

*Love's  
Melody  
Lost*

*by*  
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## CHAPTER ONE

Anna Reid drove with one hand holding a torn scrap of paper against the wheel. As she watched for road signs in the unfamiliar back roads of Cape Cod Bay, she tried to decipher her own scribbled writing. The early spring morning was unseasonably warm, and she had put the old Jeep's canvas top down to enjoy the sun. The breeze that blew through her hair smelled of salt water, seaweed and ocean creatures. It was a welcome change from the heavy air and city smells she had grown used to in Boston over the years. So much in her life had changed—too much for her to think about without stirring all her misgivings about this present strange venture. She reminded herself silently that she had made many hard decisions in the last months and she could not turn back now, not with her last hope so near.

Anna eventually turned onto a narrow, twisting, tree-lined lane that led to a large old Victorian edifice. Four stories, replete with gables and porticos, it stood alone on a bluff above the sea. The circular drive in front was cracked in places with clumps of vegetation attempting to displace the offending concrete. The house also showed signs of disrepair. Shutters hung askew, paint curled from the wood surfaces, and several windows on the upper stories were boarded over. She frowned at the overgrown formal gardens that clearly had not been tended in years. There was an air of sadness reflected in the decline of this once beautiful estate, and Anna felt herself immediately drawn to the place. It was as if it were a living presence, long-neglected and in need of care. She pulled to a stop before the grand staircase, ascending to a wide verandah. She approached the pair of heavy ornate oak doors with a mixture of excitement and trepidation. She took a deep breath as she rang the bell.

Slowly, the doors creaked open and a small gray-haired woman peered up at her.

“Yes?” the woman inquired uncertainly.

“I’m Anna Reid. I was hired by Mr. Norcross as a housekeeper.”

The little woman’s face broke into a thousand tiny lines as she smiled and extended her hand. “I am Helen Green, and *I*, my dear, am the housekeeper. *You* are here to manage our household business, and I am so glad you have arrived. Welcome to Yardley Manor.”

Anna grasped her hand automatically, her mind in turmoil. “But, Mr. Norcross indicated—”

Helen pulled her inside, saying, “I’m sure that Mr. Norcross explained things as he knew them, but Graham is not very good at keeping the poor man informed. What we need, my dear, is someone to oversee the property as well as to manage Graham’s personal affairs. Graham will explain it all to you later. Come with me now. Let me show you to your rooms.”

Anna hung back in confusion. She recalled the ad she had answered from a Boston newspaper.

“Live-in house manager needed. Must do some clerical work and drive. Salary and schedule negotiable.”

She had thought it odd that a senior attorney in one of Boston’s most prestigious law firms had conducted the interview. When he informed her that the location was forty minutes outside of Boston and required little in the way of advanced secretarial skills, she had been encouraged. Her employer, she had learned after insistent probing, would be Graham Yardley, a former musician who lived in a secluded estate on the coast. David Norcross, the attorney who interviewed her, had been reluctant to provide much in the way of details, and Anna’s curiosity had been piqued. When he went on to assure her that she would have ample opportunity to arrange her duties around her class schedule, she had accepted immediately, terminated her lease, and packed the essentials of her life.

She stared at the older woman who looked at her in pleased anticipation while her own anxiety escalated. What exactly was it she was supposed to do here? She had no experience in managing an estate, and from the brief glance she had had of Yardley Manor, it was definitely in need of managing. Still, she instinctively liked the spry elderly woman who hurried down the long hall to a wide central staircase, and what she could see of the house captured her attention immediately. Even in its current state of neglect, it was magnificent. As she followed

the housekeeper through the dark mahogany-paneled hall, she caught glimpses of the adjoining rooms through partially opened doors. Thick imported carpets, brocade-covered sofas and opulent draperies graced the high-ceilinged rooms. Multi-faceted crystal chandeliers cast flickering shadows over highly polished, ornately carved tables and broad mantelpieces. Yardley Manor managed to project an air of elegance even in its present state.

“Perhaps I should speak with Mr. Yardley first,” Anna suggested as Helen stopped before a door on the second floor. “There might be a problem. I’m not sure I’m going to be suitable for the job.”

Helen turned toward her with a strangely quiet, penetrating gaze. “Graham will meet with you at tea this afternoon. The two of you can straighten all of this out then. Now, come my dear, and let me get you settled.”

Anna realized that she had no choice but to wait. The room Helen led her into was bright and airy, and the floor to ceiling windows on the far side of the bed captured her attention immediately. They faced the heart of the estate—two hundred yards of terraced gardens which gave way to a tangle of wild brush growing up to the edge of a rocky bluff. A tiered stone wall rimmed the edge of the cliff, which fell a hundred feet down into the pounding surf. Beyond that was only the blue of sky and water. The view was breathtaking.

Anna could just make out the garden paths, now narrowed and overrun by the steady encroachment of natural flora untended for years. Here and there stone benches were still visible under the trees, marking the spots which had once provided strollers a place to rest and enjoy the surrounding beauty. To the rear left was a wide flagstone terrace, ringed by a stone balustrade which supported dozens of climbing rose bushes, desperately in need of pruning and cultivation. Beyond that stretched the formal rose gardens, clearly what had been the showpiece of the estate at one time. Now all she surveyed lay in ruins, a sad reminder of what had been, like a faded photograph of a time long gone. She was amazed to find her throat tighten around sudden tears, she was so moved by the decline of this once proud manor. It was such a waste, when all it needed was care. She shrugged her melancholy aside; she had her own life to worry about resurrecting. She turned back to the room she was hopefully going to inhabit.

“Oh,” Anna exclaimed, observing the room closely for the first time. She was delighted to see a high canopied poster bed, lovely antique walnut dressers, and mirrored vanity table. Sconces on the walls still held candles, although the overhead stained-glass light and matching table lamps now provided the light. Underfoot, thick richly colored carpets covered the glossy wood floors. The interior of the house, clearly Helen’s domain, had been lovingly maintained.

The neglected state of the exterior and grounds was clearly not from lack of funds. From what she had seen so far, most of the furnishings appeared to be priceless estate pieces. She felt like she had stepped back in time and the otherworldliness of her surroundings appealed to her. Her life was in transition, even as she transformed into a person of her own choosing. It seemed fitting that her new life should begin in a place so different from her past.

“It’s all so beautiful,” she said admiringly, unable to hide her excitement.

“Isn’t it though?” Helen looked up from where she was busily turning down the covers on the bed. “I’ve always loved the view from here. My rooms face that way, too. I’ve come to know the look of the sea in every season.”

“Have you been here long?”

“Oh, goodness, yes. My family has been employed by the Yardleys for over forty years. I wasn’t yet twenty when my husband and I came. This was just the summer house then, of course. We spent most of our time at the Philadelphia home. It’s only since—well, I’ve been here for the last fourteen years.”

“And Mr. Yardley lives here year round as well?”

Helen hesitated once again, then merely responded, “Yes.”

Anna was eager for any information that would clarify the strange circumstances of her new job, but was reluctant to pry. The little housekeeper seemed just as reluctant to discuss the issue of Anna’s employment. It might have seemed strange had it not been for the atmosphere of long-ago customs clinging to the place.

“What’s in here?” Anna called, pointing to a door opposite the large bed.

“Your sitting rooms and bath.” Helen pushed the door open, revealing a large room with a stone fireplace. French doors led out to a balcony, and several comfortable chairs and tables formed a sitting area

before the hearth. A modern bath adjoined the room.

"It's wonderful," Anna exclaimed. "I never expected anything like this."

She tried to temper her enthusiasm, reminding herself she might not be staying. She realized how much she had been counting on this position, and how comfortable she already felt.

"Are your rooms like this?" she asked, trying to disguise her worry. *What am I going to do if I have to leave?*

"The very same," Helen exclaimed. "Now, I'll leave you to get settled. You'll have to bring your own bags up, though. I'm afraid there's no butler. Tea will be at four in the library. I'll come to take you down then."

"I really should wait to unpack until I speak with Mr. Yardley. I might not be staying."

"Posh," Helen replied, giving Anna a quick hug. "Of course you'll be staying."

Anna hoped that Graham Yardley agreed.

## CHAPTER TWO

Just make yourself comfortable in here, dear," Helen said as she showed Anna into a large room filled with floor to ceiling bookcases and fine leather furniture. Helen lit a fire in the huge stone fireplace. The evenings by the sea were cool despite the deceptive warmth of the waning afternoon sun. "Graham will join you soon."

When Helen left to prepare the tea, refusing all help from Anna, Anna examined her surroundings. An oil portrait above the fireplace caught her eye. Anna recognized the bluff below Yardley she had seen from her upstairs window. In the painting, a lone figure stood on an outcropping of stone, one arm draped over a bent knee, commanding the vista of sea and sky. Deep black hair, wild and windblown, framed a face in profile marked by chiseled features and piercing dark eyes. A flowing black great coat nearly obscured the figure, open only enough to expose a ruffled white shirt, tailored trousers, and black boots. A pair of black leather gloves, clasped loosely in one hand, completed the picture of the lord of the manor. It was an image from another time, brooding and untamed. Anna was surprised to see by the date that it was done only fifteen years before. Anna imagined this was Mr. Yardley, and he certainly appeared to be all that the master of such an estate should. Aristocratic, handsome, and austere. She supposed she would soon discover that for herself.

Anna pulled a small footstool in front of one of the large chairs in the central seating area. She extended her legs toward the warmth of the fire and leaned back, watching the crackling flames, wondering if she wouldn't soon be headed back to Boston. She was nearly asleep when a deep voice behind her startled her from her reverie.

"Miss Reid?"

Anna turned, stifling a gasp of surprise as she found herself face to face with the figure in the portrait. Standing before her was

one of the most striking women Anna had ever seen. Her portrait, however arresting, had not done her justice. She was quite tall, with thick black hair brushed back from an exquisitely sculpted face. Her eyes, perhaps her most compelling feature, were nearly black, as the artist had depicted, and contrasted sharply with her pale, luminescent complexion. The oils however had not conveyed the intensity of her gaze, nor the glacial severity of her bearing. Anna tried not to flinch at the scar which marred the handsome face, running from just below her hairline across the broad forehead to one elegantly arched brow.

Anna stared, completely at a loss as the woman approached. The dark-haired woman leaned slightly on an ornate walking stick, and, despite a slight limp, was imposing in finely tailored black trousers and an open-collared white silk shirt. A gold ring with some sort of crest adorned the long fingered hand that she held out to Anna.

"I am Graham Yardley," the woman stated simply. It was delivered in a tone that left no doubt as to who was the master of Yardley Manor.

Anna rose quickly, grasping the outstretched hand. She was instantly struck by the delicacy of the fingers that held hers briefly. She cleared her throat, which felt suddenly dry, and answered, "How do you do? I'm Anna Reid."

"Sit down, please," Graham said somewhat tersely, turning toward the chair facing Anna's. Anna, still a little stunned, was about to sit when she heard a noise at the door.

"Graham! Be careful!" Helen cried.

Even as Helen called a warning, Graham stumbled over the small footstool in her path and lost her balance. She reached out, muttering an oath, struggling not to fall. Instinctively, Anna grasped her about the waist, surprised at the willowy strength in Graham's reed-slender form. Anna steadied the taller woman against her, aware of the rapid pounding of Graham's heart.

"Are you all right?" Anna cried in alarm. She could feel her shaking.

Graham pulled away sharply, her dark eyes furious, her body rigid with tension. She steadied herself, her hand nearly white as she clenched her walking stick.

"Helen! How did that footstool get there?" Graham demanded angrily.

"It was my fault. I moved it," Anna said quickly, alarmed more by her employer's physical distress than her anger. The woman was still trembling, though she was trying hard to hide it. "I'm sorry." She looked from Helen to Graham in confusion. Graham drew a shaky breath, struggling for composure.

Suddenly, with horrifying clarity, Anna realized that Graham Yardley was blind. That realization brought a quick flood of sympathy, and she said without thinking, "Oh God, I'm so sorry. I didn't know."

"How could you know?" Graham rejoined roughly, reaching behind her with one hand to find the armchair. She lowered herself slowly, her expression betraying none of her discomfiture. She would not be humiliated further by enduring empty condolences. "There is no need to dwell on it. Be seated."

Helen came quickly to her side, watching Graham with concern. She extended a hand as if to touch her, then quickly drew back. "I've put the tea in its usual place. Will you need anything else?"

"No. Leave us."

As Helen stepped away, Graham held up her hand, her voice softening. "It's fine, Helen. You needn't worry. On second thought, could you bring us some sherry?"

As she spoke, Anna could see her host relax with effort against the cushions. Her face lost its edge as well, reflecting the unexpected gentleness of her tone. Anna found her expressive features captivating—as well as quite beautiful.

Helen smiled tenderly. "I'll get it right away."

They sat in silence as Helen brought glasses and poured the sherry. She handed Anna a glass and left Graham's on the small table near her right hand. The silence continued for a few moments after the housekeeper pulled the heavy library doors closed behind her. When Graham reached for the glass and raised it to her lips, her hand was steady again.

"Forgive me," she began in her deep mellifluous voice, "I haven't asked if your accommodations are suitable."

"The rooms are wonderful," Anna replied. "The view of the sea is exquisite." Instantly she regretted her remark, but Graham merely nodded, a distant look on her face.

"I know. I always stayed in that room when I was a child."

Anna willed herself to be calm and tasted the sherry. It felt warm and comforting as she swallowed. She couldn't stop staring at the woman across from her. Her mere physical presence was imposing, defined less by gender than by the pure elements of beauty and elegance, much as a classical sculpture is often androgynous at first glance. She was aristocratic, her every movement refined. She was scrupulously polite and obviously used to being in charge. She was aloof, remote, unapproachable. She was more than a little intimidating.

"Did Mr. Norcross explain what your duties are to be?" Graham continued, unaware of Anna's discomfort.

"Not in detail. I'm afraid I may not be what you're looking for. I have no experience managing a household."

"Really?" Graham remarked dryly, raising an eyebrow. "Mr. Norcross led me to believe that you had been married and now live independently. That sounds as if you have managed at least two."

Anna laughed a little grimly. "Neither was much of a challenge, I'm afraid. Certainly not on the scale of Yardley Manor. I worked to help support my husband through law school, and since my divorce I've been a graduate student."

Somehow, much of the story seemed like someone else's to her now. Looking back on the last ten years of her life, Anna felt as if she had been sleepwalking through her days. When just out of college, she had married a man who shared the same values as she and who seemed to have the same vision for the future. Anna had a degree in botany that she couldn't use, so she worked part-time in a florist shop while Rob was a student. Eventually, they accumulated all the material trappings of a successful young couple of the eighties, including a renovated brownstone in a gentrified area of the Back Bay, a new BMW for Rob, and a Jeep for Anna. Anna had financial security, the correct circle of literate female friends, and an adequate, if not particularly exciting, love life.

Rob was content and Anna was bored. As Rob worked longer and longer hours to keep pace with the other young attorneys in his firm, Anna found herself with less and less to do. They had a maid twice a week and every modern convenience available. Neither of them had been eager for children, so Anna couldn't even mingle comfortably with the women of their social set who spent much of their time on the Commons with their strollers and their offspring. The frequent

obligatory office socials became more of a burden than a diversion, and she and her husband grew steadily apart.

Anna shook off the memories, struggling to be honest with her would-be employer about her qualifications, or to be more honest, her lack of them, but needing desperately to find a way to make it work. “Can you tell me what it is that you require?”

Graham sighed slightly, turning toward the fire. In profile signs of fatigue lined her face, and Anna caught glimpses of gray streaking her dark hair. Anna guessed her to be ten years her senior, but despite her commanding tone and rigid control, Anna sensed a weariness that had nothing to do with the years.

“I need—assistance—with handling correspondence, reviewing accounts, running the day-to-day affairs of the estate. Helen cannot handle all of this any longer, and I—cannot do it alone. I have never had anyone else do it, and I don’t want Helen to think that I’ve lost confidence in her. It has simply become too much. You would also have to do some rather menial chores, I’m afraid. Helen no longer drives, and it is difficult getting deliveries out here.” She stopped, making an impatient gesture with one graceful hand. “We need someone at Yardley, it seems, who can manage in the world beyond our gates.”

Her tone was bitter, and Anna could only imagine how hard it must be for a woman of such obvious independence to admit she needed a stranger to assist her.

“Ms. Yardley—”

“Please, call me Graham,” Graham interrupted. “Everyone always has. It was my mother’s family name, and to hear my father tell the story, I looked so much like my mother’s father the name was never in doubt.” She smiled slightly, and Anna caught a fleeting glimpse of her haunting beauty. When she gave expression to her feelings, breaking the aura of restraint, she was even more intriguing.

“Graham,” Anna began quietly, “I am in something of a desperate situation myself. I want to continue in graduate school full-time. Without this job, I won’t be able to afford to do that—not and keep a roof over my head, too. I’m afraid I’ll need some help, but I would like to try this very much.” She meant every word, and her sincerity showed in her voice. She didn’t add how drawn she was to Yardley the moment she saw it, or how right it felt to be here. She couldn’t admit even to herself how much the woman before her captured her imagination, and

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her curiosity. She very much wanted to learn more of Yardley, and its compelling master.

Graham ran a hand through her hair, leaving it tousled, and sighed again.

“It seems we are both in need of some assistance, then. Shall we agree to try it for a month or two?”

Anna smiled in relief. “I’d like that very much.”

Graham nodded once, rose swiftly, and crossed to the door with deliberate steps. “I’ll send for you when I need you. Good evening.”

With that she was gone, her footsteps echoing in the quiet house. Anna sat for a moment, replaying the strange encounter. She was left only with impressions—fleeting glimpses of strength, and loneliness, and stubborn determination. And underneath it all, pain. Anna glanced up at the portrait, wishing it could reveal Graham Yardley’s secrets.