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Brand arrived early the next morning to put in another day repairing fences, so Teddy chased Gram inside again. Just to the house, Gram, not to a home, she said, patting Gram on her curly top.

What was that all about? Brand asked after Gram left.

She s feeling somewhat useless. But a little rest won t hurt her a bit.

They worked well together and the fence began to look as though it would hold for several more years. After a long comfortable silence, Teddy began to search for a topic of conversation. How was your ride yesterday afternoon? she asked, then wished she had not brought up the subject.

He leaned back on his heels. Great, he said. We had a long, relaxing ride.

Teddy held a nail to the log and smashed it into the old wood with a vengeance. She just bet they had had a long, relaxing ride. But she had to ask and she really did not want to know one thing about those two. Well, what she really wanted was for there to be nothing between them for her to know.

Did city boy come over and eat all your candy last night? Brand asked.

Teddy straightened up and returned Brand s wicked grin. No, he comes only in Tuesdays and Fridays just like my water.

And just as welcome I suppose.

Teddy made a big deal out of hesitating before answering. Uh, well, maybe just a teeny bit more so, I guess.

Gram made lunch for Brand and Teddy again and they worked until five o clock. He laid the last log over and held it for Teddy to nail, then wiped his hands on his jeans. Guess that about does it for today, he said.

Why, do you have to go riding again? Now why did she do that? The last thing she wanted to know was what those two did every night.

He scowled, as though trying to figure her out. I hadn t planned to, but would you and Gram like to go after supper? According to the schedule, your paper boy wouldn t interfere tonight.

Teddy felt as tired as she ever had in her entire life, and her arm ached from swinging that hammer. Keeping up with Brand took everything she had and a little more. *Father, help me get rested up really quickly tonight, okay? Thanks.* I wasn t fishing for an invitation, but I ll check with Gram. I didn t realize how much she likes to ride.

His smile outshone the sun. Great. I ll be waiting to hear.

Gram could not wait to ride, so Teddy called Brand and accepted his invitation while Gram put supper on the table. Both women wolfed down the food in anticipation of the planned activities. Then Teddy noticed that she felt a lot better. Almost no aches or pains from swinging the heavy hammer and well rested. *Thanks, God*, she tossed silently into the sky.

Brand had the three horses saddled and ready to go when Gram and Teddy arrived. Powder, the dark mare, reached her head over the fence to Teddy, who petted her and talked to her a few minutes.

I'll say thanks for Powder, Brand said. She doesn't get as much attention as she'd like, now that we seldom ride her.

Gram rode Pharaoh, Teddy the dainty palomino, Misty, and Brand climbed on Thunder, the huge black stallion. They rode on the trail for two hours and returned well exercised and feeling better, including the horses. But Brand treated Teddy as a good friend. Period.

He helped repair fences all week, except when he handled his own irrigation, but did not cast a look or say a word to indicate he thought any more of her than a neighbor who needed a hand.

Lynden took Teddy and Gram to church again, and Brand took Celia. Although Brand's greeting could not have been more cordial, he did not stop to visit and therefore did not introduce Celia.

After eating the delicious meal Teddy and Gram had prepared and emptying the candy bowl, Lynden invited Teddy to sit with him on the couch. I brought that article, he said, as well as another that just arrived in the office. He pulled an envelope from his jacket pocket.

Teddy, sitting beside him, instructed herself to breathe calmly as he pulled the bits of paper from the envelope and placed them in her hand. She unfolded the picture first that turned out to be from the hidden camera in the bank. The picture of the man holding the gun was so fuzzy no one could identify anyone from it, but, it showed he had blond hair, wide shoulders, lean hips, and long, long legs. She drew in a long breath and handed it back to Lynden. I see the resemblance, but lots of men look like that. You could never, ever use that picture to identify Brand.

She unfolded the two articles and read them, learning little. I don't think you could identify Brand from these articles either, she said. All I see that could help is that the man has a guttural voice and Brand's voice is anything but guttural.

Lynden put the articles and picture back into the envelope. Well, people do strange things with their voices, you know. And it gives a pretty good physical description of the man, Teddy. Did you read it? It matches Sinclair closer than you could describe me.

Teddy had to agree but managed to get the subject changed for the entire afternoon.

Gram and Teddy had a talk that evening after Lynden finally left. I'm afraid I must give you that advice I spoke of, Gram said. You're going to have to get rid of Lynden. Gram sat at the table, tracing the butterfly pattern onto pink broadcloth. That is if you want Brand to notice you. He's an honorable man and right now he sees you as Lynden's girlfriend.

Teddy had been thinking along the same lines. I don't know if I can, Gram. Lynden's really nice. And he hasn't done anything to deserve being dumped. I guess I feel sorry for him.

Feeling sorry for someone in a situation like this is like taking a week to drill a root canal. Believe me, it'll be less painful if you do it quickly and get it over with.

Teddy remembered Lynden's articles about someone like Brand being sought for that dumb bank robbery. I have another reason to stay in touch with Lynden, Gram. Remember him saying that Brand robbed a bank just before he came here?

Gram shoved out a hand, as though pushing the thought away. Posh. Don't believe everything you hear. Brand didn't do anything of the sort.

I know he didn't do it, but I still want to learn everything I can about it. I'll have to talk with Lynden, Gram, that I'd like to remain friends with him if he'll do that.

Gram nodded wisely. All right. Then you and Lynden will understand how it is, but how's Brand going to know?

Teddy thought about that after she went to bed that night. As far as Brand would know, she and Lynden would still be romantically involved. But she could not walk up to the man and explain that she was now available, could she? And did she have any slight fears that Brand might be the bank robber? No, he could never do something like that. Even so, she doubted she could be cruel enough to completely follow Gram's suggestion of totally dumping Lynden.

A couple of days later, in the afternoon, Gram and Teddy started clipping the llamas' toenails, a job they dreaded but did anyway every three months. Llamas have split hooves like cattle, but a small nail that grows out over the hoof has to be clipped, somewhat like a human toenail. By evening they had finished about sixty llamas, and, after the usual feeding and watering, both women were more than ready to quit for the day.

They started again the next morning right after six o'clock and were going fine with Thunder, with Brand aboard, galloped up the driveway and back to the barn where they worked.

Brand dismounted and approached the women. Looks as though you two are keeping out of mischief today. He watched a moment. Hey, I never have to clip my cattle's hooves. Are you sure you wouldn't like to go back to raising cattle?

Gram's blue eyes flashed. Not on your life, sonny. Llamas are more human to handle, if you get my drift. You can have the cattle.

Brand pulled off his Stetson and shoved his hair back. That's sort of what I'm here for. I'm loading 200 head of cattle today. We have the near ones in the corral, but over 100 have escaped to the back of the pasture. We're having a terrible time. I was wondering, do you think your dogs would run cattle?

Gram jerked her head toward Teddy. You go help. I'll carry on here.

Teddy finished her llama, released it, then stood up and stretched. These dogs have never even seen cattle, as far as I know, let alone worked them, but we'll see what happens.

Brand put Teddy on the horse with him and the dogs ran alongside. Thunder took them out to the pasture where they ill-mannered cattle milled around, bawling nervously. Teddy called the dogs and told them to take the cattle in. They cocked their heads and she motioned at the cattle. When they understood what she wanted, they went to work, quietly but effectively. Soon, the cattle bunched together, moving slowly toward the gleaming white corrals, where several huge trucks awaited their turns at the loading chutes.

Well, looks as if everything's under control, Teddy said, her nostrils filled with the stench of many cattle.

Yeah, Brand answered, never taking his eyes off the two dogs working together. Those dogs are worth their weight in gold. Didn't we say they took the place of a man? Well that bunch of steers ran through six men, and the two dogs are handling them just fine.

Teddy nodded, satisfied. I'm glad. I didn't know whether they'd work cattle, but they're great dogs. She had one more comment she wanted desperately to make but hardly dared. She drew in a deep breath. I hated to be a party to what you're doing to those cattle, she said. Can you blame them for running off? They were only trying to save their lives.

Brand nodded. I thought of that. I feel sorry for them, and no, I don't blame them. This earth isn't perfect, is it? Did you know the Bible tells us that after Jesus returns to claim His own nothing will be hurt or destroyed anymore?

The dogs driving the cattle into the corrals where they would be loaded into the trucks interrupted the conversation. Brand sent several quick glances Teddy's way as they walked slowly along.

Sensing him watching her, Teddy began to feel embarrassed. Then she stumbled and nearly stepped in a fresh pile of manure. Your pasture s a mess, she told Brand, laughing. I d forgotten how filthy cows are. Sure you don t want to change to llamas?

Don t tempt me. Seriously, I couldn t afford to right now, no matter how badly I wished. I invested all my ready money in the cattle.

All the money you got in the bank heist? No! She knew better than that. How could she even let a thought like that pass through her head?

Another silence fell between them. Teddy felt Brand struggling with himself again. I owe you one, he finally said. How can I repay you?

How about a steak dinner for the dogs?

He shook his head. How about a steak dinner for you?

You don t owe me; I didn t do a thing.

He reached for her hand and held it until they stepped up to the corral. Then, after slipping the board that locked in the recalcitrant animals, he turned back to Teddy. I m afraid I d feel embarrassed, taking two dogs out to dinner. Won t you go? Please?

What about Celia, Teddy wondered. But she could think of nothing in the whole world she would like better than to go with Brand anywhere, anytime. So why not?

If you d be more comfortable, and your dub reporter would feel better, Gram could come, too, Brand offered just as Teddy opened her mouth to accept his invitation.

All right, we accept. She ll do justice to any steak you can buy.

Brand s eyes shone as though the sun lived in his head rather than in the cloudless, blue sky above. Great. How about Saturday night? Let s dress up, okay?

Thunder, Misty, and Brand took Teddy back home. Brand delivered Teddy to her door, saluted smartly and trotted off down the driveway leading Misty. She hurried inside to tell Gram about Brand s taking them out to dinner. Finding an empty house, she hurried out to the barn where Gram still trimmed toenails.

It worked, Gram. Brutus and Caesar did just great. And Brand s taking us out to dinner Saturday night. For a sort of reward, I guess. I tried to get him to take the dogs, but he thought he s be embarrassed.

Gram sat on a small wooden box, working on a quiet llama s toenails. Her furrowed face wrinkled into a big smile. That s fine. Just fine, but I m not going. Her rough voice sounded happy. Stand still, Daisy, I m not hurting you. Dating s for young people, not an old, worn-out woman. Besides, I heard somewhere that three s a crowd.

Teddy picked up her trimmers and started on maybe, a gray and white llama with an all-gray, female baby llama by her side. But you have to go this time, Gram. He expressly invited you. If he wants to take me out alone, he'll ask.

By Saturday night, Teddy and Gram finished trimming the llamas' nails and felt like celebrating the finishing of the big job. Brand said we were supposed to dress up, Teddy said as Gram came from the bathroom, her curls even tighter than usual, and smelling of powder and cologne.

Oh, he did, did he? Okay, it doesn't matter to me. The old lady flashed a toothy smile and disappeared into her bedroom. Teddy gratefully took her turn in the shower, hoping to wash her internal butterflies down the drain.

After she dried her dark hair with the blow dryer, she used a curling brush to make it perfect for the evening. She chose a long dress of huckleberry-colored satin and taffeta. The double-puffed sleeves accentuated the simple waist and the double ruffle at the bottom of the outer skirt turned up in the back and narrowed to a V at the waist, creating a bustle effect. After arranging the dress to her satisfaction, Teddy deftly applied makeup, something she hardly ever bothered with. Tonight she wanted Brand to notice her.

She stepped into the living room to find Gram already there, her head twisted around, checking her jeans for something. Do you see something on the back of my pants? she asked. Cat hair, maybe?

Teddy brushed the back of the already clean jeans. They're fine, Gram.

Gram looked Teddy over, from shining hair to matching huckleberry sandals. You really like the guy, don't you, kitten? Think he'll notice you?

Did I overdo it, Gram?

No way. You look just right. Trust me.

When Gram opened the door for Brand, his eyes darted from her to Teddy, back to Gram, then back to Teddy. Teddy drew in a ragged breath. She had never seen a man look so splendid. His black tuxedo and bow tie made his streaked blond hair look lighter and his tan darker. His shoulders seemed wider and straighter, and his legs seemed to have grown an inch longer.

While Teddy had been looking Brand over he had been doing the same to her. Finally, his face turned from puzzlement to a happy laugh. You look so beautiful you take my breath away, he said to Teddy. He still had a strange look on his face, though. Turning to Gram, he leaned way over and kissed her apricot cheek. You look happy tonight, he whispered in her ear.

She turned to him in mock indignation. So I don't take your breath away! I have a mind to stay home, just for that.

Teddy and Gram stood in the middle of the bare room, ready to leave, but Brand hesitated. Teddy wondered what she was supposed to do, but decided to wait and see what he wanted. Finally he seemed to make a decision. May I use your telephone? he asked.

He went into the kitchen, where Teddy heard him canceling a reservation. All set, he said a few minutes later. Let's be off.

They stopped a few minutes later at Denny's, where Teddy felt terribly overdressed, but the light and friendly atmosphere soon made her forget anything but the good food and company.

An hour later they climbed back into Brand's car and headed down the highway to their ranches. I never had better steak, sonny, Gram growled from the back seat. Thanks a lot. Been several years since I went out to eat.

Brand reached back and caught the tiny hand in his. Glad you came, Gram. You have a way of brightening the corner where you are, if I can steal a line from a song.

Brand went in when they arrived home and Gram took off to her bedroom. What to play a little gin? Teddy asked.

Brand thought a moment. We could. Or we could just talk, whichever you'd rather.

Teddy brought coffee and settled beside him on the couch. Okay, talk, she instructed.

I hope you weren't disappointed tonight when we went to Denny's.

Teddy smiled, remembering how she felt when she first went in. Well, I did feel a little overdressed at first, but I soon forgot all about it. It was really nice. And the steaks were great.

He took her hand in his and patted it with his other one. Do you know why we went there?

No, did we need a reason?

He nodded. I had reservations at Cyrano's, but I'd completely forgotten how Gram dresses up. I was afraid you'd be embarrassed at Denny's, but they wouldn't have let the little upstart in at Cyrano's. So I guess you'd say I was between a rock and a hard place.

Understanding flooded over Teddy, and a warm tender feeling for Brand came with it. How sweet and thoughtful!

Anyway, your beautiful dress and even more beautiful you hasn't been wasted. I can't tell you how much pleasure I've had just looking at you tonight.

Teddy's eyes dropped and her face felt warm. Thank you, Brand. I had a fantastic time, too. Really I did. And I noticed how gorgeous you look, too. She rolled her eyes. What a shame, wasting all this gorgeousness on Denny's.

He leaned toward her and her heart nearly stopped. He was going to kiss her and she had never wanted anything more. She turned her face up and closed her eyes. And waited. And waited. Teddy's blood boiled through her veins in anticipation. Finally, she peeped one eye open a bit.

Brand's face was about a foot from hers and he wore an expression of wonder. Then he lowered his lips to hers and they touched, as gently as a cloud drifting past. Her arms flew around his neck and pulled him closer. As his arms tightened around her, her reasoning left. What she wanted was for him to hold her close, and he did. Her hands did what they had been wanting to for as long as she could remember they combed through the softest, blondest hair she had ever seen or felt.

Then he pushed her way and she dropped to earth with no parachute. I'm sorry. We shouldn't have done that.

Why? She thought for a moment, then she knew. Celia!

He smiled tenderly into her eyes and love shone from his brown eyes, reaching straight into her heart. Have you forgotten, my little Teddy Bear?

She nodded her head, feeling like a pushy child. I remember. Celia.

Celia? A deep laugh rumbled from his broad chest.

Celia? No, Teddy, not Celia Lynden. Your boyfriend, remember?

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The next morning Gram studied Teddy's face. You look as if you'd won the lottery, kitten, she said, dropping into her chair across the table.

That's exactly how I feel, Gram. Brand kissed me last night. Oh, Gram, I *am* in love with him.

Is he in love with you?

Was he? He had not said so. I don't know, Gram, but he kissed me.

Gram bowed her head and asked the blessing, filled both plates with eggs, bacon, and hash browns, then continued the conversation. I couldn't be happier for you. As I told you before, I'm in love with Brand myself, but I want you to be careful. Men are strange creatures.

But he only kissed me, Gram. A tender, gentle, beautiful kiss.

Gram spread apple butter on her toast and munched it as she drank her coffee. All right. Just one more thing. You're absolutely certain he's not the one who robbed the bank on the other side of the Cascades?

Ugh! Teddy had forgotten all about that. But she knew it was not Brand. There was not any hard evidence and it had been only a figment of Lynden's imagination. Brand would never do a thing like that. Never. I'm sure, Gram, but I'll ask him right out one of these days. Like you said, nothing replaces good old communication.

As always, Lynden arrived to take them to church on Sunday. You look positively radiant this morning, he told Teddy. That yellow dress matches the stars in your eyes.

Just then Gram came tearing out in her high-water jeans. She looked extra fancy too, in the crisp white shirt she had tucked into the pants. She motioned to Teddy and Lynden. Come on, you slow pokes. We don't want to be late.

Brand came into the church soon after with Celia and a short, handsome, Mexican man with a wide smile and white, even teeth. Brand led them down the aisle to Teddy's pew and they all settled down. Brand reached for Teddy's hand and gave it one quick squeeze before gently replacing it in her lap. Nothing had ever felt so right to Teddy.

After church, Lynden went to the restroom and Brand brought the two strangers to Teddy. I want you to meet Celia and Jesse Gutterres, he said. And this is my love, Theodore Marland.

Lynden arrived on the scene just then.

Glad to meet you folks, Teddy said. I'm sure we'll see you again. She grabbed Lynden's hand and headed for his car with him in tow. Gram followed.

He turned the car around and threw gravel twenty feet as he tore out of the church yard. I saw that turkey holding your hand, Teddy. I'd expect it of him but what's wrong with you?

We'll talk after we eat lunch, Teddy said calmly. That is, if you're still eating with us?

What kind of question is that? Are you trying to get rid of me? If you are, just say so.

Teddy reached over the seat and put her hand on Lynden's arm. I'm not trying to get rid of you. Let's just go home and eat, then we'll all have a good talk, all right?

The roast tasted like cardboard to Teddy, and the potatoes could have been balls of yarn, but eventually they finished eating and Gram left them alone.

We've always agreed to be honest with each other, right? she asked Lynden.

Yeah. Is that what you called that performance in church?

Well, I really want you to be my good friend, but Brand and I have discovered we're more than that.

Lynden rewrapped his chocolate caramel and shoved the candy dish back onto the coffee table with a clatter. So you're more than friends. What are you?

We're uh I don't know what we are. We like each other a lot.

He sprang up from the couch. I'm not going to sit still while that cowboy messes up your head. Just tell him to waddle on down the road.

Teddy grinned impulsively. Too late, Lynden, my head's already messed up. My heart, too. The question now is whether you'll still be my friend.

He marched out of the kitchen, through the living room to the front door, with Teddy following. He opened the door, then turned back to her. One thing you may have forgotten, he still has a price on his head. If you insist on this foolish behavior I may have to report his whereabouts to the authorities.

Please don't do that, Teddy began, but the door slammed and Lynden was gone.

Ten seconds later he quietly opened the door and reached inside for his shoes. Sorry, he said sheepishly, I forgot these. This time he closed the door quietly.

Teddy dumped herself on the couch, and reached for the last remaining peanut butter kiss, feeling as though someone had kicked her in the stomach.

Don't you worry about him, Gram said, when Teddy told her about Lynden's reaction. But as I see it, you'd better learn for yourself what Brand has or hasn't done before Lynden blows the whistle.

That could be easier said than done, Gram, Teddy said. She reached for a tissue and blew her nose.

The next morning, Teddy finished her breakfast and stepped outside when Brand rode up on Thunder. He dismounted, looped Thunder's reins around a small bush and opened his arms. Teddy ran into them and turned her lips up to receive his kiss. His wonderful kiss that turned her inside out and upside down and her knees into peppermint jelly.

Well, didn't you get enough of that Saturday night? a gravelly voice asked.

Teddy jerked away and faced her grandmother. Hi, Gram. We were just saying hello.

Some hello. What are we doing today, kitten? She waved a gnarled old hand in their direction. Besides that, I mean.

We're fixing fences, Gram, Brand answered. Could you possibly find something else to do? I mean, we both love you, but we have some private talking to do.

The tiny shoulders reared back and Gram wheeled around. I can always find something to do when I'm not wanted. Teddy detected a twinkle in Gram's caustic words. Okay, my little Teddy Bear, let's get busy. He collected the box of spike nails and the four-pound hammer and headed for the south pasture. They worked together, reassembling the fence and replacing logs that were too far gone.

How am I ever going to repay you for all this work? Teddy asked after a while.

Brand flashed a joyful smile. What a short memory you have. You already repaid me, or should I say, Brutus and Caesar paid your debt?

That wasn't anything. I took only a couple of hours. I plan to pay hour for hour. Not that my hours are worth as much as yours, since you're so much stronger.

Well, I have an idea. Why don't we have an instant replay of our dinner out the other night? He hesitated. Minus Gram?

Sure, I'd like that. And Gram wouldn't mind a bit. Although she told me several weeks ago that she's in love with you.

She didn't mean it.

Well, not like me. Teddy gasped. *What had she just said? Maybe Brand would not notice.*

But Brand did notice. He jerked upright and the log he was holding dropped to the ground. His brown eyes shot stars. So, Teddy Bear, you're in love with me, huh?

Teddy's face burned. Never had it felt so hot. I meant like I would you know she's older.

Brand took her in his arms and held her tenderly. His lips brushed hers. I know she's older, but that wasn't what you said. He pulled away and looked into her eyes, laughing. Teddy Bear, I was going to ask you to marry me the night we went to Cyrano's. He lowered his head and proceeded to kiss her thoroughly. When he released her they both breathed in ragged gasps. But I don't see how I can wait that long. I want to marry you, and soon, my little love.

They sat down on the ground to talk. Somehow she had to make sure he was exactly what he appeared. You're way ahead of yourself, Teddy said. We don't even know each other. I may have some deep dark secret in my past and for all I know, you may have a whole closet full of skeletons.

Brand quieted and became serious. I already have yours figured out, and I don't have any, so what's to learn?

Mine? What do you have figured out about me?

Your mother died when you were born? That's why Gram named you. I didn't push because I know it makes you sad. Your blue blue eyes are so beautiful when you're happy. They're pretty with tears in them, too, but I'd rather make them laugh.

Oh. Her mother. She had forgotten all about that. In a way that was a deep dark secret she did not want him to know about. But she would worry about that another time. Right now, she must not be diverted. She had to learn where he got the money to buy his ranch. What I was trying to do, was find out if you had some secret in your past that we should talk about.

He nodded. Okay. No, I don't have any secrets you should know. Satisfied?

What about any that I shouldn't know?

He studied her face a moment. Are you asking about the women in my life?

If there were any you want to tell me about.

He shook his head. His sun-streaked hair fluffed back and forth, looking so soft and bouncy that Teddy wanted to run her fingers through it and forget all about skeletons.

One thing I've wondered about where did you dig up enough money to buy your ranch? That's a lot of wampum for a guy your age.

For a fraction of a second he looked stricken, then recovered. Well, he drawled, I've been digging a good long time. Sure enough, after I kept at it long enough, I found the money.

But where, Brand?

He looked mysteriously. In a secret place where no one else on God's green earth could look.

Teddy watched Brand's face and waited. But he did not say anymore. Okay, buster, she said, mimicking Gram's gravelly voice, get to work if you expect a paycheck on Friday.

They laughed and went back to work. But Teddy did not feel quite satisfied. One thing was certain. If he had done something so terrible as robbing a bank he would tell her at this point in their relationship. Wait! What was she thinking? Of course, he would not. Anyone who would rob a bank would not hesitate to lie about it. She would have to ask him point blank and watch his face. But what a horrible thing to ask a man who had just proposed marriage.

She decided to forget the whole thing and just enjoy the new relationship for a while. Her first love. They continued repairing fences together for the next three days and enjoyed it as much as though they were on wild and romantic excursions together.

Then, one evening, Lynden called sounding a lot less than friendly. You'd better read the paper tonight.

I always read the paper, Lynden. Is there something you want me to see?

Yeah. On the inside of the front page. It's coming into the open, Teddy. A loud crash, then a dial tone told Teddy he had finished the conversation.

What a rude pig, Teddy said aloud, reaching for the evening paper. She opened it to the second page and folded it over so she would be sure to find the article. She already knew what it was and it did not take long to find, nor to read. Just a small item about the not-so-recent bank robbery, stating the date, the details of the robbery, a description of the man, the rig he escaped in a black 1984 truck with a winch in front and that the Eugene police department had reason to believe the man had settled down in the Bend area.

Teddy dropped the paper on the floor and collapsed on the couch, trembling. The description matched Brand right down to the Stetson he always wore. And the description of the truck sounded exactly like the one Brand drove around the ranch. She lay there, trying not to think, until Gram came in and found her. Then, she gathered up the paper and showed it to the old lady.

After reading the article through, Gram sat down on the couch and gathered the top half of Teddy's five-foot, eight-inch frame into her arms as though she were still a baby. I'm sorry, kitten, she crooned, rocking back and forth. It isn't a nice situation, but you're going to have to find out. Why don't you show him the paper and tell him about Lynden's insinuation?

Teddy nodded. I'll have to do that. I'll just have to. She rounded up the scissors and cut out the notice. Twenty minutes later, the now familiar attack on the door jolted both women.

Hey, do I have a great idea! Brand said, pulling off his boots and hurrying to the bathroom to wash his hands. Then he took Teddy into his arms for a gently, but thorough, kiss. He draped an arm over her shoulder and steered her back to the kitchen where Gram still sat. He leaned over and kissed the old woman on her wrinkled cheek. How's my favorite Gram this evening? he whispered into her ear.

She reached up a small hand and imprisoned his larger one on her shoulder. Flattery will get you everywhere, she said.

Brand dropped to the couch and patted the place beside him. When Teddy complied, he continued. I have to go visit my folks this weekend and I want you to go along. His eyes never left hers. What do you think? he finally asked.

What did she think? It sounded exactly like the opportunity she had been waiting for. Surely she could not spend a weekend with Brand s family without finding out something about his history, good or bad. And she would be able to postpone confronting him with her clipping until after the trip.