

# WRONG Turns

Jackie  
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*Who has not made wrong turns along the way?*



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## About the Author

Jackie Calhoun is the author of the following Bella Books—*Roommates, The Education of Ellie, Obsession, Abby's Passion, Woman in the Mirror, Outside the Flock, Tamarack Creek, Off Season and Seasons of the Heart* (reprint). She also authored *Crossing the Center Line*, a Windstorm Creative, Ltd. book, and wrote ten novels published by Naiad Press. Calhoun lives with her partner in northeast Wisconsin. Take a look at her Web site at [www.jackiecalhoun.com](http://www.jackiecalhoun.com), or contact her at [jackie@jackiecalhoun.com](mailto:jackie@jackiecalhoun.com). She loves to hear from her readers.

# Chapter 1

Callie parked her Saturn wagon behind the small cottage and carried her bag and cooler to the back door. Her tiredness fell away as she unlocked the door. She had sworn she'd never return, yet here she was. Inside, she threw open windows and put the food in the fridge as the familiarity of the place threatened to overwhelm her. Even the slightly musty smell from being closed up reminded her of years past. She thought she'd kept the excitement at bay, but now that she was here, it began to take over.

She hurriedly changed into her swimsuit and headed down the sandy steps to the water. Ankle deep, she looked out over the lake she'd considered her own when growing up, and noted the changes. Many of the small cottages that once nestled among the trees had been replaced by sprawling two-story log homes with matching boathouses and elevated stairs. Almost all had docks with covered lifts for boats and Jet Skis.

The hot wind ruffling the water lifted her hair off her forehead. Minnows nibbled on her ankles and feet, making

her smile. She unlocked the boathouse and dragged the small Sunflower sailboat to the water, then carried the mast and sail, keel and rudder out to it. A gust caught the fabric of the sail as she clambered into the tub-shaped fiberglass shell. The sun canted toward the west, its rays dancing on the water, nearly blinding her. Her heart soared.

The little craft sped across the lake, sail straining and boat heeling in the wind. Like ballast, she stretched across its width, feet braced against the gunnels, head and shoulders leaning over the other side, both hands holding the sheet tight as the sail and boom skimmed the lake. The sailboat rounded a jut of land and the wind dropped to nothing, just like that. The sail flapped aimlessly as the boat stopped dead in the water. She glanced up at the white triangle with its yellow stripe and sunflower against the blue sky and let go of her worries—the failing business, the loss of the cottage, the pittance that was her income, her life that was going nowhere—and lived in the moment. It was enough to dangle a hand in the cool water and relish the heat of the sun and the rock of the boat.

From nowhere, an enormous horsefly buzzed her. She tried to ward it off by wildly waving her arms around her head. When that failed to work, she grabbed the rope attached to the front of the sailboat, slipped overboard and sank into the water. When she came up, the fly was gone.

She floated on her back then, propelling the boat toward her with each kick, an unwitting joy filling her chest. She'd swim the sailboat into the wind or back to the cottage, whichever came first. The water, heavy and deep, slid over her like a caress. When she turned to check her bearings, she saw the speedboat.

Caught like a turtle on a road, the next few moments seemed larger than life so sure was she that they were her last. The clear sky, the cool water and the boat speeding toward her etched themselves in her mind. She had a fleeting thought that this might not be a terrible way to die, in the lake that held her best memories. The driver was looking away, eyes on the skier riding outside the craft's wake.

She began screaming and waving her free arm, the one that wasn't clinging to the rope attached to the sailboat. As the speeding craft bore down on her, she plunged into the depths, lungs and heart bursting. Overhead, she saw the underside of the speedboat, turning, the prop spinning. She surfaced and gasped for air. The sailboat seemed to have disappeared. Had it been sunk? But then she spotted it bottom side up floating away.

The speedboat—a MasterCraft—rocked next to her on its wake. A woman leaned over its side, asking, “Are you all right?”

“You damn near killed me.” Her voice came out thin, high and hysterical. Her body trembled. Her heart, which had lodged in her throat, now thudded with anger. The water, no longer friendly, seemed a dangerously deep, opaque place.

“I know. I'm sorry.” The woman's face appeared ashen beneath her tan and around her sunglasses. “Let me tow your boat home. Okay? You aren't safe out here.” She turned toward the skier who was climbing back into the speedboat. “Go get the sailboat, Brady, will you? Turn it right side up.”

The boy slid back into the water and swam toward the small boat that was drifting toward shore.

Callie jabbed a finger at the boy seated next to the woman. “He's supposed to watch the skier so that you can pay attention to where you're going. Non-motorized boats have the right-of-way.” She shook as the rage spilled out of her.

“I know. Get in. I'll tie your boat to mine,” the woman said.

Brady returned with the upright sailboat in tow—the sail dripping, the keel and wet life jacket she hadn't worn floating inside the shell.

“No.” Callie slithered into the sailboat headfirst and awkwardly turned right side up, belatedly realizing how foolish she must look. She bailed with one hand, while reaching for the sheet with the other.

“I'll stay with you then.”

“I don't need an escort, certainly not you,” she said, slamming the keel back in its slot.

The woman flipped her thick blond-highlighted hair back.

She said something to the boys, which was impossible to hear over the purr of the motor. When all three laughed, Callie became furious all over again.

As if to rescue her, a breeze sprang up. She pulled the sheet tight with one hand and turned the rudder into the gust with the other. The sailboat leaped forward, the wet sail straining, as the small craft slid through choppy waves past the speedboat. Callie turned her face skyward, trying for calm.

As she tacked across the lake, the speedboats and Jet Skis began to disappear. No-wake hours went into effect at five thirty. How quickly the day was going. If only she could hold it back.

The boat headed toward shore at an alarming rate—the gusts always seemed to pick up speed in the shallows. She dropped the sheet, pulled up the keel and turned out of the wind just before jumping overboard in waist-deep water. After mooring the boat, she climbed the steps with legs still shaking from the scare.

The cottage at the top of the hill was one story and wood sided, with an enclosed sleeping porch that faced the lake. There was one small bedroom used mostly for storage, one bath with a shower, a kitchen and a bigger room that opened onto the porch. The view of the lake lay framed between tall red and white pines and some scrubby oaks. The cottage faced south, capturing the sun and the summer breezes. That was how her grandfather had planned it.

In the kitchen she mixed a vodka and tonic and took it down to the lake where she sat on the beach, sipping the drink, occasionally looking up from her book at the lake. A kingfisher chattered as it flew low across the water. The voices and laughter of kids swimming across the lake carried over the surface. Fishermen's boats appeared. A couple of kayakers paddled past the beach and waved. A feeling of peace settled over her, and she put the book down.

Drawn to the water, she set her drink on the pier and dove off the end. When she shot through the surface, she found herself facing a boat. A beat of fear electrified her. She looked up to see her distorted reflection mirrored in a woman's sunglasses, the

woman in the MasterCraft that had nearly run her down. There was no one else in the boat.

To put some distance between herself and the craft, she sculled backward. “Are you trying to kill me or what?”

“I wanted to see if you were all right.”

Acutely conscious of how she looked, having seen herself in the bathroom mirror—hair wet and tangled, face red from wind and sun—she said, “Yes, no thanks to you.”

“For what it’s worth, I am sorry. I’ll never take my eyes off where I’m going ever again.” She put a hand over her heart. “Want to go for a ride? It’s that time of day.” After five thirty, the boats often began circling the shore slowly. The woman held up a beer bottle and raised her eyebrows in question. She was attractive, slender with broad shoulders like a swimmer’s. When she’d leaned over the side of the boat after the near accident, her breasts had nestled against each other, catching Callie’s eye despite her fear and anger.

“I already have a drink.”

“Bring it with you. My name is Victoria.” She smiled, her teeth white against her tan.

“Callie,” she said, still treading water. Her feet touched the sandy lake bottom, and she pulled herself up on the pier.

The boat bumped the dock and Victoria took hold of a post and held on. “Come on. Climb in.” She gestured with her head.

“I’d rather have my drink here,” she said, unwilling to get into the boat that had nearly run her down.

“Would you like to ski tomorrow? I’ll come by and pick you up.”

“I’m not a skier.”

“You can spot for me then.”

Callie sighed and all resistance drained from her. “All right. Just for an hour or two, though.” She got bored and hot sitting backward in a boat, watching someone ski.

“I’ll be here around ten,” Victoria said, but she didn’t leave. Instead, she twisted off the beer cap and leaned back, holding the pier post with one hand, drinking with the other.

Victoria was downing her third beer, the boat now fastened to the pier. Callie had mixed another vodka and tonic and taken it down to the beach where Victoria was sitting on a chair next to hers. When the breeze died and the sun sank toward the lake, coloring it purple, Callie slipped into the water and Victoria followed.

It wasn't until the stars popped out of the dark sky that Victoria fired up the engine and left. "Remember, tomorrow at ten," she said. "I have to see what my nephews are up to. They're probably having a couple of beers on the sly."

Chilled, Callie wrapped herself in a towel. Marc would say this woman was coming on to her, but she thought maybe Victoria was just looking for someone to do things with. After all, teenage boys were notoriously immature.

Upstairs, she warmed the sub sandwich she'd picked up on the way, popped a cork on a bottle of merlot and ate with only a candle for light. The warm night trembled outside. A buzzing June bug joined moths as they battered their wings against the screens. Cicadas sang from the trees and tiny gnats gathered around the candle.

After eating, she went back down the hill using a flashlight. She carried a kayak out of the boathouse and paddled onto the lake. A huge red orb rose over the trees along the eastern shore as the kayak gently rocked. The mosquitoes buzzing annoyingly around her head disappeared as bats zigzagged near, some so close she instinctively ducked. When moonlight drenched the water, tears slid down her cheeks.

She was spending a week at what used to be the family cottage. When her grandparents died and left it to their four children, all of whom had children of their own, dividing vacation times became complicated. Too many people with conflicting schedules trying to share one small space. The cottage was put on the market, and Callie hadn't the money to buy it. Her parents needed the cash for retirement, they said. They wanted to travel. Her sister lived in Seattle and wasn't interested. Of all her cousins only the one who lived the farthest away could afford to buy the place. He

rented it out by the week. To him, it was an investment. To her, it was as if someone had cut out a piece of her heart.

Tired out by sun and wind and drink, she fell asleep only to awake in the night sweating from a dream she immediately forgot. Heart pounding, she watched the moon ride over the lake. When her pulse quieted, she turned on a light next to her porch bed and picked up her book—*The Tortilla Curtain*. With every turned page the characters headed toward disaster. She badly needed distraction at this time of night when all her mistakes revisited her. In the morning, the book lay face down on her chest.

Before she went down to the lake, she took a good look in the mirror. She'd showered before going to bed and now her hair lay flattened by sleep. She stuck her head under the faucet and dried her hair into a semblance of order. Auburn in color, it was thick and short with a slight wave. She saw a few gray strands here and there and thought that thirty-eight was a bit young, but it was probably in the genes. She washed the sleep out of the corners of her eyes and decided she looked presentable enough. After applying sunscreen, her only makeup, and brushing her teeth, she went outside into another cloudless slightly breezy day. She was waiting on the pier when the MasterCraft motored up, and she grabbed the boat before it bumped the post.

"Morning, Callie." Victoria patted the bucket seat next to her as the boat rocked on its backwash. "Sit next to me."

Victoria eased the boat away from the pier. "We'll take my nephews skiing. Then we can do whatever we like." She glanced at Callie over the top of her sunglasses.

Callie stared back, wondering what this woman wanted from her.

Victoria's eyes were hazel, her gaze penetrating. "How long are you going to be here?"

"A week."

"Guess we'll have to make the most of it."

Of what, Callie wondered.

*We hope you enjoyed this  
Bella Appetizer.*

