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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

BRENDA  
JACKSON

THE REAL THING



A NEW WESTMORELAND NOVEL

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\* \* \*

*The Real Thing* is part of The Westmorelands series:

A family bound by loyalty...and love!

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\* \* \*

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Dear Reader,

I can't believe I'm writing about one of those notorious Westmorelands—one of the last four in the Denver Series. When I first introduced the twins—Adrian and Aidan, Bailey and Bane—I understood the pain that motivated them to create havoc in their wake. And I knew by the time I wrote their stories they would have gotten older, improved their attitude and behavior. I also knew the person with which they chose to share their life would appreciate everything about them, and help any additional healing that was needed in their life.

I chose Trinity for Adrian Westmoreland because she was headstrong, independent. What she thought she wanted most out of life was a medical career and to live in a small town. It took Adrian Westmoreland to show her that all your wants and desires mean nothing unless you can share them with the person you truly love.

I hope you enjoy this story about Adrian and Trinity.

Happy Reading!

Brenda Jackson

BRENDA  
JACKSON

# THE REAL THING

If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as “unsold and destroyed” to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this “stripped book.”

To the love of my life, Gerald Jackson, Sr.  
To my readers  
who continue to inspire me to reach higher heights.

To my family—  
the Hawks, Streeters and Randolphins who continue to support me  
in all my endeavors. I couldn't ask to be a part of a better family.

For we cannot but speak the things  
which we have seen and heard.

—Acts 4:20 NKJV

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THE REAL THING

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## BRENDA JACKSON

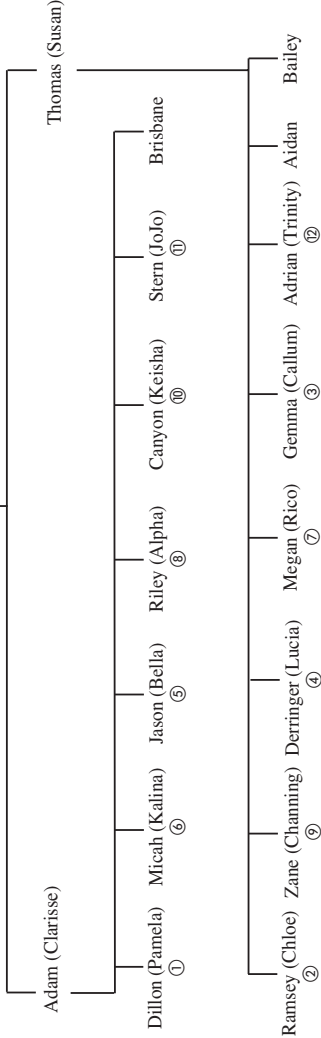
is a die "heart" romantic who married her childhood sweetheart and still proudly wears the "going steady" ring he gave her when she was fifteen. Because she believes in the power of love, Brenda's stories always have happy endings. In her real-life love story, Brenda and her husband of more than forty years live in Jacksonville, Florida, and have two sons.

A *New York Times* bestselling author of more than seventy-five romance titles, Brenda is a recent retiree who now divides her time between family, writing and traveling with Gerald. You may write Brenda at P.O. Box 28267, Jacksonville, Florida 32226, by email at [WriterBJackson@aol.com](mailto:WriterBJackson@aol.com) or visit her website at [www.brendajackson.net](http://www.brendajackson.net).

# THE DENVER WESTMORELAND AND FAMILY TREE

Raphel and Gemma Westmoreland

Stern Westmoreland (Paula Bailey)



- ① *Westmoreland's Way*
- ② *Hot Westmoreland Nights*
- ③ *What a Westmoreland Wants*
- ④ *A Wife for a Westmoreland*
- ⑤ *The Proposal*

- ⑥ *Feeling the Heat*
- ⑦ *Texas Wild*
- ⑧ *One Winter's Night*
- ⑨ *Zane*
- ⑩ *Canyon*

- ⑪ *Stern*
- ⑫ *The Real Thing*

# One

“I understand you’re in a jam and might need my help.”

*In a jam* was putting it mildly, Trinity Matthews thought, looking across the table at Adrian Westmoreland.

If only what he’d said wasn’t true. And...if only Adrian wasn’t so good-looking. Then thinking about what she needed him to do wouldn’t be so hard.

When she and Adrian had first met, last year at his cousin Riley’s wedding, he had been standing in a group of Westmoreland men. She had sized up his brothers and cousins, but had definitely noticed Adrian standing beside his identical twin brother, Aidan.

Trinity had found out years ago, when her sister Tara had married Thorn Westmoreland, that all Westmoreland men were eye candy of the most delectable kind. Therefore, she hadn’t really been surprised to discover that Thorn’s cousins from Denver had a lot of the same traits—handsome facial features, tall height, a hard-muscled body and an aura of primal masculinity.

But she’d never thought she’d be in a position to date one of those men—even if it was only a temporary ruse.

Trinity knew Tara had already given Adrian some de-



tails about the situation and now it was up to her to fill him in on the rest.

"Yes, I'm in a jam," Trinity said, releasing a frustrated breath. "I want to tell you about it, but first I want to thank you for agreeing to meet with me tonight."

He had suggested Laredo's Steak House. She had eaten here a few times, and the food was always excellent.

"No problem."

She paused, trying to ignore how the deep, husky sound of his voice stirred her already nervous stomach. "My goal," she began, "is to complete my residency at Denver Memorial and return to Bunnell, Florida, and work beside my father and brothers in their medical practice. That goal is being threatened by another physician, Dr. Casey Belvedere. He's a respected surgeon here in Denver. He—"

"Wants you."

Trinity's heart skipped a beat. Another Westmoreland trait she'd discovered: they didn't believe in mincing words.

"Yes. He wants an affair. I've done nothing to encourage his advances or to give him the impression I'm interested. I even lied and told him I was already involved with someone, but he won't let up. Now it's more than annoying. He's hinted that if I don't go along with it, he'll make my life at the hospital difficult."

She pushed her plate aside and took a sip of her wine. "I brought his unwanted advances to the attention of the top hospital administrator, and he's more or less dismissed my claim. Dr. Belvedere's family is well known in the city. Big philanthropists, I understand. Presently, the Belvederes are building a children's wing at the hospital that will bear their name. It's my guess that the hospital administrator feels that now is not the time to make waves with any of the Belvederes. He said I need to pick my battles carefully, and this is one I might not want to take on."

She paused. "So I came up with a plan." She chuckled

softly. “Let me rephrase that. Tara came up with the plan after I told her what was going on. It seems that she faced a similar situation when she was doing her residency in Kentucky. The only difference was that the hospital administrator supported her and made sure the doctor was released of his duties. I don’t have that kind of support here because of the Belvedere name.”

Adrian didn’t say anything for a few moments. He broke eye contact with her and stared down into his glass of wine. Trinity couldn’t help but wonder what he was thinking.

He looked back at her. “There is another solution to your problem, you know.”

She lifted a brow. “There is?”

“You did say he’s a surgeon, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then I could break his hands so he’ll never be able to use them in an operating room again.”

She stared wide-eyed at him for a couple of seconds before leaning forward. “You’re joking, right?”

“No. I am not joking. I’m dead serious.”

She leaned back as she studied his features. They were etched with ruthlessness and his dark eyes were filled with callousness. It was only then that Trinity remembered Tara’s tales about the twins, their baby sister, Bailey, and their younger cousin Bane. According to Tara, those four were the holy terrors of Denver while growing up and got into all kinds of trouble—malicious and otherwise.

But that was years ago. Now Bane was a navy SEAL, the twins were both Harvard graduates—Adrian obtained his PhD in engineering and Aidan completed medical school—and Bailey, the youngest of the four, was presently working on her MBA. However, it was quite obvious to Trinity that behind Adrian Westmoreland’s chiseled good looks, irresistible charm and PhD was a man who could return to his old ways if the need arose.

"I don't think we need to go that far," she said, swallowing. "Like Tara suggested, we can pretend to be lovers and hope that works."

"If that's how you prefer handling it."

"Yes. And you don't have a problem going along with it? Foregoing dating other women for a while?"

He pushed his plate aside and leaned back in his chair. "Nope. I don't have a problem going along with it. Putting my social life on hold until this matter is resolved will be no big deal."

Trinity released a relieved sigh. She had heard that since he'd returned to Denver to work as one of the CEOs at his family-owned business, Blue Ridge Land Management, Adrian had acquired a very active social life. There weren't many single Westmoreland men left in town. In fact, he was the only one. His cousin Stern was engaged to be married in a few months; Bane was away in the navy and Aidan was practicing medicine at a hospital in North Carolina. All the other Westmoreland men had married. Adrian would definitely be a catch for any woman. And they were coming after him from every direction, determined to hook a Westmoreland man; she'd heard he was having the time of his life letting them try.

Trinity was grateful she wasn't interested. The only reason she and Adrian were meeting was that she needed his help to pull off her plan. In fact, this was the first time they had seen each other since she'd moved to Denver eight months ago. She'd known when she accepted the internship at Denver Memorial last year that a slew of her sister's Westmoreland cousins-in-law lived here. She had met most of them at Riley's wedding. But most lived in a part of Denver referred to as Westmoreland Country and she lived in town. Though she had heard that when Adrian returned to Denver he had taken a place in town instead of

moving to his family's homestead, more for privacy than anything else.

"I think we should put our plan into action now," he said, breaking into her thoughts.

He surprised her further when he took her hand in his and brought it to his lips while staring deeply into her eyes. She tried to ignore the intense fluttering in her stomach caused by his lips brushing against her skin.

"Why are you so anxious to begin?"

"It's simply a matter of timing," he said, bringing her hand to his lips yet again. "Don't look now but Dr. Casey Belvedere just walked in. He's seen us and is looking over here."

*Let the show begin.*

Adrian continued to stare deep into Trinity's eyes, sensing her nervousness. Although she had gone along with Tara's suggestion, he had a feeling she wasn't 100 percent on board with the idea of pretending to be his lover.

Although Dr. Belvedere was going about his pursuit all wrong, Adrian could understand the man wanting her. Hell, what man in his right mind wouldn't? Like her sister, Tara, Trinity was an incredibly beautiful woman. Ravishing didn't even come close to describing her.

When he'd first met Tara, years ago, the first thing out of his mouth was to ask if she had any sisters. Tara had smiled and replied, yes, she had a sister who was a senior in high school with plans to go to college to become a doctor.

Jeez. Had it been that long ago? He recalled the reaction of every single man at Riley's wedding when Trinity had showed up with Thorn and Tara. That's when he'd heard she would be moving to Denver for two years to work at the hospital.

"Are you sure it's him?" Trinity asked.

"Pretty positive," he said, studying her features. She

had creamy mahogany-colored skin, silky black hair that hung to her shoulders and the most gorgeous pair of light brown eyes he'd ever seen. "And it's just the way I planned it," he said.

She arched a brow. "The way you planned it?"

"Yes. After Tara called and told me about her idea, I decided to start right away. I found out from a reliable source that Belvedere frequents this place quite a bit, especially on Thursday nights."

"So that's why you suggested we have dinner here tonight?" she asked.

"Yes, that's the reason. The plan is for him to see us together, right?"

"Yes. I just wasn't prepared to run into him tonight. Hopefully all it will take is for him to see us together and—"

"Back off? Don't bank on that. The man wants you and, for some reason, he feels he has every right to have you. Getting him to leave you alone won't be easy. I still think I should just break his damn hands and be through with it."

"No."

He shrugged. "Your call. Now we should really do something to get his attention."

"What?"

"This." Adrian leaned in and kissed her.

Trinity was certain it was supposed to be a mere brush across the lips, but like magnets their mouths locked, fusing in passion so quickly that it consumed her senses.

To Trinity's way of thinking, the kiss had a potency that had her insides begging for more. Every part of her urged her to make sure this kiss didn't end anytime soon. But the clinking of dishes and silverware made her remember where they were and what they were doing. She slowly eased her mouth away from Adrian's.

She let out a slow breath. "I have a feeling that did more than get his attention. It might have pissed him off."

Adrian smiled. "Who cares? You're with me now and he won't do anything stupid. I dare him."

He motioned for the waiter to bring their check. "I think we've done enough playacting tonight," he said smoothly. "Ready to leave?"

"Yes."

Moments after taking care of their dinner bill, Adrian took Trinity's hand in his and led her out of the restaurant.

## Two

“So how did things go with Trinity last night?”

Adrian glanced up to see his cousin Dillon. The business meeting Dillon had called that morning at Blue Ridge Land Management had ended and everyone had filed out, leaving him and Dillon alone.

He'd never thought of Dillon as a business tycoon until Adrian had returned home to work for the company his family owned. That's when he got to see his Denver cousin in action, wheeling and dealing to maintain Blue Ridge's ranking as a Fortune 500 company. Adrian had always just thought of him as Dillon, the man who'd kept the family together after a horrific tragedy.

Adrian's parents, as well as his uncle and aunt, had died in a plane crash more than twenty years ago, leaving Dillon, who was the oldest cousin, and Adrian's oldest brother, Ramsey, in charge of keeping the family of fifteen Westmorelands together. It hadn't been easy, and Adrian would be the first to confess that he, Aidan, Bane and Bailey, the youngest four, had deliberately made things hard. Coming home from school one day to be told they'd lost the four people who had meant the most to them had been worse than difficult. They hadn't handled their grief well. They

had rebelled in ways Adrian was now ashamed of. But Dillon, Ramsey and the other family members hadn't given up on them, even when they truly should have. For that reason and many others, Adrian deeply loved his family. Especially Dillon, who had taken on the State of Colorado when it had tried to force the youngest four into foster homes.

"Things went well, I think," Adrian said, not wondering how Dillon knew about the dinner date with Trinity even when Adrian hadn't mentioned anything about it. Dillon spoke to their Atlanta cousins on a regular basis, especially Thorn Westmoreland. Adrian figured Tara had mentioned the plan to Thorn and he had passed the information on to Dillon.

"Glad to hear it," Dillon said, gathering up his papers. "Hopefully it will work. Even so, I personally have a problem with the hospital administrator not doing anything about Dr. Belvedere. I don't give a damn how much money his family has or that they have a wing bearing their name under construction at the hospital. Sexual harassment is sexual harassment, and it's something no one should have to tolerate. What's happening to Trinity shouldn't happen to anyone."

Adrian agreed. If he had anything to do with it, Trinity wouldn't have to tolerate it. "We'll give Tara's idea a shot and if it doesn't work, then—"

"Then the Westmorelands will handle it, Adrian, the right way...with the law on our side. I don't want you doing anything that will get you in trouble. Those days are over."

Adrian didn't say anything as he remembered *those* days. "I won't do anything to get into trouble." He figured it was best not to say those days were completely over, especially after the suggestion he'd made to Trinity about breaking Belvedere's hands...something he'd been dead serious about. "Do you know anyone in the Belvedere family?" he asked Dillon.



“Dr. Belvedere’s older brother Roger and I are on the boards of directors of a couple of major businesses in town, but we aren’t exactly friends. He’s arrogant, a little on the snobbish side. I heard it runs in the family.”

“Too bad,” Adrian said, rising from his chair.

“The Belvedere family made their money in the food industry, namely dairy products. I understand Roger has political aspirations and will announce his run for governor next month.”

“I wish him the best. It’s his brother Casey that I have a problem with,” Adrian said, heading toward the door. “I’ll see you later.”

An hour later Adrian had finished an important report his cousin Canyon needed. Both Canyon and another cousin, Stern, were company attorneys. So far, Adrian was the only one from his parents’ side of the Westmoreland tree who worked for Blue Ridge, the company founded by his and Dillon’s father more than forty years ago.

At present there were fifteen Denver Westmorelands of his generation. His parents, Thomas and Susan Westmoreland, had had eight kids: five boys—Ramsey, Zane, Derringer and the twins, Adrian and Aidan—and three girls—Megan, Gemma and Bailey.

His uncle Adam and aunt Clarisse had had seven sons: Dillon, Micah, Jason, Riley, Canyon, Stern and Bane. The family was a close-knit one and usually got together on Friday nights at Dillon’s place for a chow-down, where they ate good food and caught up on family matters. Dates had kept Adrian from attending the last two, but now, since he was *supposedly* involved with Trinity, his dating days were over for a while.

He tossed an ink pen on his desk before leaning back in his chair. For the umpteenth time that day he was reminded of the kiss he’d shared with Trinity last night. A kiss he had taken before she’d been aware he was about to

do so. Adrian didn't have to wonder what had driven him. He could try to convince himself he'd only done it to rile Belvedere, but Adrian knew it was about more than that.

It all started when he had arrived at Trinity's place to pick her up. She must have been watching for him out the window of the house she was leasing because after he'd pulled into her driveway, before he could get out of his car, she had opened the door and strolled down the walk toward him.

He'd had to fight to keep his predatory smile from showing a full set of teeth. Damn, she had looked good. He could say it was the pretty, paisley print maxi dress that swirled around her ankles as she'd walked, or the blue stilettos and matching purse. He could say it was the way she'd worn her hair down to her shoulders, emphasizing gorgeous facial bones. Whatever it was, she had looked even more appealing than when he'd seen her at Riley and Alpha's wedding.

Adrian sucked in a sharp breath as more memories swept through his mind. Never had a woman's mouth tasted so delectable, so irresistibly sweet. She had been pretty quiet on the drive back to her place last night. Just as well, since his body had been on fire for her. Big mistake. How was he supposed to stop Belvedere from getting his hands on her when all he could think about was getting his own hands on her?

He stood and stretched his tall frame. After shoving his hands into the pockets of his pants, he walked over to the window and looked out at downtown Denver. When Tara had called him with the idea of pretending to be Trinity's lover, he had shrugged, thinking no problem, no big deal. A piece of cake. What he hadn't counted on was his own attraction to Trinity. It was taking over his thoughts. And that wasn't good.

Frustrated, he rubbed his hand down his face. He had to have more control. She wasn't the first woman he'd been

attracted to and she wouldn't be the last. Taking another deep breath, he glanced at his watch. He was having dinner at McKays with Bailey and figured he would surprise her this time by being on time.

He had one more file to read, which wouldn't take long. Then, before leaving for the day, he would call Trinity to see how things had gone at work. He wanted to make sure Belvedere hadn't caused her any grief about seeing them together last night at Laredo's.

"So how did things go last night with Adrian?"

Trinity plopped down on the sofa in her living room after a long day at work. She'd figured she would hear from Tara sooner or later, who would want details.

"Great! We got to know each other while eating a delicious steak dinner. And Dr. Belvedere was off today, which was a good thing, given that he saw me and Adrian together last night at dinner."

"He did?"

"Yes."

"Coincidence or planned?"

"Planned. It seemed Adrian didn't waste time. Once he had agreed with your suggestion he found out where Belvedere liked to hang out and suggested we go there. Only thing, Adrian didn't tell me about his plan beforehand and when Dr. Belvedere walked in, I was unprepared."

"I can imagine. But you do want to bring this situation to a conclusion as quickly as possible, right?"

"Yes. But..."

"But what?"

"I hadn't counted on a few things."

"A few things like what, Trinity?"

Trinity nibbled on her bottom lip, trying to decide how much information she should share with her sister. Although there was a ten-year difference in their ages, they

had always been close. Even when Tara had left home for college and medical school, Trinity had known her sister would return home often. After all, Derrick Hayes—the man Tara had dated since high school and had been engaged to marry—lived there.

But then came the awful day of Tara's wedding. Her sister had looked beautiful. She'd walked down the aisle on their father's arm looking as radiant as any bride could look. Trinity had been in her early teens and seeing Tara in such a beautiful gown had made her dream of her own wedding day.

But then, before the preacher could get things started, Derrick had stopped the wedding. In front of everyone, he'd stated that he couldn't go through with the ceremony because he didn't love Tara. He loved Danielle, Tara's best friend and maid of honor.

Trinity would never forget the hurt, pain and humiliation she'd seen in her sister's eyes and the tears that had flowed down Tara's cheeks when Derrick took Danielle's hand and the two of them raced happily out of the church, leaving Tara standing behind.

That night Tara had left Bunnell, and it had been two years before she had returned. And when she had, motorcycle celebrity Thorn Westmoreland had given her a public proposal the town was still talking about ten years later. Trinity's brother-in-law had somewhat restored her faith in men. He was the best, and she knew that he loved her sister deeply.

"Trinity? A few things like what?" Tara repeated, pulling Trinity's concentration back to the present.

"Nothing, other than I wish Adrian wasn't so darn attractive. You wouldn't believe the number of women staring at him last night."

She decided not to mention the fact that he had kissed her right in front of a few of those women, although he'd

done it for Dr. Belvedere's benefit. She hadn't expected the kiss and she had gone to bed last night thinking about it. Today things hadn't been much better. Burying herself in work hadn't helped her forget.

"Yes, he is definitely handsome. Most Westmoreland men are. And don't worry about other women. He's single, but now that he has agreed to pretend to be your boyfriend, he's going to give you all his attention."

Trinity sighed. In a way, that's what she was afraid of. "Adrian doesn't think Dr. Belvedere seeing us together once will do it."

"Probably not, especially if the man is obsessed with having you. From what you've told me, it sounds like he is."

Trinity didn't say anything for a minute. "Well, I hope he gets the message because Adrian is serious about making sure the plan works."

"Good. I think you're in good hands."

Trinity wasn't so sure that was a positive thing, especially when she remembered the number of times last night she had thought about Adrian's hands. He had beautiful fingers, long and lean. She had wondered more than once how those fingers would feel stroking her skin.

"Trinity?"

She blinked, realizing she had been daydreaming. "Yes?"

"You're still keeping that journal, right?"

Tara had suggested she keep a record of each and every time Casey Belvedere made unwanted advances toward her. "Yes, I'm still keeping the journal."

"Good. Don't worry about anything. I wouldn't have suggested Adrian if I didn't believe he would be the right one to help handle your business."

"I know. I know. But..."

"But what?"

Trinity breathed in deeply. "But nothing. I just hope your idea eventually works."

"Me, too. And if it doesn't we move to plan B."

Trinity lifted a brow. "What's plan B?"

"I haven't thought of it yet."

She couldn't help but laugh. She loved her big sister and appreciated Tara being there for her right now. "Hopefully, there won't have to be a plan B."

"Let's keep hoping. In the meantime, just enjoy Adrian. He's a fun guy and you haven't had any fun lately. I know how it is, going through residency. Been there. Done that. You can only take so much and do so much. We're doctors, not miracle workers, Trinity. We have lives, too, and everybody needs downtime. Stress can kill—remember that."

"I will."

A few moments later she had ended her call with Tara and was about to head for the kitchen to put together a salad for dinner when her cell phone rang again. Trinity's heart-beat quickened when she saw it was Adrian.

What was that shiver about, the one that had just passed through her whole body? She frowned, wondering what was wrong with her. Why was she reacting this way to his phone call? It wasn't as if their affair was the real thing. Why did she feel the need to remind herself that it was only a sham for Dr. Belvedere's benefit?

She clicked on her phone. "Hello?"

"Hello, this is Adrian. How did things go at work today?"

She wished he didn't sound as good as he looked. Or that when he had arrived to pick her up for dinner last night, he'd not dressed as though he'd jumped right off the page of a men's magazine.

She had been ready to walk out the moment his car had pulled into her driveway. So there had been no reason for him to get out of his car to meet her halfway down the walkway. But he had done so, showing impeccable man-

ners by escorting her to his car and opening the door for her. However, it wasn't his manners the woman in her had appreciated the most. He was so tall she had to look up at him, into a pair of eyes and a face that had almost taken her breath away.

She sighed softly now as the memory rushed through her mind. Only then did she recall the question he had asked her.

"Today was okay, probably because Dr. Belvedere is off for the next two days so I didn't see him. I'm dreading Friday when he returns."

"Hopefully things won't be so bad. We'll keep up our charade until he accepts the fact that you already have a man."

*A pretend man but, oh, what a man*, she thought to herself. "Do you think after seeing us together last night he believes we're an item?"

"Oh, I'm sure he probably believes it. But for him to accept it is a whole other story. It's my guess that he won't."

Trinity nibbled on her bottom lip. "I hope you're wrong."

"I hope I'm wrong, as well. Enjoy tomorrow and we'll see what happens on Friday. Just to be on the safe side, let's plan a date for the weekend. How about a show Saturday night?"

"A show?"

"Yes, one of those live shows at the Dunning Theater. A real casual affair."

She thought about what Tara had said, about Trinity getting out more and not working so hard. Besides, she and Adrian needed to be seen around town together as much as possible for Dr. Belvedere to get the message. "Do you think Belvedere will be attending the show, as well?"

He chuckled, and Trinity's skin reacted to the sound. Goose bumps formed on her arm. "Not sure, but it doesn't matter. The more we're seen together by others, the more

believable our story will be. So are you good for Saturday night?"

"Yes. It just so happens I'm off this weekend."

"Good. I'll pick you up around seven."



## Three

*This is just a pretend date, so why am I getting all worked up over it?* Trinity asked herself as she threw yet another outfit from her closet across her bed.

So far, just like all the other outfits she'd given the boot, it was either too dressy, not dressy enough or just plain boring. Frustrated, she ran her hands through her hair, wishing she had her sister's gift for fashion. Whenever Tara and Thorn went out on the town they were decked out to the nines and always looked good together. But even before Tara had become Mrs. Thorn Westmoreland, people had said she looked more like a model than a pediatrician.

Trinity glanced at her watch. Only an hour before Adrian arrived and she had yet to find an outfit she liked. Who was she kidding? A part of her was hoping that whatever she liked he would like, as well. She seldom dated and now, thanks to Casey Belvedere, it was being forced upon her.

Maybe she should call Adrian and cancel. Immediately she dismissed the idea from her mind. So far the week had been going smoothly. Dr. Belvedere had been off, even on Friday. It seemed everyone had breathed a lot easier, able to be attentive but relaxed. No one had had to look over their shoulders, dreading the moment when Belvedere showed

his face. She wasn't the only one who thought he was a pain in the rear end.

Deciding she would take Tara's advice and have fun for a change, Trinity settled on a pair of jeans and a green pullover sweater. Giving both a nod of approval, she placed them across the chair. It was the middle of March and back home in Florida people were strutting around in tank tops and blouses. But in Denver everyone was still wearing winter clothes.

Trinity doubted she would ever get used to this weather.

"Which is why getting through your residency is a must," she mumbled to herself as she headed for the bathroom to take a shower. "Then you can leave and head back to Florida where you belong."

A short while later she had finished her shower, dressed and placed light makeup on her face. She smiled as she looked at herself in the mirror, satisfied with what she saw. No telling how many dates Adrian was giving up by pretending to be her man. The least she could do was make sure she looked worth his time and effort in helping her out.

She glanced at her watch. She had twenty minutes, and the last thing she had to do was her hair. She was about to pull the curling iron from a drawer when her cell phone rang, and she saw it was Adrian. She wondered if he was calling to say something had come up and he couldn't take her out after all.

"Hello?"

"Trinity?"

She ignored the sensations floating around her stomach and the thought of how good he sounded whenever he pronounced her name. "Yes?"

"I'm here."

She lifted a brow. "Where?"

"At your front door."

"Oh." She swallowed. "You're early."

“Is that a problem?”

She glanced at herself in the mirror. “I haven’t done my hair yet.”

“I have three sisters, so I understand. I can wait...inside.”

Trinity swallowed again. Of course he would expect to wait inside. To have him wait outside in the car for her would be downright tacky. “Okay, I’m on my way to the door.”

Glad she was at least fully dressed, she left her bedroom and moved toward the door despising the tingle that continued to sweep through her body. “Get a grip, girl. It’s just Adrian. He’s almost family,” she told herself.

But when she opened the door the thought that quickly went through her mind was, *Scratch the thought he’s almost family.*

As her gaze swept across him from top to bottom, she willed herself not to react to what she saw and failed miserably. She was mesmerized. If she thought he’d looked good in his business suit days ago, tonight his manliness was showing to the nth degree. There was just something about a tall, handsome man in a pair of jeans, white shirt and dark brown corduroy blazer. The Stetson on his head only added to the eye-candy effect.

“Now I see what you mean, so please do something with your hair.”

His comment had her reaching for the thick strands that flowed past her shoulders. When she saw the teasing smile on his lips, she couldn’t help but smile back as she stepped aside to let him in. “That bad?”

“No. There’s nothing wrong with your hair. It looks great.”

She rolled her eyes as she led him to her living room. “There’re no curls in it.”

He chuckled. “Curls aren’t everything. Trust me, I know. Like I said, I have three sisters.”

And she knew his sisters and liked them immensely. “Would you like something to drink while you wait?”

“Um, what do you have?”

“Soda, beer, wine and lemonade.”

“I’ll take a soda.”

“One soda coming up,” she said, walking off, and although she was tempted to do so, she didn’t look back.

When she opened the refrigerator, the blast of cold air cooled her somewhat; she couldn’t believe she’d actually gotten hot just looking at him. Closing the refrigerator, she paused. Some sort of raw, erotic power had emanated off him and she inwardly admitted that Adrian Westmoreland was an astonishing specimen of masculinity. The kind that made her want to lick him all over.

“Nice place.”

She jerked around to find the object of her intense desire standing in the middle of her kitchen. For some reason he appeared taller, bigger than life and even sexier. “As you can see there’s not much to it. It was either get a bigger place and share it with someone or get this one, which I can afford on my own.”

He nodded. “It suits you.”

She handed him the drink and their hands touched slightly. She hoped he hadn’t noticed the tremble that passed through her with the exchange. “In what way?”

His gaze gave her body a timeless sweep and she felt her heartbeat quicken. His eyes returned to hers as he took his glass. “Nice. Tidy. Perfect coloring with everything blending together rather nicely.”

Was she imagining things or had Adrian’s eyes darkened to a deep, rich chocolate? And was his comparison of her to her home meant to be flirtatious? “Enjoy your soda while I work on my hair.”

“Need help?”

She smiled as she quickly headed out of the kitchen. She

didn't want to imagine how his hands would feel on her head. "No, thanks. I can manage."

Adrian took a long sip of his drink as he watched Trinity leave her kitchen. Nice-looking backside, he thought, and then wished he hadn't. Tara would skin him alive if he made a play for her sister. And if Tara told Thorn, there would be no hope for Adrian since everybody knew Thorn was a man not to toy with.

*Then why did you flirt with Trinity just now?* he asked himself, taking another sip. *You're only asking for trouble. Your job is to pretend the two of you are lovers and not lust after her like some horny ass. You've already crossed the line with that kiss—don't make matters worse.*

He took another sip of his soda. What could be worse than wanting a woman and not being able to have her? A smile touched his lips, thinking that Dr. Casey Belvedere would soon find out.

"I'm ready."

He turned slightly and almost choked on the liquid he'd just sipped. She'd used one of those styling-irons to put curls in her hair at the ends. The style looked good on her. She looked good. All over. Top to bottom.

"You look nice."

"Thanks. You look nice yourself. You didn't say what show we'll be seeing."

"I didn't? Then I guess it will be a surprise. I talked to Tara earlier today and asked her about your favorite dessert. She told me about your fascination with strawberry cheesecake, so I made arrangements for us to stop for cheesecake and coffee on our way back."

"That's thoughtful of you."

"I'm a thoughtful person. You ready to go?"

"Yes."

He placed the empty glass on the counter and crossed the room to link his arm with hers. "Then let's go."

"You're driving a different car tonight," Trinity noted when they reached the sleek and sassy vehicle parked in her driveway. The night he'd taken her to dinner he'd been driving a black Lexus sedan. Tonight he was in a sporty candy-apple-red Lexus two-seater convertible.

"And I own neither. A good friend owns a Lexus dealership in town and when I returned to Denver he sold me a Lexus SUV. But he figures as much as I'm seen around town with the ladies that he might as well let me use any car off his lot whenever I go out on a date. He's convinced showcasing his cars around town is good publicity. And it has paid off. Several people have come into his dealership to buy his cars."

"And I bet most were women."

He chuckled as he opened the door for her. "Now why would you think that?"

"A hunch. Am I right?"

"Possibly."

"Go ahead and admit it. It's okay. I've heard all about your dating history," she said, buckling her seat belt.

"Have you?" he asked, leaning against the open car door.

"Yes."

"From who?"

"I'd rather not disclose my sources."

"And you think they're reliable?" he asked.

"I see no reason why they shouldn't be."

He shrugged before closing the door. She watched him sprint around the front to the driver's side to get in. He buckled his own seat belt, but before pressing the key switch he glanced over at her. "There's only one reliable source when it comes to me, Trinity."

She lifted a brow. "And who might that be?"

He pointed a finger at his chest. "Me. Feel free to ask me anything you want...within reason."

She smiled. "Then here's my first question. More women have purchased cars from your friend than men, right?"

He returned her smile as he backed out of her driveway. "I'll admit that they have."

"I'm not surprised."

"Why not?"

"Several reasons," she said, noticing the smooth sound of the car's engine as he drove down her street.

"State them."

She glanced over at him. He had brought the car to a stop at a traffic light. "I can see where some women would find you persuasive and lap up anything you say as gospel."

A smile she wouldn't categorize as *totally* conceited touched his lips. "You think so? You believe I might have that much influence?"

"Yes, but mind you, I said *some* women."

"What about you? Are you ready for a new car?"

She held his gaze. "Unless it's free, I'm not interested. A car payment is the last thing I need right now. The car I presently drive is just fine. It gets me from point A to point B and if I sing to it real nice, it might even make it to point C. I can't ask for anything more than that."

"You can but you won't."

His comment was right on the money but she wondered how he'd figured that out. "Why do you say that?"

The car was moving again and he didn't answer until when they reached another traffic light a few moments later. He looked over at her. "You're not the only one with sources. I understand that beneath those curls on your head is a very independent mind."

She shrugged as she broke away from his look to glance out the window. "I can't handle my business any other way. My parents raised all of us to be independent thinkers."

"Is that why you didn't go along with Tara's plan at first?"

She looked back at him. "You'll have to admit it's a little far-fetched."

"I look at it as a means to an end."

"I just hope it works."

"It will."

She was about to ask why he felt so certain when she noticed they had pulled up for valet parking. The building was beautiful and the architecture probably dated back to the eighteen hundreds. Freestanding, it stood as an immaculate building with a backdrop of mountains. "Nice."

"Glad you like it. It was an old hotel. Now it's been renovated, turned into a theater that has live shows. Pam's group is working on a production that will be performed here."

Trinity knew Dillon's wife, Pam, used to be a movie star who now owned an acting school in town. "That's wonderful."

"I think so, too. Her group is working hard with rehearsals and all. It will be their first show."

When they reached the ticket booth the clerk greeted Adrian by name. "Good evening, Mr. Westmoreland."

"Hello, Paul. I believe you're holding reserved tickets for me."

"Yes sir," the man said, handing Adrian an envelope. Adrian checked the contents before smiling at her. "We're a little early so we might as well grab a drink. They serve refreshments while we wait."

"Okay."

When they entered the huge room, Trinity glanced around. This area of the building was nicely decorated, as well.

"What would you like?" Adrian asked her.

"What are you drinking?"

"Beer."



"Then I'll take one, as well."

Adrian grabbed the attention of one of the waiters and gave him their order. It was then that a couple passed and Adrian said, "Roger? Is that you?"

A man who looked to be in his late thirties or early forties turned and gave Adrian a curious glance. "Yes, I'm Roger. But forgive me, I can't remember where we've met."

Adrian held out his hand. "Adrian Westmoreland. We've met through my brother Dillon," he lied, knowing the man probably wouldn't remember but would pretend that he did.

A huge smile appeared on the man's face as he accepted Adrian's handshake. "Oh, yes, of course. I remember now. And this is my wife Kathy," he said, introducing the woman with him.

Adrian shook her hand. He then turned to Trinity and smiled. "And this is a very *special* friend," he said. "Roger and Kathy, I'd like you to meet Dr. Trinity Matthews."

Trinity couldn't help wondering what was going on in that mind of Adrian's. She soon found out when he said, "Trinity, I'd like you to meet Roger and Kathy Belvedere."

Trinity forced herself not to blink in surprise as she shook the couple's hands. "Nice to meet you."

"Likewise," Roger said, smiling. "And where do you practice, doctor? I'm familiar with a number of hospitals in the city. In fact," he said, chuckling and then bragging, "my family is building a wing at Denver Memorial."

"That's where I work. I'm in pediatrics, so I'm familiar with the wing under construction. It's much needed and will be nice when it's finished," Trinity said.

Roger's smile widened. "Thanks. If you work at Denver Memorial then you must know my brother Casey. He's a surgeon there. I'm sure you've heard of Dr. Casey Belvedere."

Trinity fought to keep a straight face. "Yes, I know Dr. Belvedere."

“Then I must mention to him that Kathy and I ran into the two of you.”

“Yes, you do that,” Adrian said, smiling.

After the couple walked off, the waiter approached with their beers. Trinity looked over at Adrian. “You knew he was going to be here tonight, didn’t you?”

He looked at her. “Yes. And there’s no doubt in my mind he’ll mention seeing us to his brother.”

Trinity nodded as she took a sip of her beer. Tonight was just another strategic move in Adrian’s game plan. Why was she surprised...and sort of disappointed?

At that moment someone on a speaker announced that seating for the next show would start in fifteen minutes. As they finished their beers, she decided that regardless of the reason Adrian had brought her here, tonight she intended to enjoy herself.

## Four

As he'd planned, after the show Adrian took Trinity to Andrew's, a place known in Denver for having the best desserts. While enjoying strawberry cheesecake topped with vanilla ice cream, Adrian decided he liked hearing the sound of Trinity's voice.

She kept the conversation interesting by telling him about her family. Her father owned a medical practice and her mother worked as his nurse. Her two older brothers were doctors, as well, living in Bunnell.

She also talked about her college days and how she'd wanted to stick close to home, which was why she'd attended the local community college in Bunnell for two years before moving to Gainesville to attend the University of Florida. Although it was a college town, the city of Gainesville provided a small-town atmosphere. She'd enjoyed living there so much that she'd remained there for medical school.

She also told him how she preferred a small town to a big one, how she found Denver much too large and how she looked forward to finishing up her residency and moving back to Bunnell.

He leaned back in his chair after cleaning his plate, ad-

mitting the cake and ice cream had been delicious. "Aw, come on," he joked to Trinity. "Why don't you just come clean and admit that the real reason you want to hightail it back is because you have a guy waiting there for you."

She made a face. The way she scrunched her nose and pouted her lips was utterly cute. "That is totally not true... especially after what Derrick did to Tara. The last thing I'd have is a boyfriend that I believed would wait for me."

He had heard all about the Tara fiasco from one of his cousins, although he couldn't remember which one. He couldn't believe any man in his right mind would run off and leave someone as gorgeous as Tara Matthews Westmoreland standing in the middle of some church. What a fool.

"What happened to Tara has made you resentful and distrustful of giving your heart to a hometown guy?"

She shrugged her shoulders and unconsciously licked whipped cream off her fork. In an instant his stomach tightened. Sexual hunger stirred to life in his groin. He picked up his glass of water and almost drained it in one gulp.

"Worse than that. It taught me not to truly give my heart to any man, hometown or otherwise."

He studied her, seeing the seriousness behind the beautiful pair of eyes staring back at him. "But things worked out fine for Tara in the end, didn't they? She met Thorn."

He saw the slow smile replace her frown. "Yes, she did, and I'm glad. He's made her happy."

Adrian nodded. "So there are happy endings sometimes."

She finished off the last of her cake before saying, "Yes, sometimes, but not often enough for me to take a chance."

"So you don't ever intend to fall in love?"

"Not if I can help it. I told you what I want."

He nodded again. "To return to Bunnell and work alongside your father and brothers in their medical business."

"Yes."

He took another sip of his water when she moistened the top of her lip with the tip of her tongue. "What about your happiness?" he asked her, shifting slightly in his chair.

She lifted a brow. "My happiness?"

"Yes. Don't you want to have someone to grow old with?"

She turned the tables when she asked, "Don't you?"

He thought about the question. "I intend to date and enjoy life for as long as I can. I'm aware at some point I'll need to settle down, marry and have children, but at the moment there're enough Westmorelands handling that without me. It seemed every time I came home for spring break, I would have a wedding to attend or a new niece, nephew or second cousin being born."

"Speaking of cousins...mainly yours," she said as if to clarify. "I've heard the story of how the Denver Westmorelands connected with the Atlanta-based Westmorelands, but what about these other cousins that might be out there?"

He knew she was referring to the ongoing investigation by Megan's husband, Rico, who was a private investigator. "It seems my great-grandfather Raphel Westmoreland was involved with four women before marrying my great-grandmother Gemma. Three of the women have now been accounted for. It seemed none were his wives, although there's still one more to investigate for clarification."

He paused and then said, "Rico and Megan found out that one of the women, by the name of Clarice, had a baby by Raphel that he didn't know about. She died in a train derailment but not before she gave the child to another woman—a woman who'd lost her child and husband. A woman with the last name of Outlaw."

He could tell by the light in Trinity's eyes that she found what he'd told her fascinating. He understood. He was convinced that if there were any more Westmoreland kin out there, Rico would find them.

Adrian glanced at his watch. "It's still early yet. Is there anything else you want to do before I take you home?"

She glanced at her own watch. "Early? It's almost midnight."

He smiled. "Is it past your bedtime?"

"No."

"Then plan to enjoy the night. And I've got just the place."

"Where?"

"Come on and I'll show you."

A half hour later Trinity was convinced she needed her head examined. She looked down at herself and wondered how she had let Adrian talk her into this. Indoor mountain climbing. Seriously?

But here she was, decked out with climbing shoes, a harness, a rope and all the other things she needed to scale a man-made wall that looked too much like the real thing.

"Ready?"

She glanced over at Adrian who was standing beside her, decked out in his own climbing gear.

*Ready? He has to be kidding.*

She saw the excitement in his eyes and figured this was something he liked doing on a routine basis. But personally, she was not an outdoorsy kind of girl.

*So why did you allow him to talk you into it?*

It might have had everything to do with the way he had grabbed hold of her hand as he'd led her out of Andrew's and toward his car. The tingling sensation that erupted the moment his hand touched hers had seemed to pulverize her common sense. Or it could have been the smile that would creep onto his lips whenever he was on an adrenaline high. Darn, it was contagious.

He snapped his fingers in front of her face, making her realize she hadn't answered his question. "Hey, don't start

daydreaming on me now, Trinity. You need your full concentration for this."

She looked over at the fake mountain she was supposed to climb. He claimed this particular one was for beginners, but she had serious doubts about that. She glanced up at him. "I don't know about this, Adrian."

His smile widened and she felt the immediate pull in her stomach. "You can do this. You look physically fit enough."

She rolled her eyes. "Looks are deceiving."

"Then this will definitely get you in shape. But to be honest, I don't see where there needs to be improvement."

She swallowed. Had he just flirted with her for the second time that night? "So, have you ever climbed an outdoor mountain? The real thing?" she asked, rechecking the fit of her gloves.

"Sure. Plenty of times. I love doing it and you will, too."

She doubted it. Most people were probably in bed and here she was at one in the morning at some all-night indoor mountain climbing arena.

"Ready to try it?" Adrian asked, breaking into her thoughts.

"It's now or never, I suppose."

He smiled. "You'll do fine."

She wasn't sure about that, and did he *have* to be standing so close to her? "Okay, what do I do?"

"Just grab or step on each climbing hold located on the wooden boards as you work your way to the top."

She glanced up to the top and had to actually tilt her head back to see it. "This is my first time, Adrian. There's no way I'll make it that far up."

"You never know."

She did. She knew her limits...even when it concerned him. She was well aware that she was attracted to him just as she was well aware that it was an attraction that could get her into trouble if she didn't keep her sense about her.

Trinity moved toward the huge structure and proceeded to lift her leg. When she felt Adrian's hands on her backside, she jerked around and put her leg down. "What are you doing?"

"Giving you a boost. Don't you need one?"

She figured what she needed was her head examined. Had his intention been to give her a boost or to cop a feel? Unfortunately her backside didn't know the difference and it was still reacting to his touch. Heat had spiked in the area and was spreading all over.

"No, I don't need one, and watch your hands, Adrian. Keep them to yourself."

He gave her an innocent smile. "I am duly chastised. But honestly, I was only trying to help and was in no way trying to take advantage of a tempting opportunity."

"Whatever," she muttered, not believing him one bit. However, instead of belaboring the issue, she turned and started her climb, which wasn't easy.

Beginner's structure or no beginner's structure, it was meant to give a person a good workout. Why would anyone in their right mind want to do this for fun? she asked herself as she steadily and slowly moved up one climbing hold at a time. After each attempt she had to take a deep breath and silently pray for strength to continue. She had made it to the halfway point and was steadily moving higher.

"Looking good, Trinity. Real good."

It wasn't what he said but rather how he'd said it that made her turn slightly and look down at him, nearly losing her footing in the process. Climbing this structure was giving her backside a darn good workout. She could feel it in every movement, and there was no doubt in her mind that he could see it, too. While she was struggling to get to the top, he was down below ass-watching.

"That's it." Frustrated with him for looking and with



herself for actually liking the thought of him checking her out, she began her descent.

“Giving up already?”

She waited until her feet were on solid ground before she stood in front of him. Regarding him critically, she answered, “What do you think?”

Dark lashes were half lowered over his eyes when he said, “I think you’re temptation, Trinity.”

Whatever words she’d planned to say were zapped from her mind. Why did he have to say that and why had he said it while looking at her with those sexy eyes of his? The last thing she needed was for heat surges to flash through her body the way they were doing now.

“Considering the nature of our relationship, you’re out of line, Adrian.”

He leaned in closer and she got a whiff of his manly scent. She watched his lips curve into a seductive smile. “Why? And before you get all mouthy on me, there’s something you need to consider.”

“What?” she asked, getting even more frustrated. Although she would never admit it, she thought he was temptation, as well.

“I’m *supposed* to find you desirable. If I didn’t, I couldn’t pull off what needs to be done to dissuade Belvedere. My acting abilities can only extend so far. I can’t pretend to want a woman if I don’t.”

Trinity went still. Was he saying he wanted her? From the way his gaze was darkening, she had a feeling that assumption was right. “I think we need to talk about it.”

“At the moment, I think not.”

When she opened her mouth to protest, he leaned in closer and said in a low, sexy tone, “See that structure over there?”

Her gaze followed his and she saw what he was referring to. It was huge, twice the size of the one she’d tried

to scale, designed to challenge even the best of climbers.  
“Yes, I see it. What about it?”

The look on his face suddenly changed from desire to bold, heated lust. “I plan to climb all over it tonight. Otherwise, I’ll try my damndest later to climb all over you.”

## Five

Some words once stated couldn't be taken back. You just had to deal with them and Adrian was trying like hell to deal.

He had taken his climb and had done a damn good job scaling a wall he'd had difficulty doing in the past. It was amazing what lust could drive a man to do. And he was lusting after Trinity. Admitting it to her had made her nervous, wary of him, which was why she was hugging the passenger door as if it were her new best friend. If he didn't know for certain it was locked, he would be worried she would tumble out of the car.

"I won't bite," he finally said as he exited the expressway. *But I can perform a pretty good lick job*, he thought, but now was not the time to share such information.

"Pretending to be lovers isn't working, Adrian."

"What makes you think that?" he asked, although he was beginning to think along those same lines. "Because I admitted I want you, Trinity?"

"I would think that has a lot to do with it."

Adrian didn't say anything for a minute. Watching Trinity's backside while she'd climbed that wall had definitely done something to him; had brought out coiling arousal

within his very core. And when the crotch of his jeans began pounding like hell from an erection he could barely control, he'd known he was in trouble. The only thing that had consumed his mind—although he knew better—was that he needed to have some of her.

"I thought I explained things to you, Trinity. You're a sexy woman. I'm a hot-blooded male. There're bound to be sparks."

"As long as those sparks don't cause a fire."

"They won't," he said easily. "I'll put it out before that happens. I'm no more interested in a real affair than you are. So relax. What I'm encountering is simple lust. I'll be thirty-one in a few months so I think I'm old enough to handle it." And he decided, starting now, he would handle it by taking control of himself, which is why he changed the subject.

"So what are your plans for tomorrow?" he asked.

He heard her sigh. "You mean *today*, right? Sunday. It's almost two in the morning," she said.

"I stand corrected. What are your plans for today?"

"Sleep, sleep and more sleep. I seldom get the weekends off and I can't wait to have a love affair with my bed. It will be Monday before you know it."

*A love affair with her bed.* Now why did she have to go there? Images of her naked under silken sheets were making his senses flare in the wrong directions.

He could imagine her scent. It would be close to what he was inhaling now but probably a little more sensual. And he could imagine how she would look naked. Lordy. His body throbbed at the vision. His fingers twitched. When he had touched her backside while giving her that boost he had actually felt the air thicken in his lungs.

"What about you? What do you have planned?"

If he was smart, he would go somewhere this weekend and get laid. Maybe that would help rid his mind of

all these dangerous fantasies he was having. But he'd said on their first date that he would see her and only her until this ordeal with Belvedere was over. "Unlike you I won't be sleeping late. I promised Ramsey that I would help him put new fencing in the north range."

"I understand from Tara that you're not living on your family's land, that you lease a place in town."

"That's right. I'm not ready to build on my one hundred acres quite yet. Where I live is just what I need for now. I have someone coming in every week to keep things tidy and to prepare my meals, and that's good enough for me."

A short while later he was walking her to her door, although she'd told him doing so wasn't necessary. She had told him that the other night, as well, but he'd done so anyway.

He watched as she used her key to unlock the door. She then turned to him. "Thanks for a nice evening and for walking me to the door, Adrian."

"You're welcome. I'd like to check inside."

She rolled her eyes. "Is that really necessary?"

"I think so. After what happened with Keisha last year, I would feel a lot better if I did."

He figured she had heard how his cousin Canyon's wife, Keisha, had come home to find her house in shambles.

Trinity stepped aside. "Help yourself. I definitely want you to feel better."

Ignoring the sarcasm he heard in her voice, Adrian moved past her and checked the bedrooms, kitchen and bathrooms. He returned to the living room to find her leaning against the closed door, her arms crossed over her chest.

Her gaze clashed with his. "Satisfied?" she asked in an annoyed tone.

Suddenly a deep, fierce hunger stirred to life inside him. That same hunger he'd been hopelessly fighting all night. He told himself to walk out the door and not look back,

but knew he could no more ignore the yearnings that were rushing through him than he could not breathe. She had no idea how totally sensuous she looked or the effect it was having on him.

He walked toward her in a measured pace. When she turned and reached for the door to open it for him to leave, he reached for her. The moment he touched her, fiery heat shot straight to his groin.

Before she could say anything, he pressed her back against the door and swooped his mouth down on hers with a hunger he needed to release. He couldn't recall precisely when she began kissing him back—all he knew was that she was doing so, and with a greed that equaled his.

He pressed hard into her middle, wanting her to feel just how aroused he was, as his tongue tangled with hers in a duel so sensuous he wasn't sure if the moans he heard were coming from her or from him.

No telling how long the kiss would have lasted if they hadn't needed to come up for air. He reluctantly released her mouth and stared down into the fierce darkness of her dazed eyes. She appeared stunned at the degree of passion the two of them had shared, which was even more than the last time they'd kissed.

He leaned in close to her moist lips and answered the question she'd asked him moments ago. "Yes, I'm satisfied, Trinity. I am now extremely satisfied."

He then opened the door and walked out.

Trinity stood there. Astonished.

What on earth had just happened? What was that sudden onslaught of intense need that had overtaken her, made her mold her mouth to his as though that was how it was supposed to be? And why did her mouth feel like it was where it belonged when it was connected to his?

She shook her head to jiggle out of her daze. The effects

were even more profound than before. It had taken days to get her mind back on track after the last kiss; she had a feeling this one would take even longer.

Her brows pulled together in annoyance. Why had he kissed her again? Just as important, why had she let him? She hadn't been an innocent bystander by any means. She could recall every lick of his tongue just as she could remember every lick of hers.

She hadn't held back anything. She'd been just as aggressive as he had. What did that say about her? What was he assuming it said?

As she moved toward her bedroom to strip off her clothes and take a shower, she couldn't help but recall something else. Watching him climb that wall. He was in great shape and it showed. He'd looked rough and so darn manly. Every time he lifted a jeans-clad thigh as he moved upward, her gaze had followed, watching how his muscles bulged and showed the strength of his legs. The way his jeans had cupped his backside had been a work of art, worthy to be ogled. And when he removed his shirt, she had seen a perfect set of abs glistening with his sweat.

The woman in her had appreciated how he'd reached the top with an overabundance of virility. That was probably why she'd lost her head the moment he'd taken her into his arms and plowed her with a kiss that weakened her knees. But now he was gone and once she got at least eighteen hours of nonstop sleep, she would wake up in her right mind.

She certainly hoped so.

## Six

With little sleep and the memory of a kiss that just wouldn't let go, Adrian, along with his brothers and cousins, helped his older brother Ramsey repair fencing on a stretch of land that extended for miles.

Ramsey had worked as CEO for a while alongside Dillon before giving it up to pursue his first love: being a sheep rancher. Adrian's brothers Zane and Derringer preferred the outdoors, too. After working in the family business for a few years, Zane, Derringer and Ramsey, as well as their cousin Jason, joined their Montana Westmoreland cousins in a horse breeding and training business.

Ramsey's wife, Chloe, had arrived with sandwiches, iced tea and homemade cookies. Everyone teased Adrian's cousin Stern about his upcoming wedding to JoJo, who Stern had been best friends with for years. The two had been engaged for more than six months and Stern was anxious for the wedding to happen, saying he was tired of waiting.

Adrian didn't say anything as he listened to the easy camaraderie between his family. Leaving home for college had been hard, but luckily he and Aidan had decided to attend the same university. As usual, they had stuck together.



Their careers had eventually carried them in different directions. But Adrian knew that eventually his twin would return to Denver.

Aidan's plans were similar to Trinity's, regarding returning to her hometown to practice medicine. He could understand her wanting to do that, just as he understood Aidan. So why did the thought of her returning to Florida in about eighteen months bother him? It wasn't as if she meant anything to him. He'd already established the fact that she wasn't his type. They had nothing in common. She liked small towns and he preferred big cities. She wasn't an outdoor person and he was. So why was he allowing her to consume his thoughts the way she had been lately?

"So what's going on with you, Adrian? Or are you really Aidan?"

Adrian couldn't help but smile at his brother Zane. It seemed that while he had been daydreaming everyone had left lunch to return to work. "You know who I am and nothing's going on. I'm just trying to make it one day at a time."

"So things are working out for you at Blue Ridge?"

"Pretty much. I can see why you, Ramsey and Derringer decided the corporate life wasn't for you. You have to like it or otherwise you'd hate it."

Adrian liked his job as chief project officer. His duties included assisting Dillon when it came to any construction and engineering functions of the company, and advising him on the development of major projects and making sure all jobs were completed in a timely manner.

As they began walking to where the others were beginning work again, Zane asked, "So, how are things going being the pretend lover of Thorn's sister-in-law?"

Adrian glanced over at Zane, not surprised he knew. How many others in his family knew? Bailey hadn't mentioned anything the other night at dinner so she might be clueless. "Okay, I guess. I'm busy trying to establish this

relationship with her for others to see. The first night I made sure the doctor saw us together and last night I went to a show that I knew one of his family members would be attending.”

Zane nodded. “Is it working?”

“Don’t know yet. The doctor’s path hasn’t crossed with Trinity’s since we started this farce.”

“Hmm, I’m curious to see how things turn out.”

Adrian looked at his brother. “If he’s smart, he’ll leave her alone.”

“Oh, I’m not talking about her and the doctor.”

Adrian slowed his pace. “Then who are you talking about?”

Zane smiled. “The two of you.”

Adrian stopped walking and Zane stopped, as well. “Don’t know what you mean,” he said.

Zane shrugged. “I saw her at Riley’s wedding. She’s a looker, but I expected no less with her being Tara’s sister and all.”

Adrian frowned. “So?”

Zane shoved his hands into the back pockets of his jeans. “So nothing. Forget I said anything. I guess we better get back to work if we want to finish up by dusk.”

Adrian watched his brother walk off and decided that since he’d gotten married, Zane didn’t talk much sense anymore.

“Dr. Matthews, I trust you’ve been doing well.”

Immediately, Trinity’s skin crawled at the sound of the man’s voice as he approached her. She looked up from writing in a patient’s chart. “Yes, Dr. Belvedere. I’ve been fine.”

As a courtesy, she could ask him how he’d been, but she really didn’t want to know. She tried ignoring him as she resumed documenting the patient’s chart.

“I saw you the other night.”

Her heart rate increased. He had come to stand beside her. Way too close as far as she was concerned. She didn't look up at him but continued writing. "And what night was that?"

"That night you were out on a date at Laredo's."

She glanced up briefly. "Oh. I didn't see you." That was no lie since she had intentionally not looked in his direction.

"Well, I saw you. You were with a man," he said in an accusing tone.

She hugged the chart to her chest as she looked up again. "Yes, I was. If you recall, I told you I was involved with someone."

"I didn't believe you."

"I don't know why you wouldn't."

Belvedere smiled and Trinity knew the smile wasn't genuine. "Doesn't matter. Break things off with him."

Trinity blinked. "Excuse me?"

"You heard what I said."

Something within Trinity snapped. Not caring if anyone passing by heard her, she said, "I will not break things off with him! You have no right to dictate something like that to me."

A smirk appeared on his face before he looked over his shoulder to make sure no one was privy to their conversation. "I can make or break you, Dr. Matthews. If you rub me the wrong way, all those years you spent in medical school won't mean a damn thing. Think about it."

He turned to walk off, but then, as if he'd forgotten to say something, he turned back. "And the next time you decide to report me to someone, think twice. My family practically owns this hospital. I suggest you remember that. And to make sure we fully understand each other, I've requested your presence in the next two surgeries I have scheduled, which coincidentally are on your next two days off. What a pity." Chuckling to himself, he walked off.

Trinity just stared at him. She felt as if steam were coming out of her ears. He'd just admitted to sabotaging her time off. *How dare he!*

Placing the patient's chart back on the rack, she angrily headed to the office of Wendell Fowler, the chief of pediatrics. Not bothering to wait on the elevator, she took the stairs. By the time she went up three flights of stairs she was even madder.

Dr. Fowler's secretary, an older woman by the name of Marissa Adams, glanced up when she saw her. "Yes, Dr. Matthews?"

"I'd like to see Dr. Fowler. It's important."

The woman nodded. "Please have a seat and I'll see if Dr. Fowler is available."

She hadn't been seated a few minutes when the secretary called out to her. "Dr. Fowler will see you now, Dr. Matthews."

"Thanks." Trinity walked around the woman's desk and headed for Wendell Fowler's office.

Less than a half hour later Trinity left Dr. Fowler's office unsatisfied. The man hadn't been any help. He'd even accused her of dramatizing the situation. He'd then tried to convince her that working in surgery on her days off under the guidance of Dr. Belvedere would be a boost to her medical career.

Feeling a degree of fury the likes of which she'd never felt before, she walked past Ms. Adams's desk with her head held high, fighting back tears in her eyes. If Dr. Belvedere's goal was to break her resolve and force her to give in to what he wanted, then he was wasting his time. If she had to give up her days off this week, she would do it. She refused to let anyone break her down.