

Perfect Partners

By Jayne Ann Krentz



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A Jayne Ann Krentz Classic

Joel Blackstone spent ten years as a CEO building Thornquist Gear from a tiny local shop into a major player in the camping and sporting goods marketplace. Joel's reward for his hard work was old man Thornquist's promise to sell the shop to him within a year. Unfortunately for Joel, Thornquist dropped dead and bequeathed his empire to a grand-niece in the midwest. A minor adjustment to Joel's plan--he would just offer to buy the company from the heir.

Leticia Thornquist was deeply saddened by her great-uncle's death. She saw his bequest of Thornquist Gear as an opportunity to change her life. On the flight to his funeral, she decided to give up her job as a university librarian, move to Seattle, and take over the company. Only one thing stands in her way--Joel Blackstone.

Will Joel and Letty face off in a battle for control of Thornquist Gear or will they find they are perfect partners?



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

With bold style and a wicked sense of humor Krentz (Sweet Fortune) tells the story of Letty Thornquist, an Indiana librarian who heads for Seattle to run the sporting equipment company she has inherited. This threatens the plans of Thornquist Gear's CEO Joel Blackstone, who made the firm a success and plans to take over another company owned by an old and dangerous enemy. Joel tries to undermine Letty's influence; but, calm and steadfastly staying at the helm, Letty discovers his tricks and finds ways to improve the company's line. After Joel and Letty's new working relationship moves out of the office, she even fine-tunes his plan for revenge. Toss in a gaggle of vividly drawn minor characters--including Letty's former fiance, the pompous professor Philip Dixon, who arrives in Seattle shod in wingtips and claims that he should run Thornquist Gear--and it adds up to entertaining contemporary romance. Letty's stereotypical librarian background is a letdown, but when Krentz sharpens her claws on business professors and prenatal classes for yuppie mommies, she's in top form.

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About the Author

Jayne Ann Krentz's acclaimed *New York Times* bestsellers include *Light in Shadow, Smoke in Mirrors, Lost and Found, Soft Focus, Eye of the Beholder, Flash*, and *Grand Passion*. She writes contemporary romantic suspense novels under her own name, futuristic novels as Jayne Castle (also available from Pocket Books), and historical romance novels under the pseudonym Amanda Quick. She lives in Seattle.

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Chapter One

Charlie, you son of a bitch, you always did have a warped sense of humor. How the hell could you do this to me?

Joel Blackstone stood at the back of the tiny church and surveyed the cluster of mourners gathered in the front pews. September sunlight filtered down through the stained-glass windows illuminating the inside of the A-frame structure with a glow. The minister's voice was strong and surprisingly cheerful, given the fact that he was officiating at a memorial service.

"Charlie Thornquist was the most dedicated fisherman I ever knew," the minister said. "And that's saying something, because God knows I've done a pretty fair job of dedicating myself to that noble pursuit. But for me it was an avocation. A hobby. For Charlie it was nothing less than a true vocation. A calling."

At the minister's right, an urn rested on a wooden stand. The small brass plaque that hung on it was engraved with the words GONE FISHING. Inside the urn were the last earthly remains of Joel's eighty-five-year-old boss, Charlie Thornquist. Several photographs of Charlie with some of his prize catches were displayed around the urn. The most impressive was the one of Charlie with a marlin he'd landed off the coast of Mexico.

Joel still could not believe that the old bastard had ripped him off in the end. After all that talk of letting Joel buy him out in another year, Charlie had stiffed him. The company Joel had built from the ground up had gone to the daughter of Charlie's nephew. Ms. Letitia Thornquist was a librarian at some little midwestern college in Kansas or Nebraska or some equally foreign locale.

The hell with it. Thornquist Gear belonged to him, Joel Blackstone, and he was damn well not going to allow it to fall into the grubby little palm of some ivory tower type who didn't know a balance sheet from an unabridged dictionary. Joel's insides tightened with anger. He had been so close to owning Thornquist free and clear.

The company was his in every way that really counted. It was Joel who had poured everything he had into the firm for the past ten years, Joel who had single-handedly turned it into a major player in the marketplace. And it was Joel who had spent the past eight months plotting a long-awaited vengeance. But to carry out his revenge, he needed to retain complete control of Thornquist Gear.

One way or another, Joel thought, he was going to maintain his hold on the company. The little librarian from Iowa or wherever could go screw herself.

"We have gathered here today to bid Charlie Thornquist farewell," the minister said. "In some ways it is a sad moment. But in truth we are sending him into the loving hands of the master fisherman."

We had a deal, Charlie. I trusted you. Thornquist was supposed to be mine. Why the hell did you have to go and die on me?

Joel was willing to concede that Charlie probably had not intentionally collapsed from a heart attack before changing his will as he had promised to do. It was just that Charlie had a way of letting business slide in favor of fishing. He had always been good at that. This time good old Charlie had let things slide a little too far.

Now, instead of owning Thornquist Gear, the rapidly expanding Seattle-based company that specialized in camping and sporting equipment, Joel had himself a new boss. The thought was enough to make him grind his back teeth. A librarian, for God's sake. He was working for a librarian.

"For most of his adult life Charlie Thornquist enjoyed one driving passion." The minister smiled benignly on the small group. "And that passion was fishing. For Charlie Thornquist, it was not the actual catch that counted, but the communion with nature that accompanied each and every fishing trip. Charlie was happiest when he was sitting in a boat with a pole in his hand."

That was true enough, Joel reflected. And while Charlie had gone off to fish, Joel had sweated blood to transform Thornquist Gear from a two-bit storefront operation into a cash-rich empire, a young and hungry shark that was on the verge of swallowing whole its first live prey. Charlie would have appreciated the analogy.

Joel narrowed his eyes against the golden glow filtering through the colorful windows. He studied the trio in the front pew.

He bad already met Dr. Morgan Thornquist, thanks to Charlie. Morgan was a full professor in the department of philosophy and logic at Ridgemore College, a small private institution in Seattle. Morgan had been raised on a midwestern farm, and some of his past still showed in his sturdy frame and broad shoulders.

But nothing else about Morgan reflected his early years as a farm boy. He was in his early fifties and, according to Charlie, had lost his first wife five years earlier. With his bushy brows, a neatly trimmed gray beard and an air of academic pomposity, Morgan perfectly suited Joel's image of a college professor. Joel had nothing against Morgan. On the couple of occasions when they had met, the man had been gracious and civil. Joel respected intelligence, and there was no denying Morgan Thornquist was highly intelligent.

The same could be said of his current wife, the tall, ice-cool, very pregnant blonde seated on Morgan's right. Stephanie Thornquist was, by aft accounts, just as brilliant as her husband. Forty years old, she was a professor in the department of linguistics at Ridgemore College.

There was no denying Stephanie was a striking woman. Her features were patrician, her figure tall and elegant, even in pregnancy. Her silver-blond hair was cut in a very short, very sleek, very angular style that was at once modern and timeless. Her cool blue eyes reflected the same serene intelligence one noticed in her husband.

Having at least made the acquaintance of Morgan and Stephanie, Joel had a fair idea of what to expect from them. They were neither a direct threat nor a mystery. His new boss, on the other hand, was both.

Joel's gaze slid almost reluctantly to the young woman seated on Morgan Thornquist's left. He had not yet met Letitia Thornquist, and he was not looking forward to the experience.

From where he was standing he could not see her face very clearly, mostly because she kept sniffling into a huge hankie. Ms. Thornquist was the only one in the small crowd who was crying. She did so with some enthusiasm, Joel noticed.

Joel's first impression of the new owner of Thornquist Gear was that she bore no resemblance whatsoever to her stepmother. Instead of being tall, elegant, and blond, she appeared to be short, rumpled, and definitely not blond.

In fact, the thick, wild mane of honeyed brown hair was the first thing Joel really noticed about her. She had made an obvious effort to anchor the unruly mass in a severe topknot, but the entire affair was already slipping its mooring. Tendrils of hair had wriggled free of the gold clip and gone exploring on their own. Some dangled down the soft nape of her neck; others were darting playfully over her brows and curled down her cheeks.

Charlie had told him once in passing that Letty was twenty-nine years old. Charlie had also mentioned the name of the college where she worked as a librarian, but Joel had since forgotten. He tried to recall the name of the institution -- Valmont or Vellcourt, something like that.

At that instant Letitia Thornquist turned around and saw him watching her. Joel did not look away as she peered at him through a pair of round tortoiseshell frames. Her eyes were large and curious. The little round glasses and the high arch of her dark brows combined to give her a look of wide-eyed innocence. It reminded Joel of the expression on the face of an inquisitive young kitten.

She frowned thoughtfully at Joel, apparently trying to figure out who he was and what he was doing there.

He realized with a small shock of interest that she had a nice full mouth. He also noticed that the jacket of her suit appeared to be rumpled, at least in part, due to a certain roundness of her figure. She was not the least bit heavy, he saw, just pleasantly curved in all the right places. There was a certain earthy sensuality about her. This was the kind of woman men secretly pictured in their minds when they thought of home and hearth and babies.

Joel groaned inwardly. As if he did not have enough problems on his hands. Now he had to figure out how to do business with a bright-eyed innocent who looked as if she should be toiling over a hot stove with a couple of toddlers playing around her feet.

On the other hand, he told himself encouragingly, if Letitia Thornquist was what she appeared to be -- a

naive midwestem librarian -- he should be able to handle her. He would make her the same offer he had made Charlie.

With any luck Ms. Thornquist would jump at the chance to get rich in a few months and hop the next plane back to Kansas, or wherever it was she came from. There was supposed to be a fiancé in the picture somewhere, Joel belatedly recalled. He was sure Charlie had mentioned her recent engagement.

Joel was checking out her slender fingers in search of a ring when Letitia Thornquist turned her attention back to the minister, who was concluding the service.

"Charlie left this world while engaged in the activity he loved best," the minister concluded. "Not all of us are thus privileged. His family and friends will miss him, but they can take satisfaction in knowing that Charlie lived his life the way he wished."

Joel gazed at the urn. I'm going to miss you, you old son of a gun, even if you did throw a monkey wrench into everything at the end.

Joel watched with interest as Letitia opened her black bag, removed another large hankie, and blew her nose. She shoved the handkerchief back into her purse and tried to straighten her suit jacket with an unobtrusive movement. It was a useless effort, Joel concluded as he watched. It was obvious Letty was one of those people who could not put on a suit without having it look rumpled inside of five minutes.

As if again aware of his gaze, Letty turned around. With an odd rush of pruri...

Users Review

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