

Chapter 1

The director of The Tower, an independent living community for active adults, kicked off the week with a resounding announcement: every bathroom on the seventh and eighth floors was slated for a complete renovation. Residents who had called The Tower home for over five years were in for a delightful surprise: they were given the opportunity to handpick their preferred layouts, finishes, cabinetry, and contractors from an exclusive list of approved professionals.

Most eligible residents eagerly embraced the news, promptly selecting their preferences. However, one notable exception was Ms. Spinner. She wanted a more upscale countertop. The design of the shower doors wasn't to her liking. She asked for a tiled shower instead of the "cheap and ugly" plastic one. Her quest for excellence led her on a long faucet-hunting expedition, where she scoured multiple stores to pinpoint the most durable and reliable options and requested the top-of-the-line models. In short, her desires extended well beyond the original budget.

While one or two short meetings with the other residents sufficed to reach an agreement, six long discussions with Ms. Spinner had still not produced the desired result. As a last resort, the director reluctantly agreed to give her the same budget as the other projects—and not a penny more—so she could proceed according to her exacting preferences. Anything

beyond that would be on her.

Ms. Spinner immediately set out on a mission to find the perfect contractor. She met with every single one on the list given by The Tower and didn't like any of them. They were too pricey, didn't look professional, were late for the appointments. None met her demanding standards. Frustrated, she conducted more research, meeting with three more from her new selection, yet no one satisfied her criteria. Her last hope materialized in the form of Jim, who arrived at their appointed time.

When she saw the man, she frowned. A giant, in his early sixties, with shoulder-length hair and an unkempt beard, sloppy attire and a hand that looked too rough to shake when he offered it. Instead, she straightened up and stared at him. The man appeared entirely unfazed.

"I'm Jim. You called me for an estimate."

They stared at each other, both with a stern gaze. The man was in a rush and wasn't craving a new job.

She looked at his boots, her mouth set in a scowl, making it clear there was no way he was coming in with those. They silently battled over the question, the big guy not particularly in the mood to please an annoying old woman.

He stood his ground, and since she had already turned down all the other contractors, she double-checked that his boots were clean and reluctantly agreed to let him in.

"I want to renovate my bathroom," she said, and led him directly there, walking like a soldier during a parade. She explained what she wanted, and he went for the pricey side. She frowned again when she saw the amount at the end of his slip.

"Getting rid of the old material will be a hell of a job since we can't bring any dumpster up here," he added, for good

measure. "And I can't be here before a good three months, at the very least. The job will take three weeks if all your supplies are here when I start."

She had made it clear she wanted to purchase all the materials herself; the sink, the cabinets, tiles, countertop, faucets, everything, so that he wouldn't add any markup on those items, and that was fine with him.

"I sure hope you do the work of a master at that price!"

She figured the man wouldn't negotiate for even a penny. She also knew he was her last option and he seemed just as close to walking away.

"Take it or leave it, ma'am."

"I'll take it," she said, neither of them particularly happy with her decision.

"You sign here."

She put on her glasses and scrutinized the contract, reading every word carefully. She finally signed it, but not without a frustrated sigh.

"Here's my business card. I'll contact you a couple of days before I start. Make sure you have all your supplies here before I arrive."

He didn't bother to offer his hand this time. He headed toward the door and left before she could voice any further complaints or requests.

"Ms... Spen—Spinner?" a man said over the phone late