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Brand's hands flew to his face, his fingers clawing the horrible stuff away. As the stench filled her nostrils, Teddy's stomach threatened to turn. When Brand was able to see, he ran to the irrigation ditch, dropped to his stomach and splashed innumerable handfuls of water on his face. Then he sat down in the grassy pasture and looked up at Teddy. What was that? he implored.

I guess I forgot to tell you that llamas spit when they get really upset. You shoved Casanova one too many times.

Oh. Brand turned his hands over, looking at them as though they might fall off at any moment. I'm not sure I want to know, but what do they spit?

It's half-digested food.

I'm keeping my cattle, after all. I knew there had to be a catch.

That night Teddy told Gram about Brand helping her fix the fence and also about Casanova spitting on the poor man. Teddy, when you talk about Brand, you have a new sparkle in your eyes, Gram said after they had finished laughing.

No way, Teddy replied.

Gram nodded her wise old head. All right. Just take my advice and don't mention Brandon Sinclair to Lynden.

A quiet tap on the door ended the discussion about Teddy's new sparkle. Lynden Greeley, Teddy's boyfriend since high school, stepped into the large bare room. The thin, brown-haired young man left his shoes at the front door, moved through the bare living room to the bathroom to wash his hands, then went to the cozily furnished country kitchen. Settling into the worn but comfortable couch, he glanced at Teddy. Why the sparkle in those big blue eyes tonight? he asked, absent-mindedly stroking Thor, the old yellow cat, who had climbed onto his lap.

When Lynden said sparkle, Teddy's bright eyes flew to Gram's faded ones. She made up her mind never to think about Brandon Sinclair again in her entire life.

Anything exciting happen today? she asked. Lynden worked at the *Bulletin*, Bend's daily newspaper, and Teddy thought he learned something new and stimulating every day.

Lynden shrugged and reached into the candy dish for some jellybeans. No, we can hardly find anything to fill the local pages. He grinned at Teddy. What do you expect from our nice quiet little town?

Young man, Gram said, interrupting the conversation, you know I don't mind your eating the candy and I don't mind your petting the cat, either. But not at the same time I my house. Don't you dare stick your hand back into the candy dish until you go wash it with soap and water.

Lynden pushed the cat onto the couch, obediently went to the kitchen sink to wash his hands, then returned and sat down.

What do you want to do tonight? she asked.

I m awfully comfortable. How about watching TV?

Sure. She flipped the switch. Mind if I knit then?

He nodded. Whatever makes you happy.

Sunday morning, Lynden Greeley called for Teddy and Gram at exactly quarter past nine, as he always did, to take them to church. You look lovely, he told Teddy, as he helped her into the back seat of his compact car. I especially like the light green suit you re wearing. You knitted that last year, didn t you? Then he turned his attention to Gram and helped her into the front seat.

When they walked into the small white community church, Teddy gulped. Brand Sinclair sat on the far end of the last row of pews. After a moment of staring, she followed Gram and Lynden to their usual seat on the aisle, half way down. Teddy barely heard the sermon; she was so aware of the big man sitting in the back of the church. To make matters worse, she felt he was staring at her during the entire service.

After church, the members of the small congregation lingered in the warm sunshine, visiting. Eventually, Brand greeted Teddy and she introduced him to Lynden.

Anyone invite you home for lunch? Gram asked in her usual brusque style.

Brand shook his sunshiny hair and his brown eyes danced. Not yet, Mrs. Marland, but I m still hoping.

Nelle, Gram said. Call me Nelle. Why don t you come on over to our place? You already know where it is, and you won t have far to go home.

Well, Nellie

Nelle, sonny, not Nellie. All right, we ll see you in a little while. Don t be too long, because our meal is all ready. You know the commandments, I suppose.

When they got home, Teddy changed her clothes in a hurry so she could help Gram with the food. They had it steaming on the table when Brand joined them.

Leave your shoes at the door and wash your hands in the bathroom, Gram barked when Brand stepped inside. Shoes are filthy things.

One golden eyebrow rose, but he said not a word as he stepped out of his boots and strode through the empty living room to the bathroom to comply. When he returned, he hesitated, looking the table over.

Well, sit down there by Teddy, Gram commanded but Lynden dropped into the chair. Gram wagged a finger at Brand. You can sit by me, then. I m almost as good company as Teddy, don t you think?

Brand sat down beside the tiny shriveled woman and took her hand. Sure, Gram, you re all right.

Nelle, sonny. Her old eyes spun over the young faces around her. Everybody s hands still clean?

Lynden and Teddy nodded. Brand looked at his, front and back. He nodded, too.

All right, I guess you re the guest, Brand, so you just go ahead and ask the blessing.

Look, Gram, Brand said, I don t know any blessings except God is Great. You don t want that, do you?

Lynden cleared his throat and prayed a prayer so long that Teddy knew for sure the chicken would be cold. She peeked to see if he was about to wind down, and met Brand s golden gaze. He winked at her, then closed both eyes tight. Teddy closed hers, too.

After the meal everyone sat down on the couch, love seat, and rocking chair to visit. What did you do before coming here, Sinclair? Lynden wanted to know.

Helped my folks on their ranch, Brand answered willingly and then he invited them all to see his ranch. It doesn t have anything exotic, like Teddy s goats, he joked, but I d like to show you anyway.

I ve been wanting to get a good look at that fancy place, Teddy said.

You two run along, Gram said. Lynden and I ll stay here and see if we can eat all the candy.

Brand and Teddy jumped to their feet and Lynden raised himself half off the couch, then settle back down. Don t be gone too long, he said, unwrapping a small candy bar.

In their eagerness to be off, Brand and Teddy literally ran off the porch but, when they stepped through the yard gate, the llamas surrounded them and forced them to slow down.

Are we in danger? Brand asked.

No. Casanova is the only one that spits and you re the third person he s spit on. But I ll call the dogs. She stuck two fingers into her mouth and let out a whistle that almost knocked her own ears out of her head. A moment later, two gray and white dogs

appeared. Teddy made a sweeping motion with her arm. Take them back there, she said softly.

The dogs quietly went to work and, in a few minutes, they had herded the llamas to the back side of the pasture.

Wow! Brand said. Those dogs are worth more than the llamas.

Teddy shook her head. No, but they re worth a lot.

Who s that jerk who ate lunch with us? Brand asked as they walked across the pasture toward his place.

Teddy smiled. That *jerk* is my boyfriend. We ve been going together for a long time.

Brand shook his head but said nothing more about Lynden. How come your grandmother wears boys jeans to church? he asked.

Teddy laughed out loud. She wears boys clothes everywhere, hadn t you noticed? She s pretty tiny and they seem to fit.

Yes, but to church?

Teddy s blue eyes flashed mischievously. She does dress up for church. She wears jeans to church rather than bib overalls, and tee shirts rather than flannel. And besides that she wears newer sneakers.

Okay, I can handle that. How come you live with her?

Who else would I love with? I m not married or anything, and we work the ranch together.

They came to the border fence a rotted, falling-down, log fence. Brand looked the fence over as he helped Teddy across, but said nothing. What about your folks? he asked when they were on their way again.

Teddy s cheeks burned. He had asked the one question she could not handle. I don t have any folks except Gram, she snapped in a voice that brooked no further discussion. Gramp died just before I was born.

Okay, one more question. Whose ranch is it? His eyes asked Teddy if that question was okay, and she smiled.

Legally, it s mine, she answered. Gram insisted on putting it in my name when I turned twenty-one. But really, it belongs to both of us.

Brand stopped walking and turned to face Teddy. How old are you?

Twenty-one on my last birthday. Why does that surprise you?

Well, I thought you were a kid, maybe sixteen.

They started walking across his pasture, toward the neat, modern building scattered over the huge place.

My turn, Teddy said, laughing. I have to know why you said Gram and I made a crazy-looking pair.

Brand turned amused eyes on her. It looked like a mouse defending an elephant.

Cute! Really cute. Of course, there's no question who the elephant was, is there?

Brand moved to Teddy's side and dropped a long, suntanned arm across her shoulders. You're a graceful willowy girl, Teddy, and I'm sure you're well aware of just how beautiful you are. I've never seen such soft, shiny hair, and the gold highlighting the dark color is nothing less than spectacular. And your shockingly blue eyes are entrancing. But have you ever seen anyone as tiny as your grandmother in your entire life?

Teddy laughed and moved away from Brand, causing his hand to crash to his side. I guess I'm used to her, she said. She's just right to me.

When he was finished showing Teddy around the ranch, Brand suggested they look at the inside of the house.

I better not go inside, she said hesitantly.

Twenty-one's old enough to go into a neighbor's house, Brand said. Anyway, we won't be alone. He took her arm and led her through the yard, which Teddy noticed was immaculately weeded and trimmed, unlike her own jungle.

Hannah, Rolf, Brand called when the front door closed behind them. The house must have been about 150 years newer than hers. Thick, cream-colored carpets covered the wide expanse of floor and modern paintings hung in exactly the right places on sparkling white walls.

She followed him through a large dining room, into a kitchen, the likes of which Teddy had never seen.

We're here, Brand, a voice called from somewhere, and a middle-aged couple appeared through a door.

Brand smiled. Rolf, Hannah, this is our next-ranch neighbor, Teddy Marland. Teddy, these are the people who take care of the place and me. Especially me. The Perrys, Rolf and Hannah.

Hannah, probably in her early fifties, red-headed, freckled, and large, shook Teddy's hand, then dropped it and hugged her. We're glad to know you at last, she said.

Rolf, a little older and with gray hair, took Teddy's hand and pumped it vigorously. Yes, at last.

After a few minutes of visiting, Brand invited Teddy to see the stables.

What was that we're meeting you at last, stuff? Teddy asked as they walked through the equally well kept back yard. Have they been here a long time?

Brand grinned foolishly and shook his head. No, they came from Alvadore with me. I may have mentioned your name a couple of times, he confessed at Teddy's raised eyebrows. Then he opened the stable door, motioning Teddy in. Let me introduce you to our horses. This is Misty. She's a real lady. Spicy, but sweet. Teddy took in the sleek palomino mare.

And this is Thunder. You probably recognize him from my crazy ride to your place. Thunder is my special stallion. He can always give me more than I bargain for. Teddy looked up at the huge black stallion. She had no doubt he would be more than she could handle.

Brand showed her the two other horses, a large chestnut gelding, Pharaoh, and Powder, a fat dark mare.

Teddy turned glowing blue eyes to Brand. I love them. We don't have any horses and I've always wanted some.

Want to take a ride?

I'd love to if you'll be patient with a green horn and a fool besides.

Brand saddled Thunder and Misty and helped Teddy onto Misty, who pranced daintily in one spot, eager to be off.

They walked around the pasture for a little while, then Brand trotted Thunder and Misty followed. Want to ride over to your place and how Gram the horses?

Yes! Let's do. But she wants you to call her Nelle.

As they approached the house, Teddy mentally compared her home to Brand's. Half as large and all on one floor, its sides were made of weathered logs. The wooden windows looked old and worn. And the inside! She would rather not even think about that right now. Her eyes lifted to the bright blue tile roof. Such a fancy roof looked silly on the decrepit old house, but Gram said if they always repaired it with good material, one day the house would look great. Teddy was not so sure about that.

Teddy nimbly slid off the friendly little palomino's back and sprinted toward the old house. He followed her up the rickety steps. Both carefully skirted the most severely rotted area. They laughed together at the sheer delight of the afternoon. Suddenly, the door burst open and Lynden stood in the opening. He was not laughing.

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The laughter slowly died to a stiff silence. Do you realize you've been gone over two hours, Teddy? Lynden asked in a stern voice.

No! Teddy said with a little gasp. I completely lost track of the time.

Time passes quickly when you're having fun, Brand quipped.

Butt out, cowboy, Lynden snapped. Returning his attention to Teddy, he spoke roughly, scolding. We planned to go to a concert in Pioneer Park this afternoon.

I forgot all about it. Is it too late? Teddy felt breathless for some strange reason and guilty.

Of course it's too late. It's nearly over.

Brand took Teddy's upper arm in his fingers. Good, let's get a drink of water and ride some more.

Lynden knocked Brand's hand from Teddy's arm and jerked her away. Not so fast, big shot, she's staying with me.

Brand's golden brown eyes burned into Teddy's. Teddy?

Oh, I don't know, she said. I should stay with Lynden. But I should take Misty back, too.

Don't give it another thought, Brand said. He turned to go, then faced Teddy again. Where's Gram? he asked.

Out making sure the llamas have plenty of food and water, Lynden replied.

And you didn't go help? Brand asked. Will you tell Gram thanks for the fantastic meal? he said to Teddy. See you later.

Where does he get off, calling Nelle, Gram? Lynden asked.

Teddy shook her weary head. I don't know. I just don't know. She felt as though the sun had disappeared behind a black cloud. Stepping into the living room, she listlessly pulled off her boots. Lynden followed.

Just then Gram came in, singing a hymn at the top of her voice. Everyone out there s fat and happy, she announced at the end of the lively chorus.

I m sorry, Gram, Teddy said, I didn t realize how late it is.

Gram made a silent Pooh. Teddy thought her grandmother s old eyes had a special glint in them. Who keeps track of time on Sunday? Gram added. I was glad for the exercise and it didn t take a minute. Brand came out to help, but I was finished. I noticed he led the palomino back home. I hope you didn t get hurt.

No, I decided to stay here with Lynden.

Oh? He decided to do something? The candy must be gone.

Teddy glanced at the empty candy dish. What would you like to do, Lynden, go for a ride?

What s to see? Another mile out and there s nothing but sagebrush.

Should we go to Pioneer Park? It s shady and pleasant.

What s the matter with here? It s shady and pleasant here, too, isn t it?

Lynden stayed for supper but never quite recovered from Teddy s neglect through the rest of the afternoon.

After Teddy went to bed that night a big, windblown figure galloped around in her head, astride an enormous black stallion. This is ridiculous, she told herself and asked the Lord to help her empty her mind and fall asleep. He did.

You look as if you need another two hours sleep, Gram announced cheerfully the next morning when Teddy slid into her chair.

I m all righ t, Gram, I just need my coffee.

Gram filled a flat brown mug with the steaming liquid and slapped it down beside Teddy s plate. What re we doing today, kitten?

Moving the herd to the north pasture. After that, we could go through and knock out the big weeds. As scarce as water is, I can t stand feeding and watering weeds.

Sounds good. I ll be out before you finish moving the llamas.

Teddy s eyes gazed toward the west as she opened the gate between the two pastures, then she walked out to the llamas. She hoped she would run into Brand today. He had not seemed bothered when she decided to stay with Lynden, but why should he? They were barely friends and she had told him right off that Lynden was her boyfriend.

Teddy looked around at the llamas, all walking or running toward her, the babies keeping near their mothers. She stuck her fingers into her mouth and whistled. The dogs appeared, trotting casually to her. Hi, Brutus, Caesar, she greeted them. Okay, guys, take us to the north pasture, but real easy.

Teddy began walking north with llamas surrounding her. Casanova and Iris crowded so close they bumped against her as they walked. The dogs separated, one to the east, one to the west, and trotted casually back and forth, keeping the llamas in a fairly tight group. Great going, guys, Teddy called to the dogs.

Then Casanova stiffened, and his ears flapped back against his head. Teddy turned to find Brand about fifty feet behind her. Don't come any closer, she called softly. We'll have these guys put away in a few minutes, then I'll join you.

She locked the gate that connected the south and north pastures and returned to Brand. Now, what can I do for you? she asked with a welcoming smile.

I didn't want anything, especially. I saw the dogs working the little camels and thought I'd watch. Why did you stop me? Afraid I'd stampede the buffalo?

She grinned. I did it for your own protection. You seem to have made an enemy among my flock.

He looked surprised. I didn't see Lynden anywhere.

Teddy chuckled. Maybe you made more than one enemy, come to think of it. I meant Casanova. You remember him?

He nodded and grinned. Oh yes. The dirty bird that spit on me! Believe me, I'll give him plenty of clearance from now on.

Want to sit down a minute? Teddy asked.

Here? He looked around the grassy pasture. Sure as I sit down, I'll find a llama pie.

Teddy shook her head. No way. Llamas all go to one corner. Not only does it keep the pasture clean, but it makes fertilizing the garden awfully easy. Now, back to your problem with my friend, Casanova, she said mischievously. He remembers you and evidently the memory isn't pleasant. Before llamas spit, they tense up, their ears flatten and they start chewing. He saw you before I did and alerted me. I noticed his head go up. He would have spit if you'd kept coming.

Brand grinned. He's just jealous. So's your other friend for that matter.

Teddy pulled up her knees and put her arms around them. I don't think Lynden's jealous. I haven't given him any reason to be.

He has reason to be jealous of anyone who lives and breathes and moves. Now, to change the subject, why don't you tell me about yourself, Brand suggested. Where did you go to college?

College? Teddy had been so busy with the ranch she had not even thought about college. Now she felt embarrassed to admit it. Nowhere, she finally said, softly. I suppose you went to some fancy school.

He shook his head. Nope. I went to Oregon State University. Majored in business administration and animal husbandry. Ranching, I guess you'd call it.

So we're going to watch a rancher who does it by the book, she replied.

Hearing a buzzing noise like a million extra-loud bees, they looked up to see Gram pile off her motorcycle. Hey, is this the way you're getting the work done? the old lady called in her guttural voice. But, as she trotted nearer, Teddy noticed a definite gleam in her faded eyes. Either the old lady was kidding or she had a crush on Brand.

Sit down a minute and catch your breath, Brand said, patting a spot beside him.

Brand's just telling me about his college education, Teddy said.

And Teddy's telling me she hasn't had hers yet, Brand added.

Oh, she's educated, Gram said. She graduated from the college of hard knocks with a master's degree in Good Judgment from Bad Experience. She's also taken many classes in gaining good experience from bad judgment. Then she said, I have to get busy. You two can waste this gorgeous day if you want to. She kicked the motorcycle to life and tore off toward the house. A few minutes later she started across the pasture on foot, whacking away at the weeds with her sharp hoe.

I have one more question, Brand said. Is your name really Theodore?

Teddy's eyes smiled, though her mouth remained still. That's my name.

Why?

Teddy shrugged. I guess Gram liked it. Maybe she didn't know it was a boy's name.

Gram. Always Gram. Is she really your mother?

This time Teddy did smile. I'm twenty-one, she's seventy-eight. Does that tell you anything?

He looked into Teddy's blue eyes with curiosity. Grandmothers usually don't name their grandchildren, he said softly.

Ugh. If she could just learn to keep her mouth shut every discussion might not turn to her origins. Why did everyone have to be so nosy, anyway? Thank goodness Lynden had never been curious about her relationship with Gram.

I m not supposed to ask that? His voice remained soft and caring.

Teddy wondered if she could even answer. Right, she murmured. To her surprise he took her hand and touched her fingers to his lips, then to hers, and walked off the way he had come. Teddy could not have been more shocked if he had really kissed her. Nobody had ever done such a sweet thing to her before. But then she had never known anyone like Brandon Sinclair before. Nobody.

The next morning, Teddy stepped back to see how much area the big gun sprinkler was covering. She looked up and noticed the black stallion galloping straight for the dividing fence, with Brand astride, leaning low over the heavily muscled neck. A moment later, Brand dismounted. He stood at the stallion s head, patting him while he yelled at the top of his voice. Call the dogs. Your pesky goats are all over my place.

How did they get over there?

Walked over the rotten logs you call a fence.

Gram, hearing the ruckus, dropped the wrenches she had been using to set up the irrigation system and ran to Teddy. Just keep your shirt on, buster. Those llamas won t hurt a thing and we ll have them back in a flash.

Oh, really? You should have seen my cattle scatter. They won t go near those long-necked camels.

Teddy began laughing. You don t have to defend me, Gram. Brand has a big mouth, but he won t hurt me. He thinks you re a little mouse defending an elephant me.

Oh he does, does he? Maybe we should let *him* figure out how to get the llamas off his dumb cattle ranch.

Brand simmered down and grinned. That mouse and elephant business does sound pretty harsh when you play it back. I m sorry. He winked. Now, will you please call your goats home, Gram?

I m not your gram! she shouted in a voice that would have frightened a tornado cloud. And they aren t goats. Come on, Teddy, let s go have lunch.

Teddy snatched the old woman s hand and hauled her back beside her. Then she stuck two fingers into her mouth and whistled for the dogs, which appeared almost immediately.

We better check the fence before you set the dogs on the llamas, Brand said, leading Thunder northward. I don't know much about llamas, but cattle can get out of a hole they can't possibly return through.

When they got there, they saw that ten feet of the rotten log fence lay flat on the ground. Teddy instructed the dogs to bring the llamas back, and in a few minutes, the llamas started returning to their own pasture. The dogs did not stop until they had every llama on its own side of the broken-down fence.

I'll bet those two dogs take the place of a hired man, Brand said. How would you like to sell them?

No way, sonny, Gram said. We couldn't operate without those dogs. She grinned. Besides, they don't know what a cow is.

Okay, I'll have to find my own dogs. How would you girls like to share the expense of putting up wire fencing between our ranches?

Gram shook her white head. Now yet. We'll just fix the log fence, even though I'd bet your cattle knocked it down.

Brand's face started to redden. Wait just a minute, Gram! Were my cattle on your place?

No, your cattle are too dumb to walk through the fence they smashed down. And don't you call me Gram! She turned and walked off. I'll bring some logs, Teddy, she called.

Brand went home. Teddy finished setting up the irrigation, then joined Gram at the broken-down fence. They spent the afternoon repairing it and went into the house, tired but satisfied with their day's work.

Later in the evening, there was a tap on the front door. That'll be Lynden, Gram said. They were watching summer reruns on TV; Teddy was working on her red sweater and Gram was cutting out pink butterflies for her quilt.

Lynden settled onto the couch beside Teddy, sprawling until he sat almost on his back. He watched the TV for a few minutes, then looked from Gram to Teddy. Since you girls aren't watching much, would you mind if I switched to another station? Without waiting for an answer, he flipped to a program he wanted to watch.

Teddy's eyes met Gram's, who barely raised a bushy, white eyebrow. Teddy's lips turned into a tiny smile. Then she shrugged. Anything new at work today? she asked brightly. She always asked because a newspaper should be an exciting place to work.

Lynden shook his head no, held a restraining hand toward her, and leaned closer to the TV.

Gram grinned and Teddy gave her a little push. The big yellow cat climbed into Lynden s lap by the saw nothing except the television.

A few minutes later, Gram laid her scissors down. Anyone want some pie and ice cream? she asked.

Teddy pushed her knitting to the back of the needles and dumped it onto the coffee table. Sure, I ll help.

Sure nice to have your boyfriend visit a couple of times a week, Gram said with a wicked grin.

Well, he feels at home, Teddy said. And I enjoy having him over.

Lynden rushed to wash his hands, accepted the dessert and gulped it, all the while with his eyes glued to the television. Could just as well fed him oatmeal, Gram said.

Teddy ate the last bite of her dessert and stood to take the dishes back to the counter when a frenzied attack on the door nearly made her drop the dishes. It actually caused Lynden to look away from the TV.

Teddy threw the door open and Brand strode into the room. Suddenly it felt as though the sun had come from behind a cloud and warmed the entire house.

Just thought I should check to make sure you girls are all right before I hit the sheets, he said, wearing a wide smile. I see you aren t.

Gram pointed to Brand s feet. Take off those boots before you come into my clean house, she yelled.

Brand backed to the front door. Sorry. He flipped off his boots.

Now go wash your hands. Those boots are dirty.

Brand complied. Now, do I get some of whatever you had in those dishes?

Teddy cut a wide slice of the warm apple pie, piled ice cream beside it, and handed it to him.

Thanks, he said after he cleaned up the dish. Hannah s a good cook, but she hasn t produced anything like this. He looked from one to another, then back to Teddy. Looks as though I interrupted a lively evening.

What should we have been doing? Teddy asked.

Anything. At least you could look more lively.

Gram slapped a long reddish box on the table almost before he finished talking. Here s a game that ll bring you to life.

How many are going to play, Gram? Teddy asked recognizing the box. Gram always hauled it out when they had company because it required four to play.

Everyone looked at Lynden who, eyes on the TV, seemed unaware of anyone's presence. Looks like it'll be three, Brand said. What's the game, Gram?

The little old woman wagged a finger at him. Nello, she said, as softly as her gravelly voice could speak. Pictionary, she said. Think you could keep up with Teddy and me?

He raised his golden eyebrows at Gram. A drawing game? He smiled at Gram. If you can do it, so can I. Bring it on.

We really need four to play this right, Teddy said. But I just figured out how we can do it with three. She explained that one would draw and the other two guess. The one who drew and the one who correctly guessed would advance their tokens on the board. Brand decided to draw first while Teddy and Gram raced to see who could guess what it was.

A sailboat? Teddy yelled.

No, it's a horse, Gram announced in her gruff voice.

No! Teddy bellowed, It's a table. Those are table legs, Gram.

As the game went on the players grew louder, laughing hysterically as they tried to draw recognizable objects before the sand disappeared from the hourglass.

Finally, Lynden roused himself from the TV and leaned over the papers. I don't see anything so funny, he said. Looks stupid to me.

Brand sobered up enough to speak. Why don't you give it a try, city boy? It may be stupid but it's not easy. And it definitely is funny.

You three are making major fools of yourselves, Lynden said, dropping into the empty chair. I'll join you if you play something sensible.

Gram shook her head. Anybody who *is* anybody is playing this game, she said. Join us in this one, or go back to your TV.

He watched a little longer, then assuring them he could do much better, agreed to play. He and Teddy became partners and Gram and Brand played together.

When Lynden played, Teddy could not guess what he drew for anything. It's a marshmallow, she said. A piece of popcorn. A cotton ball. Lynden soon grew impatient with her. When the time ran out and he told her it was a cloud, she told him clouds are mostly flat on the bottom.

When Gram and Brand crossed the finish line before Teddy and he reached the halfway mark, Lynden jumped up, knocking the playing pieces off the board and onto the table. I need to go home, he muttered. I guess I m the only one here who has to get up at a certain time. I mean with a real job.

Brand bounced to his feet. What time do you get up, city boy?

Seven o clock no matter what time I get to bed.

Brand shook his head in disbelief. Is that a fact? Well, I have my cattle all fed by six o clock. Every morning.

That s hard for me to believe, Lyn den said. After all, you don t have a boss checking on you. Come on, Teddy, kiss me good night. I have to go. He pulled Teddy to him and covered her mouth with his. She tried to pull back but he held her tightly. Finally, he let her go, put on his shoes, and stepped outside.

Teddy wanted more than anything in the world to go brush her teeth, but Brand stood in the kitchen doorway watching, his eyes mocking her. Unable to control herself, she swiped the back of her hand across her lips. That helped a little, but she knew for sure Brand saw her do it. And that he knew why.