

LITTLE SECRETS: CLAIMING HIS PREGNANT BRIDE

Sarah M. Anderson



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**Little Secrets: Claiming
His Pregnant Bride**

«HarperCollins»

Anderson S. M.

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«HarperCollins»,

He wants her in his bed, but will he want more? Restless – that's businessman and biker Seth Bolton down to a T. But when he rescues runaway bride Kate Burroughs, he wants much more than he should with the lush mum-to-be... Can she convince Seth to settle down or will he prove too tough to tame!

Has this runaway bride found the man of her dreams?

Restless—that’s businessman and biker Seth Bolton. But when he rescues runaway bride Kate Burroughs, he wants more than he should with the lush mom-to-be. He’s never been one to settle down, and he already has plans to leave. The best he can offer Kate is a no-strings fling...

And in spite of her better judgment, Kate says yes to Seth. She needs what he can give her, for however long it lasts. But soon they’ll both have choices to make. She left the wrong man at the altar... Will Seth turn out to be the right one?

“I don’t need you to save me.”

“That’s not what this is.” But even as he said it, he wasn’t entirely sure that was the truth. He didn’t think about it in terms of saving her. He thought about it in terms of helping. Of course, why he felt this compulsion to help Kate was another question that he didn’t want to investigate too deeply right now.

“Then tell me what this is about. The truth, Seth.”

The truth? Hell. The truth was he was worried about her. He couldn’t stop fantasizing about her. He was glad that she hadn’t married Roger. He knew how hard single mothers had it and he didn’t want it to be that hard for her. It shouldn’t be that hard for anyone, but especially not for her.

He didn’t say any of that. Instead, he closed the distance between them and cupped her face in his hands. “This,” he said, lowering his lips to hers, “is the truth.”

* * *

Little Secrets: Claiming His Pregnant Bride is part of the Little Secrets series: Untamed passion, unexpected pregnancy...

Little Secrets: Claiming His Pregnant Bride

Sarah M. Anderson



www.millsandboon.co.uk

SARAH M. ANDERSON may live east of the Mississippi River, but her heart lies out west on the Great Plains. Sarah’s book *A Man of Privilege* won an RT Reviewers’ Choice Best Book Award in 2012. *The Nanny Plan* was a 2016 RITA® Award winner for Contemporary Romance: Short.

Sarah spends her days having conversations with imaginary cowboys and billionaires. Find out more about Sarah’s heroes at www.sarahmanderson.com and sign up for the new-release newsletter at www.eepurl.com/nv39b.

To everyone who stood up for what they believed. You continue to inspire me!

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[One](#)

Of all the things Seth Bolton wanted to be doing today, attending the wedding of a guy he went to college with was pretty low on the list.

Besides, he hadn't even liked Roger Caputo. Seth had been forced to live with Roger for three hellish months in college when Seth's roommate had backed out and Seth had been desperate to cover the rent without asking his family for help. That Roger had been a senior and unable to get any roommate but a freshman should have been the first clue to how Seth's three months were going to go.

It wasn't that Roger was a bad guy—he was just a jerk. Entitled, spoiled, inconsiderate—every privileged white-guy stereotype rolled into one. That was Roger.

Seth couldn't imagine who was foolish enough to marry Roger, but clearly someone was. Seth had no idea if he should pity this woman or not.

He gunned the engine up the incline, following the road as it snaked through the Black Hills. The wedding was supposed to start at five thirty—Seth was running late. It was already five forty and he had at least fifteen miles to go.

For some reason, the wedding was being held at a resort deep in the Black Hills, forty minutes away from Rapid City.

Why did people have destination weddings? Well, he knew why. The late-summer sun was already lower in the sky, casting a shimmering glow over the hills. They weren't black right now, not with the sun turning them golden shades of orange and red and pink at the edges.

It was pretty—not that he was looking as he took the next curve even faster. Roger must've found one hell of a woman if she wanted to tie herself to him with all this beauty around her.

Or maybe the jerk had changed. It was possible. After all, Seth himself had once been the kind of impulsive, restless kid who'd stolen a car and punched a grown man in the face because the man had dared to break Seth's mother's heart. Sure, that man—Billy Bolton—had married his mother and adopted Seth, despite the punch. But still, that was the sort of thing Seth used to be capable of.

Maybe he was still a little impulsive, he thought as he flew down the road well over the speed limit. And yeah, he was definitely still restless. The last year living in Los Angeles had proved that. But he'd gotten good at controlling his more destructive tendencies.

So people could change. Maybe Roger had become a fine, upstanding citizen.

The road bent around an outcropping, and Seth leaned into the curve, the Crazy Horse chopper rumbling between his legs. This was a brand-new model, in the final stages of testing, and he was putting it through its paces. The new engine had throwback styling combined with modern power and a wider wheelbase. The machine handled beautifully as he took another curve and leaned in hard. Seth felt a surge of pride—he'd helped design this one.

Damn, he'd missed these hills, the freedom to open up the throttle and ride it hard. LA traffic made actually riding a chopper a challenge. And palm trees had nothing on the Black Hills.

His father and his uncles, Ben and Bobby Bolton, owned and operated Crazy Horse Choppers, a custom chop shop in Rapid City, South Dakota. Crazy Horse had been founded by their father, Bruce Bolton, but the Bolton brothers had taken the company from a one-man shop in Bruce's garage in the early eighties to a company with sixty employees and a quarter of a billion in sales every year.

Seth had never had a father growing up, never expected that he would be a part of any family business. But when Billy adopted Seth ten years ago, the Bolton men had embraced him with open arms.

And now? Seth was a full partner in Crazy Horse Choppers.

He still couldn't get his head around the meeting yesterday. His dad and uncles had called him into the office and offered him an equal share in Crazy Horse. And Seth was no idiot. Of course he'd said yes.

At the age of twenty-five, he was suddenly a millionaire. A multimillionaire. Considering how he and his mom had sometimes been on welfare when he was a little kid, it was a hell of a shock.

But Seth knew it wasn't straight nepotism—he worked hard at making Crazy Horse Choppers a successful business. He'd just gotten back from living in Los Angeles for a year, managing the Crazy Horse showroom and convincing every A-to D-list celebrity that a Crazy Horse chopper was good for their image. And he'd excelled at the job, too. Getting Rich McClaren to ride up the red carpet at the Oscars on a Crazy Horse chopper—right before he won the award? Seth's idea. The free advertising from that had boosted sales by eight percent overnight.

The McClaren stunt was the kind of strategic thinking that Seth did now. He didn't just react—and react poorly. He planned. The best defense was a good offense.

Even now—he wasn't just going to a former friend's wedding. A quick internet search had revealed that Roger was a real estate agent now, part owner in his own agency. He was up-and-coming in the civic world of Rapid City. And after a year in LA, Seth was back in Rapid City. Maybe even permanently.

Seth was not going to this wedding to wish Roger and his new bride happiness, although he would. Seth was going to the wedding because he planned to be an up-and-comer himself. God knew that he had the money now.

The Bolton men might have given him a place at the table, but Seth was going to damn well keep it.

He screamed around a curve but saw something that made him ease off the throttle. There was a limo at a scenic overlook—but something wasn't right. Seth couldn't brake fast enough to stop without crashing, but he slowed enough to get a better look.

Something was definitely wrong. The limo was parked at a crazy angle, its bumper hanging in the roadway. Was there someone behind the wheel? He didn't see anyone enjoying the view.

He was late—but he couldn't in good conscience ride on. Seth pulled a U-turn on the road and headed back to the overlook. Did his phone even have service out here? Because if this wasn't some crazy wedding photographer stunt and the driver was having an emergency...

The limo was still running when Seth pulled up alongside it. His heart leaped in his throat when he realized that the front wheel on the passenger side wasn't exactly on solid ground. The driver had stopped just before the wheel went off the edge of the overlook completely. Hitting the gas would mean certain death.

He hopped off the bike and hurried to the driver's side. He hadn't been wrong—there was someone behind the wheel. A woman. Wearing a wedding dress and a...tiara?

Definitely not the limo driver.

She wasn't crying, but her eyes were wide as she stared at nothing in particular. Her color was terrible, a bluish shade of gray, and she had what appeared to be a death grip on the steering wheel. Basically, she looked like someone had shot her dog. Or ruined her wedding.

For all of that, she was quite possibly the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen.

How many brides were wandering around this part of South Dakota? Was this Roger's bride? If so, what was she doing here? Where was Roger?

He knocked on the glass of the driver's-side door. "Ma'am?" he said in what he hoped was a comforting voice. "Could you roll down the window?"

She didn't move.

"Excuse me? Ma'am?" This time, he tried the handle. Miracle of miracles, the door was not locked. When he opened it, she startled and swung her head around to look at him. As she did so, the limo shuddered. "Where did you come from?"

"Hi," Seth said in a soothing voice, hanging on to the door as if that could keep the car from plummeting off the side of the hill. "I'm going to turn this off, okay?"

Her eyes blinked at different speeds. "What?"

Seth leaned into the limo, keeping an eye on her in case she started to freak out. The limo was actually in Park, thank God. She must have taken her foot off the brake when he startled her. "I'm Seth," he told her, pulling the key from the ignition. "What's your name?"

Seth didn't expect her to burst out laughing as if he had told a joke. Clearly, this was a woman whose actions could not be predicted. Then, as quickly as she'd started laughing, the sound died in the back of her throat and she made a strangled-sounding sob. "I'm not sure."

Bad sign. He had to get her out of the limo. "Can you come talk to me? There's a bench over there with a great view of the sunset." He tried to make it sound like he was just here for the vista.

"You not going to tell me to get married, are you?"

Seth shook his head. "You're here for reasons. All of those reasons—I bet they're good ones."

She blinked at him again, her brow furrowed. He could see that she was coming back to herself now. "Are you here for a reason, too?"

He gave her a reassuring smile. "Everything happens for a reason."

This time, when she started laughing, he was ready for it. He chuckled along with her as if they were at a comedy club in downtown LA as opposed to on the edge of a scenic overlook in the Black Hills. He held out a hand to her and bowed at the waist. "Seth Bolton, at your disposal."

For the longest second, she just stared at him, as if he were a Tyrannosaurus rex that had emerged from the undergrowth and was roaring at her. "I'm not imagining you, right? Because you're kind of perfect and I made a mess of everything."

"I'm very real—the last time I checked, anyway," he joked, which got a small, quick smile out of her. He kept his hand out, the picture of a chivalrous gentleman. Take it, he thought. He would feel so much better if she were on solid ground next to him.

She placed her hand in his and it took everything he had not to close his fingers around hers and yank her out of the driver's seat—and into his arms. Instead, he tightened his grip on her ever so slightly and waited as she swung her feet out and stood. Her layers of dress settled around her—silk and satin and chiffon and all of those fabrics that his aunt Stella made dresses out of for her fashion line.

He didn't think this was one of Stella's dresses. Stella designed classic gowns that looked deceptively simple. This gown?

There wasn't anything simple about it. The bride looked a little bit like an overdone cupcake, with sparkles and sprinkles. The skirt was huge, with tiers and layers of ruffles and lace. How had she even fit behind the wheel in that monstrosity?

Her golden-brown hair was swept up into some elaborate confection that matched the dress, but at some point it had tilted off its bearings and now listed dangerously to the left. Pearls dripped off her ears and around her neck, but her ring finger was bare.

What did she look like when she wasn't dressed up like a bride? All he could see of her was her face and her bare shoulders. And her cleavage, which was kind of amazing—not that he was looking. His body tightened with awareness even as he tried to focus on her eyes. It didn't help, staring down

into her face. Everything tugged him toward her with an instinctive pull that wasn't something he'd planned on, much less could control.

His first instinct had been right—she was gorgeous, he realized as she lifted her gaze to his. A sweetheart face, wide-set eyes that were the deepest shade of green he'd ever seen. The kind of eyes a man could get lost in, if he weren't careful.

Seth was careful. Always.

He knew exactly what happened when a man lost his head around a woman. So it was final—no losing himself in her eyes. Or any other of her body parts. She might be a goddess, but she was obviously having a very bad day and he wasn't about to do a single damn thing that would make it worse.

So he locked down this intense awareness of her.

She wasn't for him. All he could—and should—do was offer her a helping hand.

“Hi.” He launched another smile, one that had broken a few hearts, in her direction. “I'm Seth,” he repeated because he honestly wasn't sure if she'd processed it the first time.

“Kate,” she replied in a shaky voice. She hadn't pulled her hand away from his yet. Seth took an experimental step back—away from the limo—and was pleased when she followed. “I... I'm not sure what my last name is right now. I don't think I got married. I'm pretty sure I left before that part.”

In his time, Seth had seen people involved in accidents still walking and talking and functioning almost normally because they were in a complete state of shock. Big dudes thrown from choppers and yet walking around and cracking jokes with one of their arms hanging out of the socket. Later, when the adrenaline had worn off, they'd felt the pain. But not at first.

Was this what this was? Had she been hurt? He looked her over as surreptitiously as he could, but he didn't see any injuries—so this was just a mental shock, then.

“Kate,” he said, his voice warm and friendly. “That's a pretty name. What would you like your last name to be?”

“Burroughs,” she said firmly. “I don't want to be Kate Caputo. I can't be.”

Seth let out a careful breath. That answered that question.

He had found Roger's runaway bride.

Two

Kate felt like she was moving in a dream. Everything was blurry at the edges—but getting sharper. How much time had she lost? A couple of hours? A couple of days? The last thing she remembered was...

She had been sitting in the little room set aside for the bride to get ready, staring at the mirror and fighting back the rising tide of nausea. Because she was pregnant and she was supposed to be marrying Roger and—and—

“Easy,” a strong, confident male voice said.

She looked down to see that her hand was being held by a man who was not Roger and they were not at the lodge she had especially selected for the beautiful sunset. She looked around, startling again. None of this looked familiar. Especially not him. She'd remember him. “I don't...”

The man's arm went around her waist and even though she didn't know who he was or what was going on, she leaned into his touch. It felt right—comforting. Safe. Whoever he was, he was safe. Maybe it was all going to be okay. She could have cried with relief.

“I've got you,” he said, sounding so very calm when there was nothing to be calm about. “It's all right.”

She laughed at that. “No, it's not.”

“It's not as bad as you think, I promise. Roger will get over this, and so will you.”

She wasn't sure she believed that, but his arm tightened around her waist. Kate couldn't have said if she leaned on him or if he picked her up or how, exactly, she got to the bench. All she could focus on was this man—with dark hair and dark eyes and tanned skin, wearing a motorcycle jacket

over what looked like a pair of suit trousers. He sat her down on the bench and then took a seat next to her. “You’re cold,” he said, picking up her hand and rubbing it between his.

“Am I?” Yes, now that she thought about it, she could feel a chill in the air. The way he spoke to her called to mind someone trying to capture a bird with a broken wing.

Then something he’d said sank in. “You...you know Roger?”

The man—Seth? Had he said that was his name? Seth nodded. “I lived with him in college.” He stood and peeled off his leather jacket and even though Kate was having a terrible day, she was struck by how nicely this strange, sympathetic man filled out a button-up shirt. He even had on a tie—but somehow, it didn’t look stuffy. It looked dangerous, almost. “Frankly, I think you’re doing the right thing,” he went on as he settled his jacket around her shoulders. “Assuming he hasn’t seen the light and become a better human, that is.”

“No, I don’t think he has,” she said slowly. His jacket was warm and soft, and she immediately felt a hundred times better. She had been cold for far too long. It was good to realize there could still be warmth in the world.

Then she realized what she’d said. “I didn’t mean that,” she quickly corrected, feeling the heat rise in her face. She blinked. Seth was staring at her with a level of focus that she wasn’t used to. Roger certainly didn’t listen to her like this.

But even thinking that made her feel terrible. She was supposed to be marrying Roger and she wasn’t. She didn’t have to add insult to injury by—well, by insulting him. “I mean, he’s not a bad guy. He’s a great catch.” On paper.

On paper, Roger was handsome and educated, a successful small-business man. On paper he was perfect.

She couldn’t marry a piece of paper.

She was supposed to be marrying a flesh-and-blood man who didn’t love her. She was fairly certain about that.

“Even if he somehow magically turned into a great catch—which I doubt,” Seth said, fishing something out of his pants pockets and sitting next to her, “that doesn’t mean he’s a great catch for you.”

Her breath caught in her throat as he closed the distance between them. As he lifted her chin and stared into her eyes, Kate knew she should pull away. She couldn’t let this stranger kiss her. That wasn’t who she was.

She was Kate Burroughs. Only child to Joe and Kathleen Burroughs. A real estate agent who worked for her parents at Burroughs Realty—which was now Burroughs and Caputo Realty.

She didn’t make waves. She did the right thing, always. She got good grades and sold houses. She didn’t get unexpectedly pregnant. She most definitely didn’t leave her groom at the altar, and under no circumstances could she be attracted to a man who wasn’t her fiancé.

At least, that was who she’d been yesterday. It seemed pretty obvious that she wasn’t that same woman today.

He had such nice eyes. A deep brown, soft and kind and yet still with an air of danger to him. He was dangerous to her, that much was clear, because he was going to kiss her and she was going to let him and that was something the woman she’d been yesterday never would have allowed, much less entertained.

“It’s going to be okay,” he said softly. Then he touched her cheeks. With a handkerchief.

Kate hadn’t realized she was crying until Seth dabbed at her cheeks.

When he was done, Seth pressed the handkerchief into her hand and leaned back. She wouldn’t have thought it possible, but she got even more embarrassed. Really, Kate? Really? She wasn’t even close to holding it together and she wanted to kiss this complete stranger?

She’d lost her mind. It was the only rational explanation.

She was relieved when Seth turned his gaze back out to the landscape. The sun was getting lower and the world was crimson and red. “Bolting on a wedding,” he said slowly, “may not be cheap and it may not be easy. You may feel...”

“Like an idiot,” she said bitterly.

“Confused,” Seth corrected. “You’re trying to talk yourself into going back, but your instincts made you leave. And it’s a good idea to listen to your instincts.”

“That’s easy for you to say. Your parents didn’t shell out thousands of dollars on a fairy-tale wedding and invite hundreds of guests, all of whom are probably wondering where the hell you are and what’s wrong with you.”

He made a huffing noise, as if she’d said something idiotic instead of stating the facts of the matter. “Correct me if I’m wrong, but your parents aren’t marrying Roger. None of the guests are, either. You can put on a good show for them because of the sunk cost of the reception, but at the end of the day you’re the one who has to go home with him. For the rest of your life.” She shuddered involuntarily. Seth put his arm around her shoulders and, weak as she was, she leaned into his chest. He went on, “If he hasn’t changed, then you don’t want to be stuck with him.”

She sniffed. She knew she was crying again, but she was powerless to stop. Seth was warm and he smelled good and it was okay if she cried. “I don’t. I really don’t.”

“Leaving him at the altar is cheaper and easier than getting a divorce,” he said with finality. “Better to feel foolish now than to wake up tomorrow knowing you’ve made a huge mistake. Besides, if you realize you should have married him, you can still do that. If he really loves you, he’ll understand.”

That was what she needed to hear, because that was the truth that she felt in her heart. She was making a horrible mess for Roger and her parents, and she didn’t want to humiliate him or their families and friends.

But at the end of the day, she was the one who had to live with him. With herself. And she knew she wouldn’t be able to make the marriage last the rest of her life. How far would she and Roger get before she couldn’t take it anymore? A year? Three? The divorce—because there would be one. Seth was right—would be ugly. Especially because of the baby.

She lost track of time, quietly crying into Seth’s shoulder and his handkerchief as the sun got lower in the sky. Purple joined the reds and oranges. It was truly a beautiful late-summer day. Perfect for a wedding.

And where was she? Marrying her Prince Charming? Celebrating? No.

She was sitting on a bench with a man who had been Roger’s roommate. A man who understood that Roger was better on paper than he was in real life.

A man who didn’t think she was insane for running away from her own wedding.

“I’m pregnant,” she announced because she hadn’t been able to tell anyone yet and that single fact—those two little words—had completely altered the trajectory of her life.

Seth stiffened and then said, “Oh?” in a far too casual voice.

“Roger is the father,” she went on in a rush of words. “I’m not the kind of person who would cheat on my fiancé.” Ironically, though, she was the kind of person who’d abandon her fiancé. What did that say about her? “It’s his child and I should probably go back and marry him because we’re going to have a baby. Together.”

Seth didn’t say anything, nor did he spring to his feet to lead her back to the limo. Back to her doom.

Wait—how did the limo get here? Had she stolen it?

And was it stealing if she’d rented it for the whole evening?

“Easy,” Seth said again in that soothing voice of his. She could feel it in her chest, warm and comforting. “You might not believe this, but people have babies without being married all the time. It doesn’t mean you’ve doomed your kid from the beginning.”

“How can you say that?” And how was he reading her mind?

His arm tightened around her shoulders. “Because I’ve lived it, Kate. I won’t let anything happen to you—I promise. Now,” he went on even as she gasped at that honest promise—something she’d never heard cross Roger’s lips, “do you remember where the limo came from?”

“Um...” She sat up and dabbed at her eyes again. The waterproof mascara was doing its best, but it was no match for this day and his handkerchief was paying the price. She tried to focus on the limo. “Stein, maybe?” It felt right—Stein Limo. That was a thing, she was pretty sure.

“Ron Stein? He’s a great guy.”

She stared at him in confusion. “You know the limo guy?” She didn’t even know Seth’s last name, but he knew Roger and now the limo guy. Was there anyone Seth didn’t know?

“He rides,” Seth said, as if that explained everything. “I’ll see if I can make a call and let him know where his limo is. But I need you to stay right here, okay?”

“I don’t know where you think I’d go. I’m not walking home.” She wiggled her toes and realized she wasn’t wearing her shoes. Where the hell were they?

But even the thought of going home made her wince. She had a home—with Roger. They’d bought it last year, after finally setting a date for the wedding. It’d been a big sign of their commitment to each other.

No, that wasn’t right. She didn’t have a home with Roger. She owned part of a house. She shared a property with him. They split the bills right down the middle. They’d maintained separate bank accounts, even.

She’d lived with Roger, but it’d never felt like home.

“Promise me, Kate.” His eyes were intense and serious. “You’re not going anywhere without me.”

“I promise.” It wasn’t like she’d sworn to love, honor or obey—but there was something to that promise that resonated in her mind.

Why could she make such a promise to this man she didn’t know but couldn’t to the one she did?

He gave her a satisfied nod of his head, leaned over and slid his hand inside his jacket, right over her left breast. She stiffened and he paused. “Just getting my phone,” he said, purposefully not touching her. “Don’t move.” He stood and walked off to the side, far enough away that she couldn’t hear what he was saying. But he turned back to her and gave her a little smile that set off butterflies in her stomach.

She ignored them and settled back on the bench, trying to get a handle on everything that happened.

It was a lot. But she’d had a good cry and Seth’s jacket was warm and she felt better. Her mind was clearer and she could look past the next five minutes without having a panic attack.

She hoped.

She tried to rationally go over the facts. She was pregnant. She wasn’t marrying Roger. She couldn’t go back to the house she shared with him and she didn’t think she could go to work on Monday. Her parents had sold half of Burroughs Realty to Roger in anticipation of the wedding. He owned it now.

She’d worked for Burroughs Realty her whole life, starting when they had her making copies and greeting clients as a little kid.

But they hadn’t seen fit to give or even sell her part of the agency. Instead, they’d used it almost like a dowry, rewarding Roger for taking her off their hands.

Why hadn’t she realized that before? She was a good real estate agent. She sold her market well. She was more than capable of being a full partner in the family business and running the office.

But it was Roger Caputo who was being rewarded with his name on the front door. Because why? Because he was marrying her?

She was their daughter. Wasn’t she good enough on her own?

Oh, what would her parents say about all this? Especially once they found out she was pregnant? Her mother would try to be supportive—Kate hoped. The prospect of a grandbaby would be exciting, once the humiliation of a broken wedding passed.

But her father? Joe Burroughs was a dyed-in-the-wool workaholic who demanded perfection—or at the very least, that everything be done his way, and in his mind, those two things were the same.

She had to face the facts—her father might disown her for this, and if he did, he might forbid Mom from seeing Kate. Hadn't he already chosen Roger over her?

Just as she began to panic at the thought, Seth looked up at her again and smiled. It was a very nice smile, seemingly real and not the kind of expression one directed at a crazy person. He hadn't treated her like she was nuts at all, actually—even though the situation certainly did seem to warrant a little concern.

Instead of telling her she was insane to walk away from Roger, he'd agreed that tying herself to him was a bad idea. Anyone could have said the words, but Seth wasn't just saying them because she was having a really bad day. He was saying them because he actually knew Roger. Maybe not well, but he'd lived with Roger. He understood what that was like in a way that her friends and even her parents might not. Seth was speaking from a place of wisdom, and that counted for a lot.

It didn't make any sense that she felt safer with a strange man who rode a motorcycle than she did with the man she'd been with for four years, but there it was. Seth didn't know her at all, but he was more concerned with her well-being than anyone else. After all, how long had she been here? At least half an hour, maybe much longer. And had anyone come looking for her? Roger? Her parents? Any of the wedding guests?

No. Seth had stumbled upon her, noticed something was wrong, and he was actively making sure she was okay. He'd given her his leather jacket and dried her tears.

He glanced at her again, another smile on his lips—which set off another round of butterflies in her stomach. Now that her mind had cleared, it was hard to miss the fact that her Good Samaritan was also intensely handsome.

No, no—she was not going to be the kind of woman who defined herself by her attractions to men. It was blatantly obvious that she couldn't run from Roger's arms straight into a stranger's. She was pregnant, for God's sake. Romance should be the last thing on her mind.

She needed a place to stay tonight. Maybe tomorrow. She needed a job that didn't involve Roger or her father. She needed...

A plan. She couldn't sit here at a scenic overlook forever.

Had she managed to bring anything important with her—her wallet, money, credit cards, her license—anything that could help her out tonight? She rather doubted it—she didn't even know where her shoes were.

Seth ended his call and began to walk back toward her, and Kate realized something.

She needed him.

Three

“Come on,” Seth said, pulling her to her feet. She was not a tiny thing—she was only a few inches shorter than he was—but there was still something delicate about her. “I'm going to take you to a hotel.” Her eyes widened in surprise but she didn't lean away from him. Not that that mattered. “And I'm going to leave you there,” he added with a smile.

“Oh. Of course,” she said, her cheeks blushing a soft pink. “Thank you. I don't think I can go back to the house I shared with Roger.” She cleared her throat. “Are we taking the limo?”

“No. I talked to Ron—he's going to send someone out to pick it up. They did have cops looking for it but he's reported it not stolen. He's not going to press charges.”

She blinked at him. “Is that because of you?”

The short answer was yes. Ron had been furious that Kate had driven off with his limo—apparently it was his most expensive ride. He'd already fired the driver for dereliction of duties.

Ron's temper burned hot, but it always fizzled out quickly. Ron had been buddies with Billy Bolton for years and Seth had seen him in action plenty of times. He had to blow his top, and then he could be reasoned with.

Seth had waited until Ron finished blustering and then had convinced the man not to fire his driver—who had reasonably thought he'd had another hour before anyone would care about the whereabouts of the limo—and to inform the police that no theft had been committed.

But that's not what he told her. Instead, Seth said, "Ron's a great guy. He understood." Kate notched an eyebrow at him—clearly she wasn't buying that line.

But that was his story and he was sticking to it. Kate had already had a terrible day. The prospect of being arrested and booked for grand theft auto would only make everything a thousand times worse and he didn't want that, especially now that she'd calmed down.

He hadn't lied when he'd told her he'd keep her safe. This pull he felt to protect her—from the consequences of taking a limo, from Roger, from her thoughtless parents, from the harsh realities of life as a single mother—it wasn't something that made sense on a rational level. He didn't know her. He had no claim to her.

But by God, he wasn't going to cast her to the winds of fate and call it a day.

"Okay," she finally said, exhaling heavily. Which did some very interesting things to her chest. "Then what do we do next?"

"We ride." The color drained out of her cheeks. "Have you ever been on a motorcycle before?"

She shook her head, her tilting hair bobbing dangerously near her left ear. He reached up and tucked it back in place as best he could. He managed to do so without letting his fingers linger, so there was that.

"I've been riding for years," he assured her. "All you have to do is hold on. Can you do that?"

"I..." She looked down at her dress. "Um..."

She had a point. He eyed the confection suspiciously. The skirt was a full ball-gown style, layered with ruffles and lace. It spread out from Kate's waist in a circle that was easily five feet in diameter.

Ron had made it clear—Seth wasn't driving the limo. But Kate in that dress on the back of the chopper was a recipe for disaster. He could just imagine the wind getting underneath her skirts and blowing that dress up like a balloon.

"Is there any way to reduce the volume?" He tried to think back to what his aunt Stella had taught him about women's fashion. "An underskirt of some kind that we can remove?"

Her face got redder. "I have on a structured petticoat. It's separate from the dress."

"Can you get it off?"

Kate's hands went to her waist. "I'm... I'm wearing a corset. I can't bend at the waist very well. And the skirt is tied on behind." She sounded unsure about the whole thing.

Seth mentally snorted to himself. Because if there was one thing a groom enjoyed on his wedding night, it was fighting through complicated layers of women's clothing. Petticoats and corsets—what was this, the 1800s? "How did you get into it?"

"I had help. My bridesmaids..."

Seth realized that if he wanted to get her on the bike anytime soon, he was going to have to play lady's maid. Which was not, he mentally reminded himself, the same as undressing her. At no point was he getting her naked.

No. Definitely not undressing a beautiful woman he wanted to pull into his arms and hold tight. Just...removing a few unnecessary layers of clothing. So that she could safely sit on his bike. That was all.

Trying to keep his mind focused on the task at hand, he eyed the bodice of her dress. "Do you need to take the corset off?" he asked reluctantly, because that seemed less like removing layers and more like just stripping her completely bare.

She shook her head quickly. “I was able to drive in it, apparently. If we can get the petticoat off, it should be fine.”

Of all the things Seth thought he’d be doing today, falling to his knees in front of a runaway bride and lifting the hem of her skirt over the voluminous petticoat was not something that had made the top ten. Or even the top one hundred. But that’s what he was doing. He lifted the satin of her dress, rising as he moved the fabric up.

There should have been nothing sensual about this, lifting her skirts. She was still completely dressed. The petticoat stood between him and her body. God only knew how many layers were built into it, because she was still shaped like an inverted top. So this should have been nothing.

But there was something erotic about it.

Focus, Bolton, he scolded himself. This was just an action born of necessity. He had to get her someplace safe, where people she knew could step up and take over. Taking care of a pregnant runaway bride was not in his skill set, and besides, it wasn’t like he was attracted to her anyway.

Sure, she was beautiful—more so now that she’d calmed down. And yes, he was curious about what she looked like without the overdone hair, makeup and dress. And fine, he did feel a protective pull toward her. But that didn’t add up to attraction any more than helping her adjust her outfit to ride on the bike was undressing her.

And that was final.

After a few snags—the petticoat was huge—he succeeded in getting the skirt up to her waist. He handed the bunched-up fabric to her and eyed the next layer. He could just see the bottom edge of her corset—white satin trimmed in baby blue. It appeared the waistband of the petticoat was underneath the corset.

This just kept getting better, because if he had to undo the corset, he’d have to remove the dress completely. He hoped it wouldn’t come to that. If he were going to properly undress this woman, it sure as hell wouldn’t be at a roadside pull-off.

He could see her chest rising and falling quickly. Did she feel the tension, too? Or was there something else?

He managed to pull his gaze away from her chest and found himself lost in her eyes. Her pupils were wide and dark and damn if she didn’t look like a woman who was being undressed by a lover.

He put his hands on her waist, just below the bunched fabric of her skirt. Her waist felt right under his hands, warm and soft—and a little hard, thanks to the corset.

Who was he to talk about instincts? Yeah, she shouldn’t get married when her instincts told her to run. But his were telling him to pull her against his chest and tuck her into his arms and not let go. And fighting that instinct only got harder when she lifted her gaze to his because she took his breath away.

“Turn around,” he told her because he needed not to get lost in her eyes.

He needed to keep a cool head here—among other body parts. She was not for him. Only a complete asshole would take advantage of a woman in this situation. Seth was many things, but he didn’t think he was an asshole, complete or otherwise.

She turned in his arms, and Seth forced himself to step back and assess the situation. Luckily, the corset didn’t ride as low in the back as it did in the front. He could see where the petticoat was tied—in a knot.

Of course it was knotted.

He was tempted to just cut the damn thing off her body, but then a shiver raced over her skin. Brandishing a blade wasn’t the best way to keep her calm, so Seth gritted his teeth and got on with it. It felt like it took forever, but after only a minute or so, the knot finally gave. “Now what?” he asked as the waistband sagged down around her hips.

She didn't answer for a moment. "I had to step into it and they pulled it up because..." She swallowed. "Because it's so structured, it won't fall on its own. So I guess you'll have to push it down and I'll step out of it." Her voice shook.

Just for the ride, Seth repeated as he grabbed the waistband of the petticoat and worked it over her hips. Structured must mean able to stand upright on its own, because the damned fabric had no give in it at all. What kind of fresh hell was this, anyway?

The petticoat slipped over her skin, and he had to bite back his groan. He barely knew this woman and he wasn't even sure he liked her. But as he revealed the frilly lace of the white thong and the bare cheeks of her bottom, liking had nothing to do with it. His mouth went dry and his hands started to shake.

His instincts—they were pushing him past protective and into raw lust. He was strong, but how strong did one man have to be? Because he wasn't sure he could handle the way that thong left her bottom completely exposed.

Then it only got worse as he wrestled the petticoat down and revealed inch by creamy inch of her legs and bare skin. Why couldn't she be wearing those supportive bike shorts that some women wore instead of this scrap of lace? Why couldn't she be wearing a simpler outfit? Why couldn't she be someone who didn't inspire this reaction in him?

It only got worse when he hit the top of her thigh-high stockings and the blue garter on her right leg. Of course it matched the blue trim on her corset.

Roger, Seth concluded, was an idiot to let this woman go. Because Seth was pretty sure that he was going to have fantasies about this moment for the rest of his natural life.

He struggled not to touch her skin—but his hands shook even harder with the effort of it. Although he had to fight all that "structure" for every damned inch, he managed to get the petticoat pushed down to the ground, which meant that he was at eye level with her bottom. And it was perhaps one of the nicer bottoms he had ever seen. Firm and rounded and begging to be touched.

Except it wasn't. This was not a seduction. This was an action born of necessity. He would not touch her. She'd already had a bad day, and being groped by a biker wouldn't make anything better.

"Now what?" His voice cracked with the strain of trying to sound normal. "Do you just step out?" That was when he realized she didn't have on shoes. They were standing on gravel. Had she been missing her shoes the entire time?

"I...I don't want to lose my balance," she said in a strangled-sounding voice. Before Seth could process what she meant by that, she turned. Which was good due to the fact that he was no longer staring at her ass.

But now he was staring at her front. The thin lace of her virginal white thong covered the vee of her sex and everything about Seth came to a screeching halt. His blood, his breath—nothing worked. He couldn't even blink as he stared at her body.

It only got worse when she placed one hand on his shoulder for balance. Seth squeezed his eyes shut because there was no point in looking if he couldn't have her, and he couldn't have her. Offering anything beyond assistance would be a mistake. She'd run away from a wedding today. She was pregnant with another man's baby. None of her was for him.

Even though his eyes were closed, the scent of her body surrounded him, torturing him. It wasn't the scent of arousal, but there was no missing the sweet notes of flowers—maybe lilacs, and a hint of vanilla that had been buried underneath the layers. Her smell reached out and stroked him, making him shake with need.

She stepped out of the petticoat and—thankfully—let go of the skirt. It fell, covering her legs and hiding that lacy thong and those white thigh-highs and that garter belt from his eyes. Seth gave himself another few moments to make sure he had himself under control.

Then she let out a little cry and stumbled. He moved without thinking, catching her before she fell. His arms folded around her body and finally, he was able to pull her to her.

But despite his awareness of her body—and the fact that her arms went around his neck so that he could feel her breasts pressing against his chest—he didn’t miss the way she shivered or how her breathing was ragged.

“Easy,” he said, coming to his feet with her in his arms.

“I stepped on a rock,” she said, her voice wavering. She sounded like she was on the verge of tears again, and that hurt him in a way he hadn’t expected.

He wanted to make sure she didn’t hurt. He’d wanted that from the very beginning. But now, it felt more personal.

He didn’t understand this strange drive to take care of her. He could’ve called her a ride. Surely someone could’ve come to get her. Rapid City had taxis, and for a price they could’ve made it out this far.

But he hadn’t. He hadn’t done anything except hold her close and make sure she was okay.

He didn’t want to think too much about why.

He carried her over to his bike and sat her on the back. He gave thanks that his father had built this prototype with the passenger seat behind the driver’s seat. Part of Billy Bolton’s rigorous testing was to make sure that he took Seth’s mom, Jenny, out for rides with him. Billy claimed that sometimes, the additional weight of a passenger would reveal design flaws that needed to be tweaked. Because Seth didn’t want to consider any other options about what happened when his parents went out riding, he accepted that explanation at face value.

“I’ll put the petticoat in the car and then we’ll go, okay?” he said. “But you’re going to have to straddle the bike. See if you can figure that out with your skirts.” He waved a hand over her dress and hoped like hell he wouldn’t have to take the whole thing off to get her corset removed.

But even as he thought that, his brain decided it would be a really great idea. He would kill to see Kate Burroughs in nothing but a corset and some stockings and a garter. Splayed out on the bed, a package that Seth was almost done unwrapping.

He slammed the brakes on that line of thought. Nope. She had too many bags to carry, and he was a single twenty-five-year-old man. He had no interest in tangling with someone whose personal life was as messy as Kate Burroughs’s was. No matter how good she looked, no matter how sweet she smelled, no matter how much she’d clung to his neck.

No matter how right she’d felt in his arms.

She nodded and he went back to get the petticoat. It was all dirty with rocks and bits of grass stuck in it. He shoved it into the back of the limo and glanced around, hoping against hope that there would be a purse with a wallet, but nothing. There was some champagne that was probably warm, though. But he didn’t think that’d help anything right now.

He locked the limo and left the keys on the ground on the inside of the front driver’s-side wheel, where Stein had told him to leave them. True dark was settling now and it was going to be a long, cold ride back to Rapid City. It wouldn’t be so bad if he had his jacket, but he couldn’t let her freeze to death behind him.

The other logistical problem was that he only had one helmet. He had no idea if it would fit over her hair.

He went back to the bike and picked up the helmet. “Let’s see if this works,” he said. At the very least, she had managed to straddle the bike. The skirt had hiked up over her calves, and her legs were going to be cold by the time they got out of the hills, but there was no way he could risk having her fall off if she was riding sidesaddle. Maybe if she pressed herself against him, his body could take the worst of the wind. He’d be a Popsicle by the time they made town, but he’d take it for her.

But even that noble sentiment was almost completely overridden by the image of her arms around his waist, her chest pressed to his back, her legs tucked behind his. Of that lacy little thong and the corset.

Of a wedding night that ended differently.

He pulled at the collar of his shirt. Yeah, maybe he wouldn't freeze.

She looked up at him, her eyes wide. "I can't thank you enough, Seth," she said, her voice soft. "I'm having a really bad day, but you're making it better."

If she were anyone else, he'd cup her cheek and stroke her skin with his thumb. He'd tilt her head back and brush his lips over hers. He'd offer comfort in a completely different way.

But she wasn't anyone else. She was Roger's pregnant runaway bride. So instead of kissing her, he settled the helmet over her hair. It didn't work. He pulled it off. "Let me see what I can do here." She tilted her head so he could get at the elaborate updo—it probably had some sort of name, but he didn't have any idea about women's hair. He could see the pins and clips—sparkly stuff in her hair. And hairspray. Lots of hairspray. He began pulling them out and shoving them into his pants pocket. What would her hair feel like without all this crap in it? Soft and silky—the kind of hair he could bury his hands in.

He really had to get a grip. The whole mass of hair sagged and then fell. It looked awkward and painful, but he was sure he could fit the helmet on now. "There."

She looked back at him as he settled the helmet on her head and strapped it under her chin. She looked worried. "This will be fun," he promised. Cold, but fun. "Just hold on to me, okay?"

She nodded. Seth took his seat and fired up the engine. It rumbled beneath him. He loved this part of riding. Bringing the machine to life and knowing that a journey was ahead of him.

After a moment's hesitation, Kate's arms came around his waist. His brain chose that exact moment to wonder—when was the last time he'd had a woman on the back of a motorcycle?

Of course he'd ridden with women before. That was one of the reasons to ride a bike—women loved a bad boy, and Seth was more than happy to help them act out their fantasies. Motorcycles were good seduction and he was a red-blooded American man. He wasn't above doing a little seducing.

But there was something different about this—about Kate. This wasn't a seduction, leaving aside the fact that he knew what her thong looked like. This was something else, and he couldn't put a name to it.

Then he felt more than heard her sigh against the back of his neck as the helmet banged his shoulder. He winced but didn't flinch as she settled her cheek against his back, her arms tightening around him even more. Her body relaxed into his. Which was good. Great. Wonderful. The tighter she held on, the safer this ride would be.

Except his body was anything but relaxed. He was rock hard and she'd know it if her grip slipped south in any way.

He needed to get her to a hotel and then he needed to get on his way. He had a future as a partner of Crazy Horse Choppers. He had plans for the business. He had motorcycles to sell.

None of those things involved a pregnant runaway bride.

He rolled away from the scenic overlook and hit the road back to Rapid City.

Kate Burroughs wasn't in his plans. After today, he wasn't going to see her or her stockings ever again.

That was final.

Four

"Good morning, Katie," Harold Zanger said, strolling into Zanger Realty with a smile on his face and a bow tie around his neck. "It's a zinger of a day at Zanger, isn't it?"

As cheesy as the line was—and it had been cheesy every single day for the last month and a half—Kate still smiled. She smiled every day now. "It is indeed, Harold," she said.

Harold Zanger was one of her father's oldest friends. They'd been playing poker together for a good forty years—longer than Kate had been alive. Harold was almost an uncle to her.

Kate had not gone back to Burroughs and Caputo Realty. She just couldn't—especially when her parents had made it clear that splitting Roger off from the business was going to be quite

complicated, which was one way to say that her father wasn't going to do it because he was beyond furious with her.

So it had been Kate to decide that, rather than grovel before her father and Roger, she'd start over. She was the one who put distance between them.

It had hurt more than she wanted it to, to be honest. Although she'd known it wasn't likely, she'd wanted her parents to put her first. She'd wanted them to take her side and tell her it'd all work out. She'd wanted her mom to get excited about the pregnancy.

She'd wanted the impossible. Oh, Mom was excited—to the extent that she'd underlined the word excited three times in the congratulations card she'd sent. Other than that, there'd been no discussion of pregnancies, no trips down memory lane, no planning for the baby's room.

There hadn't been anything, really, since Kate had walked out of their house and driven back to the hotel where she'd been staying since Seth had dropped her off and paid for three nights.

And the hell of it was, it wasn't like they had put Roger first. No, Joe and Kathleen Burroughs had done what they always did—they'd put their business first. Burroughs Realty—Burroughs and Caputo Realty now—had always been the most important thing. Her father hadn't disowned her outright, but it was clear that, for the time being, there was no point in pursuing a family relationship. Joe Burroughs was a workaholic and Kathleen refused to go against her husband's wishes.

No, the business came first, and Roger was now part owner of the business, which meant that Roger came first. So Kate had left because she hadn't wanted to make things difficult for her mother.

Harold Zanger, gregarious and happy, had offered her a job. Kate strongly suspected it had put a strain on his friendship with Joe Burroughs, but Harold insisted everything was fine. Of course, he was an eternal optimist, so perhaps everything was. Harold had given her a desk and a blazer and some business cards and told her to “get out there and sell some houses, sweetheart.”

If anyone else had called Kate sweetheart, she would've walked, but Harold had been calling her sweetheart since she was old enough to crawl—probably even before that.

So here she was. Ready to get out there and sell some houses for Zanger Realty.

“Today's the day,” Harold said, snapping the suspenders underneath his Zanger Realty blazer, which was a delightful shade of goldenrod. “Something big is going to happen today, Katie my girl. I can feel it.”

There was comfort in familiarity and Harold said this to her every morning. She hadn't believed it at first—she still didn't really believe it—but Harold's optimism was infectious.

“Today's the day,” she agreed.

“Your big sale,” Harold all but crowed, “is going to walk through that door. I just know it.”

“I'm sure it will,” she said with an indulgent smile. Really, it was sweet that Harold believed what he said, because that was just the kind of man he was and had always been. If opposites attract, then that held true for friendships, too. Joe Burroughs had been a pessimist, convinced that tomorrow the bottom would fall out and the world would end and so he'd better sell a house today so that his family would have something to live on. Disaster was always lurking right around the corner for Joe Burroughs, so he had to miss his daughter's concerts and plays because there was work to be done.

Harold was the opposite. Today was a good day. Tomorrow would be even better. It would all work out in Harold's world, and Kate would be lying to herself if she said she didn't need that in her life right now.

Because she was three months pregnant. She'd sold exactly two houses—but they hadn't been big sales. She'd earned enough on commission to rent a two-bedroom apartment and buy some secondhand furniture. But she had to sell a lot of houses in the next six months if she wanted to be able to take time off when she had her baby.

Roger would pay child support. Just because he didn't love her and she didn't love him didn't mean that he would leave her out to dry. Roger wasn't a bad guy, really.

But when they had sat down face-to-face and confronted the aftermath of their relationship and the baby that would always tie them together, it had been clear—he'd been relieved that she'd walked away. And he hadn't even tried to hide it. He'd gone on their honeymoon trip to Hawaii without her and he hadn't missed her at all.

Even more than that, Roger had been relieved when her father had not asked him to give up his stake in the real estate business. Which really had Kate wondering—had he been marrying her because of her or for the business?

She knew the answer—the business—but she couldn't think about that.

If she ever had another wedding, she would be damned sure she was marrying someone who wanted her. Not her family's business. Not her name.

Her. Kate Burroughs. Future single mom and semiprofessional hot mess.

Aside from child support, Roger made something else clear—they were done. He wasn't going to be an active part of raising his child. It was painful, it really was. But at the same time, it was also a relief. She wouldn't have to worry about navigating around Roger at the same school plays and concerts that her own father had skipped. She wouldn't have to negotiate who would get the baby for Christmas and birthdays. It would be simpler without Roger.

It would be harder—she was under no illusions that being the single mother of a newborn wouldn't be the hardest thing she'd ever done. But she only had to negotiate with herself.

She was on her own. For the first time in her life, she didn't have to answer to anyone. Not her father, not Roger, not her mother. There was something freeing about that. Terrifying, but freeing.

Harold went back to his office and Kate turned to her listings. She had been a real estate agent for years, so it wasn't like she was learning on the job. She knew what to do. She had grown up at Burroughs Realty, copying things for her parents and then going with them when they looked at houses. She'd learned how to stage a house when she was in high school. Her parents had paid her for her help, although not a lot.

She could sell a home in her sleep. But she needed buyers and sellers. She needed someone to walk through that door and instead of asking for Harold, to ask for Kate. That was what she'd had at Burroughs Realty. She had been a Burroughs, and any Burroughs would do for some people. The name was the important thing.

As her thoughts often did when she was faced with the weight of her future, she imagined that one person in particular walking through the door—a tall, dark, mysterious biker. A man who looked dangerous and yet treated her as if she were worth protecting.

Seth Bolton.

She had not seen him since he had taken her to a local hotel and shaken her hand in the lobby. He hadn't even suggested that he come up to the room and make sure she got settled. He was too good a guy for that.

That had to be why she couldn't stop thinking about him. It had felt like...like there was unfinished business between them. Which was ridiculous. They didn't have any business together to begin with. She'd had the worst day of her life and he'd taken pity on her. That was all there was—a Good Samaritan doing a kind deed for a woman having a really terrible day. Because there was no way a man like that was single or available. And even if he were—why would he be interested in her? She had not made the best of first impressions.

Looking back at what had happened over six weeks ago, she could see with a little objective distance that she had been in a state of complete and total shock. Discovering she was pregnant had left her stunned. Deciding she couldn't marry Roger had been a realization that sent her reeling. Each shock mounted upon the next. She still didn't remember stealing the limo, but at least she hadn't been arrested. Whatever Seth had done or said to the limo owner had worked. The cops hadn't gotten involved, and she was beyond grateful for that. He had helped her see that her reasons for running were valid, made sure she was okay and let her cry it out.

But gratitude wasn't the only reason she kept thinking about him. There'd been the way he'd untied her petticoat and slid it down her legs. And the way she'd wrapped her arms around his waist and leaned into him on the long, cold ride back to Rapid City. Hell, even just the way his jacket had smelled—leather and something lighter, maybe sandalwood. He'd smelled good.

She was not fantasizing about the man. Oh, sure, he drifted through her dreams every so often, but that didn't mean she was fantasizing about him, specifically.

It was the fact that he had taken care of her. And she had needed to be taken care of. That was all.

She didn't need to be coddled anymore. She'd gotten back on her feet. Her parents and Roger had handled the entire disaster with a surprising amount of good humor—for them, anyway. But that didn't change the fact that, moving forward, she needed to sell a house. A lot of houses. Heck, even one big sale would get her through the winter.

While she was wishing for the impossible, she might as well ask for a pony. Sadly, Santa had never delivered on that one, either.

As she mused, she worked on assembling a potential list of houses. A family from out of town had called and said that the husband might be relocating to Rapid City. Nothing was definite yet, but there was a good chance that they'd move and if so, Kate was going to be the one to sell them a house. Harold had gifted her with this opportunity, rather than keep it for himself.

The Murray family had given her their standard list of requirements—three bedrooms, two baths, a fenced backyard, a two-car garage. She was putting together a list of potential homes and praying that Mr. Murray decided to take a job in Rapid City when the door jingled.

On reflex, Kate said, "It's a zinger of a day at Zanger. Can I help you?"

Then she looked up at the same moment a hearty chuckle reached her ears. There was something familiar about that chuckle, warm and comforting.

She froze. There was something familiar about the man standing in the entryway. Tall, dark. Black hair, dark eyes—that motorcycle jacket settled over his shoulders like a second skin.

And that smile. She didn't remember everything from her wedding day. But that smile? She'd been dreaming about that smile for a month. She was helpless to stop dreaming about it.

It was entirely possible, she decided as she stared at him, that she was still asleep because her fantasy had just walked into her office and into her life, hotter than ever. This was the man who'd talked her off the ledge. Who'd supported her when she'd admitted that marrying Roger would've been the biggest mistake of her life.

Who'd practically stripped her bare at a roadside overlook.

"Kate," he said, his voice stroking over her name in a way that made her toes curl. "I was hoping I'd find you."

Okay, that did it. She was definitely dreaming. "Seth? What are you doing here?"

If she were dreaming, the answer would be I have come to sweep you off your feet, my darling. Let me take you away from all of this and solve all your problems.

"I looked you up."

She blinked. "You did? Why?"

"I wanted to see how you were doing." He took another step into the office. "How are you doing?"

Her breath caught in her throat. As odd as it seemed, not many people asked that question. The fallout from leaving Roger at the altar had shown her who her true friends were—and the number was few and far between. Really, her mother was the only one who asked that question and was actually interested in the answer.

Except for Seth Bolton, a stranger who had seen her at her lowest moment. Instead of running, he'd stood by her side. He'd taken care of her. He'd made everything better.

Was it any wonder she'd been dreaming of him nearly every night?

This wasn't possible. She could not be watching Seth walk into her office, that sexy smile on his face, asking about how she was. It simply wasn't possible.

"I... I'm fine," she told him. "I mean, I'm all right."

"Good." His smile deepened and she was stunned to realize that he had dimples. What a difference. That made him hot and sweet and more than everything she dreamed of. "I meant to check in on you earlier, but I had some business to deal with first."

She lifted her eyebrows at that. Was he serious? She was nothing to him, other than a strange afternoon that had probably become an amusing anecdote. Did I ever tell you about the time I found a runaway bride in the middle of the Black Hills?

She would expect that if he remembered her at all, he'd remember the crazy woman who stole a limo and refused to marry the father of her child. Nobody should've found her desirable. Memorable, maybe. Definitely not someone worth worrying about.

"Well, as you can see, everything's okay." That was a gross generalization. She was exhausted and hormonal and worried sick about how she was going to make everything work out.

But she wasn't the same lost woman he'd found by the side of the road, either. She held her head high and faced every challenge she met with open eyes. She had a job and a purpose. She didn't need to be coddled anymore.

Not even by someone as attractive as Seth Bolton. Was it possible that he was even more gorgeous now? He took another step closer and she swore she could feel the tension between them hum, like he'd plucked the string of a violin.

The jacket was the same, but he had on a gray T-shirt with some sort of logo on it and a pair of well-worn jeans that were black. They hung low on his hips and she realized she was staring at the vee of his waist as if she'd never noticed that part of a man before.

She jerked her gaze back up, her cheeks hot. His lips quirked into a smile that did things to her. Things she hadn't felt in over a month.

No, she scolded herself. It was one thing to fantasize about a great guy she'd never have to face again. It was a completely different affair to lust after a flesh-and-blood man standing in a real estate office.

Why was he standing in a real estate office? She cleared her throat and tried to relocate her lost sense of professionalism. "Was there something I could help you with?" Or had he just come here to make sure she hadn't completely fallen apart? She hoped not. She didn't want him to think of her as this pitiful creature who couldn't function.

That string of tension that had been humming between them tightened as his eyes darkened. His gaze swept over her face, her body. Was he checking her out? Or just checking for signs of her pregnancy? It was still pretty early. Her clothes still mostly fit, although she'd already gone up a cup size in bras.

"Actually, there is," he said. "As crazy as it sounds, I'm settling down."

Oh. That sounded like...like he was setting up house with a girlfriend. Or a wife. Well. So much for that fantasy. She was not about to poach anyone's man. At least now he'd stay safely in her dreams and she wouldn't make a fool of herself over him.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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