

MY HEART REMEMBERS

Patricia McLinn

This edition published by
AWritersWork.com

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First published by Silhouette
NEW YORK
Dec. 2001

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Chapter One

“You cut your hair.”

There was nothing ominous about those four short words coming from behind Lisa Currick.

Except that they were spoken in a low, male voice she hadn't heard in eight years.

“I'll be with you in a minute,” she said, keeping her back to him, buying herself time.

Time to put the memories that came with the voice – and the man – back in storage where they belonged. Except, if eight years hadn't been long enough, how could another minute be?

She slid a file into place. One corner was crumpled where she'd clutched it. She would replace it later. Right now she wanted the sign of her agitation out of sight. If the man behind her was anything like he'd been eight years ago he wouldn't miss that sort of detail.

She closed the drawer, and faced him.

“May I help you?” She stepped behind her desk. From this desk she efficiently ran the Knighton, Wyoming, law office of Taylor Anne Larsen. It represented all that she was now – and had not been when she had last seen Shane Garrison.

“Hello, Lisa.”

She had intended to play it out, to ask if he had an appointment with Taylor, to pretend she didn't know who he was, to pretend she didn't remember him. It wasn't unreasonable. It had been eight years. A lot had changed in that time. *She* had changed a lot in that time.

And they hadn't known each other all that long back then – the tail end of one dreary New York winter and the blossoming of one perfect New York spring.

Contrary to her fantasies at the time, she also hadn't known him well.

It was entirely plausible that she might not remember him ...

Then she saw his face.

The square-jawed, strong-boned face, softened only by a mobile mouth and black-lashed blue eyes. She remembered it perfectly, yet it was different from her memory. Eight years had changed him, too. If anything, it had deepened the lines of determination in his face.

Seeing that, she decided against playing out the farce that she'd forgotten him. It would simply waste resources she might need.

"Detective Garrison." She gripped the back of her desk chair to give her hands something to do.

One side of his mouth lifted. Once, she'd seen that as a challenge to win a full smile from him.

"You used to call me Shane."

"Your professional title seems more appropriate." The needs of his profession had been the bedrock of their connection – the reason it started and the reason it ended.

"Does that mean you want me to call you Miss Currick—or is it Mrs. something now?"

"Ms. will do."

"You're not married?"

"You're slipping if your detective work learned only that I had cut my hair." The tartness of that was a mistake. Bland was safer.

His left eyebrow—the one with the small scar above it—rose. "My powers of observation haven't slipped. No ring on your left hand."

Fighting the urge to put her hands behind her back, she curled her fingers into the chair's padding. His gaze focused on the motion, and his grin shifted. He sat on the chair across from her desk, leaning back, crossing his jeans-clad legs, totally at ease.

"Detective Garrison, I have work to do. If you would

please—”

“You rent a house with your name alone on the lease, and your vehicle’s registered in your name—but you could still be married and using your maiden name. However, you left home alone this morning, departing in the only car that had been parked there all night. You arrived at your place of business at 8:50 a.m., left at 12:08 to walk to the Knighton Café, where you sat at the back booth—again alone—until 12:53, when you—”

“You’ve been following me?” The accusation was clear, but she condensed the outrage into unemotional chill.

He nodded. “Yup. And before that, I checked your public records.”

“Then why ask if I’m married? You must have known the answer.”

“I wanted to see what you would say.”

“Why? No—” She held out a hand, standing straight, no longer gripping the chair. “No, don’t tell me. It would be a waste of your time and mine, because there is no reason that could make me care why. And there is no excuse for following me. You’ve invaded my privacy enough. Please leave.”

“Aren’t you going to ask why I’m here?”

“No.”

For half a second she thought relief flashed across his eyes—as if he didn’t know what he would have answered if she’d said, yes, she wanted to know why he was here. But that was ridiculous, because Detective Shane Garrison had always known what he wanted—and didn’t want—from Lisa Currick.

“With your help, Lisa, I can—”

“You’re not going to get it.”

She said that just the way she wanted. Solid. Unemotional. Determined. And now she called on the discipline of the past eight years to return his look the same way. It wasn’t easy.

Those dark-lashed, deep blue eyes had once made

her girl's heart quake like an aspen buffeted by a Wyoming wind. Her heart was no longer a girl's, but those eyes still held power.

"I need your help, Lisa—Ms. Currick."

She refused to think about how easily she would have melted eight years ago at the idea of his needing her in any way.

"I believe the expression that covers this situation is, Been there, done that."

"I'm going to find the necklace, Lisa. You could make it easier—"

"No."

"It won't hurt his chances at parole. It might even help them."

He thought she was trying to protect Alex? A little late, wasn't it?

Alex had been her dream mentor – more than that, he'd been another grandfather to her. Beaming with pride at her accomplishments, instructing her, introducing her into the realm of jewels and gems that a girl from Wyoming had dreamed about before going to New York City.

The day she'd been picked for the plum internship with the man famed for restoring only the best pieces for only the best clients, had been the proudest of her life. And her months in the Alex White Studio had been even better than she'd dreamed. She'd learned so much, she'd been given so many opportunities, and she'd formed a bond of affection and respect with a living icon of jewelry design.

And then Shane Garrison entered her life.

"I've put it—*all* of it—behind me, and that's where it's going to stay. I'd like you to go now."

He studied her. Once that concentrated regard would have driven color into her cheeks, flustered her into speech that sped ahead of her brain, and set her heartbeat thundering.

But she'd outgrown blushing, she'd learned to guard

her tongue, and her heartbeat was her own business.

She gave him back look for look.

Slowly, he stood then advanced until the width of the desk separated them. This close she saw the flecks of black among the blue that gave his eyes such depth. She imagined she felt the heat of his body.

“I won’t give up, Lisa.”

“That’s entirely up to you, Detective Garrison. As long as you don’t try to involve me in your quest.”

As long as you go back where you belong, so three-quarters of a continent separates me from the memories.

“Can’t undo what’s done.”

While she tried to decipher that, he turned and walked out. As the door closed, she decided it didn’t matter what his cryptic remark meant as long as he was gone.

She heard his tread on the wooden sidewalk in front of the office. Not boot heels like most men around here, but thick-soled running shoes.

Running shoes’ soles were made for sneaking up on someone, unlike the straightforward here-I-come announcement of boot heels. But Detective Garrison might not have counted on the wooden sidewalks many Knighton businesses had in front of them. On wooden sidewalks, even running shoes gave plenty of warning.

He wouldn’t take her by surprise again.

“Lisa?”

Her employer and friend, Taylor Anne Larsen, stood at the door to her inner office, looking at her quizzically.

“Do you need something, Taylor?”

Taylor shook her head. “I thought I heard voices. And you look ... distracted. Is everything okay?”

“Someone came in the wrong door, and he took some convincing to see his mistake. As for distracted, I’m thinking about the project for my management topics class that I told you about.”

“I thought you had it almost done.”

“I decided last night that it needs another layer. I was

reading at lunch about how management styles need to adapt to the new economy.”

“That doesn’t mean you’ll miss the Book Pass does it?”

“No. I said I’d come, and I will.”

If she felt a twinge as she steered the conversation toward the day planned to celebrate the library addition that Taylor’s husband Cal Ruskoff had funded, it was because Taylor’s question reminded Lisa of how many times she’d begged off a social function with friends and family because of school work.

The twinge was not – definitely not – because she’d lied. Because she hadn’t. Shane Garrison *had* come in the wrong door if he thought she would help him. And he *had* needed convincing of that.

It wasn’t that she couldn’t trust Taylor. She could—she did. But she hadn’t told anyone in Knighton—not even her family—about what happened after she’d left home thinking she could conquer New York, and instead learned just how unprepared she was for anything beyond quiet, sleepy little Knighton.

If it had been something really serious, something dangerous, something they could have helped with, of course she would have turned to them. They wouldn’t condemn, they wouldn’t play I-told-you-so. But it had been her mistake, and her failure. She would keep both to herself.

She’d believed in two men back then, and she’d been wrong about both. One had disappointed her hopes. The other had disappointed her heart.

She wouldn’t take that risk again.

She would keep the door closed to Shane Garrison.

* * * *

You cut your hair.

It was a damned stupid thing to say. He hadn’t meant to say it. Which made it worse.

At least he’d kept his mouth shut about her hands. They used to bear nicks, bruises, burns and scrapes as

badges of her vocation. The hands he'd watch squeeze the back of that chair today had been smooth and blemish-free.

Keeping his mouth shut until he'd thought things through was his first rule for dealing with witnesses or suspects.

But her hair had thrown him. He remembered her hair so well. Maybe because of that day in late April – a Wednesday, he remembered that, too, though God knew why. They'd come out of the coffee shop, and a gust caught her hair. He'd raised his arm and let it wrap around his hand like a silk scarf. She'd looked at him then, eyes widening with possibilities.

Or so a fool might have let himself think

He stretched his legs in the rented SUV he'd parked under a tree that gave a view of the front and back of the law office, as well as her parked truck.

He wasn't a fool now. He'd learned a lot since that first year as detective. Learned enough to get offered a damned fine job. Of course he hadn't let Assistant District Attorney Anthony Priloski know he considered it a damned fine job.

First, it would have broken a basic rule of negotiating. Second, it would have broken his personal rule of not giving Tony the satisfaction, since his friend tended to be too satisfied with himself as it was. And third ... well, third was the reason he was in Knighton, Wyoming.

"It's a good offer," Shane had acknowledged.

"*Good* from you, Garrison, is a back flip from most people," Tony had said, sitting behind stacks of files that obscured his desk. "So why aren't you saying, *Yes, I'll take it. Yes, I'm abjectly grateful to you, Tony, for your confidence in my investigative ability and your tolerance for my surly disposition?*"

Shane snorted. "Yeah, right."

"What would it take to make you say yes, Shane?"

His head came up at the direct question. He met Tony's gaze for a moment and saw it was equally direct.

He looked away, out a window that showed a cityscape through a haze of grime that returned within days of the window washers' visits.

"I don't want to leave things hanging at the department."

"You'd have time to wrap up some cases – besides, cases get handed off all the time, so –?" Tony stopped in midstream. "Ah, this isn't about cases, plural, this is case, singular, isn't it? *The Case* as far as you're concerned. The Alex White Case."

"I just want to find that one piece—the necklace."

"Yeah, that's like Ahab saying he just wanted to go fishing." Tony shook his head. "I don't understand it, Shane. We put the guy away. So what we didn't find out where he stashed one necklace. It's not like Blanchard's destitute for lack of it. It's too damned gaudy a piece for us to have missed if it went public. Plus, it's not like White is going to get out soon and enjoy his ill-gotten gains. And even if the parole board lets him out tomorrow, he's not going to start a crime wave. He's got to be near eighty."

"Seventy-nine. But if I'd handled it differently—"

Tony responded concisely, though profanely. "I hate to swell your head any more than it already is about your investigative abilities, but if it hadn't been for the way you handled that case, there wouldn't have been a case. Nobody else thought the renowned Alex White was doing anything wrong."

Shane ignored that. "I'm not ready to give up on it. Not yet."

"Not yet? It's been eight years. Are you sure this One-That-Got-Away obsession is about the case?"

"It's not an obsession, I j—"

"You sure it's not about that girl – what was her name? You know, the wide-eyed one who was neck deep in the case – the one working with White?"

"She was never working with him, not that way. She was his intern. And she wasn't involved in the case,

except as a witness. We went over all that back then.”

“Yeah, yeah, so she said. I never quite bought that Innocent-From-the-Heartland act of hers. Where was she from? Nebraska? One of the Dakotas? Somewhere like that. But what was her name?” He shrugged, dismissing her as an unimportant detail in a life overflowing with important details. “Nope, don’t remember. Guess you don’t either. ”

Shane knew exactly what Tony was doing, but he couldn’t let that particular detail be dismissed as unimportant. “Lisa Currick.”

All vagueness in the other man’s manner evaporated, but his voice was soft. “That’s right. Lisa Currick. The one who got away.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. She was a kid.”

“You weren’t exactly Methuselah yourself ...” Tony let the pause build. “Then.”

Shane shook his head, not in denial of the comment but of the whole conversation.

“Are you telling me someone at the department’s been pushing you to find the necklace? That they’d be unhappier with your leaving than they’re already going to be if you don’t mop up that detail.” He didn’t answer. That didn’t stop Tony. “So, it *is* the girl.”

It was the tone of voice Tony Priloski used in court to persuade a jury he was absolutely certain of what he was saying. Was he right now? Were memories of Lisa Currick what kept eating at him?

Sure he wanted to know how she was. She’d been a good kid, and they’d been ... close. Not as close as his body had been urging him to be that spring eight years ago. But close enough that it was natural he wanted to make sure she was okay.

“I want to find that last piece,” he said doggedly.

“Right. You dream of finding that necklace.”

No, I dream of—

He shut off the thought. No court of law could hold his dreams against a man. But that wouldn’t stop Priloski if

he sniffed out what Shane dreamed about all too often.

“I want to find the last piece,” he repeated.

It was Tony’s turn to look out the window.

Shane sat still, giving him that time. Unlike those over-the-top cop shows that TV viewers seemed to think were so realistic, he’d found that silence and patience were among the most useful investigative skills he possessed. Skills that had helped him rise quickly to detective, where he’d first encountered Prilosi on the Alex White case. Skills Tony now wanted him to put to work as a special investigator.

Working for the DA’s office wouldn’t be any walk in the park, but more of the going-nowhere cases would be weeded out, he’d have a little more time with cases that remained, and he’d have fewer bosses to answer to. As long as the result was giving Tony the whole truth and nothing but the truth, he’d be left to work his own way. All that was appealing.

But he didn’t like leaving something undone. His police department bosses said he’d done all he could – a couple times a year when he revisited the case they said that. But he knew that wasn’t true. There was one thread he hadn’t followed as completely as he could have.

That’s why he needed to talk to Lisa Currick again, face to face. Not because of one spring. Not because of a pair of wounded eyes staring at him across an institutional hallway outside a nondescript courtroom. But because she might have an answer.

Tony shifted in his chair, the movement pulling Shane’s gaze to him.

“Tell you what,” Tony said, with a look that Shane would have called concern in somebody else, “you take some time, give this case your full attention. If nothing comes of it, then you agree to let it go, and start working here.”

“How much time?” Shane’s question set off a breakneck round of dickering.

“And if you haven’t found out anything after two months,” Tony said, wrapping up negotiations, “you let this case go.”

“Right.”

“I mean it, Garrison. I want you obsessed with the cases we’re on now. Not the ones we’ve already won. And sure as hell not obsessed with the girl you lost.”

That’s what Tony didn’t understand; Lisa had never been his girl to lose.

Shane had known that coming out here to Wyoming. What he hadn’t known was that she would no longer be anybody’s girl.

More than Lisa Currick’s hair had changed. She was a cool, reserved, unflappable woman.

A couple things about that bothered him.

First, why had the openness, the daring, the joy disappeared?

He’d noticed the change from the first glimpse this morning of her coming out of that little house set off the road as if it had drawn back to avoid passers-by.

When he’d known Lisa in New York, she’d moved like she was ready at any given moment to open her arms and embrace anybody or anything that struck her heart. Now she seemed to move simply as the practical way to get from here to there.

And that job of hers. Last thing in the world he would have expected her to be was an office manager, following a routine, making details her life.

Maybe she’d needed the money. He didn’t suppose there were many jobs available in a small town like this. But that didn’t explain why someone who’d loved the unregimented world of creativity would drop all that and get a masters degree in business, as he’d discovered she now possessed.

He suspected she’d say the chin-length haircut was practical.

His gut told him something deeper than practicality was at work here. And that same rarely-wrong organ

was urging him to find out more about how and when and why Lisa had changed.

Which brought him to the second thing that bothered him.

As much as she'd changed, as clear as she'd made it that she was not one bit happy to see him, he'd felt a tightening somewhere south of his gut at first sighting her, and it hadn't let up.

That state had clouded his judgment before. He couldn't let it happen again. He had minimal time, and one mission: to find the antique diamond, platinum and emerald necklace Alex White had stolen. Start his new job with a clean slate by wrapping up loose ends from his old one.

If accomplishing that also happened to lead to finding out why Lisa had changed, it couldn't hurt to satisfy his curiosity.

* * * *

A letter from Alex was waiting in her mailbox when Lisa got home from class that night.

She'd been deeply disappointed by Alex, but he'd hurt himself much more than he'd ever hurt her. She'd made her peace with him even before he was found guilty. He'd been writing to her and sometimes calling from prison ever since.

Today, though, she could have done without another reminder of the past.

Pulling catalogs, flyers and other mail out, Lisa looked out into the Wyoming dark, and saw nothing.

That didn't mean Garrison wasn't there.

He'd been sitting in an obviously rented four-wheel drive down the street from the law office when she came out at closing time. He'd openly trailed her to campus in Jefferson. He'd been there when she came out of class, and he'd followed her home.

Her first instinct had been to march over to him and tell him where to go. Second thoughts recognized the futility of that. The temptation to try to lose him she'd

also abandoned. He knew where she worked, where she lived, and where she went to school. What was the sense of trying to lose him when she would just go to one of those predictable spots?

When she'd pulled into her driveway, he'd slowed, as if to be sure she went in the house, then sped off. She'd waited 20 minutes without any sign of his vehicle before heading to the mailbox.

Back inside, she consciously followed her routine, setting water to heat for caffeine-free tea, opening the bills and filing them by the date they would be paid, tossing junk mail and the charity solicitations that poured in all year-round even though she contributed once a year. A waste of their money and effort. You'd think they'd have a computer program that would tell them if someone didn't respond to being inundated ... which might be an idea for a final project for her Using Computers for Business course.

Only after she'd made a note of the idea in the notebook assigned to that course did she fix her tea, sink into the corner of the overstuffed jade green sofa, and begin to read the letter from Alex.

Alex had been a robust 71-year-old when she'd last seen him. But clearly the years—and prison—had taken a toll. At first his letters were almost like Alex himself, full of sureness—some would say arrogance or even obsession, as the prosecutor had—that he would get out, that he had been right to remove those glorious pieces from unappreciative owners and replace them with fakes, that he knew better than the rest of the world.

They had also been full of his expectations for her. Nothing she'd written to the contrary had changed his view on that.

More recently the famed Alex White nonsequiturs had edged toward disjointedness with more frequency.

Tonight's letter, though, sounded like the old Alex. He'd included a sketch, along with notes for his design of a pendant of amber set in gold, and the comment, "To

look like that marigold you resemble.”

It was an old joke between them. During her interview for the coveted internship at his studio, Alex had asked her the Barbara Walters question about which tree she would be. He'd clearly meant to flummox her, but she'd shot right back that she didn't know much about trees, coming from Wyoming and all, and she'd rather be a Bur-Marigold, because they got around, and brightened up everywhere they went.

He'd roared with laughter, and that had been it—she had the internship.

He'd taken to telling people she was like the Bur-Marigold—a bright, sunny flower also called Sticktight because its seeds had a knack for sticking to passers-by, and ending up in the most unexpected places, like a girl from a Wyoming ranch ending up in the workshop of Manhattan's most revered and sought-after jewelry designer and refurbisher.

“I was going to pass you by after the first interview, with the hayseed still in your hair, but somehow you stuck to me,” he'd said. “Ah, I do like a person who knows herself, my little Bur-Marigold.”

The smile born of those memories faded as Lisa sipped her tea. She hadn't known herself at all.

She'd thought she was ready for anything. She'd been proved miserably wrong.

Shane Garrison had stepped into her life one sleeting day in late March when he came into the studio, accompanied by Alex. In fact, Alex had introduced them, seeming to harbor secret amusement as he did so.

She realized why two days later, when Detective Garrison had asked her to have lunch with him, had told her he suspected Alex of fraud, and wondered if she'd answer a few questions. Alex White – fraud? It was laughable—the kind of joke Alex most loved. She'd laughed, too, but Shane never wavered.

She'd told Alex the whole thing, and he'd insisted that as long as she enjoyed Shane's company, she should

see the detective and answer all his questions. Looking back, she supposed it had been a kind of game to Alex.

But as she and Shane continued to meet day after day while the weather slid out of misery toward delight, he had stopped talking about his suspicions.

Instead, they'd talked about everything else under the sun. Books, records, movies. Her ambitions, his love of sports, her childhood, his fast-rising career, and, of course, the amazing city around them. With warmer weather, they'd started walking during their lunches. When lunch break wasn't long enough for their conversations, they began to meet on the weekends.

Not once did he touch her more than any man might the woman he was escorting in public.

Not once did he kiss her.

But he'd looked into her eyes, and she'd been so certain ...

She was so wrong.

It was June when she had marveled to Shane about the beautiful work Alex had shown her on a commission he'd just completed. She hadn't known that the bracelet's owner had asked only to have it cleaned, but Shane had known. She hadn't known that Alex had duplicated the piece with false gems, but Shane had suspected. And with that small bit of information, he'd persuaded the owner to have the bracelet Alex had returned officially examined by the police.

It was a fake.

It was like pulling the joker out of the foundation of a house of cards. Alex's reputation was no longer impenetrable. Other customers soon had pieces examined.

Of course, she hadn't known that at the time. She'd known only that Shane suddenly was around so much less, and seemed distracted when he did come.

Then he'd arrived unexpectedly one glorious June mid-afternoon, talked her into taking off an hour early, and it had been like before. They'd spent hours walking

and talking, looking in store windows and sitting on park benches.

The next day he and the others came to the studio to arrest Alex.

That was the worst day of her life. Worse even than being called to testify against Alex at trial three months later. Alex had pooh-poohed her distress, saying of course she should tell them everything she knew – he was going to.

By the time the trial came, she knew Alex had been doing what they'd accused him of, fully convinced he was right to do it. And she knew Shane had used her to find the proof.

She put Alex's letter in the box in her closet with the others.

As soon as the trial was over, she'd left New York for good, returning to Knighton. At age nineteen she had put aside childishness, and constructed a life based on the principles her experiences in New York had taught her.

And she would keep living that life, even though the experience that had taught her the hardest lessons had shown up in the last place on earth she would have ever expected to see him.

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