this used to be a back porch or something?"

“I don’t think so. I think they were smart enough, even back then, to know that summer in the South means you need lots and lots of windows to open – especially in the kitchen.”

“I can work with this. The rest of it? I don’t know.” She crept up the stairs, pointing a dirty look into the phone’s camera. “Squeaky, much?”

“Easy fix.”

“Easy for you.”

“Hey, you said, and I quote, ‘I can handle it. You just get well.’”

She turned the phone toward her face and stuck out her tongue. “I lied. You were pitiful and I felt sorry for you. Besides, since when do you listen to me?”

“Since I didn’t have a choice.” He grimaced. She could tell he was in pain.

She wrinkled her nose in sympathy. “Have you taken your pain meds?”

“I had some Ibuprofen. I’m saving the hard stuff for bedtime, so I can sleep.”

“Good idea. Don’t let yourself hurt too much.” She worried about him. He steered clear of painkillers. They had both seen too many of their friends, sidelined by injuries, hooked on medications to get them through the pain. When Del let God get involved in his life, he was all-in and wanted to keep it that way. She was proud of him.

“I won’t. Listen, I didn’t just call to get a look at the house. I wanted to let you know I got a licensed contractor to help you out on this. You’ll still be in charge, but he knows about annoying things like moving walls, leveling floors, and so-on.”

She looked around her and felt her shoulders slump the longer she looked at the project before her. “Probably a good idea. Are you sure you don’t want to let them find another company to take care of it?”

“I would, but they couldn’t find anyone else that would tackle it.”

“What makes you think this guy will?” She hoped her glare was translating through the telephone camera.

“He owes me.” Her brother grinned. “And he should be arriving any minute now.”



NICK WOODWARD PARKED at the barn and walked around the property. He told his buddy Del that, under the circumstances, he would be glad to step in and help on this project. It was important to him, too.

Who knew a random ‘I owe you’ would turn into a monumental project, and this particular monumental project, at that? He turned to walk back around to the front of the house and saw a pickup truck. The magnetic sign on the truck read, ‘Reno-Vations, Inc. – Re-Do it Right.’

Typical Del. When they went to college together, they were both English Literature and Composition majors. So what do two guys with English majors but no teaching credentials do when they get out of college? They become contractors, of course.

Del had the right idea. His sister was a design major, and his dad had been a contractor for years. When Steve Reno decided to semi-retire, he passed the legacy of Reno Construction on to his kids. Del must have added the tag line, homage to his literary studies; alliteration was Del’s first love.

A young lady with a phone to her ear walked out the front door, onto the porch. She looked up from her call when she saw him coming toward her, waving her fingers. Her eyes widened with recognition.

Was that Lisa? He couldn’t tell. He hadn’t seen her since

college. She'd been a couple of years behind them, so while he was living the high life of an upper-classman, she was keeping her nose to the grindstone taking classes and doing whatever it was artsy people did in their spare time. From what he remembered, she had looked fifteen at twenty and was constantly pushing her glasses up on her nose—a nose that was perpetually stuck in a book of some kind.

There was always something about her, though, that drew him. After he got to know her a little better, through Del, flirting with her on the quad at Murray State became a habit. She usually rolled her eyes and ignored him.

He caught himself raking his hand through his unruly hair. He needed a haircut. Looking down, he noticed the dried concrete on his boots he hadn't noticed before. He could have at least put on his better pair, but it wasn't like he wanted to impress anybody. It was his skills as a contractor they were looking for, not his appearance.

While he waited, he decided to take a closer look at the front porch. Spongy wood in places. Great. That didn't bode well. Chances were they would end up ripping the whole porch off and starting over. More expense. This was why he dealt mainly with new construction.

“Nick?”

It was her. Come on. Could seven years make this much difference? He remembered the auburn hair, but not the brilliant green eyes. “Lisa?”

She looked surprised, and a little flushed as she held out her hand and smiled. “I didn't think you would remember me.”

He took her slender hand in his, surprised by the confident grip in such a soft hand. “Good to see you. Sure, I remember you. I almost . . .”

“Didn't recognize me? I know. I get it all the time.” She shrugged. “No glasses.” She wrinkled her nose and laughed. “I

wonder why Del didn't tell me the contractor he'd hired was you."

He lifted an eyebrow and smiled back. They both turned to face the house. "Looks like he's tasked us with this gem of a place." He glanced over at her. Her eyes were narrowed, and she had her index finger tapping on her chin as she gazed upon the dilapidated structure.

"He called it a 'jewel in the rough.'" She turned to him. "You know, the more I look at it, the more I agree with him."

"You're so solemn about it." He hoped his half-grin came off the way he intended.

"It's a big job." She stared a few seconds more. "But it'll be worth it. With acreage, people will be jumping to buy this place."

"Maybe. Or maybe it won't be for sale."

She looked at him in surprise. "Really? I thought this was a flip project?"

"Nope. Renovation and restoration, as much as possible." He put his hands in his pockets, rolling his shoulders as he took a deep breath. He spoke quietly. "This is a special place."

She tilted her head. "Special, how?"

A wave of sadness engulfed him. "It was my grandparents' place. My dad grew up here." Not that he cared. Until Granny died, his father, Dan Woodward, hadn't set foot on the place any more than he had to.

But Nick missed his grandmother. She was gone when he lost Kristy. She would have known the right things to say. He needed to let go of the past. Get on with the job at hand.

"Seriously?" Her mouth dropped open. "Not only did he not tell me you were the contractor, but he also didn't tell me his 'buddy' was the owner."

"Yeah. I bought it. It went out of the family about ten years ago, when my grandmother passed. The most recent owner

lost it to the bank, and I was able to get it back. As for the work, I thought it would be better to hire it out, time-wise, so I asked Del to do it for me.”

“Hence, the ‘I owe you’ came back to roost.”

“Exactly.” He dragged the word out. He considered himself a good contractor, but this was one project he didn’t want to mess up. His dad might not agree that it was a good idea to keep the place, but he hadn’t asked his opinion.

“Alrighty, then, owner-contractor, that makes you the boss of this job.” She saluted him.

He shook his head. “Nope. Your company, your crew. I’ll work alongside the lead carpenter and work with you on making decisions. How does that sound?”

“It sounds ... complicated.”