



Branding the Virgin (Cowboys & Virgins 1)

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Category: Erotic, Romance, Western

Description: Mary-Jane wasn't looking for drama. All she wanted was a family of her own, so she decided to make that happen. A mix-up at the sperm bank leaves her with a baby in her belly, but the father is none the wiser.

Ty was injured in a bull-riding accident, and now all he plans on doing is working on his ranch and keeping to himself. That is until a little dark-haired woman shows up on his doorstep.

When their paths cross, will Mary-Jane be able to reveal to Ty that he's the father? Will Ty be able to keep Mary-Jane from running? Will there be a lot of steam in this book? You betcha!

Warning: This pregnant virgin story is wonderfully ridiculous and just as sweet as it sounds. Saddle up and take an evening stroll with this easy quickie.

Total Pages (Source): 10

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Mary-Jane

“How did you get yourself into this, Mary-Jane?” I ask myself for the twentieth time today. I was set to arrive at my new temporary place of employment in a little over two hours and dread was weighing heavily on me. I just hope the clothes I brought will do well to hide this little baby bump that keeps getting bigger and bigger by the day. I’m running out of time.

I let out a long sigh as I absently rub my hand over the bump. This little boy has become my whole world. In all my planning I never thought this would happen. Just when I thought I was getting something I’d wanted so dearly, everything else in my life started to fall apart. Just goes to show you: you can plan everything how you like, but someone else can come to kick it out from under you, and you have to try and pick the pieces up the best you can. This time, though, it isn’t my pieces I’m picking up. I have a baby to protect and to make a life for.

“I promise, little man, I won’t let anyone take you from me.” I rest both hands on my stomach, praying my words are true and that I’m not making a giant mistake by going to see the one person who could take my baby away from me. My heart clenches at the thought of losing him. I can’t. I won’t, I correct myself. Losing this baby isn’t an option.

Someone couldn’t be that heartless, could they? To take a baby from its mother? I’m not so sure here, though. If what I’ve found out about my baby’s father is true, then heartless is pretty damn close.

Last week my doctor told me that they'd made a mistake. A giant one. They'd given me a specimen from the wrong sperm donor. Someone who wasn't a willing donor at all.

I'd gotten two giant kicks in one day. I'd lost my job and was possibly losing my child. The clinic said they had to inform the man who'd donated. I'd asked for his name and requested they give me some time before they contacted him. They were reluctant at first, but they'd given me both after I threatened a lawsuit.

After a little online stalking I'd found my baby's father. When I'd seen who he was, I'd lost my breath. He was known all over Texas, or so it seemed with all the articles a few years back. He used to ride bulls, but now he owns a big ranch down south, almost two hours from here. The place I'll be calling home for a little while.

A lot of the articles weren't flattering. He was one of the best bull riders, having won dozens of competitions, but he had a reputation to go along with it. Many articles and posts I found called him an arrogant asshole. Meaner than the bulls he rode. It made me think he wasn't going to have any compassion when it came to this situation. Or maybe he'd just sign on the dotted line and let me and my son go.

Or he could try to take him from me. He had the money. The thought of running kept fluttering through my mind. I had money saved up, and made a small profit when I'd sold my little house just two days ago, but something about running felt wrong.

I had to be sure that if I did choose to run, I was making the right decision. That I was protecting my baby, making sure we could be together. That's why I had to do this. I had to go meet this man. See who he was in person, because you can't always believe rumors.

Maybe it wouldn't be so bad. Ideally, maybe we could share custody. I could get a place in town not far from his ranch. Find a local job there and we could do this

together, if that's what he wanted. It wasn't what I signed up for when I'd decided I wanted a baby. I'd made the choice to go this alone, which I've been doing my whole life.

What if he has a wife or girlfriend? The thought makes my stomach turn. I could be turning their lives upside down. Then my baby would have another mom. A lump forms in my throat. It feels like every time I get something good going in my life, someone or something is trying to rip it from me.

I searched and searched for anything on him with someone else and came up with nothing. I'd read article after article on his bull-riding days and never was a woman mentioned or pictured with him. He had a hard look on his very handsome face, so I'm not sure I'd want to stand next to him and pose for a picture either.

It was hard to see his face in a lot of pictures with the cowboy hat, but I could always see the grim line of his mouth and hard jaw. It always seemed locked in place. You'd think if you just won some big competition you'd at least smile or something. Nope. Not him. Picture after picture he still had that hard, locked jaw. Almost like he couldn't talk. He's scary and intimidating. I don't know how I'm going to tell him about this baby.

Worse is thinking maybe he does want to be in this baby's life and he'll be cold and hard to my little boy. I'd grown up with a father like that and it wasn't easy. Even to this day I can't say whether or not he loved me. Did he take care of me? Yes. But I feel more like he put up with me because he had to. It didn't matter if I was there or not.

I think I would rather him at least be angry or something. The indifference and coldness left me empty and numb.

What I did find during my internet search was a job opening on his ranch. Someone

to help around the house for the summer and do some of the books. I could get an up-close look at the father of my child before I had to tell him the truth.

“Ma’am, I think that’s everything.” I look up

at one of the movers who’s been packing up my stuff to put into storage. I take the clipboard he’s holding out and sign on the dotted line. He hands me the key to the storage unit they’d put it all in.

My hand closes around the key that holds almost everything I own except two suitcases I have packed away in the trunk of my car. Even the stuff for the baby room I’d started to put together has been packed away in here. I hold back a tear, not wanting to make this poor man uncomfortable.

“Thank you,” I tell him, handing back the clipboard.

He nods before turning to leave.

I stand in my empty house. The place where I thought I’d be raising my son. A home that would have been filled with so much love. He’d never feel the coldness like I had.

Even without the donor mix-up I would have been leaving anyway. I’d moved to this little town because I wanted to get away from the big city. I dreamed of living somewhere where everyone knew everyone. I wanted to have a family in a place like this.

Problem was, I couldn’t find anyone I wanted to have a family with.

Ty

I toss the rope into the back of my truck and head for the house. I've got a new mare that just won't break and I'm about out of options with her. Stallions and bulls, I can handle, but give me a stubborn female horse and I might as well hang up my saddle. It was a mix-up, and I'm trying to make the best of it. I wanted a new horse for the ranch and I made a deal with another rancher a few hours away to buy his foal in the spring. He'd promised me a stud, but when a mare popped out, he told me I could take it or wait another two years. I didn't have much of a choice and agreed.

My home, the Branding Ranch, is located in south Texas. I retired on this piece of land right after I won my last rodeo championship. I was in it to make enough money to buy myself some cattle and got out. It's a hard life working rodeos, and a dangerous one at that. I was lucky enough to walk away with my nuts intact, but even I got close with that one.

My last ride was on Hercules, the circuit's biggest and meanest bull. He threw me off just after I set my eight-second record, and stomped right on my boys. They rushed me to the closest hospital and I had to stay there for a week. They had to take sperm samples from me, because I couldn't get hard to ejaculate. I haven't been able to get hard since before the accident. I thought I'd lost my dick that day, and though it's still attached, it doesn't work. They told me my sperm was still viable, but a lot of good that does when I can't get the fucking thing up.

I've got a couple of guys who work the ranch for me, and they all stay out in the bunkhouse. But it seems pointless now, because it's not like I need my privacy. I won't be bringing women home, because it's not like anyone would want me. A nice conversation only goes so far. I wasn't bringing women around before, but I'd always hoped one day I could find a wife and we could make a few babies. But that dream got stomped on, literally, the day of the accident.

My new hire, MJ, should be here today. I put an ad in the paper for a new hand to help out with some of the day-to-day stuff. I've got enough labor, but I need someone to look over the houses and catch all the stuff I'm missing. I've always had a good head on my shoulders for business, but the everyday shit, I seem to miss. I need an assistant who can go around with me during the day and see what I do and what I don't do.

I make my way back to the house, put the truck in park, and hop out. My hound dog Blue looks up from the porch for half a second before yawning and lying back down.

"Don't go hurting yourself," I say, shaking my head. The damn dog hardly moves, let alone barks. I thought hound dogs were supposed to howl.

I stay in the main house, which is on the small side—my bedroom and bathroom and a couple of empty bedrooms in the back. When I had it built, I'd thought one day of filling them with kids, but not now. There's a simple kitchen and table, but most of the meals are made in the cook house. There's a big building across the way where there's an industrial kitchen and long picnic tables for the guys to eat at during chow time. But most nights I end up in here alone. It's not that I'm a loner, I just can't seem to keep the scowl off my face. And I can tell that people would rather I keep my attitude to myself.

"Yo, Ty!"

I look across the field to see my younger brother Blake getting out of his truck. I've got two younger brothers and a younger sister. It's me, then Blake, then our brother Trace, and lastly our baby sister, Dolly. Our mom passed away when we were younger, and then our dad followed a few years ago. They left each of us a piece of land and so we all live in kind of a big commune. We all have our own places and our own farms, but I swear one of them is always stopping by. I think they know I've become more withdrawn since the accident, so they like to check up on me.

“What?” I mumble as he walks over to me.

“Always so cheerful,” Blake says, taking off his cowboy hat and wiping his brow. “That new hire coming in today?”

“Supposed to be here any minute.” As I say the words, a dark blue SUV comes around the bend and pulls up to the house. “Speak of the devil.”

“What’s his name again?” Blake asks, putting his hat back on and leaning against the bed of my truck.

“MJ. That’s all the application said.”

I watch as the door of the SUV comes open, and out hops a short brunette with long curly hair. “Guess that’s not him. She must be lost.” My words trail off as she steps around the car and comes fully into view. She’s got on a white dress with blue flowers on it, and for a second I’m rooted to the spot. She’s breathtaking, and I feel my jaw drop at the sight of her.

“Wish a little thing like that would get lost on my ranch,” Blake says, tipping his hat up.

I can’t reply to him because I’m watching as she walks over to stand in front of us, a shy smile on her lips. Neither of us speaks a word, and she puts her hand out in front of her and introduces herself.

“One of you must be Ty Jennings. I’m MJ. Short for Mary-Jane.”

I stare up at both cowboys, who look at me like they've never seen a woman before. Or maybe more like I've got two heads. One starts to smile, reaching out to take my hand, and I immediately know he's not Ty. Even if they look a lot alike. Ty is the one with the hard look on his face that matches all the pictures I've seen. Most of them I could only see part of his face, but looking up at him now, I can see almost every inch of it. The cowboy hat can't hide him from me at this angle.

Before I shake the other guy's hand, Ty grabs mine, shaking it first, but he doesn't let go for a second. He looks over at the man next to him, shooting him a glare before finally letting me go. They are clearly related. The other man's smile only turns bigger and he lifts his hands in the air.

Ty turns back to look down at me. His dark eyes meet mine. They're dark brown and almost look black around the edges. "You're not a man," he bites out through clenched teeth. I didn't even know someone could talk like that. His eyes narrow on me like he's studying something. Maybe he's waiting for me to turn into a man.

"Ah. No," I say simply, unsure how else to respond to that.

"Fucking shit." He turns his back to me, and I look over at the other man.

"Sorry he's a dick. I'm his brother, Blake." He winks at me. "The nice one. And you are?" A dimple forms in his cheek, and I wonder if Ty has one, too. I'm guessing if he did, you'd never see the thing. Then I wonder how cute my little boy will be with that same dimple. It reminds me why I'm here to begin with.

These men are my little boy's family, and I don't look to be off to a good start with them. It's clearly a problem that I'm not a man, and that's definitely not something I can change.

"Mary-Jane," I say, trying to be polite. "Or MJ."

“Don’t you have somewhere to fucking be?” Ty barks, turning around and making me jump. I almost lose my footing,

but he grabs me right before I can fall, pulling me to him.

“Don’t scare the tiny thing,” Blake jokes, the laughter clear in his voice. At least someone thinks this is funny.

I go to pull away from Ty’s hold, but he only grips me tighter as a string of curses like I’ve never heard leaves his lips. Then he practically jumps away from me from me like I’m on fire. “You have got to be fucking kidding me,” he barks again, making me wonder if he can say one sentence without dropping the F-bomb.

“No!” Blake says, laughing so hard he bends over, slapping his thigh as he howls with laughter.

Ty just turns and storms back into the house, leaving me standing there with my mouth agape.

“I…” I look at the front door he’s left wide open. I wonder if I’m supposed to follow him, but I quickly halt that train of thought. “Maybe I should go and come back,” I suggest. “I think I’m supposed to be at the bunkhouse or something.” Maybe this guy could take me over there. I really don’t want to drive back to town. I feel like my feet are starting to swell a little from the car ride and the summer heat. I really just want to sit down for a minute with my legs out.

Blake just shakes his head as if getting himself under control after his laughing fit. The ball of nerves in my stomach is growing, which isn’t good, because throwing up comes way too easily to me these days.

Seems like the articles calling Ty an asshole might have been pretty spot on. The

reality is hitting a lot harder than I thought it would.

“Don’t think you can stay at the bunkhouse.”

“She’s not staying at the fucking bunkhouse,” Ty barks, once again making me jump.

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“Would you stop that!” I snap back. My hand goes to my chest as I try to get my heart under control. How can someone so big move without my hearing them?

He just ignores me. “Where’s your shit?”

I have the urge to tell him he can shove it where the sun doesn’t shine, but I stop myself. This isn’t just about you, Mary-Jane. You have to give this a go. Even if only for a little while.

I point behind me to my SUV, not trusting myself to talk because the knot growing in my throat is so big I’m not sure I even can.

“You get gone,” Ty says, pointing to Blake before making his way towards my SUV.

“He doesn’t bite,” Blake says as he moves past me towards a black truck. I’m not sure I believe him.

I take a few breaths and attempt to push down the knot in my throat.

“Why aren’t I going to the bunkhouse?” I finally get out as Ty starts pulling my two bags from the SUV.

He just grunts a non-response, moving past me back towards the door. I follow him because I don’t really have a choice.

When I enter the house, I stop short, taking it in. There is nothing. Not one thing hung on a wall, not a trinket in sight. Just the basics a house would need. Two sofas, a TV

mounted on the wall, and a medium-sized dining room table that draws my eye to the equally bare kitchen.

I'm not sure how something could feel cold in this Texas summer heat, but it does.

"This way," he says looking back at me over his shoulder. I follow him down a hallway. He nods to a closed door. "Office."

I have to bite my tongue from pointing out he said something without a curse word or bark. He stops at a door and pushes it open to reveal a room that looks just like the rest of the house.

It's bare, with nothing but a simple, king-sized bed with a night stand and a dresser. It's painted a soft white, making me think maybe it belonged to a woman at one time. It's the only soft thing about the house. I follow him into the room, placing my car keys and purse on the dresser.

"Bathroom's in the hallway, and there is food in the fridge."

I turn to look at him, but he seems to be looking anywhere but at me. I want to knock that stupid cowboy hat off his head. From this distance I can't get a good look at him. Not like when I was standing right in front of him outside.

"Where should I start?" I ask, feeling a little lost and even more alone.

"The office. Tomorrow." He turns to leave.

"Do I need to make you dinner?" I ask, knowing I'm supposed to keep his house up. It was part of the job description. Office work with light house duties.

"No, I'm going out." He grabs my car keys from the dresser as he leaves the room,

his steps hard on the wood flooring. I stand there stunned, then hear the front door slam shut.

I drop down onto the bed, my head falling into my hands. Even at home I didn't feel this alone, even though it was just me. The coldness of the house brings back an empty childhood I really don't care to think about.

I reach down, pulling off my sandals and tossing them to the floor, before I lie back onto the bed and cup my belly.

Again I debate leaving but remember he took my keys for some strange reason. Maybe he needed to move my SUV or something. I absently rub my stomach, knowing I have to give this a chance no matter how much I want to run.

I pray that maybe Ty is just having a bad day, but I have a feeling I'm wrong. He really is just an asshole. The small hope I had about finding something more slips away.

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Ty

I go out of the house and get one of my horses, saddling it up. I had to get out of there before I went crazy. I tuck her keys in my back pocket and head out through the pasture. I use my ranch mostly for a few cattle and training horses. When I was hiring someone new, I wasn't expecting a woman, and I damn sure wasn't expecting a little thing like her. As I ride down to the woods and along the edge of the creek, I think about what happened when I touched her.

When I touched her hand I felt it all the way in my bones, and then my cock stirred. Not so much as a twitch all these months, and then I hold her hand for a second and

my dick swells up trying to get free. My doctors said maybe one day it could come back, but there were no guarantees. One little touch, however, and it appears I've been cured. I was pissed off that Blake was standing there and he knew immediately what had happened. And I was even angrier at myself that I couldn't do anything about it. I didn't want this woman on my land, but I wasn't about to let her go. Not only did I feel my cock get hard for the first time since I can remember, but something in my chest tightened when I looked at her. Something I'd never felt settled in me and it's got my mind going crazy. I had to get out of that house and get some fresh air.

"Heard your dick works."

I roll my eyes at the sound of my other brother Trace behind me. Looking over I see him on his horse as he crosses over the creek that divides our property.

"Figured Blake would go run his mouth the second he could." I give my horse a little nudge with my feet and he walks forward. Trace comes up beside me and keeps pace.

"Oh, the very second he hopped out of his truck. I thought I might find you here."

"Yeah, well, I think you might need to mind your own fucking business."

A silence passes between us. We're normally pretty close, but this situation is somewhat embarrassing, and the fact that my brothers are talking about it makes it worse. I immediately feel bad, so I look over and apologize.

"Sorry. Just been a weird day."

"Don't worry about it. Blake just loves giving you shit." He looks ahead thoughtfully and then back to me. "You think she'll stay?"

The weight of his words hit me. I had thought of letting her go, but what if she wants to leave? I don't know a thing about her, so what if she left? How could I find her? How could I convince her to come back? Why would she even want to come back to someone like me? I know I'm grumpy and a foul-mouthed pain in the ass most of the time. But if this woman is the cure to what's happened to me, and someone I want to get to stick around, then I've got some changes to make.

"She has to," I say, turning my horse around and heading back to my place.

"Good talk, Ty."

I hear Trace's sarcastic voice over the clomping of my horse's hooves, and I ignore him. I've got some shit to fix if I want to make this a place she wants to be.

By the time I get finished with everything, it's late when I get home. I'd seen the way she looked around the place when she got here, so I went to the store in town and bought some stuff to brighten the place up. Quietly, I haul in all the shit I got and start to work. I filled half my truck bed up with fresh flowers, cleaning out the store. I don't have vases, so I bought a bunch of mason jars and stuck them all over the house, filling them as I went. I put down a few rugs and some blankets the sales girl said would make any space look "comfortable." I told her comfortable to me was a good pair of boots, but she didn't think that was the same thing.

I move all over the place, putting out candles and random stuff that I hope Mary-Jane might like. When I finally finish and clean it up, it's late, and I haven't heard so much as a peep from her room. Before I go to bed, I decide to check on her, just to make sure she's all right.

I walk down the hall and stand outside her door for a second, then press my ear to it. I can hear her even breathing and decide to take a chance. I turn the knob and peek in, seeing her on her side asleep. My cock gives a little twitch, and it almost shocks me

into letting go of the door. Luckily I catch myself at the last second and hold on to it. I take a moment and just look at her in the moonlight.

Her dark curly hair is laid out on the pillow, and I swear the light makes it look like her skin is glowing. The curve of her hip is shown off in this position, and I have the strongest urge deep in my chest to lie down behind her and spoon. Not even to do anything more with her,

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just to hold her and feel her sleeping in my arms. My heart gives a little whimper, and I make myself stop looking at her.

After closing the door, I creep silently back to my own room and get ready for bed. Once I'm stripped down to my underwear, I lie in bed and think about her. Reaching between my legs, I feel my cock stir a little, and I can't help but smile. It's not all the way there like it was when I touched her, but this is something.

When I close my eyes and roll onto my side, I envision her next to me in bed. And when I dream, it's of a dark-haired beauty who smiles like an angel.

5

Mary-Jane

I turn to the side, looking in the mirror to make sure my little baby bump isn't showing. The peach-colored sundress flares out at the hips, giving me the extra coverage I need. I don't know how much longer I'll be able to hide it. I'm just praying that maybe the men around here have manners and no one will call me out on being pregnant. I'm scared that I might say I'm not and make things all kinds of awkward.

Taking a deep breath, I try to get the swirl of emotions under control, hoping that maybe Ty just had a bad day yesterday and today he'll be in a better mood. I slip on my flats and make my way out of my bedroom and down the hall towards the kitchen. Part of me wants to get to know Ty, the whole reason I'm here, but other part hopes that maybe I've missed him and he's already out working on the ranch.

I come up short when I enter the open kitchen, the morning light shining in through the windows. Everything looking different from the day before, including the woman standing at the kitchen island. She turns towards me, her wild mass of red hair bouncing with the movement. A smile pulls at her round face, and she looks to be a few years younger than me. Her pale skin is a stunning contrast to her big blue eyes and fire-red hair.

She looks like she fits here. Like she actually belongs on a ranch, with her cowboy boots and blue flannel shirt tucked into her jeans. But she's not the only thing that's different. The house has come alive. I have to bite my lip to keep from laughing because I don't know if the woman in front of me decorated the place. It looks a mess, like someone just threw a bunch of stuff together with no rhyme or reason, but it's still better than the cold that coated the space yesterday. Only now it's a decorated mess.

"Hi, I'm Dolly Jennings." She takes a step towards me, holding out her hand. Of course her name is Dolly. It even falls off her lips with a sweet twang. I smile back, then her last name hits me hard. Oh God, is this his wife? My stomach drops, and I slowly raise my hand to meet hers.

"I'm, ah..." I take a deep breath, trying to get myself under control. I knew this was a possibility, but the reality is so much harder to take. Would this be the other woman in my child's life? "I'm MJ," I finally push out. I try to get myself under control, fighting an inner battle I've been having for days since I found out about Ty. I've always known that I could rip his world apart if he did have a wife, but I try to find the good. That it would just be one more person who could love our child. But it still feels like I'm losing something, and I'm not sure what that something is.

She cocks her head to the side, studying me, before she suddenly pulls me in for a hug, squeezing me tighter than I thought someone her size could. I have to hold my body away from her a little out so she doesn't feel my baby bump.

“Ah, he’s not that scary. I promise Ty doesn’t bite,” she says as she pulls back from me. That smile is still lighting up her face. This close I can see freckles sprinkling her nose and they make her look even younger than I initially thought. “The big scary ones are always the ones with marshmallow in the center. You’ve just got to...” She makes a hand motion and a pop sound with her mouth. “...Crack them open.”

With that, she goes back over to the kitchen island, picks up her coffee mug, and takes a sip.

“Don’t you have class?” a deep voice rumbles from behind me. I don’t turn to look. I know it’s Ty. He still has the grumpy voice from yesterday, or maybe that’s just how he always talks.

“What happened to this place?” Dolly looks around the kitchen, then towards the living room. “I mean, anything’s better than what is was, but this is still kind of...” She scrunches her face, her distaste for the decor clear. I know now that this wasn’t her doing. “...Weird.”

“Class, Dolly,” Ty grumbles again, and I can feel him move farther into the room. Closer to me. It takes everything in me to not turn and look at him.

“Chill. It’s summer.” She takes another sip of her coffee.

“Where are you staying?” Ty asks. I glance to my side and see him standing there with no shirt on. His eyes are trained on me, but I just look back at Dolly, wondering about his question.

“The little cabin over by the lake.” She raises her hand. “Don’t even start. I own part of the land, and I’m eighteen. I’ll stay there all I like and you can’t stop me. You can’t make me stay here. I mean—”

Ty cuts her off. "I'm good with the cabin." I can't help but glance over at him again, and I'm surprised to see his eyes still on me. It takes all my willpower to look away and not down his naked chest.

Dolly's mouth hangs open like she can't believe what Ty just said, and I'm just as confused. Maybe they don't live together. That would explain why the house was kind of bare. Maybe she took most everything with her. I hate that I like that idea a whole lot more than them being under the same roof.

"You don't like the shit I got?" Ty asks, and I keep looking at Dolly, uncertain who he's talking to. I'm not going to speak up, just in case. That cliché if you don't have something nice thing to say... rings loudly in my head.

I feel a little tug on my hair, and I look over to see Ty has a strand twirled around his finger. "You don't like my shit?" he asks again, staring down at me.

"It's different," I admit. Somehow I manage to keep my eyes trained on his face. God, he's even bigger than I remember from yesterday. He's hard all over, and in my peripheral vision I see that the hair on his chest matches his beard. He looks like he hasn't shaved in a few days.

"We can get different shit if you want." He keeps playing with my hair, and I hear a whispered, "What the fuck?" from Dolly. Seems everyone has a dirty mouth. My kid's first word is going to be a curse.

"It's not my home. I'm fine with whatever." I mean, I'm only going to be here for a short time. It's only supposed to be a part-time position, and who knows how things will blow once Ty finds out all my secrets. They'll be showing sooner rather than later.

He releases my hair and reaches into his back jean pocket, pulling out his wallet. He

takes out a credit card and tosses it onto the counter next to him.

Then he turns and leaves back down the hallway. “Do that Amazon shit. Don’t be leaving my ranch,” he throws over his shoulder. Like I could leave. He still has my freaking keys!

“Wow,” Dolly exhales as she walks over to the counter and picks up the credit card. “I’ve never once in my whole life gotten my brother to let me use his credit card. You’re here five seconds and he just hands it to you.”

“Brother?” I ask, feeling relieved. One less obstacle.

“Yep. And there’s more of them. I know you already met Blake—he’s been running his mouth about you all morning—but there’s still Trace. But no worries. Ty’s the only asshole of the bunch.” She laughs at her own joke, like Ty heard it, and that’s when I see the dimple. The one all the Jennings seem to have.

She hands me the card. I take it from her, but I don’t plan to use it. Unless that’s what he wants me to do. He hired me to take care of the house and help with the office. I guess I can get a few things. I think about all my stuff shoved away in a storage unit, things it took years to acquire to make a little home for myself. I feel a stab of sadness. I still have them, I remind myself. One step at a time.

“Told you. Those big bastards fall hard.” She winks and polishes off her c

offee. “I just wanted to pop in and see if what Blake said was true. I’ll stop by later to poke the bear.” With that, she turns and walks out of the house, leaving me standing alone in the kitchen with no idea what I’m supposed to do.

Guess I’ll go find this office.

Ty

I hear Dolly head out the front door, and then hear Mary-Jane's footsteps. When I hear the door to the office open, I can't stay in my bedroom any longer. I wanted to get dressed and then get outside, but something is keeping me in the house.

I put on a button-up shirt, but leave it open while I pull on my boots and grab my hat. I walk to the office and give a knock on the open door, startling her. She turns around and bites her lip, and all I can think about is doing the same thing to it. Sinking my teeth into her full bottom lip and finding out what she tastes like.

My cock stirs in my tight jeans, and I can't keep the rush of blood from hammering in my ears. I want her like I've never wanted anything in my life. Being in the same room with her is like climbing on a bull for the first time. I'm excited, nervous, and don't know what to do with my hands.

I grip my hat and try to think of what to say as her eyes slide down my chest. I move the cowboy hat in front of my cock just before her eyes land on it and see how hard I am. Jesus, I've never been this uncontrolled before, and I hate how shook up she has me. I see her cheeks flush as she takes in my appearance, and I can't say I'm not doing the same. My eyes roam down her dark curls to her exposed neck, and I think of licking the pulse there. Burying my nose in there and smelling her scent. I look to her cleavage that's spilling out of the peach sundress, the ruffles on it only exaggerating how top heavy she is. I've got an image of her round ass burned in my brain from when I saw her from behind this morning. My eyes make their way back to her face and we catch each other staring

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My mouth starts working before my brain has a chance to stop me. “Come ride me.”

If possible, her cheeks burn even redder and she looks away. “What?”

I clear my throat and try again. “Come out to the barn with me. You can see the horses and maybe go for a ride.” I want to kick myself in the ass for blurting out what my dick thought was appropriate, but I try to rein it in. “I can show you the office stuff later.”

“I, um, don’t know about riding a horse. But I’d like to see the ranch.” She looks up at me, and I see her hands twitch at her side like she wants to wring them together or hold on to something.

“You ever ridden before?” I can’t help how deep my own voice is, thinking about what that question might mean. Fuck, Ty, get it together.

“No.” She looks away, and I see the hint of a smile she’s trying to hide.

“Good. I’ll be the one to show you how.”

Without thinking, I hold my hand out to her, and I stand there as she looks down at it. For half a second I think she won’t take it, but she reaches out and places her small hand in mine.

“Maybe you should finish getting dressed.” Her voice is breathy, and I watch as she licks her lips.

I look down and see my shirt is still open and my chest is exposed. I forgot to button it in my hurry to get to her, and for some reason I don't feel like closing it. I like her eyes on me. I like the way her body is leaning a little towards mine and the way her pulse is vibrating between our hands right now.

"It's hot out. I think I need to cool off."

As I put on my hat and pull her outside, I could almost swear I hear her say, "Me too."

I show Mary-Jane, or MJ, as she introduces herself to the guys on the ranch, how the place runs and what I hired her for. The guys seem to know right away to keep their distance, and I don't know if it's because I step in front of her every time one of them tries to shake her hand, or the fact that I pull her away every time one of them tries to ask her a question.

I've kept her hand in mine all day, and I can't bring myself to let it go. Not even when she tugged at it so she could open the door to one of the buildings. If she needs a door open, I'll do it for her. No need to let go of my hand.

I've also kept my shirt open because I like the way she looks at me. Plain and simple. I like her eyes on me and only on me, and if I have to walk around half naked to get them on me, then so be it.

"This is the new mare I got. I haven't broken her yet. She's been a real handful."

We walk up to the fence, and Mary-Jane looks in awe at the snow-white horse. "What's her name?" she asks, looking over at me with bright eyes.

"She hasn't got one. Think you could do the honors?"

“Seriously?” The pure excitement in her voice has me wanting to let her rename the whole goddamn place. Anything to put a smile on her face like the one she’s wearing now.

“Yes.” My voice is husky, and I watch as she bounces a little, shaking her cleavage and making my cock ache.

“She’s so pretty. She looks like Rarity.”

“Who?”

“You know, from My Little Pony. I think that should be her name.” She beams at me, and in this moment, I would never deny her anything.

“Rarity. Guess that’s her name now.”

We spend most of the day walking around the ranch and talking about the place, and she asks questions about me. I want to know about her, but every time I’ve tried to steer the conversation that way, she changes the subject. I want to push for more, but I have a feeling there’s something she’s not telling me.

“Can I cook supper tonight?” she asks, another hopeful note in her voice.

“Yes.” Why would I ever tell this woman no?

We walk hand in hand back to the house as the sun starts to set. It feels like I’ve known her so much longer than a day. There’s still a lot I don’t know, but something is happening here. It’s not just her magic touch and all that I feel when I’m beside her. There’s something deeper and sweeter, and it’s shaking me to the core.

I’m not a man that changes very often. I like things the way I like them, and then I

keep them that way. But it feels as if Mary-Jane is about to turn my world upside down.

7

Mary-Jane

I move about the kitchen, feeling Ty's eyes on me the whole time. I'm not sure what to think about today. It was fun and easy but a big contrast to the man I met yesterday. Sometimes he's still short and abrupt with things, but not so cold. Something has changed, and I can't put my finger on it.

He hasn't let me out of his sight since he took my hand this morning. He even started to follow me to the bathroom at one point. I bite my lip and look over my shoulder at him. His eyes are on my ass. I feel myself blush and turn back to the pork chops I'm frying. One thing is for sure: Ty likes me, sexually at least, and I don't know what to do with that.

Sure I've had men hit on me, but it's never been anything like Ty. Ty didn't really hit on me. He just did what he wanted. If he wanted to touch me, he did. If he wanted me standing right next to him, he just moved me there. If he wanted to look at my ass, he looked and made no apologies about it. The way he easily touches or moves to get closer to me. It's no soft flirt. It's possessive, and it's doing something to me. Maybe that's why I'd never shown much interest in men before, because none of them acted like this man. Because whatever it is Ty is doing, it's working, and that's scaring the shit out of me.

Every time he touches me, I feel my body come alive. At first I tried to break away from some of the touches, shy and unsure of what they were making me feel. But as the day wore on, I found myself leaning into them, wondering when I'd get another. It was becoming addicting, and that was another thing to add to my scary list.

It would not be good to fall into something with Ty and have it blow up in my face. It was already going to be hard to split my time with a child if I had to, but what if I fall for Ty and it doesn't work? One's heart could only take so much loss. To watch the family I've always wanted slip right through my fingers would break me.

"Dinner will be done in just a little bit," I tell him, not looking back at him. I can still feel the blush on my cheeks. He's been getting me to do that all day. It was even worse when I met some of his hands on the ranch. He was very territorial of me, and I'm not real sure what to think about that, but at least he wasn't snapping at me anymore. That was a nice change. I'd even caught his dimple out a few times when I was looking at him. His eyes would go soft and his smile would lighten his face.

"It smells real good, darlin'." Haven't had a home-cooked meal since Dolly took off to college," he says. I take the chops out of the frying pan placing them on the plate next to the stove. Picking it up, I take it over to the dining room table, and notice his eyes follow me the whole way.

"She seems sweet." I hope Dolly will be around more. She's the only other woman I've seen here. And I like the bite back she gave Ty this morning—something I'm probably going to have to learn to do myself. It's one of my flaws. I have a problem with being snippy back. It's just not in me. It isn't my nature. I go back to the kitchen, grabbing the mashed potatoes and rolls I made, and bring them to the table, too.

"She's a handful." The way he says it makes it sound like that doesn't bother him. It's light, and I can tell he loves her.

"First year of college?" I ask, motioning for him to take a seat at the table, but he comes over and pulls a seat out for me. I take it, and he sits in the seat right next to mine. Then he starts putting food onto my plate. I look over at him. It's a sweet and intimate act that I wasn't expecting.

“Yeah, her first year. It was a fight to get her to go.” He turns to look at me and catches me staring at him. “She didn’t want to leave. This kind of life is bred into your blood. If it was up to her she’d just stay here and train the horses.”

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“Then how’d you get her to go?”

“I bark and people tend to jump to.” He raises his eyebrows at me teasingly.

“I noticed,” I laugh. He’s barked a few times, which made me jump. “What about your parents? Did they want her to go?” I see something flash in his eyes and I know what’s coming. “I’m sorry. My parents are gone, too.”

He reaches out, tucking a lock of hair behind my ear. He’s done that a million times today. I’ve never had someone touch me so easily. It’s like he’s been doing it forever. Everything he does kind of seems that way, and I wonder if that’s just how he is. If I had to guess, I’d say yes. Ty seems like a man who just does what he wants.

“I’ve been looking after my family for a while now. I’m not real sure what Mama would have wanted for her, but I want to make sure she has options. Shit.” He leans back in his chair, taking a breath. “I don’t know if I’m doing the right thing or not. To be honest I have no fucking clue, but I’m trying.”

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I smile at him. A warm feeling settles deep because Ty just gave me so much more than he knows. He might come off hard and a little cold, but he cares about his family. Wants to make sure that his sister has everything she might need. He'd have to be the same with a child that's his, right? Or maybe he already has too much on his plate. I push that thought aside, wanting to grab ahold of this little spark of hope.

I find myself leaning into him. Then his lips are on mine.

8

Ty

I can't help myself as my mouth molds to hers, my hands going to her waist and pulling her closer to me. I feel myself pull her from the chair as her mouth opens in surprise, and I sweep my tongue in, taking advantage. I have her in my lap at the table, and I feel her curves against me. My hands move up and down her back as if to push her against my chest so tightly that we become one.

"Mary-Jane," I whisper and go back to kissing her like I'm desperate for it. And I am. From the second my lips landed on hers, I've been lost to the sensations that are running through my body.

I taste her soft tongue against mine, and I hum with desire. Lightning runs through my veins, and my cock throbs and pulses with each beat of my heart. Blood flows through me, and I feel like I've gotten a shot of adrenaline as excitement makes it almost impossible to sit still. I try my best to hold on to feeling simultaneously calm and wild. Having her in my arms feels crazy and wonderful all at once.

One of my hands roams her soft hip and down her thigh to the hem of her dress. The other hand is still firm on her lower back, pressing her into me further. The hand that reaches the end of her dress feels the soft silk of her skin and needs more. I push the dress up, just a little, and slowly move my hand up.

The kiss deepens and I feel her hands move to my chest, then around to my neck. She's pulling me closer to her, and the need between us grows impossibly stronger.

When the tips of my fingers reach the edge of her panties, I feel Mary-Jane stiffen in my arms. I spread my palm out on the top of her thigh, halting my motion. Kissing her softly now, I move my mouth down her chin and to her neck.

"Slow, darlin'. We'll go real slow."

Rubbing the side of her thigh, I feel her relax in my arms as I place soft kisses across her collarbone and back up to her ear.

"There's something about you that I can't seem to control. But I can't shake this need, and to be honest..." I pause to pull back and look into her eyes. "...I don't want to. I like how your hand feels in mine, and I like the way you fit in my lap. This is fast, and I don't know what you're feeling, but for me, this has never happened before."

She bites her lip and looks away before looking back at me and nodding. "Me neither, Ty. I've never felt this way before." Worry sparks in her eyes, and for a second I think she's going to tell me something. Instead she releases a breath and tucks her chin against her chest, so I can't see her face. "Maybe this is too fast."

I take my hand out from her dress and put it under her chin to make her look at me. "We'll go as slow or as fast as you want, darlin'. But I aim to keep you."

“There’s so much you don’t know.”

The sound of her voice makes my chest ache. It’s like there’s something she wants to say but she’s nervous. But there’s also hope there. There’s something she wants to tell me and she wants to be accepted.

“You got something you want to say to me?”

Her mouth opens, but then closes again. For a long pause I wait, but she just smiles at me and puts her head on my chest. “I’ll get there soon enough. But not yet.”

“Just as long as you stay, you can take all the time you need.”

We spend the rest of the dinner sitting in the same position, with her on my lap. I feed her and then feed myself, and we laugh as we talk. God, I don’t know how long it’s been since I’ve laughed, and the thought feels strange. I didn’t know that I wasn’t smiling until she walked into my life and made me do it. It’s like one day she showed up and my life truly began.

After dinner, I wash dishes and refuse to let her help. So she sits on the counter next to me as I clean up the kitchen.

“I could get used to this,” she says, leaning back and drinking lemonade as she watches me work.

“Glad to hear it. Because you’re going to have to.” I give her a serious look, but she just laughs it off.

“You keep saying you’re going to keep me. Should I be afraid you’re telling the truth?”

I put the last of the dishes in the cabinet and walk over to where she's sitting. I move slowly so she sees what I'm doing, and push her knees apart. Taking a step in between them, I pull her ass to the edge of the counter, making her let out a little squeak.

Her hands go to my shoulders, and a laugh leaves her lips.

"I love hearing that sound."

I grasp her waist, and at this height we're about eye level. I stand there for just a moment, marveling at her beauty and thinking about what she'd look like with her dark curls spread out over my bed.

"What have I done coming here like this?" she whispers. It's like she's talking to herself, but I answer anyway.

"You've come here and opened my eyes for the first time in my life. Don't make me close them again."

With that, my lips land on hers, and we stay that way, kissing in the kitchen until the crickets tell us it's time for bed. I carry her to her room and summon all the strength inside me to leave her there and say goodnight.

After I close her door, I press my forehead to it, willing my body to walk away while my heart stays put. It's the hardest thing I've ever had to do, but knowing when I wake up she'll be here gives me hope.

I wake to a warm body melded around me, and a face buried in my neck. Ty's slow, even breathing lets me know he's still asleep. His earthy smell wraps around me, and I find myself pushing into him further, soaking up the comfort of him.

I can't remember a time when I've lain in a bed and been cuddled. I should be mad that he snuck into my room, but I was sad when we parted last night. I'd wanted to lie down in bed with him, to fall asleep in his arms. Yesterday was more perfect than I could have imagined. The change in him was crazy, and I still don't know what to make of it. He'd still seemed grumpy with others, but not with me. I oddly like that only I get that side of him. His words are always soft and low when he talks to me. Almost like I'm something precious he could startle. He's handling me with care to avoid spooking me.

I'm falling for him and I'm not sure I can stop it. I can still feel his lips against mine. After I'd gotten out of the shower last night, I'd stared in the mirror for a long moment.

My lips were still swollen from his kisses, my belly was swollen with his child, and I looked how I'd always dreamed—happy after finding a man who loved me and excited to create a family with him. But it isn't real. I have to be careful no

t to get carried away. Things haven't gone as planned, and I'm scared to pop this little bubble. I'm wondering how things will change when Ty finds out. I wonder if he even wants children. He's already spent a good chunk of his life helping raise his brothers and sister. His sister is barely out of the house, and to have a baby dropped on him might be an unwelcome shock.

I feel his lips start to move against my neck. The stubble on his face brushes against my skin, making goosebumps break out all over my body. The softness of his lips paired with the roughness of his beard feels perfect. Even his kisses are like him. First you feel his roughness, then the softness he hides in there comes out. He lazily

presses his kisses against my neck. I tilt my head a little bit, wanting him to keep doing what he's doing. Wanting those kisses everywhere.

"I could wake up like this every morning," he mumbles, and I just let out a little moan. I feel him smile against me. "Sorry, I tried to stay away. I don't know why, but I just can't seem to."

I feel one of his hands start to rise up my thigh, his rough palm feeling good against my skin. My legs part just a little of their own accord. He takes the opening to slide between my thighs, cupping me. I gasp at the contact and my body comes awake. Any remaining sleepiness is washed away as I feel my pulse start to pick up.

My hips rise, wanting what he's doing. His finger drifts back and forth, slowly teasing me, and I hear myself whimper.

"You want me to keep going, darlin'?" he asks, a gruffness to his voice, and I wonder if he's as turned on as I am. I don't think I've ever felt like this before. Every part of me aches.

"Please," I say so softly I'm not sure he can hear me. My shyness is taking over. But then his hand slips under my panties from the side. One of his legs wraps around mine, pulling me open for him.

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“I’d do anything to hear that little moan you just made again. I should be the one saying please. Not you.”

My eyes fall closed as his fingers start to move.

“I didn’t know something could feel so soft,” he whispers against me. “Feels so perfect.” Another kiss lands, this time his tongue sweeps out to taste me. “Feels so mine,” he growls as one finger pushes into me. I can feel how wet I am, how easily his finger slides into me.

“Fuck, darlin’. You’re so goddamn tight.” His finger starts to move in and out of me. The heel of his hand rubs my clit, and I feel myself clench around him. “Move with me. Show me how much you like this.”

My body does as he commands as my hips start to thrust, mimicking sex. “Ty,” I moan.

“Jesus, that’s the sweetest sound I’ve ever heard in my fucking life.”

I can’t seem to stop. His name pours from my mouth over and over again until my body locks and I explode. I feel wetness leak out of the corner of my eyes, and I lie there, unable to feel a muscle in my body. It’s like all the tension and worry I had drained away and the only thing left is a sweet, warm feeling that settles over me like a warm blanket.

My eyes fly open, tearing me from my afterglow, when I feel Ty’s body move between my legs. I have no idea how he moved without my noticing.

He looks down at me. “I want to see all of you. Taste you.” I go to grab his hand, but he slips my shirt up and my whole body freezes when his eyes lock on my stomach. I feel like the whole world stops. My perfect moment shatters. The bubble I wanted to stay in for just a little bit long is gone.

The tears of pleasure I shed moments ago freeze on my cheeks. Ty’s hand drops to my stomach like he can’t believe what he’s seeing. Then his eyes slowly travel up to mine.

“Whose is it?”

I can’t seem to find the words, and then he saves me from the trouble.

“Don’t answer that.” I see his breathing pick up. His hand moves over my belly. “You’re mine now,” he says to my stomach, and I don’t know if he’s talking to me or the baby.

10

Ty

Looking up into her eyes, I see there’s something there. It’s a hint of what looks like guilt, and I assume it’s because she was keeping it from me. There’s nothing she could tell me that would make me not want her, and a baby isn’t going to do it. I’ve always wanted a family, but I kept putting it on the back burner. I thought that at some point it would just happen, and then I thought it never would, especially after my accident with the bull. I was ornery and set in my ways, and I knew this kind of life wasn’t for everyone. But from what Mary-Jane and I have shared, this is right. I know it deep in my soul that she’s the one for me, and she was meant to be here. She’s brought me back to life, and I’m talking about more than just my dick. She makes me want to be someone softer for her.

“Just let me love you for a little bit, darlin’.”

I pull her panties off and move between her legs. I want to kiss every inch of her, and I want to start right here.

“Ty. There’s um...” Mary-Jane stammers as I lean forward and give her one long lick. “We should talk.” Her words end on a moan as I put my open mouth on her pussy and start to suck.

Her flavor fills my mouth, and I’m a goner. I move two fingers up to her opening and slip them inside her. She’s so fucking tight I don’t know how I’m going to get my cock in her, but I will. I don’t care how long it takes, I want to make sweet love to this little thing.

“I’m clean, baby. I had an accident a few years ago, and I had every test under the sun done on my dick. I’m gonna take you bareback.” I almost groan at my own words as I think about taking her with nothing between us. Something like that would have freaked me out before. It would have been too intimate. But not with her.

Sliding my fingers in and out, I try to stretch her a bit more with each thrust. I put my mouth back on her clit and try to give her pleasure while I’m getting her ready to take me. She moans and shivers under me, and I can feel her juices soaking my fingers. She’s so close to cumming, and I feel like I’m about to explode myself. I haven’t so much as touched my cock and he’s throbbing with need like I’ve never felt before. It’s been years since I’ve had an orgasm, and I’m a little terrified of the amount of cum that I’m going to put inside her. I’d say if she wasn’t already pregnant, it’s likely she would be after this first time.

Her hands come up to grip my short hair, and although I think she’s going to pull me off of her, she just holds me still as I suck her pussy. The goddamn sounds she’s making are driving me insane, and I need to get her off more than I need my next

breath. Feeling her legs tremble on either side of my head, I reach my free hand up and slide it to one of her breasts, pinching the hard nipple. The little extra sensation is enough to send her skyrocketing, and she goes over the edge with a shout of pleasure.

I eat her orgasm as she cums in my mouth, and fuck does she taste sweet. I'm addicted to every inch of her, but this prize between her thighs has got me feeling like a goddamn gold medalist.

“More, darlin’. I want another.”

And she gives it to me. Her back arches, and she shoots into another climax as I work my tongue on her clit and my fingers inside her pussy. I rub her easy and gentle and coax out another little orgasm after that one. Her body shudders and quakes with the aftermath, so I gently take my fingers out and lick them clean. I don't want a drop of her to go to waste.

When I sit up and look down at her, she's a beautiful mess. Sweat has broken out on her body, and it has caused her curls to stick to the side of her face. Her nightdress is pushed up and almost all of her is exposed in the fresh morning light.

I've never seen anything more beautiful, and I don't intend to stop pleasuring her.

She reaches for me, and I move on top of her. I feel her hands pushing at my clothes, and I help her take them off me. I slip her nightdress the rest of the way off so we're skin on skin as the sun streams in over us. I'm hard and rigid, and she's warm and soft. Her body cushions me as I move between her thighs and press the head of my angry red cock to her opening.

“Go slow, Ty. I've never done this before.”

I look down at her baby belly and think she must mean she hasn't had sex while

pregnant. I don't want to know the details of how she got this way and why she had to run off, but I'm glad she ran in my direction. Because I've caught her, and she's not going anywhere. I'll rope her little ass to my bed.

"Slow, darlin'. Real slow."

When we kiss, I can still taste the sweetness of her pussy, and it drives me fucking wild. I don't know how the hell I'm supposed to control myself when I've got something so perfect and beautiful under me.

I push in slowly, trying to control the beast on my back that's telling me to fuck her through the mattress. Mary-Jane is special and sweet, and I want to be easy with her. I enter her inch by inch, and she tenses as I go. I stop a few times to let her catch her breath, but she tells me to keep going. I don't like to think about her being with someone else, but he must have had a tiny dick if she's still virgin-tight like she is now. That thought of someone leaving her in her condition makes me angry, but also happy about it, because now I'm going to make her mine. I'm going to let her know that under no circumstances is she ever going to leave me, and that her baby is now my baby. And we're going to be a goddamn family. Forever.

Finally, I'm all the way inside her, and I pause to let her relax a little more. We kiss and I feel every inch of her, rubbing her soft skin and curves. When she finally starts to move her hips under me, I know she's ready for me to make love to her. I'm careful to keep my weight off the baby belly, and thrust slowly in and out.

Moving my mouth lower, I suck on her nipples, and she nearly comes off the bed. They're so sensitive, and I think about how they'll taste once her milk comes in. The thought makes my hard-as-steel cock leak a little in

side her. I can't believe I'm getting everything I've ever wanted with the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. We may have not known each other long, but I

already know she's the kindest person I've met, and I will do everything in me to take care of her. To keep that soft, sweet woman alive and vibrant as we grow together.

I reach between us and rub her clit with my thumb, feeling her tighten around me.

"I can't..." Mary-Jane starts to protest another orgasm, but I don't let her get away from it.

"You can, darlin'. And you will." I lean down and suck her nipple into my mouth, and she cries out in pleasure. I let it pop out of my mouth and lick between her breasts. "Give me what I want, Mary-Jane. I won't stop until I get it."

I lean up and look down at her, watching the soft morning light spread over her, and she climaxes under me. The sight is enough to send me over the edge, and I thrust hard one last time, emptying inside her. The orgasm comes from every inch of my body, the release unlike any pleasure I've ever felt. It's throbbing and intense, and I can feel the cum running out between us because there's too much for her to hold.

Once I catch my breath, I look down at her, smiling, and she gives me a soft smile back. I want to collapse on top of her, but I can't, so I pull out and lie down beside her, cupping her belly and nuzzling her neck. I wanted to take it slow and ease her into things. I know I come on too strong, and that could spook her. When I want something I just take it, but this has changed things. There is no taking it slow. I have to stake my claim.

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I lie there, unsure what to say. So many things race through my mind. That was incredible and more than I ever thought my first time could have been. I close my eyes, enjoying the feel of Ty absent-mindedly rubbing my stomach. I feel whole for the first time in my life. Something has come together for me, and I didn't even know I needed it so badly. I can't lose this.

I can't believe how he responded. How he's acting about finding out about the baby. He doesn't seem mad. If anything, he seems even more possessive of me. But what will he think when he finds out it's his child inside me? How will he react to the fact he didn't get to choose to have this baby?

I open my mouth to say something, but I can't think of how to tell him. Then he's off the bed and pulling on his boxers. I sit up and watch him, grabbing the sheet to cover myself as I'm still feeling a little self-conscious. I've never been naked in front of a man before. It's something that will take some time to get used to.

Ty picks up my things, throwing them into my luggage I have sitting in the corner of the room. I'd unpacked all my stuff, and seeing him packing it is making my blood run cold. Had I misread him? Or maybe reality has caught up to him now that the lust haze has faded.

He goes over to the closet, and in one big grab he pulls my clothes down. Then he grabs the luggage and leaves the room, weighed down with clothes and cases.

"Ty!" I yell and chase him, but he doesn't head towards the front of the house. Instead he enters his bedroom. I follow him, holding the sheet to me as I watch him start putting my things away in his room.

“I wanted to go sweet and slow and make you fall for me, make you want to stay, but now slow isn't going to work,” he says. I’m not sure if he’s talking to me or himself. He opens his closet, moves some of his clothes out of the way, and hangs mine next to his. Seeing my clothes next to his makes something settle inside me. A sense of belonging, which I’ve never felt before.

“No fucker is going to show up here thinking you or my baby belongs to him,” he growls, stomping over to the luggage he dragged in. He opens my black bag and pulls out more of my stuff. He stops and looks at one of the baby books and moves to put that one on the night stand.

“You know what? I kind of hope he tries to show up here. This is fucking Texas, after all. Can’t just walk onto another man’s land and try and take what’s his without ending up with a few holes in you.”

He turns to look at me, his hard, possessive eyes focusing on me. I just stare at him, mouth open, eyes wide. Then he softens.

“I’m sorry, darlin’.” His long legs eat up the distance between us. “I’d never hurt you, don’t be scared.” He leans down and places a soft kiss on my lips. So much softer than you’d think you’d get from a man like him. Then he’s lifting me, carrying me to his bed and laying me down.

“You look good in my bed. Our bed,” he corrects himself. “Don’t move.” He pulls himself from the bed and walks over to his dresser, digs through one of the drawers, and comes back.

“This baby will be a Jennings.” I feel something slide on my finger. “You will be Mrs. Jennings. No one else will show up here trying to say otherwise. We’ll go to the courthouse tomorrow and make it official.” He glances over at the clock on the night stand. “Maybe we can still go into town today and get the paperwork started.”

He goes to pull back from the bed, and I grab him. “You’re going so fast. I can’t catch up,” I tell him. It all seems too good to be true.

“You don’t need to catch up. It’s happening.” His face grows hard again, and I can see the worry in his gaze. “Whoever he was let you slip through his fingers. I won’t make the same mistake, even if I have to tie you to this bed to keep you here. I’ll bribe a judge to sign off on our marriage. It’s happening.”

That should probably scare me, but it doesn’t. In fact, I feel my body heating all over again. “I’m not saying no, but there is more you should know.”

“We have our whole lives to catch up.” He leans in, placing his forehead against mine. “I need this. I have to know you’re not going anywhere. That I won’t lose you.” I think of how he lost his mom and dad, and that fear of losing someone else rides hard on him.

“I’m not going anywhere,” I tell him. I reach up to run my fingers across his jaw, feeling the stubble against my fingers.

He nods and stands up. He reaches out for me to pull me from the bed with him. “Let’s get on the road then. We need to...” His words trail off, and his face turns white. I follow his line of sight to the spot between my legs, and I see a trace of blood on my thighs. Seeing it makes my face flush.

“Oh my God! Mary-Jane, you’re bleeding! The baby!” he shouts, panic clear on his face. He drops to his knees in front of me, inspecting the blood. “We have to get you to a hospital.” He stands, but before he can run, I grab his arm.

“Ty, I’m fine,” I try to reassure him.

“I don’t know much, if anything, about pregnancy, but I’m pretty fucking sure you

aren't supposed to bleed."

"That blood's not from the pregnancy." He stops and stares at me in confusion. "It's because you were my first." I can tell by his face he still doesn't get what I'm saying. "You took my virginity."

"But—"

I cut him off just wanting to get the words out. "The baby." I take a deep breath, getting my bearings. "The baby is yours."

"Damn straight it fucking is."

I have to bite my cheek from smiling at that.

"I mean, I was artificially inseminated, and there was a mix-up." He just keeps looking at me like things aren't adding up, so I continue. "I went to Caro Fertility Center to have it done. It's actually why I'm here. I came to tell you." It's clear from his face that he knows the Center and things are clicking into place. "They gave me your baby."

He just stares for a second before turning and leaving the room. I stand there, uncertain whether I should follow him, until I hear yelling coming from the other end of the house. I grab one of his shirts and slide it over my head before going to see what's happening. When I enter the kitchen, he's pacing back and forth with a phone pressed to his ear.

"I want it all destroyed!" he yells into the phone. The volume of his voice makes me jump. "All of it."

He's quiet for a second. "Were there any other mix-ups?" Those words are quiet and

sinister, and my heart freezes when I hear them. “You’re fucking lucky.” With that, he clicks the phone off and drops it onto the counter. I stand frozen in place, and he turns to see me there.

He lets out a deep breath. “It’s okay,” he tells me, but I can’t seem to move. “I got it all destroyed.” I take a step back from him. He seems so mad.

“No other fucking woman is going to have my cum inside her but you. If I had found out they’d had another fucking mix-up I would have burned that goddamn place down for you.” He closes the distance between us. “Only you carry my babies.”

His mouth lands on mine in a possessively sweet kiss. My feet leave the ground, and I feel us moving through the house until my back hits the bed.

“Never thought I’d be happy about that bull almost taking my nuts off, but I’d do it again if it set you on the path to me.” I smile up at him. “I knew you were the one the moment you stepped out of your car. Woke me back up. Knew I’d be the man that loved you forever.”

“I love you, too,” I tell him, thinking how all these little things brought us together. Like the universe was making sure we found each other, one way or another.

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Ty

I lay her down on the bed, then hover over her and look down at her beautiful face. Her hand comes up to my cheek and I feel the cool band against my skin. Pulling her palm away, I look at the ring on her finger and then back into her eyes.

“That belonged to my mama. My daddy gave it to her when he proposed, and after

they passed, it came to me. I thought maybe Dolly should have it, but she said if a man who wanted to marry her didn't have a ring, she didn't want him."

Mary-Jane gives me a smile, and I feel my heart swell with love.

"I held on to it, thinking that maybe one of my brothers would want it one day. But after I saw you, I knew where it would end up. I know that my mama would have loved you from the second you walked in the house. Wrapped her arms around you and made you a part of the family. You've got a spirit like her. Your heart is good and pure, and I know without a shadow of a doubt that you're the one for me."

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My lips land on hers, and I pull the clothes away from our bodies. I can't seem to keep my hands and mouth off her. When we are completely naked, I move between her legs and settle my cock into her opening, but I don't push forward.

"I want to know everything there is to know about you, Mary-Jane, but first I want to make slow, sweet love to you."

"Nothing would make me happier."

Thrusting inside her, I sheath my cock in her warm, slick heat. Her tight grip pulses around me, and I groan at the sensation. She's so perfect, and I never thought it could be this good. This amazing.

At a lazy pace, I pull out and then make my way back in. I brush strands of hair away from her face and kiss her softly as we just enjoy the feeling of making love. The feeling of being one and being complete.

I can't believe we're going to have a baby. I've become engaged and a father all in one morning. There's no telling what the rest of our lives is going to be like if this is how we're starting. I can't wait for the adventure to begin.

"I love you so much, Mary-Jane. And I love our baby." I rest my hand on her belly between us, careful not to put too much pressure on her. "I'm just so happy."

"Me too, Ty. Me too."

I kiss down her neck to her breasts, sucking one nipple into my mouth and then

moving to the other. I love every inch of her as my thick cock fills her up. Her climax builds, and I feel her legs wrap around my waist, squeezing me tight.

“So close, Ty. I’m right there. Come with me.”

Two more long strokes and we explode together. I feel her pussy clench and quiver, cumming on me. I hold myself over her as I fill her up, and let my seed flood her tight womb.

Our lovemaking didn’t create this baby inside her, but it brought us together. And that’s the most important part. We have forever to work out the details, but the most important part is having her by my side.

Rolling us over, I put Mary-Jane on top of me without pulling out. She lies across my chest, and after a moment she sits up and starts to move. My cock hasn’t gone down since I met her, and it’s going to take a long time before it finally does.

I smile up at her as she moves slowly up and down, moaning with every pass. She looks like a goddess on my cock, and I want to lie here and worship her until my last breath. I grip her hips and help keep her steady as she rides. I’ve branded her with my baby, and now I want to imprint myself on her soul.

“Marry me today, darlin’. After this, I want to take you up to the courthouse and get the license. I don’t want another day to go by without making it legal. You and me and our baby. Make me the happiest man alive and marry me.”

“I’m yours, Ty. Me and our baby. I was yours from the moment we met, and I aim to keep you, too.”

It doesn’t take long before we’re both reaching our peak and climaxing together.

I want to do everything I can to seal this deal, and the thought of that drags me out of bed.

I grab my cell phone on the way out and call the first number on it.

“Hello?” Dolly says, still half asleep.

“I’m getting married today. Go get Blake and Trace and meet us at the courthouse. I’m gonna get ol’ Judge Thompson to run the papers through today. He owes me a favor after I broke his last horse.”

“What the fuck?” Dolly spits out, and I hang up.

I look over at Mary-Jane, who’s laughing at me. My smile matches her own as I pull her into the truck and make her sit in the middle, right beside me. Right where she’ll be for the rest of our lives.

Epilogue

Ty

Just over year later...

“I think she’s finally ready for you.”

I walk over and take Mary-Jane by the hand. My brother Blake sits in the grass with my son TJ and is talking to him about women. I just roll my eyes. He’s the last person in the world I want giving love life advice to my son. He’s all hung up on someone who won’t give him the time of day. But TJ’s babbling pretty good right now, so maybe he could offer up some help to Blake.

Mary-Jane and I walk over to the horse pen and take a look at Rarity. It took me a long time to break her in to where I felt comfortable enough for Mary-Jane to ride her, but I think the two of them are ready. Mary-Jane has been working with her alongside me, and I think something about her presence has gone a long way to soothe the horse. They've created a connection, and I'm happy that Rarity has bonded with my Mary-Jane.

"You ready?" I ask, squeezing her hand.

She looks at me with bright eyes and nods her head. "Yep. Today's the day. "

Walking inside the pen, Mary-Jane walks up beside Rarity and strokes her neck. I stand back, leaning on the fence and watching as she talks to her in a calm, soothing voice. God, my wife is beautiful. If possible, she's gotten more beautiful with every day that passes. She looked radiant the whole pregnancy with Ty Junior, or TJ as we call him, but even afterwards she still has that glow. Something about her just pulls at every part of my heart, and I love her more every day.

I watch as she climbs on Rarity and steadies her. They take a moment to adjust, and then Mary-Jane leans forward, petting her mane. She whispers words of calm to her, and after a few moments, they start to walk around the pen.

"She looks good up there."

I look behind me at my brother and then back to Mary-Jane. Trace comes up beside me and leans on the fence.

"You keep looking at her and I'm gonna make it so it's the last thing you see."

"Calm down, big bro. I don't want your woman. I just meant she's doing a good job here on the ranch. Jesus, you get so touchy with her."

I look over at him and then give him a smirk. “Just wait. One day you’ll find the one, and then you’ll want to keep her away from every other man on the planet.”

“Pfft,” he scoffs. “I’m never settling down. Blake is the one with goo-goo eyes over that girl in town.” He turns around to face him and little TJ sitting in the grass. “Me? I’m gonna stay single. I don’t need the drama of women. All I need is my land and my horse.”

“Spoken like a true Texan.”

I look back at Mary-Jane, and she beams at me. I give her a little wave, and she blows me a kiss. I catch it and then blow her one back. It’s silly and stupid and I don’t fucking care. I love that goddamn woman and I’m not afraid to show it.

“One day, little brother. One day you’ll change your mind. She’ll turn your world upside down, and you’ll beg it to stay that way. Mark my words.”

THE END

When Clare Stevens walked onto the McCallister ranch, she expected her life to be a certain way. She was the mail-order bride of the owner, and she was to fulfill her duties. Clean the house, cook for his men, and warm his bed at night. What she didn't expect was the beefy cowboy who walked in and literally swept her off her feet.

Cash McCallister didn't have time to date and find a wife. So a mail-order bride seemed the easiest way to find a partner. He thought he'd made a mistake until he laid eyes on the little piece of sunshine that lit up his life. He never imagined a true love like this. He never knew an obsession could take hold so tightly.

When drama hits the farm and their fast love is threatened, can Clare and Cash hold it together?

Warning: This is literally as cliché as it sounds...and just as awesome. It's country living with high-calorie foods and easy sunsets. Come sit on the porch and stay a while. You'll like what you see.

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Publisher's Note: This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are a product of the author's imagination. Locales and public names are sometimes used for atmospheric purposes. Any resemblance to actual people, living or dead, or to businesses, companies, events, institutions, or locales is completely coincidental.

Edited by Aquila Editing

This book is for those of us lucky enough to have a night under the stars while sipping Boone's Farm. Here's to the backs of trucks, cowboy hats, and tight jeans. Yeehaw!

Chapter 1

Clare

“Miss Clare Stevens?” I turn my head to look at the man who said my name. The sun blocks my view until he takes another step forward, his cowboy boots tapping on the concrete of the train station’s entryway. His movement gives me a clear view of him now, and I’m taken aback by the sight of him.

He looks like he could be my father’s age. Not that I knew my father, but if I had to guess how old he was, he’d be around this old. Instantly, the little bit of the fear I’d been feeling slides away. The man looks nice. The laugh lines around his mouth are evident, even with all the wrinkles. His grey hair is cut short, his skin is deeply browned by the sun, probably from years of working out on the land.

“Yes, that’s me.” I rise from the bench I’d been sitting on for over an hour. I was starting to wonder if my soon-to-be husband was coming or if maybe he’d changed his mind. The worry had grown worse with each ticking minute that had gone by. I didn’t even have enough money to catch a train back out of Lobo, Texas. I would have been stranded in a town in the middle of Nowheresville.

“Sorry about that, ma’am. One of the fences broke this morning and we had hogs all over the place. Had to round the bastards up.” He cringes slight at his own curse. “Excuse my language, ma’am.”

I smile, letting him know it doesn’t bother me “Don’t hold back on my account. I grew up on a farm with ten ranch hands. I’ve heard it all.”

“That so?”

I nod. “Yeah, until my mama got sick and we had to move to the city.” I can still hear the pain in my own voice. It’s still fresh. I can’t hide it, even if I wanted to. She left me all alone a little over a month ago, and I don’t have anyone now. The ranch I’d grown up on was gone. It wasn’t our ranch, but it felt like it after all the years we poured into working there. The ranch hands there were the only family I’d ever really known, but the Blackwells upped and sold the ranch last year and there wasn’t the option of going back to work there now.

I’d found myself up the creek with no paddle.

“Sorry about your loss.”

I just shrug my shoulder because I really don’t want to talk about it.

“That all you got?” He nods at the one bag I have sitting next to the bench. That all you got? The words burn.

“Yeah, that’s all I got.”

He studies me for a second, his eyes going soft.

“He’s never going to see you coming.” He laughs, and the lines around his mouth are more prominent now. I know he’s talking about my future husband, Cash McCallister.

“Pretty sure he knows I’m on my way.” I go to grab my bag, but the man beats me to it.

“Name’s Earl,” he says, picking up my bag and giving me a wink. “And no, I’m not

sure he knows you're coming."

With that, he turns, bag in hand, and starts heading out of the train station. I follow him as we make our way towards a black truck. He throws my bag into the back before opening the passenger door for me.

He actually has to give me a little boost to get inside. This thing needs a freaking stepladder or something.

Closing the door behind me, I slip on the seatbelt while he climbs in the driver's side. He buckles his own belt before he turns the key and the truck comes to life.

"It's about an hour's drive out to the ranch. It's nothing but farmland once we pull out of this town. You need anything before we go?"

"Where is he?" I don't know why that's my response, but I'm hurt that the man I'm supposed to be marrying isn't here to pick me up. I actually thought we'd be tying the knot before heading out to his ranch. That's what the email had said.

"Got held up," is his only reply as he pulls out of the train station, getting right on the road out of town.

I bite my lip as I look over at Earl, who shoots me another wink. I debate whether I should try to grill him for information about Cash or let it be. He'd probably tell him everything I'd said. Besides, Cash told me how this marriage was going to work and why he needed a wife.

A marriage of convenience. Someone to warm his bed and cook his meals. He hadn't said it in such blunt terms, but I could read between the lines. Though I didn't know why a man as handsome as Cash needed a mail-order bride. Handsome was putting it mildly. He'd given me one picture of himself and said it was the only one he had. It

looked like it was taken without him knowing. He was on top of a horse, a stern expression on his face.

I couldn't make out his hair with the Stetson on his head or his eye color, but there was no hiding he was attractive and massive. Intimidating was the best word I could use to describe him in the picture. I couldn't imagine a man like him needed to get a mail-order bride, but here I am. Something about not needing the tangles of love. This wasn't going to be hearts and flowers. We would each do our part.

His words were cold, and at that, I'd pushed the idea of finding my Prince Charming out the window. When I'd first found out about the Cowboy Mail-Order Bride Program, I'd let those little romantic ideas dance around in my head, but it was clear from the emails and the fact that he couldn't even bring himself to pick me up today that he hadn't been lying. This is all for convenience.

He didn't even ask for a picture of me. All he wanted to know was if I could cook, clean, and work a computer. That had pretty much been the gist of it. The agency did a background check, and I'm not sure what-all they'd given Cash of it.

I close my eyes, and soon the hum of the truck puts me to sleep. I don't know how long I drift, but the touch of a hand to mine wakes me from my sleep.

"We're here," Earl says. I look out at a large ranch-style home made completely out of wood. A deck wraps around the whole thing and I see white swings on the porch. The double front door is a dark blue, giving the home a welcoming feeling.

I open the truck door, wanting to see more, but Earl grabs me by the wrist.

"Wait for me." He exits the truck, coming around to my side to help me down.

There's land as far as I can see, with barns speckled here and there.

“It’s beautiful here.”

Earl just nods in agreement before going back to the truck and getting my bag. A few men step out of the white barn closest to the house. Both raise their hats, saying hi. I nod back at them.

One thing I’d always loved about growing up on a ranch was that there were always people around. And I love to cook. Mama and I could cook for hours for the men, and it was worth it to see their faces light up when they came in after a hard day of work. It made me feel needed, a part of something. I want that feeling again.

“Let me show you inside.” I follow Earl up the porch stairs. He opens the doors to the house, leading right into the living room. Everything is minimal. It looks like a woman has never even stepped foot in here. The walls are bare, and the only furniture consists of three sofas facing a giant television screen. The living room is open and connected to the dining room and kitchen.

The dining room has a wooden table that could probably seat fifteen people at it, but the kitchen steals the show. I find myself standing in it, not even realizing I’d moved. The countertops are all granite. The island has a sink of its own. One wall has four ovens built into it. The stainless steel appliances practically sparkle. I think I’d marry Cash just for this kitchen alone.

“Brand new,” Earl says, breaking through my kitchen high.

; I turn to look at him still standing in the living room as he watches me.

“How many hands are here?”

“Total is eighteen people if you count yourself, ma’am.”

I could definitely handle eighteen people in a kitchen like this. I glance over at the clock. It’s already one in the afternoon.

“Dinner time?” I ask as I start to pull open drawers, looking to see where everything is.

“Six,” I hear him say from behind me as I find an apron and pull it on, tying it behind my neck and making sure not to catch any of the blonde spirals that have come loose from my ponytail.

“Well, I better hop to then if I want to have dinner done by then. I’m guessing that my adoring soon-to-be husband has no plans to marry me today since he couldn’t even be bothered to pick me up.” I turn, putting my hands on my hips.

Earl just smiles. Again.

“No, I don’t think he has plans to marry today.”

I give a curt nod before getting back to the task at hand. Not even married and I’m already mad at the man. But I think this is how our marriage will be. I’ll see him at meals and when he comes to bed. A bed I’m sure I’m supposed to be in. That was never outright said, but that is what married people do.

I’d made plans for that as well, making sure I’d gotten myself on the pill before I’d come out here. I might have landed myself in this situation, but I wouldn’t bring a child into it with me. This was about surviving, and Cash had never said anything about children.

I go to the pantry and look to see what I have that could feed almost twenty people.

After looking over the shelves in here and in the kitchen, I decide on burgers with baked fries and a pasta salad. I'll need to go to the store soon, but I have enough for tonight and breakfast tomorrow. But I need to start with the pies to get them into the oven.

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When I come out of the pantry, I scream. Caught off guard by a young man who looks to be about my age or maybe in his early twenties. I'm still a few days shy of my twentieth.

He holds his hands up at my shriek.

"Sorry, ma'am. I was just coming in for the first-aid kit." He wiggles the kit he has in his hand. "Barbed wire got his calf."

"Sorry, you just scared me. I didn't expect anyone."

He gives me a crooked smile. "So the boss went through with it. Got himself a wife."

"That's me," I confirm, though we aren't married yet. I go over to the sink and pull out a dish towel I saw in the drawer, wetting it with warm water.

"You might need this." I hand him the towel.

"You're mighty small." His eyes run over me like I'm hiding size somewhere. I am small. I'm barely five foot two, and I used to have a little more meat on my bones, but when money runs tight so does food.

"I think I can handle my chores while still being small." I reply, not sure where he's going with this.

"Oh, I'm sure you can. I just meant..." He looks back at the front door like he suddenly wants to leave and not finish what he was saying.

“Well?” I push, wanting to know.

“I should really go.” He backs up out of the kitchen, first-aid kit in one hand and towel in the other, before he darts out the front door. And I stand there, wondering what he meant.