



Rancher's Healing (Flying Diamond 5)

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Category: Romance

Description: When Tayla Miller winds up at home with a broken heart, can an old love mend it?

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CHAPTER ONE

JAKE

Leaving the city was still the best part of my day. I didn't mind covering for the doctors in the ER, because it kept up my skills and gave me something other than Mr. Joseph's gout to think about. But the drives home were the killer.

Turning the music up, I ignored everything around me except the road and vast prairie in front of me.

Something was on the road ahead, but I couldn't make it out. As I grew closer, I saw someone had broken down. It was a fancy horse trailer, with a very familiar flying diamond logo on the back door. Someone from the Flying Diamond 5 was in trouble.

Pulling to a stop, I got out of my truck and headed for the driver's door. The back door on the trailer was open, and I poked my head in, seeing two horses in their stall. It looked like there should have been three.

"Hello?" I called out, hoping not to startle anyone who might be working on the truck. Making my way around the vehicle, there was nobody. The truck was full of stuff, and the bed had what looked to be a blown-out tire from the trailer. Whoever it was already had it fixed.

"Hello?" I shouted, a little louder this time.

"Jake, is that you?" I heard a woman's voice call back to me. Turning, I looked

behind me to see a woman with dark hair, legs that stretched for miles, and a smile taking up most of her face.

“Tayla?” I didn’t need to phrase it as a question. I knew that woman like the back of my hand. I’d studied her body as much, maybe more than my anatomy textbooks for medical school. She got closer, and I had to fight the blood flowing to my dick. God, she was gorgeous.

Clearing my throat, I focused enough to ask her, “Are you all right?” Frowning, I looked at the horse she was walking.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Rusty here’s a little shit when it comes to loading, and he must feel we’re close to home because he took off.” She walked closer to the trailer, and the horse tried to pull away.

“Here, give him to me.” I reached out for the halter and took him from her. A smirk crossed her face, and I was pretty sure she was quite happy to prove me wrong that I could get the beast in the trailer.

He walked on perfectly for me and I locked him in the stall, taking off the halter she had used. And that’s when I realized why she was smirking.

“I think this is yours.” My voice was as pitchy as a teen boy.

Her bra hung off my finger, and she burst into a fit of laughter. She reached out to grab it, but I hooked my finger so she couldn’t pull it off. “Not the first time I’ve had one of these in my hands.”

She closed her eyes and shook her head. “Those were good times.” Her mouth was smiling, but her eyes were sad, now that I was looking at her. I let her slip her bra off my finger, and she crossed her arms over her breasts.

God, Jake, look anywhere else. My brain screamed at me, so I looked into the trailer before looking back at her.

“What’s wrong, Tay?” I reached out and brushed her hair out of her face.

It was the first time I’d touched her in years, but I could still feel her body against mine, what she felt like beside me and how it felt to be.

.. Enough. My brain yelled before I could finish that thought.

“I’m home for good.” She let her eyes fall from my face to the road beneath us.

“Are you okay?” The hair on the back of my neck stood on end, and I was ready to pummel the man who’d hurt her.

“I’m fine. Caught him cheating, and that was the last straw.” She shrugged and turned away from me. “Then my tire blows ten miles from home, and that one runs.” She pointed to the trailer.

“Got anything to drink in the living quarters?” I asked. Spending time on the side of the highway wasn’t exactly getting me home, but tonight there wasn’t any reason I couldn’t spend time with her.

“Yeah, the fridge is full.” She nodded. “It’s unlocked.”

I walked toward the door. Giving her a moment to sort the bra situation out, I went to the fridge and grabbed two sodas for us. A beer would have been better, but we both still had miles to drive.

“Follow me,” I said as I walked past her and held out the drink.

“Always the responsible one, hey Doc.” She said as she cracked the can of Dr. Pepper and smirked.

“Do no harm.” I said as I held up my right hand. Dropping the tailgate of my truck, I hopped up and patted the spot beside me. She sat and took a drink of the soda. The early autumn breeze blew the hair off her face, a face I’d memorized at one point in my life.

“I’m a good listener.” Leaning over, I bumped her shoulder with mine. Tayla’s half smile made my heart break. Her brokenness was unlike anything I had ever witnessed. She was outgoing, full of life, and right now I wanted to take her in my arms and get her back to that person’.

I cleared my throat to try again. “I do know a little something about catching your partner cheating.” The spritz of my drink made us both look at it as I opened it.

“Hattie?” she asked, frowning.

“Yeah, the girls were at my mom’s for the day because I was at the clinic.

I thought she went to the city, so when I ran home for lunch, her car was there with Jason Ryan’s parked beside it.

” The scene replayed in my head like it was yesterday.

Should I tell her or stop talking? My brain screamed at me to shut up, but when had I ever listened to that?

“I tried to come up with every excuse imaginable for why he was there. As I opened the door, those sounds were unmistakable.” Letting my voice trail off, Tayla scooted closer to me.

She set the drink on the tailgate and looked at her hands.

“I threw up.” Her slight shrug pulled me back in time, but I pushed that night out of my head and waited for her to continue.

“I was in shock, I guess, but when I opened the door of the trailer, I saw everything. Then she asked him if she was better than me, and I was sick. Even the slamming of the door didn’t stop them.

She laughed, and he moaned as he came.” She picked up her drink and hurled it onto the asphalt.

It made a thumping sound, and the soda that was in it splashed all over the road.

“What’s wrong with me, Jake? Am I that unloveable?” Tears dropped from her eyes, and I wrapped my arm around her shoulder and pulled her close to me.

“There’s nothing wrong with you.” Absentmindedly, I kissed the top of her head. What the hell did I do that for? She’s going to think I’m an idiot.

“What am I going to do?” she whispered.

“You’re going to drive the next ten miles with your head held high, march onto that ranch, and tell them you’re back.

Nobody needs to know why right now. That’s for you to tell when you’re ready.

” The woman beside me was a shell of her audacious self.

“And when you need someone to scream at, you call me.”

Tayla gave a laugh as she finally relaxed and quit crying. “I don’t deserve to have you as a friend,” she said quietly.

“Sure you do. Just because the timing for us wasn’t right doesn’t mean we have to hate one another.

” We sat in silence after I said that. There wasn’t a lie in what I said.

We’d been good together, and I wouldn’t deny that at one time the woman I pictured in my life, being the mother of my children, and who I was going to grow old with was her.

But medical school and barrel racing were our downfall.

Tayla glanced at her watch. “I suppose I should get going before it gets later, and I’m sure whoever’s waiting at home for you will be getting anxious.” She sat straight and took a deep breath.

“Nobody at home, Tayla, hasn’t been for a long time.

” The air was thick around us, and I knew I shouldn’t have said that.

She’d just had her heart ripped out, and here I was trying to make a move.

What the hell was wrong with me? “I’m going to follow you to the ranch in case you have more trouble.

” I climbed off the tailgate, and she followed me.

“I don’t know how to thank you for this.” She said as I opened the driver’s side door for her to get in.

“Well, I should be the one thanking you. You provided the drinks.” Her eyes glittered with laughter instead of tears, and I was content with this being the outcome.

The thought of not seeing her again made me blurt out, “Hey if you need a job, I could use a receptionist. Mom’s retired, and I haven’t hired anyone.

I’m sure my nurse would rather do her job instead of answering phones.

” I leaned against her open door. As I watched her, I could almost see her brain working as I swatted a mosquito and walked to my truck.

“When do I start?” She called out to me. When I turned, I saw her grinning face.

“Monday, eight-thirty. I don’t like tardiness.”

“Oh I know, Doctor Gordon. See you Monday.” She waved, and I went to climb in the truck. “And Jake? Thank you.”

Tayla pulled away, and I followed her to the road that breaks off to the ranch. Speeding up, I pulled alongside her and waved. Sadness still painted her face, but it was lighter than when I first saw her.

Tayla Miller was home and working for me. What was I supposed to do now?

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CHAPTER TWO

TAYLA

Pulling to a stop in front of the barn, I watched The Five walk out, staring at the truck. They all looked at one another as they approached. I took a deep breath, knowing it was time to face them. It wasn't like I could spin the truck and massive trailer around and run away again.

Reaching for the door handle, I remembered what Jake had said. I held my head high and got out of the truck.

"Tayla?" my brother, Kipp, said as he moved to where I stood.

"Hey, brother. Mind if I come home?" He stopped mid step and frowned. Great, that wasn't the reaction I was looking for.

"Welcome home, Tayla. How many animals are in that trailer?" Griffin, one of my brother's business partners, asked as he walked on the opposite side of the truck. Lincoln and Ryder waved as they walked.

"Thanks Griff, there's three." He nodded, and I heard him open the latch for the gate.

"Home for a rodeo?" Kipp asked, moving closer, followed by my brother-in-law Nash.

"No, for good, if I'm allowed." I looked down at the gravel and kicked at a larger

stone.

“Welcome back.” Kipp’s voice was light, and I looked up, seeing his smiling face. He opened his arms, and I walked into his hug. It was too much, and I couldn’t hold back the tears. Kipp tightened his grip, and Nash’s hand pressed on my upper back.

“Who do we need to go after?” Nash asked, with a menacing tone in his voice. Kipp let me go, and I dried my face.

“He cheated. I got mad and left. Lark is so mad at me for leaving without talking to her.” My sister Lark and I had been inseparable since we started racing. This was the first time we’d been apart in forever.

“She’s not.” My sister-in-law, Nora, said as she walked to my brother’s side. “She called about two hours ago, telling me you were on the way. I’ve been waiting for you and hoped you’d get here before these five got home.” She hugged me and left her arm around my shoulder.

“Thanks for the heads up, my darling wife,” Kipp said as he shook his head.

“I would have been, but I got a flat ten miles back. Then Jake stopped, and we talked for a while.” I tried to be aloof, but I watched Kipp’s brow rise slightly.

“Jake?” Kipp said flatly.

“Yeah, he was on his way home from a shift at the hospital.” I didn’t want to tell him anymore than that. He didn’t need to know.

“Come on, they can take care of the horses and unhitch the trailer. We can unpack your truck after supper.” Nora turned me toward the house. “I have to know about Jake,” she whispered, and all I could do was shake my head.

“How did we end up having to do all her work?” Nash asked loudly, laughing a little to let me know he was joking.

Nash was a good man and like a second brother.

He’d been in love with my youngest sister for years.

Finally, they managed to get on the same page and have two of the most adorable girls.

“You’ve always been the lucky one, Nash,” I yelled over my shoulder and Nora laughed.

Nora put her hand on her growing abdomen. It wouldn’t be long now, and I was happy to be home to help her. It would take my mind off my pile of flaming shit life. “How much longer?” I asked as I lightly touched her stomach.

“Three weeks. When I saw Jake on Monday, he said I need to be ready any time though. Speaking of Jake.” Between her smirk and arched brow, I knew what she wanted to ask.

“Shut up, both of you until I get in there.” My sister, Fallon, yelled from the porch. The screen door slapped shut as she walked into the house. Josie, her almost three-year-old daughter, ran to me and launched herself into my lap.

“Auntie TayTay.” She squealed and wrapped her tiny arms around my neck.

It was hard to believe that not that long ago, nobody even knew Josie existed.

I was sad Fallon hadn’t felt able to talk to me about her problems, but I didn’t dwell on it.

All I knew was that now I could spoil all these kids that were running around the ranch.

“Hey, missy, you have no idea how badly I needed that hug.” I said as I held onto her tightly.

“Okay, let your auntie go,” Fallon said, as I shifted Josie on my lap. With these women staring at me, I spilled the entire story, and they each reached out for my hand.

“Okay, but where does Jake fit in with all of this?” Nora asked, looking from me to Fallon.

“Don’t look at me. I only found out about Jake after I came back.” Fallon said, holding her free hand up. Both women turned to me and waited.

“You two together are very annoying.” I said, as I turned my attention back to Josie. “Little miss, you and I need to get out of here. Your mom and Auntie Nora are gossips.” I couldn’t help but smile when Josie nodded with a mouth full of the cheesy fish.

“Nope, Jake, spill.” Fallon pointed at me.

“I don’t want to corrupt young minds.” I covered Josie’s ears.

“Josie, find your dad,” Fallon said flatly.

“No, I stay with Auntie TayTay.”

“Smart girl.” I said, holding up my hand for a high five, and Josie didn’t leave me hanging.

“Bet Jake would tell me if I called him.” Nora said as she stood to reach for the cordless phone on the table.

“Or I could get Elle to find out. You know, since she’s working for Jake and all.

” I hadn’t known that Griff’s new wife was working for Jake.

He didn’t mention who his new nurse was, but it made sense.

Elle was fantastic, and it made me excited to know we’d be working together.

“We used to be on and off.” I blurted out, slamming my hand down on the phone before she could grab it.

“Nice.” Fallon nodded to Nora as she sat back down.

“It started as flirting here and there. He’s the same age as Kipp, so obviously off limits, but it didn’t matter. He offered to drive me home one night after a party and, well, I ended up on his lap in the front of his truck.”

“You’re three years younger than Kipp.” Nora said like she was doing the math in her head.

“How much younger are you? Both of you? Don’t look at me like that. You two can’t even talk. At least Jake and I were in high school at the same time.” I crossed my arms around Josie like she was my shield from whatever they were going to say next, but the two busybodies kept silent.

“Anyway, that night we just kissed. A lot. We didn’t actually go all the way until I was eighteen.

He had girlfriends, and I had boyfriends, but when he came home that summer, well, things happened.

” I looked out the window at the barn and closed my eyes.

It was no use thinking of what happened in the loft because it couldn’t happen again.

“Wait, you were a virgin until you were eighteen. Your excuse was you were too busy with your horses to worry about it.” Fallon said as she moved baby Lottie to the blanket she’d put on the floor. Josie squirmed in my lap, and I let her down to go play with her sister.

“That was an excuse. I just wanted it to be Jake.” Biting the inside of my lip, I smiled slightly, thinking that no matter what happened in life I’d never regret that first time with him.

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CHAPTER THREE

JAKE

I smiled as I saw her big black truck parked in the second spot behind the building Monday morning. She was leaning up against the hood in a knee length black skirt, a white blouse and heels. How was I supposed to concentrate on patients when she was out at the desk?

“Good morning, Doctor Gordon, I picked this up for you.” She handed me a coffee from Steam’n Sugar.

“Thank you.” I was surprised and appreciative at the same time. Taking a sip, I looked at her. “You remembered.”

“Jake, black coffee isn’t difficult to remember.” Tayla rolled her eyes and laughed. Her laugh was like music to my ears and I liked hear it much better than seeing her tears like the other day.

Silence filled the office and the butterflies in my stomach, and sweaty palms were a surprise. “So we open at nine and close at three-forty five so I can get home before the bus gets there.” She followed me into my office.

“Libby is eight, and Skylar is six.” I handed her the picture I had on my desk.

“How have they gotten so big?” She asked as she focused on the photo in her hands. “God, they look like you.” She smiled as she looked up at me.

“Poor girls.” I mumbled as I put my bag down on my desk.

“Or lucky, depending on whose opinion you’re looking for.” She set the frame back down and followed me out to the waiting room.

“Mom’s going to come in later and help you get set up with the computer, but I’m sure you’ll have it figured out by then.

Elle needed the day off to help Parker with something or she would have been here to get you settled in.

” We walked behind the desk and I went through all the files and pulled up the appointment list for the day.

* * *

We’d worked well together, but I hadn’t been surprised about that. We’d always made a good team in anything we’d done.

“Well, there you are.” A woman’s voice said from the waiting room, so I went to see who was here.

“Mom, what are you doing here?” Tayla asked, and I saw the mother Julie Miller standing at the desk. “This is my work mom, you can’t just show up.”

“You’ve been home three days and not a word to me.”

“Mother, you were gone visiting Auntie Beth.” She huffed. This surprised me Julie wasn’t normally like this.

“A call would have been nice.” She turned to look at me as I made my way out of

where I'd been eavesdropping. "Doc. How are you?" She asked, smiling.

"I'm good Julie. Did you have an appointment?" I didn't want to kick the woman out, but I also needed to get things cleaned up so I could get home before the girls got there.

"Nope, just came to see my girl." Julie smiled and nodded before she walked out the door.

Tayla was ashen, and she looked at me with her big brown eyes. "I'm so sorry Jake, I mean Doctor Gordon."

"It's fine Tayla, I'm sure she's not going to be the only one." I laughed and her shoulders relaxed.

Leaning over the desk, we worked on who needed bookings for the next few days. Being this close to the woman I thought I'd spent my life with was testing my professional resolve.

When she turned and smiled at me, I was gone. Leaning in, I gently pressed my lips to her soft, silky, cherry flavoured mouth.

Fireworks whizzed by my head, and she entwined her fingers in my hair as she sighed. Pulling away, I had a brief moment of panic before I inwardly jumped for joy that I'd kissed Tayla Miller once more.

"This can't happen here." I whispered.

"You're the one that started it." She shrugged before looking back at the computer.

"I know." I said, before kissing her neck.

She turned in her chair and smiled at me. “So I guess playing doctor here is out of the question, too?” Her sassy smirk was going to get me in trouble as I leaned down and kissed her again.

Pulling away, I said the only thing that came to my sex starved brain. “I don’t need an office. I prefer to do that remotely.”

CHAPTER FOUR

TAYLA

The barn had been transformed into something from a magazine. Fairy lights were hung in the rafters, the posts holding up the structure were draped in black tulle and the tables that covered the floor were so elegant I wondered who Nora thought was showing up tonight.

People milled about and catering staff wandered around with trays of appetizers and drinks. “You look like you could use this.” A drink appeared in front of me, and I turned to see Jake smiling.

“Thank you.” I said, reaching for the glass of champagne. “How’s your evening been?” I asked, before taking a sip.

“A nightmare, to be honest. Starcie Stinener has been on my ass all night.” He rolled his eyes and shook his head.

“I’ve noticed.” My words came out flat.

“You have?” The look on his face was mild surprise.

“Of course, I’ve hated her since kindergarten, and I feel bad for anyone who ends up getting her claws buried in their backs.” Taking another drink, I wondered if I had the courage to say what I really wanted to. Oh, what the hell, I was going to. “Plus, I’m jealous.” I shrugged.

My words seemed to launch him into action.

Jake grabbed my hand and pulled me off to the side of the room. It was darker over in the corner, and unless someone was looking for us or saw us come over here, they wouldn't even realize where we were. "What do you mean, you're jealous?" His words were almost a growl.

"I want to be the one that's taking all your attention." Letting my gaze fall to the floor, I couldn't stop the burning of my cheeks and the fluttering in my stomach at the revelation.

"God, Tayla, you are the one that's taking all my attention tonight. I don't even know what Starcie's been saying to me, because I can't keep my eyes or mind off you in that dress." His words sent shockwaves to my core. "I wish we could leave and go to my house right now."

I wanted that too, but it was a bachelor auction. As one of the town's bachelors, he had to stay. "What if I win you?" I asked, straightening his tie.

"Then I will take you home as soon as this thing is over." He whispered in my ear.

I couldn't help but smile. He moved his hand from my waist to my cheek and around to the back of my neck.

Pulling me to him, he lowered his head and pressed his lips to mine.

This wasn't the accidental, chaste kiss that we shared the other day.

This was passionate, needy, and I remembered why I'd liked kissing him so much.

"The time has come to round up all our bachelors." Kipp called into the microphone.

“I hope you brought your wallet with you tonight. Starcie said she’s going to run up anyone that bids on me.” Jake’s smirk made my heart stop.

“Good thing I saved all my winnings from last season.” I arched my brow, and he leaned down for another quick kiss.

“See you in a bit.” His whispered words fluttered over my ear, and all I could do was nod as I watched him walk away.

Taking a deep breath, I walked out of the shadows and immediately caught Starcie’s eye. The anger on her face should have killed me on the spot. “There you are,” Nora said as she walked up to my side. “Who the hell have you been kissing?” She frowned and crossed her arms.

“Nobody.” I scoffed.

“Your lipstick is a mess, your lips are puffy, and you’re wispy.” She fluttered her arms like she was floating.

“Wispy? Nora, you’re crazy.” I brushed her off and walked to the table that had been reserved for the ranch.

“Who was it?” She whispered as we waited for the auction to start.

“Jake.” I whisper yelled back to her.

“Pay up girls.” She held her hand out. Fallon, Elle, and Kristin each put a hundred dollars in her hand.

“All right everyone, let’s get this evening started.

I'd like to bring up the most beautiful auctioneer we've ever had for this event.

Nora, sweetheart, please come up to the stage.

"My brother's chest puffed out with pride as he watched his wife make her way to the microphone.

"Not only is she our auctioneer, she organized this event and the proceeds will go to the health clinic in the hopes of being able to offer more services to our remote little corner of the world." The audience clapped and quieted when Nora took the microphone.

"Thank you for that introduction, Kipp." She stood behind the podium and looked out over the crowd.

"Wow, it's packed in here tonight. I won't keep you waiting.

Let's get started. We have seven bachelors tonight, two from the ranch, four from town, and, of course, our own doctor, Jake Gordon.

"A whistle came from behind me, and I didn't need to turn to know who it was.

Only one person would act that tacky at a black-tie event.

Looking over at my Fallon, Elle and Kristin, we all mouthed, "Starcie." Rolling our eyes, we look back at Nora.

My stomach fluttered as I waited for Jake to come on stage.

"Now ladies and gentlemen, Doctor Jake Gordon." He walked out, smiling nervously as he scanned the audience.

Was he looking for me? “Jake grew up here and only left to go to medical school. His dedication to our community is commendable. I know he’s getting calls to join large hospitals, but he stays here.

So let’s make sure he can keep practicing medicine in our county for years to come.

” Nora clapped for Jake, as did the rest of the room.

“Two thousand.” One of the older women said from a few tables over. The women with her giggled, and they all waved at Jake. He grinned and waved back.

The back and forth went on for a while until a voice shouted from behind me, “Six thousand!” I watched Jake’s smile falter slightly, but unless you knew his tell, nobody would have seen it.

“Seven.” I said as I held up my number.

“Seven-fifty.”

“Eight.” I called, trying not to let her bother me.

“Eight-fifty,” Starcie said, her voice squeaking. I waited for a second.

“Going once, going twice.”

Standing, I locked eyes with Jake. “Twelve thousand dollars.” Arching my brow, I didn’t even try to hide the smirk. The room was so quiet you could hear a piece of straw fall to the floor.

“Going once, going twice, sold to Tayla Miller.” Nora beamed, and I made my way through the chairs to the stage. Holding my arm out for Jake, he laced his through

mine, and we walked to where my mom sat at the table waiting for payment.

“Isn’t this cozy?” Mom grinned as she wrote up the receipt for me.

“Have a lovely date, you two.” Mom winked and Phil put his arm around her, smiling at me.

Writing out the check was easy, and I was suddenly very happy I had put away a percentage of my winnings.

Handing the paper to my mom, she took it and tucked it into the cash box.

“What, no lecture about being safe?” I asked, looking at my mom’s boyfriend.

“Nah, Jake’s good.” He held out his hand and Jake shook it.

Moving away from the table, Jake put his hand on the small of my back and led me right out of the barn. Starcie stood over by the cars, her arms crossed and glaring at me. “Don’t stop, just keep walking. I see her.” Jake said quietly as he led me to his truck.

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CHAPTER FIVE

JAKE

“Where are the girls tonight?” Tayla asked, breaking the unnerving silence we’d sat in since leaving the ranch.

“With Hattie. It’s her weekend.” I hated when they were gone, but Hattie had been a wonderful mom, even if we weren’t meant to be together.

I turned onto the road where my ranch was.

It was a fraction of the size of the Flying Diamond 5, but it had been in my family for generations.

Even though I was busy with my practice, I liked coming home to the quiet and to the animals that needed me.

It gave me something to do when the girls were with their mom.

Pulling to a stop at the house, I parked, got out, and opened Tayla’s door. She wrapped her arm around mine and walked pressed up against me. “I suppose I should have asked if this was what you wanted,” I said as I swung the door open.

“Jake, I wouldn’t have bid twelve thousand dollars for you, or come home with you if I didn’t want this.

” She grabbed my face between her hands and pulled me down to her.

Our lips met, and time stopped. Her lips were soft and tasted like vanilla.

Backing her into the house, I kicked the door closed.

She sighed against me, and my tongue slipped against hers.

I wrapped my arms around her. “Please Jake,” she whispered as she pressed her hips against me.

“Turn around.” I said when I wrenched my mouth from hers.

She did as I asked, and I pulled her hair off to the side.

The black dress hugged her body seductively.

I wanted to gouge out every man’s eyes that dared to look at her.

Pulling the zipper down, I exposed her back.

Reaching back up to her shoulders, I pushed it down her arms. No bra, no panties, just the dress and her.

It fell to the ground with a soft puff and she turned back to face me.

“I’ve dreamed of your body,” I whispered, hoping she wouldn’t take it the wrong way.

“Really?” she asked quietly, and all I could do was nod. “What did you dream about?” She bit the corner of her lip.

“Should I tell you, or show you?” I arched my brow and couldn’t stop the blood from rushing to my dick.

“Show me.” She whispered, as she reached for the buttons on my shirt. Her fingers worked like magic as she undid my shirt. Her hands shook slightly as she pushed my shirt off my shoulders.

Her fingers danced over my tattooed chest. “Well, aren’t you full of surprises, Doctor Gordon?” She arched her brow, and my shirt fell to the floor.

“Can’t have my patients knowing all my secrets,” I growled as I swept Tayla up into my arms. Placing her on my bed, I opened my belt, pulled down my zipper, and stepped out of my pants.

“So many secrets.” She looked at me as I stood there without underwear on. I’d gone commando tonight. My dress pants were always uncomfortable when I wore boxers. I hadn’t paid for a well-tailored suit to have boxer briefs ruining the look.

I walk to the end of the bed, never breaking eye contact, and the corners of her mouth curl up in a smile.

Crawling up the mattress, I grabbed her ankle, placing one leg out to the side, and repeating the process with the other.

God, this woman, spread out before me, made every memory come flooding back.

Her legs were soft as I dragged my hand up her inner thigh while I positioned myself. Leaning down, I was overcome with her scent and ran my hand over her mound. A sigh escaped Tayla’s chest, and I smiled as I slid down her body.

When I licked her core and ran my tongue over her sensitive bud, she cried out.

The warmth of her hands wrapped around my arms, and she gripped me as she pushed against my tongue.

Over and over I dragged my tongue up her slit, adding one finger, then another and another, until she moved her hips against my face, fast and furiously searching for that peak.

Then I sank my fingers deep within her, and she cried out.

Panting, her orgasm crashed over, and she clenched around my fingers.

“Jake,” she moaned when I pulled my fingers from her. Leaning over her, I pressed my mouth to hers. Her tongue lazily dueled with mine, and the need to consume her threatened to overtake me.

I pulled away and smiled. “Can you taste yourself, sunshine? You’re the best thing I’ve eaten in years.”

I kiss her again and feel her own smile before she says, “Please, Jake.”

“Are you ready?” I whisper as I position myself at her entrance.

“I’ve never been more ready,” she whispered. I wanted to go slow, but I couldn’t wait. With one thrust, I plunged deep into her, and Tayla cried out.

“Jake, oh god. You feel so good.” Her words made me swell more, and she wrapped her legs around my back.

Rocking into her, she moaned, and her head lulled to the side. “You’re so wet for me, sunshine. God, you’re so fucking sexy,” I growled as I thrust into her again.

“I used to imagine it was you when I was alone.” She panted as she opened her eyes and gazed at me. “It was always you, your touch, you above me, your cock buried deep inside me.” She ran her hands over my chest, flicking my nipples and making me moan.

“I’m going to come if you keep doing that, sunshine.” Thrusting my hips roughly, I made her whimper.

“Well, then get at it, big boy, so I can too.” She whimpered.

“Are you close?” I gritted my teeth and pumped into her again.

“So. Close.” She gasped each word. I thrust into her with wild abandon, putting pressure on her clit.

It had always been the surefire way to tip her over the edge.

And apparently, it still worked for her.

She spasmed around my cock as she cried out, convulsing under me.

Watching the pleasure roll through her body made me tense and release into her with a groan.

Our breathing returned to normal as I rolled off Tayla and pulled her to my side. “That was irresponsible. I can get you a Plan B prescription, if it’s what you—” Her hand pressed over my mouth.

“I’m on birth control, Doctor Gordon, so shut your brain off.

” She widened her eyes and focused on me like I was the only person left in the

world.

“I also haven’t been with anyone since I left Arizona, and I had myself tested to make sure I hadn’t caught anything from my ex.

Before you start, I went to Doctor Lorenzo in the city.

There was no way I was talking to you for those tests.

” She took her hand away from my mouth and replaced it with her pouty, puffy lips.

CHAPTER SIX

TAYLA

The curtains on the window were open slightly and a stream of sunlight flowed through. A big arm was draped across my waist, an even larger leg intertwined with mine, and the familiar scent of the man beside me filled my nose. I didn't want to open my eyes. I didn't want the night to be over.

"You're beautiful when you pretend to be asleep." The words whispered in my ear sent tingles through my body.

"How did you know I wasn't sleeping?" I asked, shifting closer to him. Jake tightened his arm and moved his leg so it was now right between my legs.

"Your breathing changed." His low, authoritative voice sent a shiver through my body.

Had it always been like this with Jake? Had the world always felt this right?

Like this was something we were supposed to be doing.

Were we supposed to be together? Had I been selfish when I chose riding over him?

He'd even offered to wait and let me chase my dream, but I was stubborn, and I had pangs of regret.

“Hmmm.” I grumbled as he ran his hand along the underside of my breast.

“Hmmm, what?” He asked as he nibbled on my ear lobe.

“The downfall of sleeping with a doctor. You notice breathing patterns.”

“But there are benefits.” He replied between the light kisses he was placing on my neck.

“And what would those be?”

“When we play doctor, I know what I’m doing.” Jake slid his hand down my abdomen, but stopped just before he could slip his finger over my clit. “Do you want to play doctor, Tayla?” He made slow circles, teasing me. Lifting my hips, I hoped it was enough to make his finger dip lower.

Just as I opened my mouth to say yes, there was a knock at the door. We both froze. I held my breath, hoping maybe we’d just been hearing things. Another knock sounded, and Jake groaned. “What time is it?” I whispered.

“Ten.”

“What? How did we sleep so long?”

“We didn’t go to sleep until after four, sunshine.” Jake let me go and reached for his phone. “Shit, it’s Hattie.” He jumped out of bed, pulling his black dress pants on. Grabbing a t-shirt off the laundry hamper, he headed for the door.

“Jake, what am I supposed to do?” I pulled the covers up as I sat up in the bed, and he turned back to look at me.

“Guess you’re meeting the girls.” He shrugged and grinned at me.

“I have no clothes other than the dress I wore last night, and I think it’s in your entryway.” I wanted to die, curl up under the bed, and just expire. Except the fact that I was in a doctor’s house, and he’d probably resuscitate me. His kiss alone would do it.

“Look through the drawers. I’m sure there’s something you can wear.” He closed the door behind him. Was I supposed to get up now? No time like the present to let the gossip fly.

I looked through his drawers and found a shirt and a pair of sweatpants. The minor issue of no bra might be a problem, though. There was a drawer with a compression bandage in it along with other sports related stuff. It wouldn’t be the worst thing as long as I didn’t wrap it too tight.

Looking in the mirror, I was satisfied with how I looked. Except for the freshly fucked hair and smeared makeup, I didn’t look too much like I was doing a walk of shame. Wiping the mascara from under my eyes and taming my hair with his brush, I took a deep breath as I opened the door.

Trying not to draw too much attention to myself, I tiptoed through the hallway. “Hi, Tayla.” Hattie said from the door. She didn’t sound mad, maybe slightly amused.

“Hi Hattie, how are you?” I smiled as I walked over to where everyone stood.

“I’m good.” She let her gaze drift from me to Jake with a smirk. “I heard you two left the auction in a hurry last night.”

“And yet here you are this morning.” Jake said flatly. His expression matched his voice.

“I need to cut the weekend short. Jason planned a getaway, and it’s non-refundable. He mixed up the weekends.” Her saccharine smile made me wonder if the “getaway” came up about the time the gossip got to her phone.

Hattie had been Fallon’s best friend. She was a few years older, but they’d gotten along well. Until they didn’t. Fallon never talked about their falling out, and it was just one thing I never asked her about. I thanked my lucky stars that our relationship was better than it had ever been.

“Daddy.” Two voices unanimously called out as they ran to the house from the pasture that ran along the driveway.

“Hey, princesses, I’m so happy to see you.” Jake hugged his girls. Their eyes moved from him to me.

“Tayla Miller is in my house?” The older girl squealed before jumping up and down.

“You might be her favorite person. I might go as far as her idol.” He smiled at Libby and ran a hand on the back of his neck sheepishly.

“I want to be you.” She said dreamily.

“How about you be you and be better than me?” I smiled.

“But nobody can show me how.” She let her head fall, and she looked at the floor. There was something more there, but it wasn’t my place.

“Hey, if your dad and mom agree, I could teach you.” I looked up at Jake and tried to avoid Hattie’s now pointed glare. She had barrel raced for years; she could teach Libby.

“Okay girls, I have to go. Libby, it’s fine if Tayla wants to teach you how to ride.

” She talked to Libby like she was blowing her off.

Hattie looked at me and rolled her eyes.

“I don’t have the time to do it.” With a flippant wave, she was out the door, running to the car like she was stealing something from the store.

Jake pushed the door closed, and it slammed.

“Libby, Skylar, why don’t you change into jeans, and we will start our lessons.” I said, taking my eyes from Jake.

“I get to learn too?” Skylar asked cheerfully.

“If you want,” I said. “When I was growing up, my sisters Lark and Fallon would ride with me. It’s something we had as sisters.

” The girls looked at one another and smiled as they nodded.

They ran noisily to their rooms, and the slamming of their doors reverberated through the long, one-story ranch style home.

“I’m sorry,” Jake said, as he let his head flop back against the wall. “I can take you home if you want.” His sigh made me think the girls coming home spur of the moment wasn’t a onetime thing. There was a reason the girls lived with him and not Hattie, after all.

Moving closer to him, I raised my hand and pressed it against his cheek.

“Look, I don’t know what you and I are, but it’s too late to hide me from the girls.

I’m wearing your clothes, for goodness’ sake.

You’re a single dad, I knew that, and I don’t want to go home.

” Jake wrapped his arm around my waist and pulled me close.

Lowering his mouth, he pressed a quick kiss to my lips. “Thank you. I’m going to make some breakfast.” He slid his hand down to my ass and squeezed it with a sly grin.

Our silent moment didn’t last long, and we could hear the girls arguing as they ran back down the hallway.

Jake let me go, and I took a step away from him.

The girls stopped fighting when they got to us.

“Did you eat breakfast?” Jake asked, crossing his arms. The tattoos that covered his biceps peaked out from his sleeve, and I wanted to see them all again.

“We had a banana, but mom said we had to get going,” Skyla said as she looked up at Jake.

“You ladies, go get your horses ready, and I will make brunch,” he said, bending down kissing the girls on the head. They pulled their boots on and ran out the door.

“Guess I’m a lady too, so I’ll go help them.” I smirked as I slipped my feet into the heels I was wearing last night.

“You can’t wear those to the barn,” he said, pointing at the heels.

“I can, I have, and I will.” Kissing his cheek, I marched out the door, knowing he was watching me. But wearing his oversized clothes wouldn’t emphasize my strut.

Laughter filtered out from the open barn door, and I almost stopped mid step. It reminded me so much of growing up with my sisters. Smiling, I peeked my head around the corner. “Need some help?” The girls looked at me and nodded.

They’d done well with the bridles but needed the help only an adult could give. Lifting the saddles, I was impressed with how the horses looked. “How long have you had these two?” I asked as I handed the reins to the girls.

“A few years. Mom doesn’t like us riding for some reason, but Dad said no ranch is complete without a few horses,” Libby said, shrugging as we walked into the sunny makeshift arena. The girls needed a little boost to get on their horses, and when they were comfortable, they were ready to listen.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

JAKE

Libby and Skyla monopolized Tayla's day to the point I felt like I hadn't seen her for hours. Laughter filled the porch, and the door opened. "Dad, can Tayla stay for supper?" Skyla shouted just before the door slammed.

"Hey, we don't need to send the door to Wyoming," Tayla laughed. I appreciated her saying something because they didn't listen to me when I told them to quit slamming it multiple times a day.

"It's hard to close, so I just make sure it does." Libby's words weren't wrong. It did like to stick. One day I'd get around to fix it.

"Okay, but still, that's what we have hips for. Just give it a little bump." I walked to the door just as Tayla pushed her hip out. She had hips I wanted to sink my fingers into again.

"Well, ladies, have you learned everything you need to know?" I leaned against the wall and crossed my arms.

"Lesson one was good, but I think we need to have more." Skyler said, folding her hands and bringing them up under her chin. The three of them were kicking their shoes off in the doorway and I watched Tayla take off her heels, wondering how she'd managed out there wearing them.

“Yeah dad, if we’re going to be the next Miller Sisters team, we need more practice. Well, I guess we wouldn’t be the Miller Sisters, we’d be the Gordon sisters, but you know what I mean,” Libby said.

“I guess that’s something I’ll have to talk to Tayla about.” I looked up at the woman who’d gone with the change of plans like she’d been doing it all her life.

“Well, maybe you can talk over supper,” Libby said, moving closer. “Ask her to stay,” she whispered loud enough to cause Tayla to cover her mouth to hide her giggle.

“Tayla, would you like to stay for supper?” The girls turned as I wrapped my arms around them and pulled them closer to me. They were grinning up at Tayla, and I added my smile to it.

“How can I say no to you three? Thank you for the invitation. I’d be happy to stay.

” The woman had no idea how sexy she was dealing with the girls.

I’d been hesitant to bring anyone around because I didn’t want to make a fling seem like it was more.

While there had been no intention for Tayla to meet them like this, I wasn’t upset that it happened.

I was upset that Hattie bailed on her weekend yet again.

“Why don’t you go play, and I will figure out what we’re going to have for supper.” My daughters ran off, and I turned to Tayla. “You don’t have to stay if you want to get out of this place.”

“I want to stay. Libby and Skylar are wonderful, and if I leave, I’m liable to track down your ex-wife and give her more than a piece of my mind.

” She crossed her arms over her chest. “Did she seriously just dump the girls back home so she could interrupt your weekend? Look Jake, I don’t care about me, but seriously. Who does that to their kids?”

She was gorgeous when she was angry, and devilishly hot when she was mad about the treatment of my kids. “It’s typical Hattie. I should have expected it and taken you somewhere else.”

“No, you never have to take me somewhere else. If there’s another time, and she does the same thing, I’ll be the lucky one to spend time with them.

” Before she could take another breath, I gripped the back of her neck and pulled her to me.

My lips connected aggressively with hers.

This woman was unlike anyone I’d ever known.

I swept my tongue into her mouth, and she took a step closer, fisting my shirt in her hands.

“I’ll make it up to you.” I whispered against her lips.

“I look forward to it.” She smiled and gave me another quick kiss as the girls came yelling down the hallway. She took a step back before my daughters got to where we were, and we watched them storm out of the house. The autumn heat never stopped them from being outside.

“Let’s go make supper.” Tayla grabbed my hand and pulled me to the kitchen. “Maybe we can make out in there. At least we’ll hear them come in.” She smirked, and I followed her into the kitchen. Before she could protest, I picked her up, placed her on the counter, and stepped between her legs.

“Make out? Well, sign me up.” I leaned in and a thrill shot through my body when she wrapped her arms around my neck.

Pressing my lips to hers, I grabbed her hips and pulled her tightly to me.

My dick was fighting against my jeans to stand at full attention, and Tayla being the devil she is moved her hips so her core was pressed against me.

“Tayla, you’re going to make me come in my pants.”

“It’s kind of hot to think I can make you get off without even touching you.”

“But you are touching me.” I looked down between us at the bulge in my pants pressed into her.

“Fine, with so many clothing items between us.” She rolled her eyes, and I leaned in, kissing her neck before licking up to her ear.

She tilted her head and gave me more access, sighing as I sucked lightly on her neck.

I might have gotten a little overzealous, and I stood back and looked at the red mark on her neck.

Tayla’s eyes went wide, and she gritted her teeth.

“You better not have given me a hickey, Jake.”

“Oh, I guarantee I did, sunshine.” I grinned like I was a teenager who’d just had my first make-out session.

“You’re mine now, Tayla Miller.” I ran my hand up over her throat and ran my thumb over the spot that would be bright red tomorrow, smiling at my handiwork.

The words felt good to finally say out loud, but something in her expression made me think she didn’t believe it meant forever.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TAYLA

“ Jake, I’m going to Steam’n Sugar to get lunch. Need anything?” I asked, popping my head into his empty office.

“Pretty sure the only lunch I want you don’t need to leave the building for.” His sexy smile almost made me close the door and stay in for lunch.

“This is the office. We agreed it was off limits, Doctor Gordon.” I emphasized his title.

“Even when we’re closed for lunch?” He arched his brow and leaned forward, resting his elbows on the desk.

“I’ll get you a sandwich and coffee.” I shook my head and turned to walk into the staff room.

Jake’s big arm wrapped around my waist and turned me to face him.

“We didn’t say no kissing in the staff room, just the office.

” He lowered his head, and I tipped mine up to meet his.

Every kiss was sweeter than the last. I was no longer in control of my arms, and they wrapped around his neck as I leaned into him.

He pulled away and smiled. “You better grab lunch before I get carried away. Food sounds great, thank you.” We took a step away from one another, and I reached for my purse.

“I’ll be back shortly.” Walking past, I jumped when he slapped my ass.

“That’s for not letting me eat what I want.” He followed me out of the staff room and turned back to his office.

I leaned against the back door, letting the warm breeze flutter over me, settling my heart and my libido. God, that man is a constant distraction, I thought to myself as I walked away from the office to the street.

Walking to the coffee shop always cleared my head. “Hey Tayla, how’s your day?” Mrs. Jonson smiled as I passed her on the sidewalk.

“It’s really good. How’s yours?” I stopped and gave the older woman a hug.

“Oh, it’s a typical day for me. I just had coffee with the girls.

It wasn’t enjoyable. They’re pissy. I won the bingo pot last night, but I paid for their coffee so they’re talking to me again.

” The older woman laughed, and I joined her.

“Now I’m on my way to crib, so if I’m going to get my regular chair I better run.

Tell your mother I say hi. Since she’s been sleeping with that sexy PI, I never see her.
” She patted my arm.

“I will tell her, but I don’t see her a lot either, come to think of it,” I said as I

frowned.

“Well, I wouldn’t go visit my mother if I had that sexy Doctor Jake warming my bed. Unfortunately for me, it’s just Frank snoring away.” She shook her head and sighed. “But he’s not all bad.” She winked and waved as she walked down to her car.

Picturing Mr. And Mrs. Jonson in bed was not the pre-lunch image I wanted in my head.

Thankfully, I made it to the coffee shop without anyone else stopping me.

I loved living in this small town, but sometimes I learned far too much about people.

Since starting at the doctor’s office, that’s increased tenfold.

Chimes rang out as I walked into the coffee shop. “Well, if it isn’t my favorite, almost daughter-in-law,” Fred smiled as I walked in.

“Hey Fred, how’s your day?” I asked, walking up to the counter.

Fred and my father had been best friends until my father’s death.

When his son Nash married Fallon, he took us all under his wing as in-laws.

It felt right, and he’d always been a part of our lives, so having him around made everything better.

“It’s been busy. All people can talk about is that auction on the weekend. Nora sure raised a lot of money.” Fred grinned.

“Yeah, I’m sure that’s what everyone’s been talking about.

” Rolling my eyes, I looked at the man. Fred’s receding hairline was immaculately cut and combed.

He looked like he’d lost some weight. No doubt that had to do with his fiancée Wanda making sure he was eating properly.

My brother had issues with Fred over the last few years, but those had been put to rest by Nora, who Fred treated like a daughter.

“Well, I, for one, think it’s wonderful, and I’ve told everyone who’s tried to get me to talk about you two that exact thing.

” He nodded curtly. “I’m just about done with your order.

I just have to grab more to go cups from the back.

” Fred left, and I was acutely aware that I was being watched.

Turning, I saw Starcie and a few of her friends, who were just as nasty as she was.

“I didn’t realize Nora’s auction was actually a fuck fest.” She said loudly, and the people around her giggled. “I’m going to have to save all year, so I can win the good doctor next year.”

Smiling sweetly as I dropped tip money in the jar, I kissed Fred’s cheek and grabbed my lunch. As I walked past the table, I stopped. “He won’t be available next year, Starcie. Looks like you lost to a Miller yet again.” Fred laughed as I left the coffee shop.

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CHAPTER NINE

TAYLA

“O k, what’s the plan for tonight? I’m boyfriend and kid free.” I walked into Fallon and Nash’s house for girls’ night.

“Boyfriend?” Nora and Kristin asked at the same time, each sitting up a little straighter.

“Yes, boyfriend. What did you think he was?” I asked as I sat down on the couch.

“Well, you’ve never defined it, so we weren’t sure what was going on,” Fallon said, as she walked out of the kitchen with a tray of appetizers. She set them on the table and sat beside me.

“It feels juvenile calling him my boyfriend, but he’s not my partner, and I don’t know what else to say. So, boyfriend, it is.” I shrugged as I leaned forward, scooping a tortilla chip in the dip Fallon had made.

“They’re so cute at the clinic. They try to hide the fact they’re in love, but the longing glances and the kisses in the staff room are a dead giveaway.” Elle said, as she giggled.

“Hey that’s work secrets. You aren’t supposed to talk about it.” I looked over at Elle, who couldn’t stop her laughter.

“So what’s new? I’ve been so busy at the clinic and teaching Jake’s girls to ride, I feel like I haven’t seen you all for a month.” I looked at the girls, and we fell into comfortable chatter.

My phone rang, and I looked down at Jake’s number. The girls ooh’d and huddled around me as I answered the call. “Hi babe.” My words chipper and the girls all awed behind me.

“I’m so sorry to interrupt your evening.” He sounded tired, and I could tell there was tension in his voice.

“What’s wrong, Jake?” I stood from the couch and walked into the kitchen, where I could have some privacy.

“Are the girls okay?” My stomach dropped, thinking something might have happened to one of them.

The thought took me a little off guard, because I’d only ever worried about myself, and now here I was asking my boyfriend if his kids were okay.

“They’re fine, but Jason and Hattie were in a car accident. The girls were at her mother’s house, and I want them home. I hate to ask you but...”

“I’m on my way. Does she still live in Weston Gap?” I walked out of the kitchen and grabbed my purse and rooted through it for my keys. Grabbing a piece of paper, I wrote what Jake had told me, and I ran out the door.

“Yeah, same house as always,” he sighed, and I wanted to be there for him, to be the one he relied on.

Getting in my truck, I turned the key, and it roared to life. “Okay, I’m leaving the

ranch now. Do they know?"

"Yes, I talked to them. They are upset, and rightfully so, but they just want to be in their own house tonight. The hospital has relieved me, and I'll head home as soon as my replacement gets here, but it will be late when I get there.

"I heard a muffled page in the background that included his name.

"I have to go. I'll call you when I'm leaving. "

"All right, sounds good. Jake?" I said my stomach was churning, but I needed to say it.

"Yeah?"

"I love you." Silence filled the space between us, and I wondered if I'd said the wrong thing.

"I love you too, sunshine. Gotta go." His voice was slightly perkier than it had been only moments ago.

"Bye." I said just as the line went dead. He loved me, too. There was no hesitation. He'd just said it, and I couldn't stop smiling.

* * *

My drive to town was slightly accelerated. I just wanted to get to the girls and get them home. Knocking on the door, I was greeted by Hattie's mother. "Hi Mrs. Wallace."

"Thank you for coming to get them. They want to be in their own beds, and I need to

get to the city.” She stepped out onto the step and pulled the door almost closed behind her. “The hospital just called, and things aren’t looking good for Hattie right now. They want me there as soon as possible.”

“Oh no, do you need someone to drive you? I don’t like the idea of you driving all that way alone.

” Fallon and Hattie had been best friends growing up.

I’d spent a lot of time here over the years, so it wasn’t quite as awkward as it could have been.

There were frogs croaking and crickets chirping, but other than that, nothing was said.

“I appreciate that, Tayla. There aren’t many women who’d offer to help the ex-mother-in-law of her boyfriend.”

“Well, I knew you long before you were Jake’s ex-mother-in-law, so we’ll say it’s for old times’ sake.” I smiled, and she chuckled slightly.

“Let’s say that.” She nodded. “My son is on his way over. He’s going to take me, but thank you again.” Just then, the door opened, and two tearful girls walked out to where I stood. Opening my arms, they both rushed me, and I wrapped them in a hug.

“Say bye to your grandma, and I’ll get you home,” I said quietly after I’d kissed them both on the head. They turned and hugged Hattie’s mom, and we left, both girls silent. I wasn’t sure what to say to them.

Once we got home, they curled up on the couch.

They wanted to wait until Jake got home, and I didn't have the heart to send them to bed.

Jake had texted that he was on his way, but he hadn't called, which was fine since I had one girl on each side of me sleeping on my lap, a show on the tv turned down low.

The door creaked as it opened, and I looked over from where I was sitting. "Hi sunshine." He smiled, but it was a tired smile, and I thought he looked like he'd aged ten years since I'd seen him last night.

Jake walked around the couch and looked at his daughters asleep, their heads each resting on one of my legs.

I didn't want to tell him that my rear end was asleep, and I was sure I'd be stuck in this position for the rest of my life.

"They wanted to wait until you came home, and I didn't think it would hurt anything.

" I shrugged, and he leaned over and pressed his lips to mine.

"Thank you for dropping everything and getting them for me." A smile finally cracked his face.

"What happened?" I asked quietly as Jake picked up Libby, and I followed him down the hall with Skyla. He kissed each of them goodnight, and we closed the doors to their rooms.

"Hattie and Jason had gone out for supper, and Jason had too much to drink. Instead of being smart and finding a place to stay, he got behind the wheel and they headed for home." Jake leaned back and stretched before finishing the story.

Taking his hand, I pulled him down the hallway and into the livingroom.

I guided him to sit, and I curled up beside him.

“They got about four blocks from the restaurant. He was going way too fast and drove into oncoming traffic. Hit a semi that was stopped waiting for a light to change. Jason didn’t make it.

He bled out on scene, and Hattie will be touch and go.

” Jake ran his hands through his hair and sighed before glancing at his watch.

“She’s probably out of surgery now. I should check my phone.

” Jake checked his phone and breathed a sigh of relief when he read that Hattie had stabilized and all her vitals were good.

“I don’t want the girls to lose their mom.

We might not always get along these days, but it’s not fair for the girls to grow up without her. ”

“I’m taking you to bed. To sleep, not to fool around.” Jake held his hand out and exhaustion covered his face. He stood and pulled me off the couch.

“Boy, I’m glad you clarified.” I rolled my eyes and shook my head.

“I’m far too sleepy to do anything.” I wrapped my arm around his waist, and he put his arm over my shoulder.

Turning the lights out as we went, the only sounds besides our footsteps came from

the outdoors.

A slight breeze had started at some point since I got here, and the leaves on the trees were rustling as we got ready for bed.

Cuddling up next to him, I waited for him to say more, but he didn't.

There would be time for discussions, treatment information, and prognosis.

Right now, I just wanted him to know he wasn't alone.

"I meant what I said on the phone, Jake. I love you and I love the girls. From now on, it's not interrupting me if you need me for anything, okay?"

I'm here for you, the three of you, always. "

"I've loved you for ten years, Tayla Miller, and I'll love you for the rest of my life." He kissed my head, and we drifted off to fitful sleep, keeping one ear open for the girls and his cell phone for updates.

CHAPTER TEN

JAKE

F ull fall had hit Montana, the temperatures started to drop.

There was frost on everything almost every morning, and life had found its new normal.

We'd all attended Jason's funeral and helped Hattie as much as we could, since she was wheelchair bound and likely would be for a while.

She'd broken her back and was in pain much of the time, so her visits with the girls weren't ever very long.

Tayla and I would take them over and would stay close, so we'd be there when they were ready to leave.

It was so much harder than I'd even imagined. Hattie tried to put on a brave face for them, but she was dying inside from grief. Once, when Tayla had taken the girls to the truck and I was closing the door, she'd looked into my soul and wondered how long she'd be able to go on without Jason.

"You'll do it for your girls, Hattie, because you're a good mom and you love them. Focus on them and what you have, not on what you lost."

Her mom had come out of the kitchen as she gripped my hand tightly before I left.

“Thanks Jake, I don’t deserve this after everything.” She had support in place and I believed she’d get well again. But now it was time to focus on my future.

Battery operated candles flickered all along the walkway up to the door.

I watched Tayla walk up the sidewalk with a questioning look on her face.

She didn’t knock, just opened the door and saw more candles along the hallway.

“Jake, Lib, Sky, are you here?” She called.

I motioned for the girls to take their places.

“Tayla, welcome to Chez Gordon. For your dining pleasure tonight, we’ve curated a menu that we hope is to your liking.” Libby remembered everything she was supposed to say. Skylar moved behind her and tugged at Tayla’s coat. I couldn’t help but smile when Tayla pretended to let her take it off.

“Please follow us,” Skylar said as she walked beside Libby.

This was it. Now or never, she’d say yes or no.

I pulled out her chair and motioned for her to sit.

Our plates were already served and the girls and I took our places.

This wasn’t originally my plan, but when I’d talked to the girls, they had wanted to be involved.

They sat between us, and this was how it should be.

“This is amazing. You guys have been busy.” Tayla smiled at the girls before she looked at me.

Chatter flowed easily, but I couldn’t hide how nervous I was.

If Tayla realized it, she didn’t mention anything.

The girls cleared the table and sat back down.

“Tayla, you came back into my life in just about the most unexpected way. You also quietly worked your way into my heart and took my daughters under your wing like they’d been a part of your life forever.

” I looked at my girls who were about ready to ruin the not so surprise, surprise.

Moving my chair, I stood and walked over to kneel beside Tayla as the girls came to stand behind me.

“Tayla Miller, when you pictured how your proposal would go, I don’t think you imagined two daughters being included, but this is who I am.

I’m a dad who is completely in love with you.

Would you do me the honor of becoming my wife? ”

Tears streamed down her face, and she looked up at the girls before she looked back at me. “Yes, I’ll marry you.” I slipped the ring on her finger, and she didn’t even look at it, just leaned in and kissed me. The girls wrapped their arms around us both, bouncing on their feet and squealing.

When we got things settled down, the desert was set at our places. “So you’ll be our

step-mom?" Skylia asked.

"Yep, sweets, I will." Tayla grinned at her, but there was something bothering Skylia.

"Hey, what's up?" I asked as I took a spoonful of ice cream.

"Step-mothers are mean. That's what Jodie Perkins said." Sky looked worried, and Tayla shifted her chair back from the table. Kneeling beside my youngest daughter, Tayla took her hands.

"Sky, I will answer to whatever you want to call me. There will be times that I have to be the adult, but I promise I will always have your best interest at heart, and I will always keep you safe." She smiled at Sky and waited.

"Could I tell people you're my extra mom?"

"I like how that sounds." Tayla nodded, and they hugged. "Just so you know, you'll always just be my daughters." She looked over at Libby, who was smiling through her tears as she nodded.

They'd been hurt by their mom moving on with Jason and his family, and I vowed it would never happen in this house.

I knew Tayla felt the same because she wanted to pummel Hattie every other week.

It hurt her how much the girls were being neglected by their mom, but she never showed it to the girls.

Whenever they saw Hattie, Tayla was her same wonderful self, and I didn't have any reservations about our life together.

* * *

With the kitchen finally clean, and the girls exhausted from today, they had gone to bed without complaining tonight. Tayla came out of the kitchen with a beer in each hand. “So, fiancé, how are you feeling?” She handed me the drink and sat on my lap, leaning back on the armrest of the couch.

“I feel like my life is perfect,” I told her before kissing her again.

“Me too.” She said between passionate kisses. She pulled away from me and smiled. “When do you want to get married?”

“Tomorrow?” I asked, and she laughed before taking a drink. “Really, any time is good with me, but I’d prefer sooner than later. I’ve waited my entire life to find my soulmate, and I don’t want to go another day without you.”

“You’ll never spend another day without me, marriage license or not. I’m yours forever, doc.” I liked sitting here with her, but I wanted her under me or on me. It didn’t matter. I just wanted her. “Take me to bed,” she whispered, and I stood as she wrapped her legs around me.

“I thought you’d never ask.”

“I didn’t ask, I told.” She ground her hips against me as I walked to our room.

“Is this how married life will be? You bossing me around, telling me what to do?” I asked, before dropping her onto the bed. Her laughter filled the room that had been lonely and quiet for too many years.

“Make love to me,” she whispered as I ran my hand over her body.

“I always do, sunshine,” I replied before I slipped my hand under her shirt. “But you are wearing far too many clothes.” She stood, and I watched raptly as each piece of clothing ended up on the floor.

“It’s your turn, doc.” She grinned as she slid back onto the bed. My clothes quickly landed in the pile with hers.

“Not here. I have a change of plans. Grab that blanket.” Barefoot with only my boxers on, I pointed to the end of the bed, grabbed her hand, and pulled her back to standing.

I wrapped the blanket tight and together, we tiptoed through the dark house and through the front door.

The lights were off in the house, and I quietly opened the front door.

“Jake, where are we going?” Pulling her behind me, we ran across the yard, and I opened the small door on the barn.

“I made love to you for the first time in this barn, so I think it’s only right for our first time as an engaged couple to be back here.” Flicking the light on, we walked to the stairs, Tayla clutching the blanket close to her, staving off the chill in the air.

Flipping the blanket onto the floor of the hayloft, I laid down and waited for her to join me. “It wasn’t just our first time that night,” she said as she stood in front of me.

“I know.” Smiling, I let my gaze travel down her amazing body. “I didn’t know if we’d have another opportunity after that night, and I wanted it to be memorable and perfect for you.”

Her eyes softened, and she shivered. “Jake...”

“Now we’ll have every night for the rest of our lives together. But tonight, I want it to be memorable and perfect again. On your knees, sunshine.” Her eyes grew dark, and she knelt before me as her lips widened into a smile.

“Now I want you to crawl to me.” There wasn’t a question or hesitation, she just did it. She moved across the floor like a cougar stalking its prey. I was the prey, and I didn’t even care.

Our eyes were locked on one another, and she moved right over the top of my rock hard cock.

The muscles in her arms flexed as she lowered and licked the head of my dick.

Letting my eyes fall closed, I groaned at the movement.

I looked at her just as she wrapped her lips around me.

“Fuck, Tayla.” The bubble of her laughter vibrated through me, and I pushed deeper into her throat.

Gripping the base of my shaft, she pulled me all the way out of her mouth, licking her lips and smirking at me. “As fun as this is, I need you.” She whispered as she moved to kiss me.

I slithered under her, grabbing her hips where she knelt and maneuvering her until my mouth found that delicious pink center.

She cried out and her hands fell forward to land in the hay.

The angle pushed her further into my mouth, and I moved one hand around her ass to slide first one, then two fingers inside her.

God, she was already soaked, but I had a primal need to feel her come apart in my hands. Soon her legs were shaking and her thighs squeezed my head even as her slick pussy clenched my fingers with her orgasm.

She panted on her hands and knees, and I pushed my way back up on the blanket until she was poised over my throbbing dick.

“Kiss me,” I growled.

Our lips came together as she sank down on my cock, and we both moaned. As tight as she was, I knew I wouldn’t last long, but I was still determined to make this a night to remember. I teased her nipples and played with her clit until her rhythm changed.

Then I thrust harder and harder, taking over while her hands settled on my chest. When she found my own nipples, my jaw clenched together.

“Damn it, Tay.”

“Now, Jake, now,” she replied with a gasp.

And we both fell apart in an explosion of fireworks that should’ve burned down the barn.

My vision went white as she squeezed and spasmed, her breathy cries making me pump harder, longer until I was wrung out and bone dry.

The weight of her delicious body fell atop mine, and I rubbed soothing circles over her back.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TAYLA

We didn't need to wait to get married, and Thanksgiving seemed to be the perfect time.

Standing in my old room at the ranch, I looked at myself in the mirror.

How had this happened? When I'd come home, I was sure life would be just me alone.

Now it was Jake and the girls. My heart was so full for them, my nieces and nephews and the ever-expanding family.

"Are you ready?" Kipp asked as he popped his head into the room. Turning to look at him, a tear slipped from my eyes. I couldn't talk. All I could do was nod. "Well then, let's go." He offered me his arm, and I took it.

We walked out of the room, "Wait, Kipp, I want to go to the living room." I let go of his arm, and Kipp looked confused. My dress swished with each step I took, and I stopped in front of the giant picture of my father.

Looking up at him, the ache was slightly less than it had been the last few years, but I still missed him. "I hope you're here in spirit today, Dad. It doesn't seem right that we've all continued on without you." My voice hitched, as I said, "Love you, Daddy."

Kipp walked up behind me, pressing his hand on my back. “He’d be happy about you and Jake. I’m fairly sure he’s responsible for all these relationships on the ranch, and I know he’s happy we’re all coming home.”

Turning to look at my brother, I smiled, and we left the room. The wind was cold as we walked out of the house toward the event barn.

“Thank you for keeping this family together, Kipp. If it wasn’t for you, I don’t know where we’d all be, but I’m fairly sure it wouldn’t be here.” I wrapped my arm around him, and we walked the rest of the way in silence.

Kipp knocked on the door, and the music started. Lark and Fallon swung the barn doors open, and I walked down the aisle to the man I was madly in love with. My sisters pulled the doors closed behind us and followed.

“Dearly beloved, we’ve gathered here to witness the union of Jake Gordon and Tayla Miller.” The officiant said, smiling at everyone. “Who gives this woman to this man?”

“We do.” Three voices called out. I turned to look at Kipp, then back to my sisters.

Tears rolled down my face as I looked from them to Jake.

It was more special than anything I could have dreamed of.

Kipp shook hands with Jake and stepped out of the way and went to sit with Nora, Cooper, and baby Halley.

“We’ve been waiting a long time for Doctor Jake to find the woman who challenged him but supported him, would love his daughters like they were her own, and keep the clinic running like a well-oiled machine.

” A bubble of laughter from the crowd made me smile, and I looked back at the girls who stood behind me.

They were all smiles, in their burnt orange flowy dresses, holding bouquets of fall flowers.

I’d made sure they were involved every step of the way. This day wasn’t just about Jake and me, it was about them as well. They needed to know I was joining their family, not taking their dad from them.

“Tayla, do you take Jake as your wedded husband?” The man’s voice shook me out of thinking about the girls.

“I do.” I grinned at Jake. He looked so handsome in his black suit. We might be getting married in a barn, but he looked like he could walk down the runway of a fashion show. The suit hugged him perfectly, and I wanted him out of it.

“Jake, do you take Tayla to be your wedded wife?”

“I do.” He squeezed my hands as he said it, and I felt more love from two short words than I’d ever felt in other relationships.

We spoke our vows, and I turned to look at Libby and Skyla.

“Girls, today I made a vow to your dad to love him forever, but I want to make one with you both as well. When I thought of the man I was going to marry, it didn’t involve a single dad.

But the moment I met you both, I couldn’t imagine my life without you in it.

You girls brighten my day and I love you so much.

” I handed my bouquet to Lark and reached out for their hands.

“Today, I vow to love you until my life is over. I will be there for you whenever you need me, no matter what time of day. I will never stand between you and your dad, and I will always respect your mom. Today you become my girls too, and there is nothing I wouldn’t do for you.

” They hugged me, and I returned their embrace.

Turning back to Jake, his eyes were misty too, and all I wanted to do was kiss him. Once rings were exchanged, we anxiously awaited the words I’d longed to hear for years.

“I’m pleased to announce you husband and wife. Jake, kiss your bride.” Our officiant smiled and stepped back.

Jake pulled me to him and smiled. I gazed into his eyes for a split second before he pressed his mouth to mine. Longing, need, and passion were unleashed in our kiss. We didn’t want to embarrass the girls, so we kept it short and sweet.

Our crowd cheered as we turned to look at them.

Jake wrapped his arm around my waist and pulled me tightly to his side.

“Girls, come stand in front of us.” I said, looking at them.

Libby stood in front of Jake, and Skylar in front of me.

The flashes were almost blinding, and my stomach flipped when Sky reached for my hand and clung to me.

This was my family, and I couldn't picture anything I wanted more.

* * *

Night fell over the ranch, and we were warmed by a bonfire.

Gathered in a circle with our loved ones was perfect.

"When we were little, we used to end Thanksgiving around a fire much like this one. Everyone would say something about what they were thankful for, so tonight I'd like to start that tradition again.

" Kipp said as he took a seat beside his wife.

"Mom, since you're the matriarch of this crew, why don't you start? "

She was sitting across from me, and I could see her eyes glisten.

"I'm thankful for this year. It's been trying in some ways, but so wonderful in many more.

My kids are all in one place, I've got grandkids galore, and my children have picked wonderful spouses.

And I have a wonderful partner." She reached for Phil's hand, and he kissed her knuckles.

As everyone spoke what they were thankful for, I felt my dad's presence wash over me when it was my turn.

"I guess you know what I'm thankful for.

” I laughed as I gripped Jake’s hand. “But I’m also thankful for Dad.

I don’t want to make this sad, but I’m thankful for the legacy he left, the type of man he was, and I’m so thankful he taught me how a man should treat his wife.

He’s who I measured every man to, and I’m so grateful I found one that embodies those same morals.

” Leaning over, I kissed Jake again. “I love you,” I whispered.

“I love you too.”

We sat around the fire, and people started filing out when they were ready to leave. Once there were just embers, Jake’s parents went to start their car.

Jake, the girls, and I huddled together. “We’ll see you two in a few days,” he said to the girls as we wrapped our arms around their shoulders.

“I’m going to miss you both so much,” I said, squeezing them.

“We’re only going to grandpa and grandmas,” Skyla said.

“I know, but I’m kind of used to you being around.” I laughed as she wiggled out of my hug.

“You two have a nice few days alone. Plan to stay for supper when you pick the girls up,” Jake’s mom said as she hugged me. “We’re so happy to welcome you to the family, Tayla. Thank you for loving my three.”

“They’re easy to love, Mrs. Gordon.” I smiled, still a little awkward around his parents.

“Tayla, it’s Eleanor.” She smiled and ushered the girls to the car.

Jake walked up behind me, wrapped his arms around my waist, and pulled me back to him. Waving as the girls left, he kissed my neck, nibbled on my earlobe, and let a hand travel down my abdomen. “Are you ready to go home, wife?” Pressing against him, I felt how ready he was to get home.

“Yes, husband, take me home.” I pressed my ass against him, and he groaned.

“We might not make it home.”

“I’m sure the loft is free.” I said, as I turned to look at him. Jake grabbed my hand and pulled me toward the barn. Laughing, we barrelled through the door, and Jake turned and pressed me up against it, his mouth devouring mine.

We didn’t make it to the loft. An empty stall was where my dress fell and we made love for the first time as husband and wife. “I’m too old for concrete floors and straw,” Jake said as he rolled off me and caught his breath.

“So let’s go home, have a bath, and crawl into bed?” I traced my finger over his chest.

“That’s the best thing I’ve heard today. Let’s go.” He sat up and we got dressed. Peeking out the door, we ran hand in hand to his truck.

“Good night, Tayla.” Kipp called from his front porch.

“Night, Kipp.” I yelled back, trying to stifle my laughter. Jake and I got in the truck and broke into hysterical laughter.

“He’s going to start locking that barn,” Jake said as he pulled away from the yard.

“If he does, it won’t be the first time I’ve broken into it,” I said as I slid across the bench seat and sat beside my husband.

“What don’t I know about you, Mrs. Gordon?” Jake asked as he ran his hand up my thigh.

“I can’t reveal all my secrets at once. What fun would that be?” I rested my head on his shoulder, and we drove home with the radio playing old country songs.

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TAYLA

We were a month shy of our first anniversary and while we'd settled into married life easily, being together twenty-four-seven had its benefits and challenges.

Working together was our challenge, and there were days I really didn't like my boss, but I'd learned to leave it at the office. Usually after we'd broken the no fraternization policy during our lunch break or after we closed.

"Tayla, could you please book Mrs. Johnson in for suture removal in seven days?" Jake came out of his office with Mrs. Johnson holding onto his arm, and she was grinning up at him.

"Should I be jealous?" I asked, arching my brow, looking from him to the older woman.

"If I was younger, I would say yes." She said before giggling. Typing on my computer, I booked her in like Jake had asked.

"Here's your card for the next appointment, and I will give you a call the day before to remind you." I smiled at her, and she took the card I'd set on the desk. The bell above the door rang as she left, and for the first time, the waiting room was empty.

The office had been steady for the last few weeks. It seemed like everyone needed Jake at the same time, all trying to be seen before the end of the year rush. "I'm just going to wrap up her appointment, and we can head home." He kissed my head as he walked back to his office.

Taking a deep breath, it was now or never.

Well, not never. He'd figure it out, eventually.

Standing, I locked the front door and grabbed the paper off the printer.

"Babe, I got this paperwork sent over to me this afternoon." I walked into his office and handed it to him before taking a seat across from him.

Silence hung in the air, and all I could hear was the humming of the air conditioning, the buzz of the florescent lights, and my heart pounding. His face grew into a frown, and I watched his eyes scan the test results.

"Sunshine, I haven't seen anyone who is pregnant this week." He looked up at me, and I tried to keep my expression normal.

"Think it was sent to the wrong clinic?" I asked, crossing my legs.

"That's possible, but..." He finally saw the name at the top of the paper. "Tayla, these are your results. On a test I didn't know about or run." He let the paper slip out of his hands.

"You are correct, doctor." I smiled. He'd taught me how to help with simple things and dipping pregnancy tests was one of them.

The "report" was just a word document I'd made to look like the results from the lab.

But in all reality, it was the three pregnancy tests I'd taken out of the supply closet this morning that all came back glaringly positive that assured me of my suspicions.

"Tayla, you're pregnant?" He asked, leaning back in his chair.

“We are, yes.” I barely got the words out, and he was out of his chair as if someone had stuck him with a needle. He pulled me up from where I was sitting.

“Oh my god, sunshine. This is amazing.” He moved his hands to my face, and I kissed him as if my entire world was right here in this office.

Pulling away, I watched him go from husband to doctor in the blink of an eye. “We should do an exam to confirm, and I’m going to need to...” I pressed my finger to his mouth.

“Jake, you’re the dad, not the doctor. I will make an appointment with Doctor Lorenzo, and he will take care of everything.

And if for some strange reason, I ignore my contractions, and you have to deliver our baby at home or part way to the hospital, so be it.

” I shrugged and grinned at him. “I hear Nora’s not bad either. She could assist you.”

“You won’t be ignoring contractions. If you want me to deliver our baby, then all you have to do is say the word, and I will do the catching at the hospital with a full obstetrics team present.

I have it on good authority Nora has quit delivering babies.

I think Fallon’s accidental home birth traumatized her.

And I love you more than you will ever know. ” He leaned down and kissed me again.

“Are you done? I think we can beat the bus home,” I smiled up at my husband.

“Go to the truck while I turn the lights off.” He turned me toward the door, and I walked to grab my jacket. The mornings were cold now, but that wasn’t surprising for October, but the late afternoons were usually too hot to need it. Fall in Montana meant nothing was the same hour to hour.

We drove home in silence, hands pressed together, fingers intertwined, and I knew Jake’s mind was going a million miles an hour. “We shouldn’t tell the girls just yet. I don’t like hiding it, but we don’t want the entire county knowing yet,” Jake said as he turned onto the lane.

“I don’t like hiding it either, but I agree. When they can know, they can tell the world.” I grinned at him. We walked into the house hand in hand.

“Go sit. I’ll figure out what we’re going to have for supper.” Another kiss, and he pulled his tie off and let it hang around his neck. Sleeves up to his elbows, he undid the top buttons on his dress shirt.

“We should have left work sooner, because damn you’re looking hot, doctor Jake.” I bit the corner of my mouth and eye fucked him as I let my gaze trail down his body.

“The girls are going to your mom’s for a cousin’s sleepover for the weekend. I’m taking them there tonight after dinner, so when I get back you better be naked and in my bed.” He ran his hands over my breasts and let them settle on my abdomen. “God, I can’t wait to watch you growing our child.”

Brakes squealed outside the window, and as much as I liked Jake’s hands all over me, we did try to keep the PDA to a minimum around the girls. “No, I said I wanted to get off the bus first,” Libby yelled at Skyla.

“I was ahead of you, so I got out first. Get over it,” Skyla yelled back.

The door slammed, and Jake and I called out at the same time, “Hey, quit slamming the door.” The girls’ arguing stopped, and they rushed into the living room.

“Homework, and then we eat. You’re off to Grandma Julie’s for the weekend,” Jake said, winking at me.

The commotion that started the second they got home settled, and I closed my eyes and just sat in the quiet. There wouldn’t be much of that soon. A ringing broke the almost sleep I was in. “Hey Birdie, what’s up?”

“I need the mom whisperer,” she said somewhat apprehensively.

“Birdie, what did you do?” I sat up, and Jake came into the living room. “Hey, Jake’s here. Can I put you on speaker?”

“Yeah,” she sighed, and I clicked the speaker. “Hey Jake.”

“Lark, what’s up?” Jake sat beside me and took my hand.

“I got married.”

“You what?” we yelled together.

“He’s great, a bronc riding biker from a small town in Saskatchewan.” Her voice was too perky, and I wondered if he was sitting beside her.

“Lark, that’s in Canada,” Jake said, rubbing his head.

“I know. We just crossed the border. We’re on the way to his ranch.” She sounded like she didn’t have a care in the world. I suppose the only care she had was our mother. Usually a levelheaded woman, but when it came to her kids, she was totally

the scariest person on the planet.

“Lark, this isn’t smart, you don’t know him,” I said, feeling the need to strangle her.

“Tayla, he’s a good guy. He has a ranch on Hell Fire Creek with his parents and two brothers. And they are in a motorcycle club that keeps the law around where he lives. And Tay, his tats rival Nash and Jake’s.” There it was, the reason she fell for him, a tattooed biker.

I looked over at Jake, and there was only one thing that was going to make this not remotely okay with mom.

“Birdie, when we take the girls to mom’s tonight, you better be prepared to owe me, because you ran off to Canada with your new husband, you know she wanted us all close.

But she’ll get over it when I tell her I’m pregnant. ”

“You’re pregnant?” The girls yelled from behind me.

“Oh god, I gotta go, Birdie. Congratulations,” I said, trying to make my voice lighter.

“Congrats to you too. You’re going to love Jax, I know it,” she said before the line went dead, and I looked at my extra daughters.

“Surprise,” I said as they ran over and threw their arms around me. Jake smiled, and I wondered what I’d done to deserve this amazing life that I wouldn’t give up for anything.

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Blinking slowly, I stared up at the monitors watching to make sure nobody had strayed onto the property in the night. Since Griff's accident, we were watching the perimeter like a hawk. Rather, I was watching it like a hawk, since I had the set up at my place to watch.

One entire wall of my office was set up with screens so I could easily check on any part of the ranch. I watched the feed every morning, and night to make sure there wasn't anyone wandering around.

Reaching for my coffee cup, I leaned back in my chair and flailed as I thought I would tip over.

Scalding coffee landed in my lap, and as if I had an eject button under me I jumped off the chair, and quickly undid my jeans, kicking them off.

My underwear was next, because there was nothing worse than cold soaking wet boxer briefs.

Well I suppose a burned cock would be worse.

Thankfully my jeans absorbed most of the heat.

"Hey, how do things look?" I heard Linc's voice calling from down the hallway.

"Fine, hey give me a..."

"What the fuck are you doing in here?" I looked up as my business partner and friend

walked into my office. Grabbing my chair I yanked it over and stood behind it.

“Spilled my coffee,” I grumbled as I looked at the mess all over the floor.

“Well, that’s better than what I thought you were doing.”

“Fuck off,” I huffed at him. “Get out of my house. Nobody was in here last night, since that’s why you came barging in here.”

“Okay, good to know. Are you heading to town today?” Linc asked.

“Yeah, I’m going to go now, need something?”

“Swing by Kristin’s place, she’s not returning my calls.” He ran his hand through his hair, and let out a sigh.

“What’d you do now?” I asked as I shuffled toward the door keeping the chair in front of me.

“Nothing, why is it always my fault?”

“Because it usually is,” I called back as I headed for my room.

“I asked her not to ride this season. See if we could finally have a normal relationship.”

“You’re an idiot.” I replied as I walked back down the hallway doing up a new pair of jeans.

“Funny, that’s what she said.” He rolled his eyes and shook his head. “Is it so wrong, I want to see her more than a few times a month?” He asked as I shoved my chair back into my office and went to the kitchen.

“No, it’s not but this is her life. I mean it’s not like you didn’t know this was her career when you met her.”

“I get that. She doesn’t need to ride, I’ve got more money than she could ever spend.”

“She’s a horse girl, I’m sure she could spend it.

” I said flatly as I grabbed two mugs from the cupboard and poured coffee in each one, handing one to Linc.

“It’s not about the money, it’s about the thrill, the buckle and at the end of the day the world championship.

” Pulling out a chair, I took a seat at my dining room table.

“I know,” Linc sighed as he took a seat across from me.

“Heard they had to take Wes Paulson to the home last week.”

“Deflecting your discussion to a discussion about my ex-wife’s family is weak.

” The hot liquid burned as I took too big of a gulp.

I fought spitting it back out and swallowed it down, groaning as it made its way to my stomach.

“Yeah, Kate couldn’t keep him at home anymore.

She’s moving to Everton, so she can be closer to him. ”

“Think Lexie will come home?” He set his cup on the table, and I watched him arch his brow at me. I’m sure he was waiting for me to launch myself over the table, and

beat the shit out of him. Because that's what I usually did when people brought up my ex-wife, but I didn't move.

"Don't know. Strange thing about an ex-wife, she doesn't keep me updated on her comings and goings anymore. And I don't care what she does."

"That's why you still have a picture of her by your bed then?"

"Get the fuck out of my house." I yelled, as I pointed at the door.

"Well that's better than getting my face smashed in. Thanks for the coffee Ryder." Linc stood, and walked toward the door. He hesitated, and I wondered if he was going to open that big mouth of his again but instead he pulled the door open and left without another word.

Linc wasn't wrong, I did care what Lexie did. I wanted to know what she was doing, not to keep tabs on her in a psychotic way, but I was still absolutely in love with her.

Three years ago I signed divorce papers because it was what she wanted. I wouldn't hold her hostage in a marriage she didn't want, no matter how much I wanted her.

Grabbing my truck keys off the counter I pushed the door open and walked away from my house. I didn't need to lock it. There were more security cameras around this ranch and I'd have an ID in a matter of minutes, even with the door unlocked.

Town was quiet today, it usually was in the fall. Kids were back to school, ranchers in the area were getting their fall work done and the farmers were busy racing the clock to get crops off before it froze or snowed.

"Well I didn't expect to see anyone from the Diamond today." Fred said from behind the counter. The balding man smiled like I'd given him a million dollars as I walked toward him. At one time he was the ranch boss.

“Hey Fred. Just needed to get away for a morning. I’m sure I’ll be run off my feet when I get back.” I leaned against the counter.

“How’re my grand girls doing?” He asked as he grabbed a cup and poured black coffee into it.

“You were out there last night, pretty sure they’re the same.” I chuckled. He was such a proud grandfather to all the kids running around the ranch now. It didn’t matter that only one was his biological grandchild; he had more love in his heart than anyone I’d ever seen.

“I just hate missing anything, they make my life worth living.” He beamed and held out the cup to me.

“Are you talking about the girls again?” His fiancée Wanda asked as she put her arm around him and smiled sweetly.

“You know it Darlin’” Fred’s laugh was infectious and I couldn’t help but chuckle.

The bell above the door chimed, and we all looked to see who was coming in, and my heart plummeted to the floor.

Her long molasses colored hair cascaded over her shoulders, and her brown eyes locked on me instantly.

“Come on Alexandra get in the cafe. There’s no reason to stop in the doorway.

” Another woman’s voice said from behind her and she popped out beside her.

“God, what’s wrong with you?” She asked before noticing me. “Oh.”

“Thanks for the coffee Fred.” I said and tossed a five on the counter.

Turning, I walked toward the door, I tried to just look at the floor.

“Lydia.” I nodded at her as I got closer and I finally looked up again.

“Lex.” I snuck around the women, and walked to the door, hearing the bell again as the door closed behind me.

Don’t look back. There’s no reason to look back, just get in your truck and leave. My brain yelled at me and I managed to get to the truck and get in, but my eyes moved across the street and I looked through the cafe window and my eyes locked on her.

Once again my heart ripped in two. The truck roared to life when I turned the key, and I pulled out of the parking spot like I was a teenager in high school trying to impress my friends. The tires squealed as I sped off down the street.