

A man with a beard and mustache, wearing a black cowboy hat and a dark leather jacket with a shearling collar, is looking off to the side. He is standing outdoors, possibly on a wooden fence. The background is a soft-focus landscape with trees and a cloudy sky.

He's playing with fire but
being burned by her is a
risk he's willing to take.

RAND

MEN OF CLIFTON MONTANA BOOK 27

Bestselling Author

SUSAN FISHER-DAVIS

RAND

Susan Fisher-Davis

Men of Clifton, Montana

Book 27

Rand Men of Clifton, Montana Book 27

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First eBook Publication: March 2023

Cover Model: Chris Matteis

Photographer: Rob Lang

Cover Artist: Untold Designs Romance and Fantasy Covers

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Edited by: KDL Editing & Proofing

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PUBLISHER: Blue Whiskey Publishing

www.susanfisherdavisauthor.com

Acknowledgments

To my husband, Rob, for telling me to do this.

To Chris Matteis for being Rand. It was great working with you.

You can find Chris on Instagram at:

[@chrismatteis](https://www.instagram.com/chrismatteis)

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/chris.matteis32

To Rob Lang Photography. Let's do this again!

You can see more of Rob's photos at:

www.roblangimages.com

Instagram:

[@Roblangphotography](https://www.instagram.com/Roblangphotography)

To Kelli Littlehead. You are the best editor... EVER!

Thank you.

To the ladies in my Facebook group: Susan's Hot Cowboys—I have no idea what I'd do without you. You are the best bunch of women I've ever known. It always brings a smile to my face to see your posts.

As always to you, my readers.

I wouldn't be able to do this without you. I love every one of you,
and I appreciate your support.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

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Chapter One

Rand Morris made his way along the sidewalk, touching the brim of his hat at the women he passed. Some smiled a little more than others, but he kept walking. He never had a problem getting a date.

As he came to the building, he walked up the concrete steps, pulled on the glass door, and entered. He stopped at the display case to look for the department he wanted, and once he found it, he strode down the hall.

He stopped at a door with frosted glass and the Sheriff's name scrolled on it, took a deep breath, opened it, then stepped into the lobby. He mentally groaned when he saw Betty Lou Harper sitting behind the counter. When she didn't look up, he cleared his throat, and she did a double take when she saw him.

"Well, look who it is," she said, making him give a tightlipped smile.

"Betty Lou, how are you?"

"Just fine and dandy, Rand. What about you?"

"I'm good, thank you. Is Sam around?"

"Sam," she yelled.

Rand turned his head so she wouldn't see him grin.

"Damn it, Betty Lou—" Sam Garrett stopped speaking when he saw him standing there. "Rand? How the hell are you?"

"Good, Sam. You?"

"I'm great." Sam stuck his hand out to him, and Rand shook it.

"Do you have a minute?"

"I do. Follow me. Betty Lou, please hold my calls unless it's Tessa."

"I will," Betty Lou said as she stared at Rand.

"Have a good day, Betty Lou," he said as he touched the brim of his hat.

“Uh, huh. You too.”

Rand nodded, then followed Sam into an office.

“Take a seat, Rand.” Sam moved around the desk to sit behind it.

“She hasn’t changed,” Rand said.

“She’s gotten nosier, if that’s possible. I can guarantee it’s killing her wondering why you’re here.”

Rand grinned. “No doubt there.

“So, why *are* you here, Rand?” Sam sat back in his chair and clasped his hands across his stomach.

“You know I’m not one to complain, Sam, but the Madden’s bison keep coming on our property.”

“You could have called, Rand. You didn’t have to run in here.” Sam sat forward and put his arms on the desk.

“I had to pick up some things.” Rand rubbed his nape. “I’m getting tired of it. Their damn bulls will breed with our cows if this doesn’t stop.”

“Did you call them?”

Rand blew out a humorless laugh. “Like they’d take my calls. I’d go there, but they’d probably shoot my ass.”

“True. Your families are almost as bad as the Hatfield’s and McCoy’s.”

“It’s been that way for a long time, Sam. My great-grandfather and old man, Horst Madden, is where it all began.”

“It wasn’t always that way. They were friends at one time.”

“Yeah, but you know the reason for that.”

“I do, but Rand, the families need to let the past go. It’s damn ridiculous.”

“You don’t have problems going to other ranches when fences get broken. Like with Trick and his problems with Baker,” Rand practically growled out.

“That was different. Baker was deliberately cutting Trick’s fence. Are you accusing Silas of cutting your fence?” Sam raised his hand when Rand opened his mouth to speak. “I’ll send one of my deputies out there. I have to be in the office today. Will that work?”

Rand pushed to his feet. “Yes, I appreciate it, Sam.”

Sam stood and put his hand out. “No problem at all, Rand. I just wish this bickering would stop.”

“We don’t *bicker*. Hell, we don’t speak at all. If they keep their animals on their property, we’re fine.” Rand touched the brim of his hat and strode out the door. He was about to pass Betty Lou when she looked up at him.

“How’s your grandfather, Rand?”

“Cantankerous as ever,” Rand said with a grin.

“I believe that. So, when are you going to settle down?”

“When you agree to marry me, Betty Lou.”

“Pffft, you’re way too handsome, Rand Morris.” She grinned.

“You make that sound like it’s a bad thing.”

Betty Lou burst out laughing. “You’re a charmer. Tell your grandfather I said hello.”

“Yes, ma’am. You have a good day, Betty Lou.” He touched the brim of his hat, strode from the lobby, down the corridor, and into the sunshine.

Everly Madden grunted as she lifted a bale of straw into the wheelbarrow. She picked up the handles, pushed the cart close to the stalls, set it down, cut the twine around the bale, and tossed straw into the stalls for the horses.

It was tedious work, but no one else could do it today. Since her grandfather let the ranch hands rotate every other weekend

off, most chores fell to her on those days.

“He should be out here doing it. It’s not my damn ranch,” she muttered.

“No, but it will be one day.”

She spun around to see her grandfather, Silas Madden, standing behind her.

“Stop sneaking up on me,” she snapped.

Silas laughed. “You’re just mad I caught you talkin’ to yourself.”

“I talk to myself when I want an intelligent conversation.” She hid a smile.

“Are you sayin’ I ain’t intelligent?”

“If the boot fits, Pap.”

“Damn, if you ain’t just like your grandmother. Mouthy as hell.”

“Yeah, but you love me just like you loved her.”

Everly walked to him, put her arms around his waist, and hugged him. His arms encircled her.

“Neither here nor there.” He looked over her head. “Are you done yet?”

“Yes, this was the last stall. Why?”

“I’m hungry.”

“So? You’re more than capable of making yourself something to eat.”

“Aw, come on, Evie. You said you’d make pancakes.”

“You’re going to turn into a pancake. You’d eat them twenty-four seven if I let you.”

“I would, but I know you *won’t* let me.” He kissed her cheek. “Please.”

“You, old man, know how to sweet-talk a woman. Let’s go inside, and I’ll make you your damn pancakes.”

He chuckled. "I'll go inside. You put the wheelbarrow away, then wash up. I'll be waiting."

Everly shook her head as she watched him turn, walk down the barn's aisle, and disappear out the door.

After putting the wheelbarrow away, she headed out of the barn and stepped into the sunshine. She stopped when she saw a Sheriff's SUV pulling to a stop, and she watched as Deputy Nevada Shelton stepped out and glanced around. Damn, that man was fine. Too bad he was married.

"Hello, Deputy," she said with a smile.

He grinned at her, touched the brim of his hat, and strode to her. The sunlight glinted off the badge pinned to his khaki shirt.

"Everly," he said.

"What can I do for you?" she asked as she stared at him.

"We had a complaint that your bison are breaking the fence between your property and the Morris's."

Everly clenched her jaw as she glanced toward the Morris property, then back at Nevada.

"I didn't know. I hadn't gotten around to checking the fence today. There are only a couple ranch hands here today, but I'll get the bison."

"I see. If you could make sure you get your animals over on your side, I'm sure everything will be fine."

Fine? Nothing will ever be fine between the Maddens and the Morris'. Not in this lifetime.

"I'll go now, but I need to let Pap know first."

"Yes, ma'am. You have a nice day." He turned, strode back to his vehicle, got in, and drove off.

After taking a deep breath, Everly jogged up the steps, wiped her feet, and entered the house to see her grandfather standing at the sink, staring at her with his arms folded.

"What did that deputy want?"

God! She hated even mentioning the name Morris to her grandfather.

“Our fence is down, and some of our bison are on Morris’s property.”

“Those bastards called the law on me?”

“What else would they do, Pap? You’d shoot them if they came over here, and don’t you dare try to tell me you’d take a phone call from any of them,” she snapped.

“I wouldn’t take anything from them. I don’t want you going over there,” he said.

“I don’t have a choice. The men working today are in the east pasture cutting hay, and someone needs to get the bison, and don’t you dare suggest you do it! You’ll end up shooting someone.” She turned back to the door, opened it, and looked back over her shoulder. “I won’t be too long. You stay here.”

Everly took a deep breath, stepped onto the porch, closed the door, and walked across the yard to the barn. She hated going over there. She hoped there weren’t too many of their bison over there, or she’d never get them back unless she made several trips.

After saddling her horse, Sassy, she spurred her out of the barn to head for the fence. Why did her grandfather feel the men needed every other weekend off? They’re ranch hands. That is their job.

Sassy ran through the grass, making it swish as she did. Quickly, they came along the fence.

Everly groaned when she saw the fence down and the bison munching on the grass on the Morris property.

“Damn it,” she muttered.

Nudging Sassy, she rode onto the property and counted twenty of her grandfather’s bison.

“Did you come alone?”

She reined her horse to a stop and looked in the voice’s direction. Her heart dropped to her stomach, looking at Rand

Morris sitting on a beautiful Appaloosa. The horse was all white with black spots all over it. The horse was just gorgeous, and the man was way too handsome for his own good.

“You’re intelligent, Morris. I’ll give you that.”

“Always the smartass, huh, Madden?”

She shrugged and moved her horse slowly through the bison, wondering how in the hell she would get them back to the right side of the fence.

“Do you need some help?”

Startled, she looked over her shoulder to see Rand behind her. She glanced away from him. Damn him. His hair was the color of dark chocolate, and those green eyes were lady killers, and he knew it. Although his cowboy hat sat low on his forehead, she knew how handsome he was. Some would say devastatingly so. He was thirty-three and never married. He enjoyed his freedom too much, and no doubt, had his pick of any woman he wanted. He was what tall, dark, and handsome looked like. He stood six foot five. She’d always been a sucker for a tall man. She had always thought him sexy and hated herself for it. There was no way the Madden and Morris families could ever have any relationship. It was a Hatfield and McCoy kind of thing.

She took a deep breath, blew it out, and nodded.

“I could use the help.”

When he said nothing, she glanced at him to see him staring at her and raised her eyebrow.

Rand nodded, then moved his horse along the bison.

“I think if we can get some of them moving, the rest will follow,” he said.

“I hope so. Once we get them back to where they belong, I’ll repair the fence.”

“I can do it, Everly. You’ll need to keep them moving back to the barn.”

“I can fix the fence,” she snapped.

“Damn, you are so fucking hardheaded. I said I’d do it,” he growled out.

Everly narrowed her eyes at him.

“I don’t care what you said. I don’t listen to you.”

“Fine. Let’s get them over there, and then you’re on your own.”

“Yeah, whatever, Morris.”

She walked Sassy alongside the bison, making sure not to make sudden moves. She didn’t need to fall on her ass in them. Wouldn’t Rand Morris love that? She could see him from the corner of her eye, doing the same thing. He didn’t take his eyes off the bison as he moved around them. He knew they could be dangerous too.

Once they got them moving, the bison headed back to where they belonged, but a few strayed back to Morris’s property when she dismounted to fix the fence. She took a deep breath, mounted Sassy again, and rode the horse back to get them. She reined to a stop when she saw Rand sitting on his horse with his arms folded on the pommel and a smirk lifting his lips.

“Shut up,” she muttered, and when he chuckled, her heart hit her stomach.

“Need some help?”

“Fuck you, Morris,” she snapped.

He sat up and put his hand over his heart.

“I’m hurt you would say that, Everly.” He nodded. “I’ll leave you to it then.”

When he turned his horse to leave, she took a deep breath.

“Wait.”

He turned the horse around and raised an eyebrow.

“You know how much I hate asking, don’t you?”

“Oh, I do, darlin’, but there is no way you can do it yourself. Do you need my help?”

“Yes, damn you.”

Rand rode his horse close to the bison, then looked at her.

“Was that so hard?”

“Just shut up and help me, Morris.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said with a chuckle.

Everly gritted her teeth before she really said what she thought. She looked at him and sighed. Why did he have to be so good-looking? His dark hair touched the collar of his red T-shirt and curled on the ends. How many women had he talked out of their panties with those green eyes? They were bottle green, like the old dishware her grandmother had in the China cupboard, and they fascinated Everly from day one.

He was way off-limits to her. Too much had gone on between her great-grandfather and Rand’s. Their families hated each other.

They once owned a thousand acres together, the Double M ranch. They had split the acreage in half and parted ways. Everly knew what had caused the rift, and being a Madden, they had drilled it in her head to hate the Morris family with every fiber of her being.

The bison was moving toward the fence when she looked over at him. She hated having him help her. She hated *him*.

It was reciprocated too. The Morris’ hated the Maddens just as much. Although Rand had never acted mean toward her, she knew it was drilled into his head, too, that the Madden family was not to be trusted.

They finally got the bison on the Madden property. She reined Sassy to a stop, turned in the saddle, and saw Rand dismounting and getting tools from his saddlebag. He stopped in his tracks when he saw her staring at him, then started toward the fence. Her eyes went to his crotch. Did he have to wear chaps? She’d bet her last dollar it wasn’t the chaps making his fly look that good.

“Don’t argue with me. Just get the bison home. I’ll take care of this,” he said, then continued to the fence.

“All right.” She took a deep breath. “Thank you.”

Rand burst out laughing. “I bet that hurt like a bitch.”

She turned back in the saddle, nudged Sassy, and threw her middle finger up, but she couldn't stop the grin when she heard him laugh.

Rand shook his head as he watched her ride behind the bison. Everly Madden was a beauty, with her dark hair and blue eyes. She had one hell of a figure, and he'd ask her out if things were different, but he didn't feel like getting shot.

Silas Madden was a mean old man, according to Rand's grandfather. Everly was probably told the same thing about his grandfather over the years. No wonder Rand's parents moved away. Everly's had too.

Bickering, Sam had called it. It was more than that. Horst Madden destroyed the trust his great-grandfather had in him, and it ended a long friendship. A friendship and trust that would never be again.

Shaking his head, he returned to repairing the fence, and then head home. It was getting late, and he was hungry.

He pulled his cellphone from his pocket, scrolled through the numbers, and hit *Send* when he found his grandfather's number.

“Where are you?” McArthur Morris asked when he answered.

“Up in the north pasture. There was some Madden bison here, so I helped Everly get them back to their side.”

“You helped a Madden? What's wrong with you?”

“Give it a rest, Gramps. There was no way she could do it on her own.”

“Were you up there waiting for her?” His grandfather was suspicious, if nothing else.

“I was up here to keep an eye on them. I didn’t want them after our cows.”

“You didn’t tell me they were on our property,” his grandfather snapped.

“I took care of it,” he growled out.

“Okay, son. Okay. I just don’t want you associating with them. Why’d you call?”

“What do you want for dinner?”

“Steak.”

“Steak? I had steak last night.”

“Yeah, so?”

“Good Lord. I’m making a trip to town to get us some burgers.”

“Sounds good to me.” The call disconnected.

Rand looked at his phone. Had his grandfather conned him?

He placed his phone back into his pocket with a chuckle, repaired the fence, mounted his horse, and tore off through the pasture to head for the house. A burger sounded great. Every Friday, Rand and his grandfather had dinner together. His grandfather lived in a small cabin on the property, and Rand had built himself a beautiful log home.

They tore the old homestead down years ago, and Rand and his grandfather lived in the cabin together until Rand finished his house. His grandfather refused to live with him, and he was grateful for that. Not that he didn’t love him, but he needed his privacy. They both did.

Rand shook his head, thinking of Everly Madden. Damn, she was gorgeous, but he knew he had a snowball’s chance in hell of getting close to her. If he did, and her grandfather found out, he’d shoot him or cut off his balls.

Once he unsaddled his horse and cooled him down, Rand strode across the yard, up the steps, and entered the kitchen. It was damn hot out today. He'd take a quick shower, then head for town.

After his shower, he dressed and then headed for the kitchen. Taking his hat off the peg, he slapped it on his head, opened the door, and walked to his truck. He opened the door of the truck, and the heat slammed into him. It was too hot for this late in the year.

"Shit, I should have let the windows down," he muttered as he climbed in, started it, and drove out of the driveway to head for the Clifton Diner.

A few minutes later, he pulled into the parking lot, found a spot, parked, then strode to the door. The heat was stifling, so he picked up his pace. He was about to open the door when someone called his name, and he turned to see Lacey Cosgrove quickly walking toward him, and he mentally groaned but put on a fake smile.

"Lacey," he said as he touched the brim of his hat.

"Rand, I haven't seen you in forever. Are you eating here?"

Rand shook his head. "I'm getting an order to go."

"Oh, too bad. I would love to have dinner with you." She ran her fingers along his arm.

"Sorry, but I'm picking dinners up for Gramps and me."

He opened the door and waited to see if she was going inside.

"Okay, maybe next time. You should call me," she said, smiling.

"I'll see you around, Lacey. I have to get going, or my grandfather will send out the National Guard if he doesn't get his burger soon." He nodded at her, then entered the diner, making the bell over the door chime.

When the door closed behind him, everyone looked his way and waved or called out to him.

“Hi, Rand,” Connie said as she stood on the other side of the counter.

“Connie, how are you?”

“Just fine, hon. Are you picking up your order?”

“Yes, ma’am, please.”

“I’ll be right back with it.”

Rand nodded, then spun around on the stool to look around the little restaurant, to see it crowded as usual. About the only time it wasn’t, was if snow kept people home.

He knew many people were tourists from the Clifton Bed and Breakfast. Through the summer months, both the B and B, and the Bur Oak guest ranch in Spring City, brought a lot of tourists to the little towns. The Bur Oak closed the last week of August, and the B and B stayed open until early October.

When he saw Connie come from the kitchen with a to-go bag, he spun back around, then got to his feet. He pulled his wallet from his back pocket, handed her cash, and waved away the change. He smiled, picked up the bag, nodded at her, and walked out into the heat.

Everly entered the house and sighed at the cooler air. It was too warm for this late in September, and she knew it was a teaser before the colder weather set in.

“Did you get the bison back?”

“Yes,” she said as she removed her hat and hung it on a peg.

“Did you make sure you got them all? I wouldn’t put it past the damn Morris’ to steal some of them.”

“Stop it. You know better.”

“Do I? I don’t trust them.”

“No shit.”

“You watch your mouth.”

“Don’t talk to me like I’m a child, Pap. I’m twenty-eight years old, and I’ll talk any way I want. I live on a ranch, for God’s sake.”

“You can swear on the ranch, but not in my house.”

“Quit acting all high and mighty, old man. If it’s such a bother for me to speak my mind, then maybe I should move out.”

“Now, Everly, you don’t mean that. The only way I’d want you to leave is if you fooled around with a Morris.”

Everly turned to look at him.

“That would just be horrible, wouldn’t it? Maybe it would end this stupid ass feud once and for all.”

“*Nothing* will end this feud,” Silas shouted.

“Then I won’t tell you that Rand Morris helped me get our bison back on our land. You’d want to shoot him for the hell of it.”

“You stay away from that boy.”

“Boy? He’s a grown man, Pap. A thirty-three-year-old man.” She smiled. “Quite good-looking too.”

“Everly Linda Madden, don’t you even kid about something like that.”

“Who says I’m kidding? He really is very handsome.” She bit her lip to keep from grinning, then burst out laughing when her grandfather left the room grumbling under his breath.

She and her grandfather butted heads daily, but she had to stand up for herself or he’d run all over her. He tried, for a long time, to make her kowtow to him, and when she stood up to him, he finally stopped. She loved him, but he didn’t run her life. No wonder her parents moved away.

“I’ll make your pancakes, then I’m going out.”

“Where are you going?” he asked as he came back into the kitchen.

“I’m going to Dewey’s. I haven’t been out in ages. A girl needs to kick her heels up once in a while.”

“You make sure you come home.”

“Pap, if I want to go home with a man, I will. I’m no virgin, ya know.”

“I don’t need to hear that, Everly.”

“How old was grandma when you got married?”

“Nineteen. Why?”

“Well, I’m a little behind, aren’t I?”

“Your grandmother didn’t fool around with any man except me.”

“Times have changed, Pap. Women go to bed with a man when they want to nowadays.” She knew she was egging him on, but it was so much fun.

“I don’t care about other women. You just behave yourself.”

“Pap, I’m a good girl, but if I want to have sex—”

“Stop that kind of talk right now,” he shouted.

Everly laughed. “I’m just messing with you. I’ll be home. Late. I’m going to get your dinner for you, then I’m going to shower and go out. Do not wait up for me.”

“Your mother would have a fit.”

“My mother would be the first to tell me to go have a good time.” She smiled.

“Just make me some damn pancakes, then go out. Do whatever you want, but don’t tell me about it.”

“Oh, Pap, I would never do that. I don’t kiss and tell.”

She laughed when he left the room again, then she made his pancakes. After she set them on the table, she yelled for him, then headed upstairs to get a shower, get dressed, and head for Dewey’s.

An hour later, she sat at the bar, nursing a Callahan whiskey, and watched the people on the dancefloor. Several cowboys hit on her, but she wasn't interested. Though, why, she didn't know. She hadn't had sex in months, but none appealed to her. She drained her drink and tried to get a bartender's attention.

"Well, hello there, Ms. Madden."

She glanced to her right to see Rand taking the stool beside her.

"Go away, Morris."

"Is that the thanks I get for helping you today?"

"I thanked you."

"Yeah, you did, but it hurt like a motherfucker, didn't it?"

Everly looked at his handsome face and nodded.

"As a matter of fact, it did." She picked up her drink and took a sip.

Rand chuckled. "At least you're honest."

"More than can be said for a Morris."

"Oh, come on, Everly. What our great-grandparents did has nothing to do with us."

"You don't think so? Then why do our families hate each other?"

He leaned close to her. "I have a confession. I don't hate you, Everly."

She looked at him. "I'm honored."

Rand laughed. "Damn, you are tough. Can I buy you a drink?"

"No. All I need is for someone here to see that and tell my grandfather."

"Okay, so you can buy me one. I don't give a rat's ass what anyone thinks."

"Buy your own. You've got plenty of money."

“And so do the Maddens, but yet, you’re too chickenshit to buy me a drink.”

“I am not!” She stared into his eyes, seeing the dare. “Fine.” She signaled a bartender. “I’ll have another Callahan on the rocks and give him whatever he wants.”

“Rand? What would you like?” Laura Blackstone asked him.

“The same as Ms. Madden, Laura. Thank you.”

Everly saw Laura frown, but she walked away to get their drinks.

“Was that so hard?” Rand whispered in her ear.

“You have no idea, Morris.”

When he chuckled, she had to suppress a shiver. The man was too damn sexy, and he was the enemy.

Laura set their drinks in front of them, and Everly paid her. She picked her drink up and sipped it.

“Best whiskey,” he said after he took a sip.

“For once, I agree with you.”

“Good God! Mark that on a calendar.”

“You are such a smartass,” she snapped.

Rand laughed. “Right back at you.” He turned on his stool to face her. “Seriously, Everly, why do we have to be enemies? It was our great-grandparents.”

“Yes, it was, but they have drilled it into our heads that we are not to trust each other.”

“So, let’s change that.”

“You cannot be serious, Rand. My grandfather has already said he’d kick me out of the house if I... fooled around with a Morris.”

“Don’t tell him.”

Everly looked at him to see him trying not to grin.

“Go away, Morris.”

“Yes, ma’am. Thank you for the drink. I think I’ll find a... *pleasant* woman to have a drink with. Enjoy your evening, Everly Madden.”

Everly nodded and watched as he got down from the stool and made his way to a buxom blonde. As she watched, the woman was all over him. He looked her way, grinned, and winked at her. Everly shot him the finger and saw him laugh.

Shaking her head, she knew it was time to go. She was not only bored, but she’d be damned before she’d sit and watch Rand Morris with some woman. As much as she hated to admit it, she was far too attracted to him, and there was only so much she could take. She had to convince herself that she actually hated him.

After waving to Laura, she hopped down from the stool, strode through the crowd and out the door. Alone.

Chapter Two

Rand watched as Everly walked out the door. Damn, she was sexy, but his chances of getting close to her were slim to none. Even if he somehow convinced her to go out with him, old man Silas Madden would shoot him if he ever found out. Rand had to admit that he was attracted to her. Hell, what man wouldn't be? She was stunning.

He grinned as he thought about sparring with her. She gave as good as she got, and he liked a feisty woman. She didn't back down from anyone, and he admired that.

"Hey."

"Yeah?" he said to the blonde.

"Want to get out of here?"

Rand looked at the door, and back at her.

"How about I buy you a drink, and we talk."

"Talk? Why the hell do we need to talk? Look, cowboy, I like you, but if you're not interested, I'll find someone who is."

Rand mentally winced. He didn't want her, and he'd only talked to her because of Everly. He shook his head. There was no sense in leading her on.

"Okay, darlin', you go find you someone else then. I'm heading home."

"*What?* Are you serious?"

"No one turned you down before?"

"Fuck you," she snapped.

"No thanks. Have a good evening." He touched the brim of his hat and pushed his way through the crowd to get to the door. He hoped he caught up with Everly.

He pushed the door open, stepped outside, and looked around the parking lot, but didn't see her.

"Shit," he swore.

It was probably for the best. Their families would never accept them dating. Damn feud. A woman he's interested in, more than he should be, and he can't do anything about it. He wondered if she'd be interested in sneaking around.

After he got to his truck, he climbed in, and drove home. It wasn't even midnight, and he was going home. Alone.

As he drove along the two-lane blacktop, he wished things were different between the Morris' and the Maddens because he really liked Everly. Could she be the one he'd been waiting on?

People assumed he didn't want to settle down, but he did. He wanted a bunch of kids to pass the ranch down to. He knew once his gramps passed away, he'd inherit all the land.

Both the Morris' and the Maddens raised bison, and the ranches did well, but what was he supposed to do with it if he had no one to pass it down to?

He wouldn't get married just for the hell of it. He wanted that one woman in his life and if things were different, he'd go after Everly.

Groaning, he couldn't get her out of his mind lately. She hated him though. All because of something that happened years ago. In his opinion, it was time this damn feud ended, and everyone got on with their lives.

He pulled into the driveway of his home and drove up to the back porch. After putting the gear into Park, he shut the truck off, stepped out, and entered the house. He removed his hat, hung it on a peg, and strode to the living room then took a seat in the recliner, picked up the remote, and turned on the TV.

"What an exciting life you lead, Morris. Friday night and here you sit."

He lifted the footrest, leaned his head back, and tried to get into the movie, but all he saw was a pair of beautiful blue eyes the color of the sky on a cloudless day.

“Shit,” he said as he slammed the footrest closed, turned off the TV, and headed to bed.

The following day, he, and some of the ranch hands, moved the bison to the east pasture. As he rode along behind them, he looked to Madden land and smiled when he saw Everly on her horse, riding the fence. He kneed his horse, Jester, into a run and rode over to the fence.

“Hello, Ms. Madden,” he said as he removed his hat, raked his fingers through his hair, and resettled the hat.

“You got the hots for me, Morris? You can’t seem to stay away from me.”

Rand laughed. “Uh, oh. My secret is out.”

Everly reined her horse to a stop and her eyes narrowed as she looked at him.

“Funny, Morris. Real funny.”

“Is the fence down?”

“Not that I know of, but I’m checking anyway.”

“I see.”

“You see what?”

“Nothing. I figured you were out so you could get away from your grandfather.”

“Is that why you’re out?”

“To get away from your grandfather?”

“You need to go on the road as a comedy act.”

“Sorry, couldn’t resist. No, I’m out to move the bison.”

“I’ll let you get back to it then.” She nudged her horse and started along the fence.

“I’d rather talk with you, Everly.”

She stopped again and glared at him.

“Stop it, Rand Morris. I know you’re not serious. You like jerking my chain.”

“Do I?” Rand folded his arms on the pommel and smiled.

“I don’t know what you’re up to, Rand, but I’m not in the mood to fool with you.”

“I’m always in the mood to fool with you, Everly,” he said in a low tone.

She burst out laughing. “Are you trying to get us both shot?”

He couldn’t get over how beautiful she was, and he’d never wanted a woman more.

“We could meet in secret. Think of how hot that would be.”

“What’s the matter, Rand, did the blonde turn you down last night?”

He sat up, and grinned. “Nope. I did the turning down. You have a nice day, Everly Madden. If I’m lucky, I’ll see you again.” He turned the horse around and rode back to the men.

Everly’s mouth dropped open and she snapped it shut. There was no way he was serious. He was messing with her for some reason. Wouldn’t he have been shocked if she said she was all for meeting him in secret? It would serve him right to give him a little of his own medicine.

Shaking her head, she knew she’d never tell him that. She’d look like a fool because he was teasing her. She could never admit that she liked him, even though he told her he liked her. Rand Morris was trouble with a capital T. He had women after him all the time. She frowned. Did he really turn the blonde down last night?

“Why would he say he did if he didn’t?” She frowned. “Because he’s a Morris and they lie.”

She continued along the fence and did her best to keep her eyes off Rand. He was a true cowboy. He sat that horse perfectly and when he'd ran the beast back to the bison, Rand didn't budge in the saddle.

Why did he have to be so gorgeous? It would be so much easier to hate him if he didn't appeal to her, but he did. Anytime he wore chaps, she had one hell of a time keeping her eyes off his crotch. Not that she saw him very often, but her eyes seemed to go to his fly anytime he was around.

Groaning, she moved along the fence until it turned to the west, and she followed it back to the house.

After unsaddling Sassy, she cooled her down, gave her extra oats and clean water then walked across the yard to the house, and entered the kitchen.

"Where have you been?" Silas sat at the kitchen table.

"I told you I was going to check the fence."

"We have ranch hands to do that."

"They're busy with moving the bison closer to the barns."

"Everly, you better not be out looking for Rand Morris."

She hung up her hat and spun around to look at her grandfather.

"I told you what I was doing. If you don't believe me, that is your problem, Pap. I did not go looking for Rand Morris."

"Did you see him though?"

"What is this about?"

"I heard you were talking to him at Dewey's."

"Do you spy on me? Yes, I spoke to him. He sat beside me and said hello."

"He's up to no good, trust me on that."

"The only reason you think he's up to no good is because he's a Morris. If it were any other man, you wouldn't bat an eye."

“You need to find you a good man and Rand Morris isn’t one.”

“I am not having this conversation with you. I will see whomever I want.”

“So, you want to see him?” Silas got to his feet, and she saw his hands clenched into fists.

“I didn’t say that, but if I did, there is nothing you could do about it. I live my own life.”

“If you see him, you will no longer be allowed in this house. Are we clear on that?”

“You have made that abundantly clear, Pap.” She walked past him. “I’ll be in my room.”

Everly climbed the stairs, entered her room, and slammed the door behind her. Her grandfather was so set in his ways. Especially about the Morris’. She couldn’t understand why the feud even continued. Her great-grandparents were long gone and so were Rand’s. Silas Madden blamed all of them for what happened when it was his father and Rand’s great-grandmother who had started it all.

She was so tired of it. So many times, she’d been in town with her grandfather, and they’d see McArthur Madden in the diner or the feed store, and her grandfather would just go off. McArthur wasn’t much better. They’d stand toe to toe and argue over... nothing. Nothing at all.

It finally got to the point that she’d walk out of wherever they were and get in the truck. Her grandfather embarrassed her so much that she quit going into town with him for fear of running into a Morris.

It had to end, and she knew the only way it would, was when Silas or McArthur died. Her parents couldn’t take it, and moved to Hartland, and Rand’s parents moved to Spring City. It was ridiculous. Every bit of it.

She entered her bathroom, stripped, pinned her hair on top of her head, and started the bath water. She planned to soak for as long as she could then she was going to bed.

After she sunk into the warm water, she leaned her head back and thought about her grandfather telling her about Rand and her speaking last night at Dewey's. She slapped her hands on the water, making it slosh over the side. How dare he spy on her? She was a grown woman, and if she wanted to talk to Rand, she would. Damn anyone who told her grandfather about it. It was no one's business. No one's but hers and Rand's.

Placing her hands over her face, she fought back tears. This had to stop, but until one of the grandfathers passed away, it would never end.

The following Saturday, Rand sat at the bar in Dewey's, looking over the crowd. He had no idea why he was even here again. Yes, he did. He was hoping Everly would be here, but that didn't look like it was going to happen.

Picking up his bottle of beer, he took a long pull on it, then set it down.

"Hey, Rand."

He looked over to see Dominic Blackstone standing beside him.

"Hey, Dom. How are you?" He shook his hand.

"I'm good. You?"

"Same."

"Do you mind if I sit here?"

"Not at all. How's married life treating you?" Rand grinned.

"Great. You should try it."

Rand laughed. "Not me. I'm not interested in that."

Dom grinned. "Yeah, I wasn't either."

Rand saw him looking at Laura behind the bar.

“You two seem happy. She deserves that after what Jeb did to her.”

“I know. I could still kick his ass, but he’s finally moved on to the next ex-Mrs. Carson.”

“No doubt there. Some people can’t be faithful.”

“Hi, baby,” Laura said when she stepped in front of Dom and handed him a beer then leaned over the bar and kissed his lips, making the people along the bar cheer.

Rand grinned as Dom stood, cupped her face in his hands, and deepened the kiss.

“Hi, yourself, darlin’.” Dom resumed his seat.

Rand watched a blush move into her cheeks, but her face lit up with a big grin.

“Do you need another beer, Rand?”

“No, thanks, Laura. I’m heading out.”

“Be careful.”

“Yes, ma’am. Dom? See you soon.” He paid for his beer, gave them a nod and walked outside.

The cooler weather seemed to have moved in this evening. He made his way to his truck, aimed the fob at it, climbed in, and drove home. He wondered what Everly was doing.

Once he got home, he headed for the barn, saddled Jester, and tore out of the barn to head for the pond. He didn’t feel like sitting in the house right now. He had too much on his mind. *Everly*. She was on his mind, and he had to stop thinking about her because nothing would ever come of it. She would never go against her grandfather and Silas Madden would disown her if he knew she saw Rand.

He reined the horse to stop at the edge of the pond. The full moon reflected off the water. As he sat there, he wished there was a way to stop the feuding between the families. His parents had gotten so fed up that they moved out of Clifton, and who could blame them?

His father, Randall, and Everly's father, Benjamin 'Bam' Madden used to be the best of friends when they were young children. Until Silas and McArthur learned of it and separated them by putting them in different schools.

Randall called him Bam because his initials were B.A.M., and they lost touch over the years. It just wasn't right.

Blowing out a frustrated breath, Rand turned Jester to head back to the barn. Once he cooled him down, he'd try to get some sleep and not think about Everly Madden. The best thing he could do was stay the hell away from her.

A few weeks later, Everly rode Sassy along the fence, looking for any problems. It was cold today and she'd rather be in the warm house, but someone checked the fence every day. It was her turn.

She reined the horse to a stop when she saw the fence laying on the ground, and a horse belonging to the Morris' stood munching on Madden grass.

"Hey," she yelled, but the horse didn't raise its head. "Damn it. Now I have to let Morris know."

With a deep sigh, she rode back to the barn, handed Sassy off to a ranch hand, climbed into her truck, and drove to the Morris property. She just hoped old man McArthur Morris didn't shoot her.

When she reached the property, she drove close to the barn, parked, then entered. Once her eyes adjusted, she strode down the aisle, looking for Rand or someone who could relay the message.

"What are you doing here, Everly?"

Everly turned to see Rand barreling down on her. She watched as he removed his work gloves and stuck them in the back pocket of his jeans, which made his coat open, and she

couldn't stop herself from looking at his crotch. *Great! Wearing chaps again.*

"One of your horses is on our land. Go get it off our property," she said, placing her hands on her hips.

"You could have just moved it yourself, then repaired the fence. You didn't have to come here. Now I have to stop what I'm doing and go get the horse because *Ms. Madden* didn't want to put herself out." He stopped within two feet of her.

"You're a real pain in the ass, Morris," she snapped as he moved around her and strode away.

He turned, walked back to her, and stopped within inches of her.

"Yeah, so? Like you're not, Madden."

"I just wanted to tell you that your horse was on our property. Like you, I could have called the sheriff, but I didn't want to be a bitch about it," she growled out.

"Didn't want to be a bitch? Come on, Everly. You know that's not possible."

She gasped, then slapped his face, making her palm sting. Rand grabbed her arms and pulled her up against him, raising her on her toes. His nose almost touched hers.

"Never hit me again," he snarled.

"What the hell would you do if I did, Morris? Hit me back?"

They stared into each other's eyes, and she watched as his gaze dropped to her lips and back into her eyes. The next thing she knew, his lips were on hers, and he was walking her backward until she came up against the wall.

She couldn't stop the moan as she reached for the snap of his jeans, and she could feel his hard cock testing the strength of the zipper.

He unsnapped her jeans while she toed off her boots. God! This was so wrong, but he had her so damn hot. His lips never left hers as he tried to shove her jeans down.

She slid her hand inside his jeans and wrapped her hand around his cock, straining against his underwear. He groaned against her mouth.

Everly pulled her lips from his and gasped when he slid his fingers inside her panties and down to her slit.

“Please,” she murmured and drew a deep breath when his fingers touched her clitoris. He didn’t stop until her belly clenched, and she cried out when she came.

Rand dropped to his knees and tugged her jeans and panties down. She stepped out of them and kicked them away. Then he stood, removed a condom from his wallet, and rolled it on. He lifted her, pushed his jeans down, and plunged into her. His fingers dug into her ass as he took her hard against the wall.

She hooked her ankles behind his back and wound her arms around his neck. She knocked his hat from his head and held on for the ride. He felt amazing.

Once again, that feeling rushed over her, and she groaned against his neck, then nipped it with her teeth. He grunted and slammed into her, then placed his face in the crook of her neck and groaned when he came.

As they took deep breaths, it hit her what she had done. She pushed against his shoulders, and he raised his head to look at her.

“Let me down,” she panted.

Rand let go of her and stepped back while pulling up his jeans. He never took his eyes off her as he snapped and zipped them while his chest heaved.

Her face was on fire. *What the hell was she thinking?* She pushed past him, picked up her jeans and panties, pulled them on, and then her boots. Without looking at him again, she ran from the barn.

Rand raked his fingers through his hair, then placed his hands on his hips as he looked in the direction she'd gone. He picked up his hat, slapped it on his head, and walked from the barn.

“What the fuck were you thinking? Thinking with your damn dick is what,” he muttered as he strode across the yard, up the steps of the porch, entered the house, and stopped in his tracks when he remembered how hot the sex was with her. *Son of a bitch!*

With a heavy sigh, he removed his hat, hung it on a peg, and walked to the bathroom off the kitchen. After disposing of the condom, he washed his hands, opened the door and headed for the living room. He stopped when he saw his grandfather standing at the front window, looking out toward the driveway.

“Was that Everly Madden?” he asked without turning around.

“Yes, sir.”

“What was she here for?”

Not sex, that's for sure.

“She came over to tell me my horse was on their property.”

“She could have called you. I don't want a Madden on this property.” He turned to look at him. “You understand me, son?”

“Yes, sir. I'll go get the horse and when I get back, I'll grab a shower, then we can eat.”

“That's fine.”

Rand was sure his grandfather suspected something, but that could just be guilt on his part. He took a deep breath, walked out the door, and climbed into his truck.

“What the fuck were you thinking?” he asked himself again.

Everly drove her truck as if the hounds of hell were chasing her.

“What were you thinking?” she asked herself again.

So absorbed in chastising herself, she missed the driveway. She slammed on the brakes, making the truck skid along the blacktop.

Taking a deep breath, she pulled onto the berm, checked for traffic, turned around, pulled into the driveway, and stopped.

She put her head against the steering wheel as tears rolled down her cheeks.

“That was just so damn wrong, but so fucking hot,” she whispered.

Raising her head, she knew no matter how hot it was, it could never happen again. There could be no future of any kind for her and Rand.

“*Future?* Who said anything about a future? We had sex. *Once.* Never again,” she muttered. *Never say never.*

Everly had been engaged years ago, but her fiancé wasn’t interested in living on the ranch she’d inherit one day. She was too involved with running the ranch. She didn’t need a man in her life to complicate things, and Rand Morris could certainly complicate things. It was for the best.

“God! It was so damn hot,” she muttered as she pressed the gas to drive to the house. Now, if she could look at her grandfather without looking guilty, she’d be happy.

Saturday evening, she headed to Dewey’s for a night out. She deserved it and wanted to drink the memory of her and Rand having sex out of her mind.

Sitting at the bar, sipping a Callahan and Coke, she watched people dancing. She missed a man’s company, but it was mostly missing the sex. Rand sure made her realize just how much she missed it.

Damn, the man knew what he was doing. Her orgasm had been so intense. She moaned. *Son of a bitch!*

“Are you okay, Everly?” Scarlett Conway asked her.

“Oh, yeah. I’m fine, Scarlett. I just remembered something I was supposed to do.” She hated lying, but there was no way she’d tell Scarlett the truth.

“Okay. Flag me down if you need a refill.” Scarlett smiled and moved to another customer.

“Fancy seeing you here,” she heard Rand say from beside her as he slid onto a stool.

“Oh, God. What did I do to deserve this?”

When he chuckled, she glanced over at him.

“Did you follow me?”

“Oh, sure, Everly.” He snorted. “You know better.”

She turned on the stool to look at him.

“You know, today was a huge mistake.”

As she stared at him, a slow grin lifted his sexy lips.

“If you say so. I’d never call something that good a mistake.”

Everly looked away and signaled Scarlett.

“Another Everly?”

“No, thanks. Could you give me my tab? I need to get out of here.”

She saw Scarlett glancing back and forth between her and Rand.

“Uh, sure. I’ll be right back.” She walked off.

“I never thought you were a chicken, Everly.”

“I’m not. I just want to get away from you.”

Rand touched the brim of his hat.

“Have a nice night.”

A brief pang went through her heart when he didn't ask her to stay. *What?* No way did she care if he wanted her to stay or go.

After paying her bill, she hopped down from the stool and walked through the crowd without giving Rand Morris another look or thought.

Rand walked outside of the bar and glanced around. He grinned when he saw Everly sitting on a bench and headed for her.

"Hey," he said when he reached her. "I thought you were leaving."

"Go away, Morris."

"Now, why would I do that, Madden?"

"Because I don't want anything to do with you."

Rand took a seat beside her.

"That's a lie."

"You've got some balls, Morris."

"Damn right, I do, and you know it."

He watched as she folded her arms across her chest, and he did all he could to keep his eyes off the material of her T-shirt stretched tight across her breasts since her coat hung open. He leaned close to her.

"As much as I hate to admit this, I like you, Everly."

She looked at him, and her eyebrow rose.

"Bullshit. You just liked the sex."

"No, I didn't like the sex." He grinned when her eyes narrowed. "I *loved* the sex. I want to do that again."

"Go away," she repeated.

“Tell me you didn’t like it, darlin’.”

“I didn’t.”

“Liar.” He chuckled when she laughed.

“Okay, I liked it, but it can’t happen again.”

“Why not? Our grandfathers hate each other, not us.”

“They taught me to hate the Morris family with every fiber of my being, and they taught you the same about us Maddens.”

“Doesn’t mean we have to.”

“What’s the matter, Rand? Can’t you find another woman to have sex with?”

“Darlin’, I can walk back in that bar and come back out with just about any of them.” He shrugged. “I want you.”

Everly shook her head. “No.”

“You’re going to deny yourself great sex?”

When she sputtered out a laugh, he got to his feet, took her hand, pulled her up, and led her through the parking lot.

“Rand, where are we going?”

“To my truck,” he said with a grin.

Everly tugged on his hand, making him stop and look at her.

“I will not have sex with you in your truck.”

“Why not? Where’s your sense of adventure?”

“I don’t have one.”

“Oh, but darlin’, you do.” He leaned down and put his lips close to her ear. “You fucked me in the barn.”

She pushed at his shoulders.

“That was a mistake.”

“It was damn hot, though, wasn’t it? I want you again, Everly.”

“Rand, our families hate each other. This is not a good idea.”

“Why deny ourselves?” He cupped her face in his hands and stared into her eyes. “Can you tell me you’ve had better?”

She closed her eyes for a few seconds, opened them, and blew a breath.

“No, but—”

He pressed his lips to hers, then slowly raised them.

“No buts, darlin’. I never have either.” He huffed. “Look, Everly, I don’t know what will happen with us, but I don’t fucking care about the damn feud. It’s time we all got over it.”

“And you think by us having sex will end it? Rand, my grandfather would shoot you on sight.”

“You could come to my place.”

“Doesn’t your grandfather live with you?” She frowned at him.

“No. He has a little cabin he lives in on the property. The only time he comes to my house is Fridays for dinner.”

“I don’t know....”

“I do. Why not enjoy this?”

“Because you will break my heart. You’ll throw me over and return to hating me because of our families.”

“What happened to our families was long before you and I were even thought of.”

“It doesn’t matter how long ago it was. Our families are enemies.”

“Well, I don’t care.” He folded his arms across his chest.

“Well, I do. This...” She waved her hand between them. “Ain’t happenin’ sweetheart. Goodnight.” She turned from him, strode across the parking lot, climbed into her truck, and drove off.

“Damn it,” Rand muttered.

The next day, Everly sat at the kitchen table, pushed the chair back, got to her feet, walked to where her hat and coat hung. She took them off the hooks and headed for the door. She turned back to look at her grandfather.

“I’m going to take Sassy out.” She shook her head when he didn’t even look up from his crossword puzzle.

After saddling Sassy, she tore out of the barn to clear her head. She knew the men were out with the bison, and the fence had been checked.

As she rode along the field, she reined the horse to a stop when she spotted Rand on the other side of the fence on his horse. He raised his head and spotted her, then nudged his horse to ride to the fence. Everly sat there watching him ride. A cowboy through and through.

“Well, hello, Ms. Madden,” he said as he touched the brim of his hat.

The afternoon in the barn came at her like a rushing train, and she looked away from him. She nudged Sassy to move along the fence.

“Aren’t you even going to say hello?”

“No.”

Rand chuckled. “I would think after our, uh, little time in the barn, you’d be able to talk to me.”

She reined Sassy to a stop, turned in the saddle, and looked at that handsome face.

“Fuck you, Morris.”

“I believe you did, darlin’.”

Everly gasped. “A real gentleman wouldn’t say that, but since you’re a Morris, it’s expected.”

“Damn, Everly. What’s got your panties in a wad?”

She took a deep breath, dismounted, dropped the reins, walked around the horse, and stared at him.

“What’s got my panties in a wad? Seriously, Rand?” She glanced around. “The thing is, I *can’t* like you. Nothing can ever come of this.”

“We’re adults, Everly. I want to see you. Be with you, and no matter how much you deny yourself, you want to be with me too.”

“I’m supposed to hate you when I—” she stopped talking.

Rand dismounted, walked to the fence, and stared at her.

“When you what?”

She took a deep breath. “I don’t.”

“Oh, darlin’, you know I like you too, but—”

Rand removed his hat, raked his fingers through his hair, then resettled the hat.

“Let’s go to the pond.”

Everly stared at him, then nodded. “All right.”

They rode their horses to the pond, dismounted, removed the saddles and blankets, and sat on a large boulder at the bank.

Everly leaned back on her hands, stared across the water, and watched the sun glint off it, making it look like glass. Rand bent his knees and rested his wrists on them. Neither said anything, but she couldn’t help but think about how all of this started.

Hers and Rand’s great-grandfathers were the best of friends, from grade school, and they remained friends through high school and graduation and even served in the war together. They’re the godfather of each other’s children. They were each other’s best man when they each married. The land was something they always talked about doing together, and when they had the chance to purchase it, they did. Jointly. They were inseparable. Their wives became best friends too.

Then everything changed because her great-grandfather and Rand's great-grandmother had an affair. The families were torn apart, and friendships ended.

Everly's great-grandmother left her husband for cheating on her, and Rand's great-grandfather kicked his wife off the ranch and divorced her for adultery. That started all of this. It happened after their grandfathers were born. Rand's great-grandfather took Everly's great-grandfather to court for half of the bison and the ranch. The only thing they own equally is the pond because it sits on both properties, and neither would let the other have it.

It was drilled into their heads that neither family were good people. The families hated each other because of something that happened years ago. What happened never should have. They were friends and trusted each other. A lot of good it did any of them. Everly mentally snorted and glanced at Rand.

“We have all been raised to hate each other.”

“I don't hate you, Everly. For God's sake, I'd like to know you. I know it will be hard for us to be together, but why should we suffer because of past generations?”

“I'm sure your great-grandfather badmouthed my great-grandfather as much as he could—”

“Well, he slept with my great-grandmother. What the hell do you expect, Everly? He'd just let it go. If I had a friend who cheated with my wife, I'd be the same way. They were both to blame. They cheated on their spouses. Spouses who were all friends.”

“They should have just stayed away from each other.”

“When my grandfather discovered that my father and yours were becoming friends, he told my father to stay away from the Maddens because they couldn't be trusted, and he told my father why. Of course, my grandfather blamed your great-grandfather for tearing a marriage apart. Their friendship ended quickly, and my grandfather enrolled my dad in another school because our grandfathers didn't want them associating

with each other.” Rand shook his head. “It’s a fucking mess, but it’s them, not us. This feud could end with us.”

“Rand, this feud will never end, and we’d be wise to remember that.” She got to her feet. “I have to go.”

“Wait. Everly, I’ll be here tomorrow at noon,” he said, as he wrapped his fingers around her wrist.

“And that concerns me, how?” She pulled her arm away, saddled Sassy, mounted the horse, kneed her to run, and headed home. All the while, tears rolled down her cheeks.

Chapter Three

There was no way Everly would meet him tomorrow. It was just asking for trouble, but the sex was so hot between them. Maybe it had been a fluke. First time together, and all that mumbo jumbo.

“I should have sex with him one more time, just to make sure,” she muttered.

Sex that hot didn’t happen just once, so she should have sex with him again to see if it was a onetime thing.

“Keep talking and you’ll convince yourself it’s the right thing to do.”

She rode Sassy into the barn, removed the tack, and cooled the horse down. As she strode across the yard, she kept trying to talk herself out of meeting Rand tomorrow.

“I’m busy,” she said as she climbed the steps to the porch, opened the door, and entered the kitchen.

“Did you have a pleasant ride, honey?” her grandfather asked as he sat at the table playing solitaire.

“Yes. The cooler weather is nice.”

“Uh, huh,” he muttered without looking up.

“What do you want for dinner?” Everly removed her hat and coat, and hat then hung them up.

“Pancakes.”

“Again? I swear you’re going to turn into one.” She smiled when he chuckled.

“Please?”

“All right. Let me go grab a shower, and then I’ll make your damn pancakes.”

The following day, Everly mucked out the stalls to keep busy, but she kept looking at her watch. Eleven-thirty.

“No. You will not go to the pond,” she said under her breath.

When she finished the last stall, she looked at her watch to see it was twelve-thirty. She put her tools away, ran out of the barn, across the yard, and into the house, then climbed the stairs, and entered her bathroom to shower.

“He’s probably gone, Everly. He said noon,” she said as she practically tore her clothes off, then stepped into the shower stall. She washed and dressed in record time. As she ran down the stairs, she caught herself before she fell.

“One of these days, you’re going to fall,” her grandfather said from the bottom of the stairs. “Why are you in such a hurry?”

“I’m not. I slipped. I’m going for a ride. I’ll be back later.”

She didn’t wait to see if he answered her. She ran to the barn to saddle her horse.

Fifteen minutes later, she was running Sassy full-out to get to the pond, but when she got there, she didn’t see him.

“Damn it,” she swore. “Probably for the best.”

“I didn’t think you were going to show,” Rand said as he stepped out from behind a tree and leaned against it.

“You’re here.”

“Yes, and I kept waiting, but you didn’t show. I was about to leave.” He walked toward her horse and stared up at her. “Get down, Everly.”

She inhaled deeply and shook her head. “We can’t do this.”

“What? Why not?”

“Why not? We’re enemies, Rand. It would come down to choosing us or our families.”

“Then why did you bother coming? You could have just stayed home and let me find out that way instead of coming here. You should have stayed away.”

“Don’t you put this on me, Rand Morris. I kept telling you we couldn’t be together.”

“And yet, here you are.”

She stared into his eyes, and she could see anger in them. And why shouldn’t she? He was pissed. He turned from her, walked behind the tree and when he came back out, he was on his horse.

“I never took you for a tease, Everly.”

She gasped. “I’m not! If our families didn’t hate each other, it would be so much easier.”

Rand touched the brim of his hat and nodded.

“You have a good day, Ms. Madden,” he said, and spurred his horse into a run.

Everly bit her lip as she watched him ride away full-speed, and he never looked back. She wiped a tear away and turned Sassy to head home. She wondered if Rand would go to Dewey’s Saturday night.

As she cooled the horse down, she couldn’t stop thinking of the look on his face when she told him they couldn’t be together. He was so angry... and he looked hurt.

“One more trip around the barn, Sass, then I’ll put you in and give you some extra oats.” Everly chuckled when the horse snorted. “I know you think I’m crazy not seeing Rand, but we’re enemies. Well, our families.”

Sassy jerked her head back, making Everly almost drop them.

“Come on.” The horse wouldn’t move, so she walked back to her and rubbed her velvety nose. “I am crazy, aren’t I? He’s so sexy, and he doesn’t even try to be. True cowboy, Sass, and I have always loved them.” She sighed. “I’ll go to Dewey’s Saturday night.”

She laughed when Sassy nodded, then started down the aisle as if the horse was cooling *her* down.

Saturday afternoon, after finishing her chores, she walked across the yard, up the steps, and entered the house. She removed her hat and coat, then hung them on the pegs.

“Pap?” she called out. “Pap?”

“I’m watching football.”

Everly entered the living room to see him in the old recliner he refused to get rid of.

“You could have answered me. Did you eat?”

“I had a sandwich, honey. I’m not hungry, but you should eat.”

“A sandwich sounds good. I’m going to eat, then take a shower, and head out.”

“Dewey’s again?”

“Don’t start, Pap. I’m a healthy young woman. I like to get out and kick up my boots.”

“You just make sure you don’t drink and drive.”

“I don’t drink that much.”

“I know, honey. You go have fun. I suppose I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Maybe,” she said before heading back to the kitchen. She heard her grandfather mumbling. “Did you say something?”

“No.”

“Oh, good.”

She bit her lip to keep from laughing, but it was so much fun teasing him. She turned back to the living room and frowned. Rand had called her a tease, and she wasn’t.

“I thought you were going to make a sandwich.”

“I’m going to shower first, and I might just grab a sandwich at the bar.”

“Whatever you want, honey. I’ll probably be in bed when you get home. *If* you come home. Either way, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Everly smiled, walked to him, leaned down, and kissed the top of his head.

“I love you, Pap. I’ll see tomorrow. Sometime.” She laughed when he grumbled under his breath, then made her way up the steps. She entered her room, closed the door, and headed for the bathroom.

As she turned the water on, she nibbled on her bottom lip. She hoped Rand was there tonight.

Rand strolled across the parking lot toward Dewey’s. The parking lot was full. Another wild Saturday night at Dewey’s.

Each time the doors opened, he could hear the music, along with laughter. It was a great bar. It had always been a good place to hang out, but it’s even better now since Scarlett bought it from Dewey, her uncle.

Scarlett was married to one of his good friends. Noah Conway was the best saddle maker, in Rand’s opinion. He owned four Conway saddles. They were second to none.

As he reached the doors, he opened one and stepped inside. Sardine can was an understatement. He tried to get through the crowd, but people kept stopping him to talk or others were standing in the way.

He finally made it to the bar but didn’t see an empty stool. Raising his hand, he got a bartender’s attention.

“Hey, Rand, what can I get you?”

“Just a bottle of beer, Keith. I’d hate to try to get through the crowd with a mug of beer.”

“You got that right. I’ll be right back.”

Rand nodded, and Keith moved to the cooler. Rand watched him slide it open, reach inside, and pull out a beer. As he twisted the cap off, Keith headed back to him.

“Here ya go. Just raise your hand if you need one of us.”

“Sure, but who’s going to see me do that if I’m in this crowd?” He chuckled when Keith shrugged.

Rand glanced around the bar and saw an empty seat, so he got to it and sat. If he wanted to keep this seat, he’d better not move.

“Hey.”

Rand looked over to see a beautiful blonde in a sweater so tight he didn’t know how she could breathe.

“Ma’am,” he said with a nod.

“Buy me a drink?”

It tempted him to tell her no, but if he had to get past wanting Everly, he needed to move on.

“You sound like she was yours,” he muttered.

“What?”

“Nothing. Just thinking out loud.”

“Okay. So, buy me a drink?”

“Sure.” He raised his hand to get Laura’s attention.

“Hey, Rand. What can I get you?”

“This lady would like a drink on me.”

“All right. What can I get you?” Laura asked the blonde.

“Callahan whiskey on the rocks, please.”

“Be right back.”

Rand lifted his beer, took a swig, and almost spit it out when he saw Everly enter the bar. He watched her look over

the crowd and her eyes landed on him. He saw her take a deep breath, then pushed through the crowd.

When the stool next to him became vacant, he was hoping Everly would sit beside him, but the blonde hopped on it. *Damn.*

“What’s your name?” she asked him.

“Rand Morris.”

“I’m Cheryl Landis. It’s nice to meet you.”

He was about to say something when he saw Everly stepping up beside the stool the blonde sat on.

“You’re in my seat,” she said.

“I don’t think I am, sweetie.”

When Everly looked at him, he raised his eyebrows and shrugged. He was sure he could see steam coming out of her ears. She gave him a tightlipped smile, then looked at the blonde. Oh, hell.

“First off, I am not your sweetie. Second, I came here looking for him, so you can just go away. Find another cowboy. Third, you shouldn’t put your cashmere sweaters in the dryer. They shrink, and it looks like yours has shrunk more than once.”

Rand hung his head. This could go a lot of different ways. He raised his head to see the women glaring at each other, then he remembered what Everly said.

“You came here looking for me?”

“Yes.” Everly looked at him, then back at the blonde. “But if you’d rather not talk with me, I’d understand.”

“Would you now? You told me we couldn’t be together. I know you’re not a fickle woman, Everly, but decide.”

“We need to talk, Rand. If you have plans with this... *lady*, I’ll leave you to it.”

He stared at her and wanted her so much. The blonde didn’t appeal to him. Since he’d been with Everly, no other woman

did.

“What do we need to discuss, Everly? I think you made yourself clear.”

“See? He doesn’t want to talk to you.”

“Look, you need to keep out of this,” she said to the blonde.

“Well, he said—”

“Shut up,” Everly growled out, and Rand knew the shit was about to hit the fan.

He sighed and knew he had to break this up because he was certain Everly would have no problem kicking the blonde’s ass.

“All right, Everly. We’ll talk.” He looked at the woman. “I’m sorry, but I need to talk with her.”

“Fine, but don’t come crawling to me when she doesn’t want you.”

Rand chuckled. “I don’t have a problem with that.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Everly fold her arms, and a smirk lifted her lips.

“Oh, so sorry, but you can go now. Find another cowboy. This one is mine.”

“Whatever,” the blonde said and walked off.

Everly looked at Rand and wondered if she had gone insane. *This one is mine.* What the hell, Everly. *Why? Why did she say that?*

He stared at her as he lifted the bottle to his lips and downed the rest of the beer and set the empty bottle on the bar.

“We can go outside and talk.”

“All right.” She turned to move through the crowd but stopped and looked at him. “If you want the tiny sweater

woman, go for it.”

Rand grinned at her. “I didn’t want her at all. Come on, let’s go.”

She took a deep breath and nodded. Now that he would talk with her, she realized she had no idea what she would say.

“You go out first. I’ll be out in a few minutes.”

“Sure.”

Everly watched him push his way through the crowd, and then he disappeared out the door.

“What are you thinking?” she muttered, then headed for the door.

This was more than wrong. It was forbidden, and they couldn’t seem to stay away from each other.

“Everly? Do you want something?”

She mentally shook her head to clear the cobwebs and saw Laura staring at her with a frown on her face. Everly smiled.

“I’m fine, Laura. Thanks.”

Laura nodded, then moved along the bar to wait on customers.

Everly blew out a breath, turned and made her way through the crowd until she reached the doors. Stopping, she argued with herself about seeing Rand. There would be hell to pay if they got caught. *How is this going to work?*

She pushed against the door and stepped outside. The weather had cooled, and she knew snow wouldn’t be far behind.

“Maybe the snow would keep you away from him,” she murmured as she glanced around the parking lot. She saw a truck flashing the lights, and with a deep sigh, she headed for it.

When she reached the truck, the passenger door opened.

“Hop in, darlin’,” Rand said with a smile.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

“What? You’re the one who said you needed to talk to me. Get in, and we’ll talk.”

“All right.” Everly slid onto the seat and stared out the windshield. She pulled the door closed. God! He smelled amazing.

She looked at Rand to see him leaning against the door, then he put his leg onto the seat, bent at the knee, and stared at her.

“Well? You wanted to talk, so talk.”

“This was a mistake,” she muttered.

“What was a mistake? Having sex, or you getting in the truck with me?”

“Both. I’m so afraid Pap will find out. If he does, he will disown me and kick me out.”

“Then make up your mind, Everly. If we continue to see each other, we have to keep it quiet.”

“Your grandfather would be angry too.”

Rand shrugged. “It’s my life.”

She turned on the seat to face him.

“It is, but would you want to do something that makes your grandfather angry?”

“Everly, I’m thirty-three. I live life like I want. No one else. You’d do best to remember that because it’s how you need to live. If you want me to leave you alone, I will. Just say the word.”

Rand held his breath, waiting for her to answer.

“I’m scared. I hate hurting my family, but you’re right. It’s my life. I would like to see you, but it won’t be easy.”

He sighed. "I know, but even though our families are enemies, you and I aren't." He reached across the seat and took her hand in his. "I've never wanted a woman more, but I'm not going to pressure you. We could meet at the cabin on Saturdays or here at Dewey's."

"I suppose. If they catch us, we're in trouble."

"Do you think we're the first couple to sneak around?"

"No, I know we're not."

"It's up to you, Everly. I'll do whatever you want."

"My gut is just in knots over this, Rand. It was bad enough the first time."

"What does that mean?"

"After I left the barn, I thought I was going to be sick."

"Damn, was it that bad?" He grinned when she laughed.

"I didn't mean the sex was bad. It just hit me what we had done. Mortal enemies having sex."

"I get that, but it's good between us, Everly, and you know that."

"It is." She nodded. "I'll meet you at the cabin next Saturday."

Rand blew out a relieved breath.

"I'll be there, sweetheart. Can I kiss you?"

"No. You, Rand Morris, will not try to get me in the backseat. We have to be careful."

"One kiss?"

She opened the door and jumped down, then looked at him.

"No." She slammed the door.

He saw her hightailing it across the parking lot. She never looked back. He watched until she disappeared. He sat up, started the truck, and drove home. Saturday couldn't get here soon enough. She better show up.

The next day, Everly rode Sassy along the fence. She couldn't get the time in the barn out of her mind, and she was eager to see if the sex was as amazing as the first time. The smile faded as she thought about being caught by either of their grandfathers.

Silas Madden wouldn't hesitate to throw her off the ranch. He hated Rand because he was a Morris and he expected her to do the same. Shaking her head, she knew she couldn't hate him. He was all she thought of, and she knew it was wrong, but she couldn't wait to see him again. But where could it lead?

"Nowhere but to a heartache," she said aloud. God! What was she doing? It would destroy her grandfather. "It's my life."

What would she do if it came down to choosing between her grandfather or Rand? She was to inherit the ranch once her father passed away, but would her grandfather even leave it to her father if she chose Rand?

"What a mess."

What if she and Rand fell in love? She was so damn attracted to him, and she always had been, but it hadn't been until recently that he paid her any attention. She reined Sassy to a stop and frowned. Why was he suddenly interested? Was he toying with her? But why would he bother doing that?

No. She shook her head. She didn't think he was toying with her. He seemed genuinely interested in her.

Kneeing the horse, she rode home and into the barn. She was removing the saddle when her grandfather entered the barn.

"Where have you been?"

"I told you I was going for a ride." She lifted the blanket off and carried it to the tack room, then returned to cool Sassy down.

“You were gone a while.”

She turned to look at him. “Pap, I am not on a schedule, am I? The men do their part and I do mine, so let me relax sometimes.”

“I suppose the best way for you to do that is ride.”

“It is. I love it.” She turned from him before he saw her pink cheeks. *He would never forgive her if he knew!*

When she turned to face him, he was staring at her, but nodded, and left the barn. Everly blew out a breath. How was this going to work?

The following Saturday, she rode Sassy up through the pasture, jumped the fence, and headed for the hunting cabin. She knew where it sat since she’d seen it from her side of the fence. She just never knew they used it for hunting.

When she saw the cabin, she slowed the horse and watched the door open. She blew out a relieved breath when she saw Rand step onto the porch. He leaned against the post and folded his arms. Her heart hit her stomach when he grinned at her.

“About time, Madden,” he said.

“I’m right on time, Morris. You’re just impatient.” She dismounted, then led the horse to the porch.

“You can put her around back with Jester.”

“All right. Let me cool her down, and I’ll be in.”

“I’ll help you.” He trotted down the steps, walked to her, and kissed her. “I’ve missed you,” he murmured close to her lips.

“It’s only been a week, Rand.”

His eyebrows shot up. “Are you saying you didn’t miss me?”

She grinned. “I’m not saying anything. I know how you are. You’ll use it against me.”

Rand chuckled. "Damn right, I would. Come on. I have lunch for us."

"Really? What are we having?"

"Fried chicken. I picked it up from the diner earlier."

"I love Connie's fried chicken."

After cooling her horse down, he took her hand and led her inside. He held a chair for her.

"Let me get my coat off." She removed her hat, then took her coat off and placed them on a bench beside the door. She glanced around. "This is a nice little cabin."

"I'm the only one who uses it now. Gramps doesn't hunt anymore."

Everly turned to look at him, and before she knew it, they were tearing each other's clothes off. Rand picked her up and carried her to the bed in the corner of the open room. He placed her in the center and came down beside her.

Rand pressed his lips to hers and Everly fisted her hands in his hair, trying to pull him closer.

"Rand, please. I need you so much."

"So, you missed me?"

"Shut up, Morris," she growled, then laughed when he chuckled.

He settled between her legs, moved his lips across her cheek to her ear, tugged on the lobe, then moved down to her breasts.

"Dear God, you are perfect," he murmured before he took her nipple into his mouth and sucked.

When he moved down her belly, she pulled his hair. He raised his head to look at her.

“No?”

“No. Yes.”

“Wait. Which is it?”

“I meant I didn’t mean no.”

“Good. I have to taste you, Everly.” He moved his lips down to her curls and then moved his tongue along her slit. Up and down, repeatedly, until he put his mouth over her clitoris and sucked hard. Her breathing increased, then she cried out as she came.

Rand moved up her body and stared into her eyes.

“Wrap those long legs around me.” She did, making him groan.

He inched into her, never taking his eyes from hers.

“Please,” she murmured.

“Anything for you.” He took her hard, and they both groaned as they came together.

Rand placed his face in the crook of her neck. Then he realized he hadn’t worn a condom. *Son of a bitch!* He raised his head to look at her and was about to say something when he heard footsteps on the porch.

“Oh, my God. Who is that?” she whispered.

“I don’t know. The door’s locked. Let me see.” He got up and dressed, then moved to the door. Someone pounded on it before he got there.

“Rand? Son, are you in there?”

“Shit,” he muttered. His grandfather! “Uh, yeah, Gramps. Give me a second.”

“Why’s the damn door locked?” McArthur asked as Rand saw the knob turning.

He looked over his shoulder to see Everly ghostly white. He pointed to the bathroom. She nodded, got out of bed, picked up her clothes, made her way to the bathroom, and closed the door.

Rand saw her coat and hat on the bench. He quickly got them, walked to the bathroom. He tapped on it and Everly opened it.

“Your hat and coat,” he said quietly while handing them to her. She took them and closed the door.

He took a deep breath, opened the door, and stared at his grandfather.

“What are you doing here, Gramps?”

“I was taking a horse ride. I was going to get some water, but the door’s locked, and I couldn’t figure out why.” His grandfather looked into the room over Rand’s shoulder.

“I was out riding too, and just wanted to get my fishing pole and head for the pond.”

“Well, let’s do that. I’ll get mine too,” McArthur pushed his way past Rand and entered the cabin.

Rand watched him glance around. How was he going to get out of this? Fishing was the last damn thing he wanted to do, but it would look suspicious if he didn’t go.

“All right, Gramps. We can go to the pond. I’ll get the poles and be right out.”

“I need to use the bathroom first.”

“Uh, it’s broken. I need to get a new handle.”

“Oh, all right, then. Let’s go. Where’s your horse?”

“Around back.” He walked to where the fishing poles were, then handed them to his grandfather. “Here, take these out, and I’ll get Jester saddled.”

His grandfather stared at him, then turned, walked out, closing the door behind him. Rand blew out a relieved breath and locked the door again. He heard the bathroom door open and looked over to see Everly standing there, dressed. He strode to her.

“I’m sorry, baby, but if I don’t go, he’ll know something’s up.”

“I know. It’s fine. I’ll wait a little while, then go.”

“I’m sorry,” he repeated.

“It’s fine.” She touched his cheek.

“I’ll call you later.” He kissed her lips.

“All right.” She smiled.

“What?”

“Good thing you’re quick on your feet. Fishing?”

“I’m good at a lot of things, darlin’.”

“Damn right you are, Morris.” She kissed his lips. “I’m going to Dewey’s tonight.”

He grinned. “Dewey’s sounds good. Maybe I’ll see you there.”

Everly wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Maybe this time, I’ll go to your truck with you to do more than talk.”

Rand groaned, making her laugh. “One can only hope. I’m sorry, but I have to go before he comes back. Later, baby.”

Everly nodded, and after kissing her forehead, he headed out the door to see his grandfather waiting for him.

“Hurry, boy. The fish are waiting.”

“Yes, sir.” Rand walked around to the back of the cabin, saddled his horse, then rode back to his grandfather. Not the way he was hoping to spend today, but he knew he had no choice. Damn.

That evening, Rand entered Dewey’s seeing it wall to wall people. As was usual on a Saturday night. He made his way through the crowd and to the bar. He glanced along the bar and smiled when he saw Everly sitting there with a drink in her hand. He pushed through the people and took the empty stool beside her.

“Hey,” he said.

“Hey, yourself. I didn’t think you were going to show,” she said in a low tone.

“You know better. Someone said they might have sex with me in my truck.”

She shook her head. “I don’t think that’s what I said. I believe it was, I’ll go to your truck with you and do more than talk. I mentioned no sex.”

“Damn, Madden. Don’t tease me. I just had the longest day of my life, and now you’re telling me there might not be sex?”

Rand grinned when she burst out laughing.

“You know, if people keep seeing us talking and laughing together, they’re going to think something is up.”

He leaned close to her. “Nothing is up yet, but once we get to my truck, I’m sure that will change.”

She sputtered out a laugh. “Only you, Rand Morris. Only you.” She frowned at him.

“What?”

“Is Rand short for Randall or Randolph?”

“Nope. Just Rand.”

“I like it, and if you ever tell anyone I said that I’ll deny it.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He winked.

“What can I get you, Rand?” Scarlett asked him.

“A beer, please, Scarlett. Whatever’s on tap.”

“Sure thing. I’ll be right back. You okay for now, Everly?”

“I am. Thank you, Scarlett.”

“She has to be wondering why we’re sitting together,” Everly said.

“No doubt many people in here are.”

“My grandfather told me he knew we were talking in here the last time.”

“Damn, does he have spies?” Rand glanced around, but no one seemed to pay any attention to them.

“I’m sure someone here just loved letting him know. He’ll know about this too.”

“Well, hell then, darlin’, let’s go outside.” He nodded his head when Scarlett set his beer on the bar. He picked it up and downed half of it.

“Thirsty?” Everly asked him.

“Not really. I just want to finish this and then go outside with you.” He watched her pick up her glass, salute him with it, then down what was left in it. She set the glass on the bar and stared at him, then nodded.

“All right, but not together.”

“Okay. I’ll go first. No one would think you’d follow me,” he said with a grin. Then downed the rest of the beer.

“Oh, but they’d think you were following me?”

“Hell, yes. What sane man wouldn’t want to follow you?”

She shook her head. “You, Rand Morris, are a charmer.”

“Only with you, sweetheart.” He got off the stool, nodded, moved through the crowd, then walked out.

Chapter Four

Everly parked her truck by the porch and stared at the house. Taking a deep breath, she blew it out, picked up the small white bag, opened the door, stepped out, and entered the kitchen.

“Where have you been?”

“Just out,” she said with a shrug. She set the bag down and removed her hat and coat and hung them on the pegs.

“What’s in the bag?”

“Feminine items. Do you want to look to see if I’m telling the truth?” She held the bag out to him and grinned when he made a face.

“No, thank you. Did you have the men check the fence?”

“They did it this morning. You know it’s done every day.”

“Good. I don’t want our bison on Morris’s land, and I sure as hell don’t want theirs on ours.”

Everly pulled a chair out from under the table and took a seat.

“Pap, why can’t you all get past this hatred?”

“You know why.”

“It was years ago. Generations, for God’s sake. Let it go.”

“Why are you so interested in it now? You’d better not have something going on with Rand Morris.”

She pushed to her feet. “What if I did? What would you do?”

“What would I do? Girl, you would no longer be welcome in this house.”

“Seriously? You’d throw me out?”

“So fast your head would spin, so if you’re even thinking about it, you’d better think again.”

She stared at him and knew she couldn’t say anything to him yet. She was sure she was pregnant. If she was, she had to figure out how to break it to him. Being pregnant wouldn’t bother him as much as finding out the baby was with Rand.

“I’m going to my room. I’m not feeling very well. I’ll be down for dinner.”

“Okay, honey. Go get some rest.”

Mentally shaking her head, she left the room, and climbed the stairs to her room. One minute, he was raising hell with her, and the next, he was as sweet as can be. She knew that would drastically change once he found out the truth.

She closed the door to her room, strode to the bathroom, and set the bag on the counter, then removed the pregnancy kit. She stared at the test in her hand. Shaking her head, she couldn’t do it. She’d have to eventually, but it petrified her of the results.

She walked into her bedroom as tears rolled down her cheeks. She just couldn’t do it yet. After putting the kit back into the bag, she hid it in a drawer in her nightstand. Her grandfather never came into her room, but she sure didn’t want the kit out in case he did.

She sat on the bed, lay back, then rolled to her side and sobbed. What a mess they had gotten themselves into. All because she couldn’t tell him no. She had wanted him so much, and it was so good between them, but how was any of this going to work?

If she was pregnant, she wanted the baby. The one thing she wanted in life was to have a child, but not with a Morris, and not yet, but what’s done was done. Rolling onto her back, she stared at the ceiling fan as it twirled around.

To say her grandfather would be angry was a huge understatement. She knew he would throw her off the ranch, and then what? Where would she go? Home to her parents?

Would they accept the fact that she was pregnant with Rand's baby?

Placing her hands over her face, she cried. This was the worst that could happen. A Madden and a Morris having a baby together.

"You should have told him no, but you didn't. You agreed to sneak around with him," she muttered.

Getting off the bed, she walked out of her room, down the stairs, and into the kitchen. Her grandfather was nowhere to be seen, so she headed out the door, across the yard, and entered the barn.

After saddling Sassy, she rode out of the barn, up to the north pasture, and jumped the fence to get on Morris's property. She kneed Sassy to a run and rode her down to Rand's house.

She dismounted, dropped the reins, walked up the steps, and knocked on the door. She just hoped his grandfather wasn't here.

When no one answered, she sighed, then mounted her horse and rode back home.

Everly quietly entered the house and made her way up to her room. She breathed a sigh of relief when she made it without running into her grandfather.

Saturday morning, she woke up early, and walked down the stairs, and into the kitchen to see her grandfather seated at the table.

"Good morning," she said as she walked to the coffeemaker.

"Morning. What are your plans for the day?"

"Today, I'll be in the barn, mucking out the stalls. I'm going to Dewey's tonight."

"That's becoming a pattern with you, isn't it?"

"Pap, let it go. I am old enough to do what I want. If you have to watch my every move, I'll go live with Mom and

Dad.”

“If I find out you’re seeing that Morris boy, you *will* go.”

“I’m going for a ride and check the fence. I’ll be back later.”

“Eat some breakfast,” he snapped.

“No thanks. You killed my appetite.” She walked to the bench, took her hat and coat off the pegs, then walked out the backdoor, slamming it behind her.

As she stood on the porch, she pulled her coat on, placed her hat on her head, then walked down the steps, across the yard, and entered the barn. She strolled down the aisle after letting her eyes adjust and stopped at Sassy’s stall.

“Hi, girl. Let’s go out.”

“Good morning, Ms. Everly.”

She turned to see Micky, one of the ranch hands, standing behind her, and she smiled.

“Hi, Micky. I’m going to check the fence.”

“I checked it,” he said.

“Oh, well, I’ll just take a nice ride then.” She started toward the tack room.

“I saw you at Dewey’s last night,” he said in a low tone.

Everly halted and turned to look at him.

“Why didn’t you say hi?”

“You seemed a little busy.” He smirked.

“Is that right? Well, I am never too busy to speak to any of you men who work here.”

Micky nodded and turned to walk away.

“Not too busy for Morris either,” he muttered, but she heard him.

She bit her tongue to keep from saying anything, but she was sure he was the one letting her grandfather know she’d been talking with Rand. Taking a deep breath, she quickly

saddled Sassy, then tore out of the barn and headed for the north pasture.

Rand saw Everly riding along the fence, and kneed Jester into a run.

“Hey,” he said, and watched her rein her horse to a stop.

“Hi.”

“What’s wrong?” He leaned his forearms on the pommel and stared at her.

He watched her take a deep breath, then told him about the ranch hand in the barn.

“Shit,” Rand muttered. “Now, what?”

“I think we need to stay away from each other—”

“Hell, no. Everly, whether or not you want to admit it, we’re good together.”

“I do admit it, Rand, but let’s just back off for a while. Just long enough for Pap to get it out of his head that I’m seeing that Morris boy.”

Rand smirked. “You wouldn’t be seeing me if I was a boy.”

Everly laughed, and it made him chuckle.

“That’s true.”

“Let’s go to the cabin.”

“I just said we need to stay away from each other for a while.”

“I’ll need something to tide me over. Who knows how long ‘a while’ is?”

Everly shook her head, turned her horse away, and Rand was so disappointed that she was leaving, until he saw her turn the horse toward the fence, ran her at full speed, and cleared the fence. She kept riding but looked back over her shoulder.

“What the hell are you waiting for, Morris?”

Rand kned Jester and ran after her, then caught her and passed her.

“Now who’s behind?” he said as he rode by.

Later, as they lay on the bed together, Rand kept his arms around her and kissed the top of her head.

“I hate not seeing you for a while.”

“Just a week or two.”

“No longer, okay?”

“We’ll get together then. I’ll let you when I feel safe enough[m1].” Her fingers sifted through the hair on his chest.

He blew out a breath and nodded.

“All right. I don’t like it, but I’ll do whatever you want. Just as long as this doesn’t end.”

Everly sat up, and he stared at her.

“I don’t want it to either, but we have to be careful.”

“Are we always going to hide this, Everly?”

“I don’t know. You know how our grandfathers are.”

“I told you before, we can end this feud.”

“It won’t end for them, Rand. Never.”

“Probably not until they take their last breaths, and sweetheart, I am not waiting that long. We have to do something.”

“We will. Let’s just back off for a little bit[m2].”

“Are you sure you can do without me for that long?” Rand grinned.

“I don’t know, but I’ll give it a good try. Can you be without me?”

Rand rolled on top of her and gazed into her eyes.

“No.” He pressed his lips to hers and deepened the kiss. “Once more.”

Later, as he rode back to the house, he swore almost the entire way. He didn't like this. Not. One. Bit. He wanted to be with her. He was falling for her. And how in the hell would that even work?

Her grandfather had a hold over her, and Rand hated it. He knew she and her parents had lived with her grandfather before her father became an attorney, but when the fighting would keep escalating between the families, Everly's parents bought a house in Hartland to get away from it.

Everly worked the ranch with Silas in the summer, and once she graduated, she moved back into the house with him. But he won't let her live her own life. His grandfather let him alone, but that was because they didn't live together and Rand told him he would live his life his way, not his grandfather's.

Damn, he hated the thought of not seeing her for a couple of weeks. She was in his blood, and his heart. He wanted her in his life, but how?

A week later, Rand placed the rake and shovel in the wheelbarrow, lifted the handles, and pushed it to the compost when he saw Everly barreling down on him. She clutched something in her hand, and he swore he could feel the anger pouring off her. He hadn't seen her since the day at the cabin. God, she was gorgeous, and he had missed her so much.

He set the wheelbarrow down, folded his arms, and waited for her to get to him. She stopped a few feet from him and stared at him.

“What's wrong? You sure look pissed, darlin'.”

“I *look* pissed? You think I *look* pissed? Let me tell you something, Rand Morris. I *am* pissed.”

She threw whatever she held in her hand at him, and he instinctively caught it. Then she turned and headed back to the barn doors. Rand looked down at the object in his hand, and the blood drained from his face as he looked at the positive pregnancy test.

After slightly hesitating, he ran after her and caught her right before she mounted her horse. Then he took her arm in

his hand.

“Everly, are you sure?”

“The stick shows positive, Rand. Damn you.” She jerked her arm from him.

“Damn *me*? Why aren’t you on birth control?”

“Seriously? You think every single woman is on birth control?” She poked his chest with her finger. “Why didn’t you wear a condom?”

“Excuse me? I didn’t even think about it, and apparently, you didn’t either,” he snapped.

She pushed at his chest. “Damn, I don’t want a baby right now.”

“You will not give up this baby.”

“I have told you before that I don’t listen to you. If I want to give the baby up, I will—”

“Everly—”

“But I won’t. I’ll raise this baby.”

“We both will.”

“Oh, no. You will have nothing to do with my child.”

“Your child? It’s mine too.”

“I don’t hold you responsible—”

“Then why fucking tell me at all?”

“I got angry when I saw it was positive. I’ve had the test a week before I got the nerve up to take the test. I shouldn’t have come over here. You never would have known.”

Rand laughed. “We live in Clifton. *Everyone* will know.”

He watched a tear roll down her cheek.

“This will not go over well, Rand. Our grandfathers are going to have a fit.”

“This is our lives, Everly. Not theirs. We’ll do whatever we have to do to care for our child.” He wiped the tear away with

his thumb.

“Pap will probably throw me out of the house,” she whispered.

“You can live with me.”

“Are you out of your mind? In a Morris house on Morris land? You are certifiable, Rand.”

“Then you tell me what we’re supposed to do. I want to be a part of my child’s life. I can’t be if we’re in separate houses.” He took a deep breath. “In fact, I think we should get married.”

“You *are* crazy! It will be a cold day in hell when I marry a Morris.” She sniffed. “I’m going home.”

Rand wrapped his fingers around her wrist, making her look at him.

“Everly, just think about it. If we don’t stick together in this, it could get ugly. What if my grandfather tries to pressure me into filing for full custody? I’m not saying I would, but both of our grandfathers will want the baby to be raised as a Morris or a Madden. Not both. There are people who marry for worse reasons.”

“I have to think.” She moved away from him.

“Are you going to tell your grandfather?”

“Not today. I have to come to terms with it first.” She turned her back to him.

Rand stepped up behind her, put his arms around her waist, and his chin on her shoulder. She stiffened up at first but leaned back against him.

“We’ll get through this, baby. I promise.” He kissed the side of her neck.

“I have to go.” She pushed away from him and mounted her horse.

He nodded, but she had already ridden off.

How in the world would Everly tell her grandfather she was pregnant by Rand Morris? He would have a fit. There was no doubt in her mind that he'd throw her out of the house. Then what?

Could she marry Rand? Would it work? As he said, some people marry for worse reasons, and she did like the idea of both parents raising the baby. She didn't want to make Rand a part-time father any more than she wanted to be a part-time mother.

She rubbed her hand over her belly and smiled about the life growing inside her. She had always wanted children, but she didn't expect it to happen this way.

"What's done is done," she murmured as she rode into the barn, and cooled the horse, then entered the house. Her grandfather sat at the table, playing solitaire.

"You've been gone a while," he said without looking up.

Huffing out a breath, she hung up her coat and hat, then walked to the coffeemaker, but changed her mind. She'd rather not drink coffee while pregnant.

"When are you going to the grocery store?" she asked.

"Tomorrow. Why? Do you need something?"

"Uh, yeah, could you pick up some chamomile tea k-cups?"

"Chamomile? Why?"

"I want to cut back on caffeine." *God was going to strike her dead!*

"Caffeine gets ya going. You need it working a ranch."

"I'll get it myself. I don't want to put you out," Everly snapped.

"Don't go getting all huffy, girl. I'll pick up some for you. Damn, lately you've been in a mood."

She pulled a chair out from under the table, sat, and stared at him.

“I’m sorry, Pap. I’ve just been busy and tired. I need a good night’s sleep, and I can’t get that if I keep drinking coffee.” She shrugged.

Silas reached across the table and touched her hand.

“No worries, honey. I know you women can be moody. I was married for fifty-five years.”

“You got married young, didn’t you?”

“We were seventeen. We ran away to do it. I miss your grandmother every day.”

“I’m sure you do. No other woman would put up with you.” Everly laughed when his eyes narrowed at her.

“Like I said before, you’re just like her. Mouthy as hell, but I love you too.”

The smile slipped from her lips as she thought about telling him she was pregnant. That part wouldn’t be so bad but telling him who the father was would cause him to hyperventilate. What a mess.

“I love you too, Pap. I’m going to go lie down for a while. I’ll be down for dinner, and no, we cannot have pancakes.” She kissed the top of his head as she walked past him and laughed when he grumbled under his breath.

The smile left her face when she thought about Pap finding out she was fooling around with Rand. Her grandfather would be hurt and angry. It hadn’t surprised her when he said he’d throw her out.

The thought of moving in with her parents didn’t sit well with her. She loved them, but she didn’t want to live with them.

Everly wondered how she and Rand would ever be together. Her family meant everything to her, and even though she was a grown woman, she knew it was going to be hard letting the families know.

Would they think she was a traitor? Would they accept the baby? It might not be so hard to tell everyone she's pregnant, it was who she was pregnant by.

"I don't know what to do," she said as a tear rolled down her cheek.

Maybe she and Rand could just disappear. She snorted. Rand would never do that. He had a ranch to run. She did want to be with Rand. They needed to stick together, and if no one could accept it, then she and Rand would do what they had to, to raise their child. With or without the families' support.

Chapter Five

Rand made his way down the barn's aisle but stopped when he saw Everly's truck pull up to the doors. He knew something was wrong going by the look on her face.

"Everly."

She turned around when Rand call her name and headed for her. He pulled his work gloves off, stuck them in his back pocket as he walked to her.

"We need to talk," she said.

"Okay. Let's go inside." He led her across the yard, to the porch, opened the door and nodded for her to enter. They removed their hats and coats and hung them by the door.

"It's a lovely kitchen, Rand."

"Thanks. Come into the living room and we'll talk." He took her hand and led her to the room. "Have a seat."

Everly sat on the sofa, wringing her hands.

"What are we going to do?"

"I told you what we need to do."

"Get married? Seriously? Our grandfathers would disown us."

Rand squatted down in front of her and took her hands in his.

"Everly, do you want to live your life the way your grandfather wants, or do you want to live it the way you want?"

"But, to get married."

"I want to be a part of my child's life and being married, I can be. All the time. I don't want to be a weekend father. I want to be there for you and our child."

Everly cupped his whiskered cheek in her hand.

“Can we make it work?”

“I don’t see why not.”

“But how will we do it?”

Rand straightened up and paced across the room. He raked his fingers through his hair.

He walked back to her, and he had a feeling she wasn’t sure getting married was a good idea, but how would they even do it? There were too many people at the courthouse who knew them.

“We can’t get married, Rand. Everyone in Clifton will know if we get married here.”

Rand squatted, took her hands in his again, and looked at her.

“We’ll go to Vegas.”

“What? Are you serious? Just disappear for a day or two and tell no one where we’re going?”

“Everly, I know two people who own jets, and I know that neither of them would hesitate to fly us there. We can get married and come right back.”

“Won’t they say something?”

“No. Neither of them would. I know that for a fact.” He lightly squeezed her hand. “Yes, or no? I can go see one of them and see when they could do it. Come on, baby. Let’s do this.”

“But what about when we come back?”

Rand huffed. “We’re going to have to tell our grandfathers, eventually. We’ll get married and keep living apart until you feel you can tell him. I know it’s going to be hard for you, but it has to be done.”

“I don’t know, Rand. Us getting married could make it worse.”

“How could it be worse? Look, Everly, we don’t hate each other, and you have to admit we have great chemistry.”

“In sex, you mean.”

“Yes, but that’s a hell of a start. We don’t know what the future brings, but I want to be in my child’s future. I know if we don’t get married, your grandfather will make it impossible for me to do that.” Rand took her hand and helped her up.

“I believe that. Rand, I want you to be a part of the baby’s life too. That’s only fair.”

“Then let’s do it, Everly.” Rand kissed her forehead.

“All right. See whomever it is about the jet and let me know. I’m going to the house. I’m not telling him about us getting married.” She stood and gazed into his eyes. “Tell yours too, Rand. About the baby, first. I don’t think we should spring both on them at once.”

“I will, darlin’, but after we’re married.”

“Okay.” She stood on her toes and kissed his lips. He pulled her against him and took her lips in a deep kiss. She moaned and wrapped her arms around his neck. He slowly raised his lips.

“That was nice,” he murmured.

“Yes.”

“Give me your cellphone number,” Rand said as he took his phone from his pocket and entered her number when she gave it, then he gave her his.

“I hope we’re doing the right thing.” Everly nibbled on her bottom lip.

“Of course, we are. We’re going to make this work, Everly. I promise you that.”

Everly nodded and then strode out of the house. He watched her climb into her truck and drive off. His stomach was in knots over this. A Morris and a Madden getting married would shock many people, but it was best for the baby.

“Yeah, you just keep telling yourself that. You know you’re doing it because you’re so attracted to her, but you have no

idea how she feels. It's going to hurt like hell if this doesn't work," he murmured.

Later, Rand drove up to the farmhouse, parked, stepped from the truck, and glanced around. He didn't see anyone, so he walked up the steps of the porch and knocked on the door. It opened, and he grinned.

"Rand, what are you doing here? Come in," Grant Hunter said as he opened the door wider.

"Grant, could I speak to you for a minute?"

"Of course. Would you like something to drink?"

"No, thank you." Rand removed his hat and held it in his hands.

"Have a seat. What's up?"

Rand took a deep breath, blew it out, pulled a chair out from the table and sat. He watched as Grant did the same.

"Could you fly me to Las Vegas? I'd pay you."

"Vegas?"

"Yes." Rand cleared his throat. "Everly and I are getting married, and we don't want anyone to know yet." He looked at Grant and almost burst out laughing at his expression.

"You and... Everly? Everly *Madden*?"

"Yes. Can you fly us there? If not, I can ask the Callahans. As I said, I'll pay you."

"No."

"No?" Rand nodded as he got to his feet. "I understand. Thanks anyway, Grant."

"I don't think you *do* understand. I'm saying no to you paying me. I'd be happy to fly you both there."

"Really? That would be great, but we want to come back the same day. Is that possible?"

"Sure. I'm not sure what's going on here, Rand, but if you and Everly want to get married, maybe it will end that damn feud once and for all."

“You can’t tell anyone.”

“I won’t. On my honor. When?”

“The day after tomorrow.”

“Sounds good. Be here around seven in the morning. Do you mind if Jessa goes?”

“That’s fine. I know she won’t tell anyone.”

“No, I won’t,” Jessa said as she entered the kitchen. “Rand, I promise you neither of us will say anything until you tell us we can.”

“Thank you, Jessa. Grant. We’ll be here. I appreciate it. Maybe you two could be witnesses.” He shook Grant’s hand, hugged Jessa, and walked out the door. He couldn’t wait to tell Everly.

After parking his truck at his home, he entered the kitchen, pulled his phone from his pocket, and called Everly.

“Hello?”

“Everly, it’s Rand,” he said, and knew she should have seen his name come up.

“Uh, can I call you back?”

“Sure-is your grandfather there?”

“Yes, and we’re having lunch.”

“Okay, sweetheart, call me when you get a chance. I have good news.”

“Great. I’ll talk to you soon.” She disconnected.

Damn, how was this going to work? He knew she had doubts, and now his were setting in. Not because he didn’t want to get married, but because of their grandfathers.

He knew McArthur Morris would be pissed, and Silas would be, as well.

“Fuck,” he muttered as he made his way to the living room and sat in the recliner.

He hoped she called soon, and right about now, Silas Madden was doing his damndest to discover who she'd been talking to.

Everly stuck her phone in her pocket and looked at her grandfather to see him staring at her. *Wait for it.*

“Who was that?” *And there it is.*

“A friend. She wants to get together one day.”

“Who?”

“Really, Pap, she’s a friend. You don’t know her.”

“I see. Well, I’m done, so I’ll load the dishwasher, and you can call your... friend.”

Everly clenched her jaw to keep it from dropping open. Did he suspect Rand called? No. Why would he even think it would be Rand? *Everly, my girl, you are getting paranoid.*

“As Stephen King said, perfect paranoia is perfect awareness,” she muttered as she made her way upstairs to her room.

After she closed the door, she sat on the bed and called Rand.

“Hey, darlin’,” he said in her ear, making her shiver.

“Rand, I’m so sorry—”

“No need to be, Everly. I knew something was up because you didn’t act like you knew it was me.”

“I told him it was a friend. What’s your good news?”

“Day after tomorrow, we’re flying to Vegas.”

“Two days? Rand, are we sure about this?”

“Don’t back out on me now, sweetheart.”

“Who’s flying us?”

“Grant. Jessa’s going too. I suggested they stand up for us.”

“Oh, my God. I never even thought of that.”

“I hadn’t either until Grant asked if Jessa could go. Both said they wouldn’t say a word about it.”

“Okay.”

“Come on, Everly, we need to do this.”

“I know because I also know you’re right in my grandfather trying to keep you away from me and the baby.”

“Darlin’, we’re getting married. I want a wedding night.”

“A... wedding night?”

“It’s not like we haven’t had sex. It’s why we’re doing this to begin with.”

“Because you didn’t wear a condom,” she snapped.

“And you didn’t mention one either,” he growled out.

“You should have.”

“Okay, let’s just stop this and put it on both of us.”

Everly huffed. “All right.

“So, can you be here in two days? Grant said he’d like to take off by seven.”

“Yes. Yes, I’ll be there.”

“Good. I’ll let you go, darlin’.”

“Okay, and Rand?”

“Yeah?”

“I didn’t mention a condom because you had me too hot to even think about it,” she said, and disconnected. Then she lay back on the bed and laughed.

Rand looked at the phone in his hand, then laughed. She wasn't the only one who was hot. He'd never had such a reaction to a woman. She had him on fire that day in the barn, and every time since. He couldn't wait to be with her again.

Rand scrolled through the numbers until he found the one he was looking for. He pressed *Send* and called his good friend.

"I'm heading into town for lunch. Can you meet me at the diner?"

"Sure. I'm at the feed store now, so once I get my order, I'll head for the diner and get us a booth," Kaden Taylor said.

"I'll see you there." Rand hit *End* and returned the phone to his pocket.

Blowing a frustrated breath as he drove to town, he wondered how he could tell Kaden what was going on in his life. Kaden knew all about the feud and Rand knew it would shock him when he told him about what happened with Everly. Rand knew it could go one of two ways. Either Kaden would find it hilarious, or he'd be sympathetic.

Rand and Kaden's friendship went back to first grade. Rand knew if he told his friend something, it would go no further. Were Rand and Everly having a church wedding, he would ask Kaden to be his best man, but that wedding wouldn't happen, and he hoped Kaden understood why he hadn't been asked.

Later, Rand entered the Clifton Diner to see Kaden sitting at the counter. Rand made his way through the center tables and took a seat on a stool beside Kaden.

"Hey," Rand said.

"Been a while, Rand. I thought you forgot we're friends." Kaden lifted the glass of water to his lips.

"I've been busy, but you should know better than that." He huffed.

"What's going on?"

"You wouldn't believe it." Rand nodded when Deidra Mitchell poured him a glass of water. "Thank you, Deidra."

“You’re welcome. Are you ready to order?”

“Just my usual is fine,” Rand said.

“Same here, Deidra. How’s Preston?”

“He’s doing great. He’s out working the ranch, so I know that makes him happy.” Deidra smiled.

“I’m sure you make him happy too,” Rand said with a smile.

“I’d better.” Deidra laughed.

Rand and Kaden chuckled, then Deidra moved to the metal wheel for orders, and pinned their orders to it, and spun it around.

“Rand? Seriously, what’s going on with you?”

Rand reached for the napkin holder and toyed with it, then he looked at Kaden.

“I’m, uh, getting married,” Rand said in a low tone.

“Married?”

“Yes, but don’t tell anyone yet.”

“No problem, but who are you marrying? I didn’t know you were even dating.”

“Everly Madden,” Rand whispered.

“That’s real funny, Rand. Now, tell me the truth.”

Rand turned on the stool to look at Kaden.

“I’m telling you the truth.”

“Does your grandfather know?”

“What? That I’m getting married, or it’s Everly I’m going to marry.”

“Hell, both.”

“Neither of them knows we’re getting married. We decided we’d tell both of them afterward.”

“I’d tell him over the phone.”

Rand chuckled. “It would be safer, wouldn’t it? Thing is, he’d be at the house waiting for me. I can’t avoid it. I have to let him know.”

“But... why are you marrying her?”

“She’s pregnant.”

He looked at Kaden’s face and saw shock.

“How? Wait. I know how, but how did you two get together?”

Rand took a deep breath and told Kaden everything. When he finished, Kaden stared at him for a few seconds, then he burst out laughing.

“It’s not funny,” Rand snapped.

“Oh, but it is. How are you two going to get married? Courthouse?”

“We’re going to Vegas. I wanted you to be my best man, but that won’t happen.”

“Are you sure you want to do this—” Kaden quit talking when Connie set their lunches on the counter.

“You two enjoy your meals.” Connie winked at them, then moved off to refill glasses.

Rand looked at Kaden. “Don’t try to talk me out of it. I want to see my child—”

“I’m sure Everly would allow you to see your—” Kaden’s eyes narrowed. “Why are you shaking your head?”

Rand sighed. “Neither one of us trusts our grandfathers to try to talk us into trying for sole custody. If that happens and Everly wins, Silas will never let me see my kid. I’m sure gramps would be the same.” He shook his head. “No. I’m not letting that happen. I can’t.”

“I get that. Even though it happened years ago, I know how the two dislike each other. I wouldn’t put it past them to do what you say.”

“I’m not going to hate it, being married to Everly.”

Kaden chuckled. "I get that too. She's a beautiful woman."

"You stay the hell away from her," Rand snarled out.

"I've never asked her out, and now it's too late because you're going to marry her."

"You stay away from her," Rand snapped again, making Kaden laugh.

"When are you going to Vegas?"

"Day after tomorrow. Grant's flying us. Jessa is going too, so they'll stand up for us."

"Does Grant know?"

"Yeah. I had to tell him why I was going to Vegas. To say it shocked him would be an understatement."

"I can imagine. Hell, I'm shocked, but I agree with you about your grandfathers. You're doing the right thing, Rand."

"I'm sure Gramps won't think I am." Rand picked up his burger and took a bite. It didn't appeal to him like it usually did, but he knew it was him, not Connie's burgers. What a damn mess.

Two days later, as Rand drove them to Grant's ranch. Everly sat beside him, praying she didn't get sick. She almost screamed when Rand reached for her hand and kissed the palm.

"Everly? We'll be fine."

She looked over at him and nodded.

"We'll make it work. I'm just nervous."

"Of course you are. It's your wedding day," he said and grinned.

"If it were only that." She wiped a tear away.

“I know you’re afraid, and honestly, I’m not feeling too brave right now myself. Neither of us wants to hurt our families, but Everly, *we’re* going to be a family. We need to make this work because, darlin’, I’m telling you we are going to be on our own.”

“I know. It’s just that I’ve never kept anything from my family.” She squeezed his hand. “It’s going to hurt them. All of them.”

“You’re not telling me anything I don’t already know. Either it will blow over or it’s just you and me.”

Everly smiled. “And our baby.”

Rand grinned at her. “Yes. Our baby... boy.”

“Boy? It’s a girl.”

“How do you know?”

“Just a feeling, but I really don’t care what it is, we’ll love our child.”

“Definitely.”

Everly nodded, then sat forward to gaze at the large white farmhouse.

“Oh, my. This is gorgeous,” she said.

“Haven’t you ever been here?”

“Oh, sure. I’m one of the close friends of Grant Hunter.”

“Sarcasm doesn’t suit you.”

She laughed. “I couldn’t resist. I never had a reason to come here, but it’s a beautiful place.”

“Yes,” Rand said. “Hey, it looks like Grant is ready for us.”

Everly looked to the porch and saw Grant standing on the porch with Jessa beside him. Well, at least she’ll be able to say that Grant Hunter flew her to Vegas to marry Rand.

“Take a deep breath, sweetheart. It’s now or never.” Rand shut the truck off, then stared at her. She inhaled deeply, nodded, and opened the door to step out.

Rand did the same. This was it. He was getting married.

His gut was aching. He knew it would hurt their families, but what else could they do? Their grandfathers will do everything they can to separate them. Each will want the baby raised by their family.

“It’s my life,” he muttered.

“What?”

“Nothing. Let’s do this.”

“I’m ready if you are.”

“Right.” Rand turned his gaze to Grant and Jessa. “Hey, you two.”

“No offense, Rand, but you don’t look too good,” Grant said with a grin.

“None taken. I know we’re doing the right thing, but that doesn’t make it easy.”

“I don’t envy you when you tell your families,” Jessa said.

“Maybe we won’t tell them.” Rand smirked.

“You know we have to. Please get me to the jet before I change my mind,” Everly said.

“Everly, this is a decision you have to make. I know your grandfathers, both of them, and how they argue if they see each other, but this is up to you.”

“I agree, Everly. If you don’t want to do this, then we’ll all go inside and have a cup of coffee together,” Jessa said.

“Don’t I get a say in this?” Rand asked.

“No,” Everly, Grant, and Jessa said simultaneously.

Rand shook his head as he leaned back against his truck, folded his arms, and frowned. What if they talked Everly out of getting married? He wanted this. He just didn’t know how

much until Grant opened his mouth. Rand glanced at Everly to see her looking at him.

A smile lifted her lips. "I'm fine. This is what we want to do. I am not being coerced into it. It's my decision, Grant, and I want to go to Vegas."

Rand gave a relieved sigh. He'd been worried she'd say she couldn't do it. He winked at her, then he chuckled when she winked back.

"Well, darlin', let's do this." Rand strode to her and cupped her face in his hands, then kissed her lips. When he raised his head, he looked over at Grant to see him shaking his head. "What's wrong, Grant?"

"Nothing's wrong, but I don't envy either of you when you have to tell your grandfathers."

"We know. Trust me." Rand stared at Grant.

"Well, I said I'd do it, so let's get going. I fueled the jet, and it's ready to go. You can ride to the jet with us and leave your truck here or drive it to the runway and park it in the hangar. No one will bother it."

"I'll do that." Rand put his hand out to Everly. "Ready?"

She grinned. "Yes. Are you?"

"Not too late to back out," Grant teased.

"Grant," Jessa scolded.

"I'm teasing, darlin'." Grant kissed her lips, then grinned.

After piling into Grant's truck, they rode up to the hangar.

Chapter Six

As Grant flew the jet over Vegas, Everly stared out the window. Even this early in the day, people were everywhere. She couldn't keep the smile off her face.

"It's a busy place," Rand said from beside her.

"I've never been here." She looked out the window, trying to take it all in.

"You'll love it. It's always busy."

"I've never been here, either," Jessa said excitedly.

"Once I land this thing, we'll look around and get you two married." Grant glanced back at them, then to the front to land.

They made their way across the tarmac and entered the building. Everly watched as Grant made his way to a car rental kiosk. She noticed people looking at him, and she could hear whispers. Biting back a grin, she looked at Jessa.

"Can he go anywhere without being recognized?"

"Everywhere we go, people look at him. Either they think he's handsome, or they know who he is. He loves giving them autographs but ends the conversation when they ask him if he'll go back to singing."

"He doesn't miss it, does he?" Rand asked Jessa.

"Not at all. He loves writing songs but not performing." Jessa smiled.

They entered a wedding chapel an hour later, and Everly was sure she would be sick.

"Are you all right?" Rand asked her.

"I'm just nervous. I never thought I'd have a wedding in Vegas."

"I'm sorry, but we don't have a choice."

“We could have gone anywhere in Montana and gotten married,” Everly said.

“Yes, but my luck, someone I know would see me.”

“This is more exciting,” Everly said, then kissed his lips.

“Hello, welcome! Who’s the lucky couple?” a woman asked as she walked to them.

“We are,” Rand said, putting his arm around Everly’s shoulders.

“Wonderful. Let’s get to it. Do you have rings?”

“No—”

“Yes, I do.” Rand smiled at Everly.

“You have rings?”

“Yes. We can’t have a wedding without rings, can we?”

Everly bit her lip as she stared at Rand. He had thought of everything, and she never gave it a thought. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Everly? Darlin’, what’s wrong?”

“I never even thought about rings. I gave no thought to someone standing up for us. I didn’t even bring a dress. What else have I forgotten?”

“Flowers,” Rand said.

She watched him walk over to a glass case of flowers, [\[m3\]](#)pick up a bouquet of white and red roses, pay for them, and then hand them to her. Sticking her nose down into them, she inhaled deeply.

“I love roses. Thank you,” Everly said.

“You’re welcome. If you’re ready, we’ll do this, and you look fine.”

She stared at him, nodded, then took his hand in hers. She took a deep breath, blew it out, and entered a room the woman had pointed out.

It resembled a small church with white pews, red carpeting, and an altar. Standing at the altar was... *Elvis*.

Everly stopped and stared at the man in the white jumpsuit. His hair was pitch black. He wore gold sunglasses and those long sideburns the real Elvis had.

“I swear, if he says thank you, thank you very much, I am out of here,” [m4]Rand whispered, making Everly laugh. Rand, Grant, and Jessa joined in.

After the wedding, they found an excellent restaurant and celebrated. Everly refused champagne, but Rand got her a Ginger ale in a flute.

She watched Grant get to his feet and tap the glass rim with a knife.

“Congratulations to you, Rand and Everly. I know I can speak for Jessa when we say we are happy for you and wish you a long life together.”

They tapped their glasses together, and then they took a drink. Everly couldn't stop smiling as she stared at the wedding band on her finger.

Rand leaned over and kissed her temple.

“We'll be fine.”

“I hope so. I don't want to think of our families and how they'll react. I know Pap will be so pissed, and so will MacArthur.”

“We'll cross that bridge when we get to it.”

“I'm not looking forward to it.”

“Everly, I know you're not, and I'm not either, but this is the right thing to do.”

“I know. I honestly believe it will be better for us to stick together.”

“It’s all we can do.”

They spent the day touring and enjoyed some gambling. Rand chuckled as he watched Everly playing blackjack, but his mouth dropped open when she won a big pot.

“I won!” she shouted.

“Yeah, but I think we should go while you’re ahead.”

Everly stuck her tongue out at him but laughed.

“Okay. Let’s blow this popsicle stand,” she said.

Rand laughed. “I think we better get her back to Clifton before she bets it all.”

“We’re ready. I’ll call the hangar and tell them we’re on our way. They’ll get the jet ready.” Grant took Jessa’s hand, and they all walked out of the casino into the day’s heat. It might be cold in Montana, but it was hot in Las Vegas.

When they entered the terminal, they had to push through the crowd.

After getting on the jet, Grant talked to the tower, then taxied down the runway. The jet flawlessly lifted into the air.

Rand glanced at Everly, and he could see how pale she was, so he reached for her hand and squeezed it. She jerked but looked at him and smiled.

“Your grandfather isn’t expecting you home, is he?”

“No. I told him I’d be home tomorrow.”

“Good.”

“Aren’t you worried about your grandfather?”

“As of now, no, but I’m sure the fear will set in.”

Everly laughed. “My fear set in when I found out I was pregnant.”

He chuckled, then put his arm around her.

“We’ll take it one day at a time.”

“It’s all we can do. I’m not at all happy about going home tomorrow.”

“I’m sure Silas will pump you for information about what you did today and tonight.”

When she looked at him, he wiggled his eyebrows, making her laugh. She snuggled against him, and he held her tight.

Rand knew she was scared, but he was too. The last thing he wanted to do was hurt his family, and he knew Everly felt the same way. All he knew as of now was that they’d face it together. They only had each other.

It was close to eight when Grant landed the jet at the ranch. Rand gently shook Everly to wake her. She sat up, rubbed her eyes, and yawned.

“I can’t believe I fell asleep.”

“I’m sure you’re tired. You probably haven’t slept at all.”

“Not much, that’s for sure.”

“All right, we’ve landed in the beautiful town of Clifton, Montana. Now, get off my plane,” Grant said with a chuckle, making Rand and Everly laugh.

“Right away, sir. Thank you for this. Both of you,” Rand said.

“We were happy to do it. Now, you two go have a wedding night,” Jessa said as she unbuckled the seatbelt and got to her feet. She hugged Everly. “Congratulations.”

“Thank you so much, Jessa. Grant. You both are wonderful,” Everly said.

“We know. Go away so I can get my man to enjoy a wedding night again.” Jessa grinned.

Grant burst out laughing. “I’m all for that.”

Rand stuck his hand out to Grant, and he shook it.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Your secret is safe with us.” Grant grinned.

“But please, if you need us, call us.” Jessa smiled.

“We will.” Rand took Everly’s hand in his and led her to the door.

Grant lowered the steps and motioned for them to go. They reached the bottom of the steps and piled into Grant’s truck.

When the truck stopped at the house, they stepped out and went their separate ways.

Once in the truck, Rand looked at Everly to see her staring out the windshield. He watched a tear roll down her cheek, and he reached over to wipe it away.

“It’s setting in, isn’t it?” he asked in a low voice.

“Yes. I am not fooling myself into thinking everything will be peachy keen because it won’t. Not for a long time, if at all.”

“I still think we did the right thing. This way, neither of them can demand we file for full custody. This baby is *ours*, no one else’s.”

He started the truck and drove them home.

Everly tried to keep the thoughts at bay, but once the families discovered, what would happen? She blew out a breath.

“We’ll be fine,” Rand said.

“You sure like saying that, and you’d better be right, Rand Morris.”

He snorted out a laugh. “So, I see how this marriage is going to go.”

She burst out laughing. “You have no idea what you’re in for.”

“I need to look up annulment when we get home.” Rand grinned when she laughed.

Everly tried to relax, but having sex with Rand almost had her wiggling in the seat. Sure, they’d had sex before, but

tonight... tonight, they're husband and wife.

She looked at him when he stopped the truck, and their eyes met. She lifted her lips slowly and watched him close his eyes, take a deep breath, open his eyes, turn to open the door and step out.

Everly stayed where she was and watched him through the windshield as he walked around the truck. When he opened her door, she turned to face him.

"Kiss me," she whispered.

A slow, sexy grin lifted his lips as he leaned forward to press his lips to hers. Everly moaned and wrapped her arms around his neck. He lifted his lips and stared into her eyes.

"Let's go inside, Mrs. Morris."

"I'm keeping my maiden name," she said.

"What?"

She giggled. "I'm kidding, but I'll have to get used to being Everly Morris now."

"We both have a lot to get used to. Come on, darlin', let's get inside. It's cold."

"A big difference from Vegas."

"Yeah, it is." Taking her hand, he helped her out of the truck. Then led her to the porch and stopped at the door.

Everly frowned at him. "What are you waiting for?"

"I'm trying to decide if I should take a risk here."

"What are you talking about?"

"If I pick you up to carry you over the threshold, will you punch me?"

"You want to carry me in?" She blinked her eyes. Hormones were making her crazy.

"It's tradition, isn't it?"

She nodded. "I'm no lightweight, Morris."

"I bet I have almost a hundred pounds on you."

When he picked her up, she squealed but wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Get the door, Everly.”

She kissed his neck, reached down, turned the knob, and pushed the door open.

Rand entered the house, set her on her feet, and closed the door. She watched him lean back against it and fold his arms.

“Can I take a bath?”

“Everly, this is your home too. You can do whatever you want. You never have to ask me.”

“Maybe you could join me?”

“I’d love to. Follow me, and I’ll show you where everything is.”

Later, Rand held her while she slept. He should sleep too, but this whole situation was scary. There was no doubt in his mind that their grandfathers would be livid.

“Why aren’t you asleep?” Everly asked him.

“Too much going on in this head of mine.”

When she sighed, her breath moved across his chest.

“I dread going to the ranch. We’re married, and we should be together.”

“I agree, but you know they won’t be happy about this.”

Everly sat up, leaned against the headboard, and tucked the sheet under her arms.

“I get sick to my stomach thinking about Pap’s reaction. He’ll kick me out.”

“I know it’s going to hurt you, but you have a home here now.”

“What a marriage! We have to live apart for a while.”

“We can still get together, right?”

“Of course. In with a penny in with a pound.”

Rand chuckled. “If you think that will work, we’ll try it.”

Everly laughed, but it ended with a big yawn. “I’m so tired.”

“Go back to sleep. I’m going to get up since it’s almost three. I’m usually up by four. You stay as long as you want. Call me when you’re leaving to go to your grandfather’s.”

“I will,” she murmured, closed her eyes, and fell asleep.

Rand slid her over so he could get out of bed. He walked to the dresser to get his clothes, entered the bathroom, and quietly closed the door.

After his shower, he shaved, then walked into the bedroom to see Everly buried under the blankets. He could only see the top of her head.

Strolling to the bed, he leaned down, pulled the blanket back, and kissed her cheek.

“I’ll talk to you later, sweetheart,” he whispered, then walked from the room to prepare for the day.

He entered the kitchen and made a cup of coffee. As it brewed, he walked to the door and looked out to see the grass was white from frost. He glanced at the thermometer to see it was only thirty. It looked like winter had made her appearance.

After drinking his coffee, he rinsed the cup, then walked to the pegs to get his hat and coat. He pulled the coat on, took his hat off the peg, put it on his head, and stepped out onto the porch.

“Damn, it’s cold.”

Taking a deep breath, he jogged down the steps, strode across the yard, and entered the barn.

Everly rolled onto her back and stretched her arms above her head. She tossed the blankets off, got out of bed, and entered the bathroom to take a shower.

She smiled when she remembered last night. What a wedding night. They couldn't seem to get enough of each other.

The smile slipped away as she thought of her grandfather. She had to tell him sometime, but she also knew she had an uphill battle coming, and she was not looking forward to it.

After her shower, she dressed, made her way into the kitchen. She didn't make a cup of coffee because she was sure Rand didn't drink decaffeinated, and she was so nervous about seeing her grandfather. Taking her hat and coat off the pegs, she put them on, opened the door, and stepped onto the porch.

She looked at the barn but saw no one. They were probably out in the pastures. Too bad she couldn't see Rand before she left. She took her phone out of her coat pocket, found Rand's number, and pressed *Send*.

"Hey, darlin'," he said when he answered.

"Good morning. I'm heading out."

"I want to see you later."

"I don't think we should see each other very often—"

"Everly, we're married. I don't like living apart."

"It's only for a short time. I'll meet you at the cabin tomorrow. I should spend today at Pap's."

"Are you telling him today?"

"No. Right now, my stomach is in knots."

"That's morning sickness," Rand said with a chuckle.

"I wish that's all it was. I'll talk to you later. Have a great day."

"You too. We'll talk later. I have to get moving. The men are way ahead of me, but I'll catch up. I didn't want them to

hear me talking to you.”

“I get it. Bye for now.” She hit *End* and put the phone back into her pocket.

With a heavy sigh, she climbed into her truck and headed for the ranch. As she moved along the two-lane blacktop, she kept a hand on her stomach because it was upset.

“Please make it home.” She was nauseated and knew she wouldn’t make it without pulling over.

Driving the truck onto the berm, she opened the door, leaned out, and threw up. She closed the door, leaned her head against the steering wheel, and cried.

“How is this going to work for us?”

She raised her head, checked the traffic, then pulled onto the road.

She parked in her usual place when she pulled up to the house but didn’t get out. Her hands wrapped tightly around the steering wheel as she battled with herself.

She screamed when someone tapped on the passenger window. Her grandfather was standing there. She pushed the button to lower the window.

“I didn’t expect you until later,” he said.

“Uh, I wanted to get home.” She pasted a false smile on her face.

“Okay. Please call Ash for the feed to be delivered. It looks like winter is here.”

“All right. I’ll call him. Anything else?”

“Not that I know of.” He turned away and walked off.

Everly was getting paranoid. There was no way he knew anything about her and Rand.

“Oh, God. How am I going to tell him?”

She took several deep breaths, opened the door, and entered the house. She missed Rand already.

How did it come to this? Everly hated hurting her grandfather and her parents. She hoped they would forgive her for fraternizing with the enemy. Neither of them would come out of this without battle scars.

“You did more than fraternize with him,” she muttered. “You’re pregnant with a Morris baby, and that will not go over well.”

After hanging up her coat and hat, she made a cup of chamomile tea, then headed for the office to call Ash Beckett.

She moved behind the desk, looked up the number, and then called him.

“Hello?”

“Cassie, how are you? It’s Everly.”

“Hey, Everly. I’m fine. You?”

“I’m good. Thanks for asking. Is Ash around? I need to order some feed.”

“He’s out now, but I can tell him to call you.”

“I’d appreciate it.”

“No problem. I’m sure he’ll get back to you as soon as possible. Are you low?”

“I doubt it, but with the weather changing, I want to get more in.”

“All right.”

Everly and Cassidy talked for a while, then hung up. Everly pushed the chair back, got to her feet, and headed up the stairs. She planned to do absolutely nothing today. She was still tired. Either from being pregnant or Rand keeping her up half the night.

She closed the door, made her way to the bed, and fell across it. She’d just close her eyes for a few seconds...

Rand entered the house around six and hated how empty it felt. He'd get a shower, then something to eat. Shouldn't his wife be welcoming him home? This marriage was a lot different than he thought it would be.

Hiding this wouldn't be easy since he wanted Everly with him. He didn't realize how much he'd miss her.

After his shower, he dressed in a T-shirt and sweatpants, made a sandwich, then sat down to eat. He set his cellphone on the end table while he ate. Should he call her or wait for her to call him?

He picked up the phone, found her number, and pushed *Send*.

"Hi," she said when she answered.

"Are you alone?"

"Yep."

"I miss you."

"I miss you too."

"We have to do something soon because this will not be easy. It's like a band-aid. Rip it off."

"I think I'm paranoid. Pap hasn't said anything, but he keeps watching me."

"Everly, you are being paranoid. There's no way he knows anything. Only four of us know, and we can trust Grant and Jessa."

"I don't doubt that."

"Meet me tomorrow at the cabin around noon. Can you do that?"

"Yes. I'll see you then, Mr. Morris."

Rand huffed out a laugh. "Looking forward to it, Mrs. Morris."

"Oh, my. I *am* a Morris now, aren't I?"

"Yes, and we're going to make this work. Somehow."

“We’ll talk tomorrow. I know I’m going to miss you tonight.”

“We could meet at Dewey’s this evening.”

“I’ll be there.”

“No alcohol, darlin’.”

“I won’t. I’ll have my Ginger ale.”

“I’ll see you later. Around eight.”

“All right.”

He hit *End* and set the phone back on the end table, then stared into the empty hearth. This would be one of the hardest things to keep quiet. They didn’t have a choice. They were having a baby together, and eventually, everyone would know. That didn’t bother him as much as their grandfathers knowing. He knew, without a doubt, that it would hurt them both. As he keeps telling Everly, though, this was their lives. Rand wanted the baby, and getting married was the intelligent thing to do. This way, neither grandfather could do anything about it. They’ll have to get used to having a great-grandchild with Morris and Madden blood.

It didn’t bother him. It surprised him he was a little excited about the baby. The day she told him, he was sure he hyperventilated. But, once it set in, he was happy.

That was one reason he mentioned marriage: it was the only way they could protect their child. Rand knew how his grandfather would react, and he was sure Silas Madden would act the same way.

“What a mess we’ve gotten ourselves into.”

He strode down the hall to head for his bedroom to get dressed. He grinned as he thought about seeing Everly.

Later, Rand entered Dewey’s and mentally groaned. Pushing his way through the crowd, he made it to the bar.

“Hey, Rand. What can I get you?” Scarlett asked him.

“Beer is fine. Whatever’s on tap.”

“Be right back.”

Rand watched her as she opened the chest freezer, reached in, and pulled out a frosted mug. She held it under the tap, filled it with little foam, then walked to him and set in front of him.

“Thanks, Scarlett. How’s Noah?”

“Great. He should be here later.”

Rand glanced around the bar, then looked at her.

“I think you need to expand. Sardine can comes to mind.” He grinned when Scarlett laughed, then she looked over his shoulder, and her smile grew. Rand looked back to see Noah coming through the crowd, then took a stool.

“Hey, Noah.”

“Rand. Good to see you.” Noah grinned at Scarlett. “Hey, baby,” he said as he leaned across the bar to kiss his wife.

“I was just telling Scarlett that she needs to expand.”

“Hell, no. Don’t give her any ideas.”

Rand chuckled, then turned on the stool to look around, and he saw Everly coming in. She was so beautiful, and he wished she could go home with him. She took an empty stool next to Noah.

“What can I get you, Everly?” Laura asked her.

“Ginger ale, please.”

“You got it,” Laura said.

Within a few minutes, Laura set the glass on the bar in front of Everly. Rand did his best to ignore her, if only for appearance’s sake, but he was dying. He wanted her so much.

When he glanced at her again, she stared at him but turned away when he caught her eye.

An hour later, he was so ready to go to his truck with Everly. He stood, pulled his wallet out of his back pocket to pay his tab, told Noah goodbye, and headed out.

He took a seat on the bench and waited. And waited. Where was she? He was about to get up and go back inside to look for her when he saw her come out the door, and he got pissed. She did this deliberately. He pushed to his feet.

“About time,” he said.

“I didn’t want it to look like I was following you.” She touched his cheek. “I’ll make it up to you.”

“Let’s go then. Get in your truck, and we’ll go somewhere.”

“Cemetery again?”

“Unless we go to the house, that’s a ways out. Cemetery is closer.”

“I’ll meet you there.”

“Do you even realize how bad I want to kiss you right here?”

“Probably the same way I feel about it.”

Rand gazed into her eyes, then turned away and headed for his truck.

“Get movin’, woman.”

He chuckled when she ran to her truck, climbed in, and started it. He barely got to his vehicle when she drove past, waving at him.

Everly laughed when she waved at Rand. She knew he wanted her as much as she wanted him.

“Enjoy it while you can. Once it hits the fan, we’re all in for a world of hurt.”

She glanced in the rearview mirror to see headlights coming up behind her. He stayed behind her until they drove into the cemetery. She went around the bell tower, parked, and waited. The passenger door opening made her jump.

“Your truck or mine?” Rand asked her.

“Either. I have a backseat too.”

He shoved the door closed, opened the back door, and climbed inside.

“Well, come on back here, sweetheart.”

He watched her remove her coat and hat and did the same. She crawled between the seats and sat next to him.

“Rand—”

“What?”

“I’m just worried about how all this will go. My parents probably won’t say much, but my grandfather—”

“I know, baby, I know. We’re going to have to tell them.”

“Yes, but not yet.”

“It has to be soon, Everly. Eventually, they’d find out without us telling them, but I really don’t want to keep it from anyone. We have to do this.”

“I’m trying to figure out a way to tell him.”

“I understand. You let me know when you want to tell him, and I’ll tell my grandfather too.”

“We’re old enough to make our own decisions, but that doesn’t make it easier.”

She knew it didn’t matter how they told their families, the shit would hit the fan, and she was not looking forward to it.

Chapter Seven

Everly stared at him. She knew what was going through his mind because it was going through hers too. She reached over and touched his cheek. He looked at her and smiled.

“Sorry. I know we did the right thing, Everly. It doesn’t make it easy. We’re going to break hearts. I know it will devastate my grandfather, and yours will be too. But...” He shrugged.

“As much as I hate to say this, if my grandfather disowns me, I’ll have to live with it.”

“That would be way too hard for you.”

“I get ill just thinking about telling him. He is going to be so mad and hurt.”

“What can we do, though?” Rand touched her hair.

“Nothing. There is nothing we can do to make it easier for them. The minute they hear we’re married, and why...” She shook her head. “I can’t imagine.”

“Well, you tell me, darlin’. I’ll do whatever you want as long as we care for this baby together.”

“We will. We have to.”

“I agree.” He grinned at her. “Did we get in the back seat to talk?”

Everly laughed. “Not to begin with, but since we’ve talked, let’s get to why we’re here.”

She looked at Rand, smiled, and leaned forward to press her lips to his. She smiled against his lips when he groaned. Then he pulled back.

“What are you smiling about?”

“I think I enjoy having power over Rand Morris. All the girls want him, you know.”

Rand laughed. “Rand Morris is only interested in one woman, and that’s his wife, Everly Morris. I’m not sure how she’d feel about this, because I believe she can kick my ass.”

She burst into laughter, then kissed his neck. “I think she can too.”

“What did I get myself into?”

“When we’re old and gray, can we come here to fool around?”

“Sure, but if we’re old and gray, I doubt I’ll be able to get in the back seat.”

“Oh, my God! I thought you were going to say you wouldn’t be able [\[m5\]](#)to have sex.”

“Shoot me now,” Rand said.

“If it gets to that point, I will.”

“*What?*”

“Just kidding.”

“Not funny, sweetheart, not funny at all.”

Everly kept her eyes on him as she toed off her boots. Then she lifted her sweater over her head and tossed it upfront. She unsnapped her jeans and lowered the zipper. She lifted her hips, shoved them down, then sat in her red bra and matching panties.

“You’re killing me,” he whispered as he kissed her lips.

His hands went to the front clasp of her bra. He looked into her eyes, unhooked it, and lowered the straps down her arms.

“You’re so beautiful.”

“So are you. Do you know that I always thought you were so sexy, but I had to hate you?” She cupped his face in her hands. “I don’t, Rand. I don’t hate you at all.”

“Good, because I don’t hate you either. And if we’re telling secrets, I’ve always thought you were stunning, but I knew I didn’t have a chance with you.”

“Get those pants off, Morris.”

Rand chuckled. “Yes, ma’am.”

She watched as he tugged his T-shirt off and tossed it to the floor. Then she touched his washboard stomach.

“How did you get this?”

“I work on the ranch every day.”

“I do too, but my stomach isn’t like this.”

Rand laughed. “I sure hope not.”

“I’m in shape, but you’re in amazing shape.”

“This isn’t the first time you saw me.”

“I was going to say something on our wedding night, but you made me lose my train of thought.”

“*I made you* lose your train of thought? How do you think I felt looking at you?”

Blinking her eyes to stop the tears, she sniffed.

“You say the right things, Rand. I will not be in shape in a few months.”

“It won’t bother me one bit.” He leaned forward and put his lips over her nipple and sucked on it, then ran his lips up her chest, neck, and ear.

She could feel him grin when she shivered. When he moved his lips across her cheek, she closed her eyes.

“Open your eyes, darlin’.”

She did as he said and stared into his beautiful green eyes.

“You have no idea how bad I want you, Everly. Since our wedding night, I find it hard to sleep without you.”

“I feel the same.” She moved her hands down his abs to the snap of his jeans.

Looking into his eyes, she smiled, then unsnapped and unzipped them. She slid her hand inside and wrapped her fingers around his hard cock. She wanted this man so much.

He arched his hips, and she slid his jeans down. Then sat up and frowned.

“What?”

“You don’t even have to take your pants off. How unfair is that?”

“The perks of being a man.”

Everly hooked her fingers into the waistband of his boxer briefs and tugged them down to his knees.

“Come on, Everly, you’re taking your damn sweet time here.”

With a sly grin, she lowered her head and put her mouth down over him. His hands gripped her hair as she sucked on him.

“You have to stop. I need to be inside you.”

She sat up, smiled, and straddled him. She looked down at his hard cock, then into his eyes.

“Do you have a condom?”

“My wallet—” His eyes narrowed. “We don’t need a condom.”

Everly threw her head back and laughed.

“Gotcha,” she said when she could catch her breath.

“I’m not sure how, but I will get you back for that.”

“Looking forward to it.”

She raised up, then slowly lowered onto his cock. When she took him in, they both groaned. She wrapped her arms around his neck and put her lips close to his.

“Kiss me,” she whispered.

“With pleasure,” Rand said right before he kissed her lips deeply.

Everly moved against him. Then his fingers caressed her clitoris, and she drew in deep breaths. She was going over, but she didn’t want to go alone.

“Rand,” she gasped. “Come with me. Don’t let me go alone.”

Rand gripped her hips in his hands and moved with her. It wasn't easy on the back seat, but he sure wouldn't stop now.

"Now, Everly," he said in her ear.

Soon, he could feel her inner muscles clenching around his dick, and she screamed.

"You'll wake the dead," he said with a chuckle.

"I better not see any hands coming up out of the ground."

"You know, that's one thing I've never understood."

"What?" she asked with a frown.

"Hands coming out of the ground. It's impossible unless they threw you in the ground, but there's a vault and the casket-what?" He frowned.

"Are we seriously sitting here discussing burials?"

Rand burst out laughing, and she joined in. He shook his head.

"That was a little morbid, huh?"

"Ya think?" She kissed him. "I don't want to go home."

"You're not going home; your home is with me now. Oh, I just thought of something. We should get a room ready for the baby."

"I'd love to. Is it only Fridays you and McArthur eat together?"

"Yeah, but that will not happen once he finds out about us. Why?"

"I'm just wondering if it's safe to see you."

"He helps on the ranch, but not too often. His rheumatoid arthritis gets him down."

“I’ll call you before I go to see my husband. Maybe have a roll in the hay with him.”

“Sounds good. I guess we’d better get going,” he said, but neither moved.

A surprised look flashed across her face, and he knew she could feel him getting hard again.

“Once more?”

“For tonight, at least.”

Later, as he drove home, all he could think of was Everly. His wife.

“Holy shit, you are so dead, Morris.”

The next afternoon, while he was mucking out the stalls, his cellphone vibrated in his back pocket. He set the rake down, got the phone, and smiled when he saw Everly’s number.

“Hey, sweetheart,” he said.

“Hi. Can I come see you?”

“Are you okay?”

“Yes. I want to get out for a while. I finished my chores.”

“You be damn careful what you do, Everly.”

“Ooh, that was sexy.”

Rand sputtered out a laugh.

“Please be careful.”

“I am. I promise. I’ll see you soon.”

“Yes, ma’am. Hey, park your truck behind the first barn. I’m in the middle one. Hurry.” With a grin, he hit *End*, stuck the phone in his pocket, and picked up the rake. He couldn’t wait to see her.

Everly tiptoed to the door, slowly turned the knob, and pulled it open, but winced when it creaked. She froze and waited.

“What are you waiting for?” she muttered.

She quietly stepped into the hallway, then down the stairs. Her grandfather wasn't in the living room, and no sounds came from anywhere.

Blowing a relieved breath, she strode to the kitchen and stopped to see her grandfather sitting at the table.

“I didn't know you were here,” she said.

“Where else would I be?”

“Don't be sarcastic. It was so quiet—”

“Next time, I'll sing at the top of my lungs.”

“Please don't. I've heard you sing.”

“Good enough reason to do it, then.”

“Who pissed on your pancake?”

He pushed the chair back, got to his feet, and stared at her.

“I didn't have pancakes this morning because someone didn't make them. I'm going to the barn.”

She watched him get his coat and hat, then headed out the door, slamming it behind him, making her jump.

Did he suspect something? No. He would let her know if he did. She shrugged. She didn't care. She would see Rand. Her husband.

When she stepped out onto the porch, she almost ran back inside. It was bitterly cold. The wind blowing around her had her pulling her coat tight around her. The blue beanie she wore kept her head warm. She rarely wore a hat, except her cowboy hat around the ranch, but the air was sharper now.

It was cold earlier while she'd been riding the fence. She'd been hoping Rand would be there. He wasn't, and it had disappointed her.

He was coming to mean so much to him, and it made her realize she was so close to falling in love with him.

As she drove to his home, the closer she got, the more excited she became.

She pulled into the driveway and panicked. What if McArthur was around here somewhere, just waiting to pop out?

“Get a grip,” she murmured.

Sighing, she knew she wanted to see Rand, so for now, she’d chance it.

After parking behind the barn, she glanced around as she walked to the middle barn, opened the door, and stepped inside. She let her eyes adjust and then started down the aisle, looking for Rand.

“What are you doing here, Madden?”

She spun around to see him leaning against a wall and almost groaned, looking at the man. How did she think it was cold outside? This man had her burning up, and he had only to look at her.

“I came here to see you, Morris.”

“Well, here I am.”

“Oh, yes. I see that.” She slowly strolled to him. He never moved a muscle; he kept his eyes on her. She stopped in front of him.

His hands reached out, grasping her arms, and pulled her close, then took her lips in a deep kiss.

Everly wrapped her arms around his neck and leaned into him.

He slowly lifted his lips from hers, making them cling together.

“Hello, Mrs. Morris.”

“Hello, Mr. Morris.” She sighed when he kissed her again.

Rand wrapped his arms around her, pulled her close, and kissed her. Suddenly, he lifted his lips, looked toward the open barn doors to see his grandfather entering the barn, and did the only thing he could. He took her arms in his hands and shoved her into the empty stall, where she landed in a pile of hay.

“What the hell, Morris?”

“Shhh, my grandfather is heading this way.”

“Oh, no.”

“Just stay quiet. I’ll go to him, so he doesn’t come too far. I’ll get rid of him, Everly.”

Rand strode down the barn’s aisle to meet his grandfather.

“What’s up, Gramps?”

“I want to get some salt blocks.”

“Then do it. Why are you telling me?”

“I was hoping you’d go.”

“Gramps, I’m far from done here.”

“I’ll finish here.” McArthur moved around him.

“No!” Rand yelled.

“No, what?”

“Uh, let me finish here, then I’ll go. Will that work?”

“If you’re sure.”

“I am. Besides, I’m sure this weather isn’t helping your bones. Why don’t you go home and stay where it’s warm?”

“What are you up to?”

Rand glanced over his shoulder, then back to see his grandfather frowning.

“Uh, I’m not up to anything.”

“Uh, huh. Something’s up.”

“I have plans for later.”

“So? That has nothing to do with now. You act like you’re trying to get rid of me.”

“I just want to finish and shower before I go to Dewey’s.”

“Do you own stock in that bar?”

“What?”

“You’re there so much lately. Either you’re becoming an alcoholic, or you have ownership in it.”

“You’re a real comedian.” Rand shook his head when his grandfather laughed, then walked out of the barn.

Rand huffed. That had been way too close for comfort. He ran back to the stall where he’d pushed Everly. He stopped at the doorway to see her lying in the straw. Her hands were over her face, and her shoulders were shaking. Was she crying?

He kneeled beside her, wrapped his hands around her wrists, and pulled her hands away. She had her eyes closed.

“He’s gone. Everly? Darlin’?”

She opened her eyes, looked at him, then howled with laughter. Rand sat on the straw beside her and laughed with her.

“I’ll say one thing. This is never boring.”

“You got that right.”

“Do you need to go to the feed store for him?”

“I’ll go later. Let’s go inside.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. I’m done here.” He got to his feet and helped her up.

“You told McArthur you had more to do.”

“A little fib and I have to tell you, Everly, I don’t like lying, and we’re going to be doing it a lot.”

“I don’t like lying either. What else can we do?”

“Nothing.”

“I know it upsets you. That I’m having such a hard time with this.”

“That doesn’t upset me. What upsets me is that we *have* to lie.”

“For just a little longer, please.”

Rand leaned over and kissed her forehead.

“All right. I’m not a very patient man, darlin’.”

“Why doesn’t that surprise me?”

“We’ll get through this. What we have to remember is that we can’t let them get in our heads. We’re married, and we plan to stay that way.”

“I have an appointment with Dr. Anderson next week.”

“For the baby?”

“Yes, she’s my OB/GYN. Even if someone sees me there, they won’t think anything of it. I see her once a year.”

“It will be more than that, though, since you’re pregnant, but I’m sure everyone will already know by the time you show.”

Everly gasped. “We have to tell our families, Rand.”

“Whenever you want.”

“Let me get my nerve up, and I will. You can tell McArthur after I tell Pap.”

“Sounds good. Now, let’s go to the house.”

“Are you sure he’s not around?”

“Positive, but let me look to make sure. Come to the door with me. I’ll check around and in the house.”

“Okay.”

Rand got to his feet, helped her up, and took her hand. They walked to the barn doors.

“Stay here.” Rand quickly kissed her lips, then strode across the yard, glancing around.

Everly watched him and had to put her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing.

She saw him walk up the steps to the porch, open the door, and disappear inside. A few minutes later, he stepped onto the porch, looked around, then waved her over. The way he was looking around made him look guilty as hell.

She waved at him, then leaned against the wall and did all she could not to laugh, but she couldn't stop it from bubbling out. Bending at the waist, she put her hands on her knees and laughed until she cried.

“Hey.”

Everly screamed and put her hand on her chest.

“You scared me,” she hissed.

“When you didn't come over, I thought I'd better check—”

She lost it again, making him stop talking. She tried to catch her breath, but when she looked at Rand to see him frowning, she laughed harder.

“You're seriously going to hurt yourself,” Rand snapped.

“I'm sorry.” She straightened up and wiped the tears from her cheeks.

“What was so funny?”

“When I saw you looking around, it struck me as funny.”

He grunted. “I guess you had to be there.”

That just sent her into more peals of laughter. When she snorted, Rand laughed. Then he took her hand and led her across the yard and into the house.

Later, as they lay on the bed together, Everly snuggled against him and smiled when he pulled her closer.

“I might tell pap tomorrow. No promises, though.”

“Just remind yourself that no matter what anyone thinks, family included, we did the right thing. If they can’t accept that, then it’s their loss.”

“I’m not sure I’ll spring the marriage on him, though.”

“I understand that. The pregnancy will be hard enough.”

“I’ll say ‘hey, Pap, Rand Morris, and I did a thing. It will be here in about eight months. Oh, and by the way, we’re also married.’”

“I’m sure Silas would keel over. So do one or the other first, and we’ll see how that goes before we spring the other on them.”

She slid onto his chest and gazed into his eyes.

“I should probably get going.”

“I wish you didn’t have to go, but until we get this out in the open, we have to go to separate beds. Damn, I hate even saying that.”

She leaned down, kissed his lips, and then rolled him off to the edge of the bed. Then she sat up, gathered her clothes, entered the bathroom, and closed the door.

Rand sighed as he watched her close the door. He knew this was ripping her apart. He wasn’t doing too well, either. Hurting his grandfather almost made him physically ill.

McArthur Morris was a good man, but he was tough. He never said anything he didn’t mean. Rand wasn’t looking forward to hearing what he had to say about this.

After sitting up, he got to his feet and found his jeans. He grinned when he remembered Everly tearing his clothes off as he tried to get her out of hers.

It wasn’t just his family he worried about; it was his heart. He was falling in love with her, and that scared the hell out of

him. He was sure his heart would break if she left him.

Thirty-three years old and never been in love. Oh, he'd been in a deep... *like* with someone, but he'd kept his heart to himself. Until now. Until Everly.

Rand dressed and was about to leave the room when the bathroom door opened and Everly stepped out. He strolled to her.

"Are you all right?"

"Of course, I'm not."

"Aww, come here, baby." He pulled her into his arms, and her arms wrapped around his waist.

"I have to go," she whispered.

"I know. Come on, and I'll walk you to your truck."

"I hope your grandfather didn't see it."

"Are you kidding? It's enough that he makes it through the first set of doors."

"Oh, because of his arthritis?"

"No, because of his laziness."

Everly laughed. "I needed that. Thank you."

"Let's go before I decide to tie you to the bed."

"Promises, promises," she said.

"Can you get out tonight?"

"Yes. What do you have in mind?"

"We meet at Dewey's or just come back here later."

"I don't want to chance being here. McArthur could be hiding in the bushes."

"All right. We'll meet at Dewey's. If you can't make it call me."

"Stay away from women in tight sweaters."

"That reminds me, you said this cowboy was yours. Is that right?"

“I do not recall saying that.” Everly shook her head.

“You have selective memory. I’ll see you later, darlin’. Oh, and yes, this cowboy is yours.” He kissed her lips.

A few minutes later, Rand watched her driving away. Once she disappeared, he got to work. He couldn’t wait to see her tonight.

Chapter Eight

A week passed before Everly got the courage up to tell her grandfather. Her gut was in knots. Taking a deep breath, she rolled her shoulders and walked to the living room. This had to be done, and she knew it had to be now.

“Pap? Dinner’s ready.”

“Okay, honey. Just let me wash up. It smells great.”

“Yes.” She didn’t know what else to say. It was time to face the music, and she had made him his favorite fish for dinner. “Like that’s going to help,” she muttered as she headed back to the kitchen.

After setting the plates on the table, she placed a piece of fish on both, then pulled a chair out and sat.

When he entered the kitchen, he sat down, scooped a spoonful of wild rice out of a bowl, and plopped it on his plate. Then he looked at her.

“Eat, girl.”

“I’m not very hungry, but I will try to eat the fish.”

“By the way, were you sick this morning? I thought I heard you in the bathroom.”

Oh, God! She sure felt sick right now.

“Uh, yeah.”

“Are you feeling better?”

“For now,” she whispered.

He placed his fork down on the table and looked at her. She met his eyes and saw suspicion there.

“For now? What does that mean?”

She huffed. “It means I’m fine now, but I’ll probably be sick again in the morning.”

“How would you know that—” He shot to his feet.
“Morning sickness?”

“Yes.”

“You’re pregnant?”

“When a woman is having morning sickness, it usually means she’s pregnant.”

“Don’t get smart with me. You tell whoever got you pregnant he needs to do right by you.” He resumed his seat.

Everly sat back in the chair, folded her arms, and stared at him.

“Is that right?”

“Yes. It’s the right thing to do.”

“Women don’t need to get married just because they’re pregnant, but you’ll be happy to know that the father *wants* to marry me.” *Wait until he discovers you already are!*

“Good for him. You bring him here so I can have a talk with him.”

“I can’t do that.”

“Why not? I’m not going to say anything to make him mad.”

“It’s not him I’m worried about.”

“Who? Me? Why would I get mad? The man wants to do the right thing. I admire that.”

Everly couldn’t help it. She burst out laughing and then sobered. Her hormones were off the charts.

“You won’t.”

“And why is that Everly?” he asked her in a quiet voice.

“Because the father of my baby is... Rand Morris.”

Silas shot to his feet again. “You’d better be lying about that, girl.”

“I’m not.” She shook her head.

“I told you what would happen if you snuck around with him. Now he’s gone and gotten you pregnant. Pregnant by a damn Morris. You pack your things and get out. Go home to your parents. See how they like it that Rand Morris knocked you up.” He tossed his napkin onto the table and strode from the room.

Everly choked back a sob as she cleaned up the table. After filling the dishwasher, she took her coat and hat down from the pegs, opened the back door and stepped onto the porch, then she jogged down the steps to head for her truck. She needed to see Rand.

Everly drove to his ranch, parked, entered the barn, let her eyes adjust, then went in search of Rand. She was so upset, and she needed his support.

When she saw him sauntering toward her, she put her hand over her mouth as tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Everly? Darlin’, what’s wrong?”

She shook her head as tears continued to roll down her face.

Rand pulled her into his arms and kissed the top of her head.

“Tell me,” he whispered.

She wrapped her arms around his waist and sobbed.

“Rand—” She hiccupped.

“Baby, you’re scaring me. What is it?”

Everly raised her head and stared into his eyes.

“Pap told me to get out of the house.”

“Son of a bitch. Because of us?”

“Because the baby is yours.”

“Then come home. We’re having a baby, and we *are* married. If neither of our grandfathers like it, that’s too damn bad.” He cupped her face in his hands. “Move in with me, Everly.”

“I want to...” She shook her head. “You should have seen his face. He was livid. I’ve never seen him that angry.”

“Come on, Everly. We’re husband and wife. We knew this would happen.”

She stared into his eyes, then nodded.

“All right. I’ll go pack some things and then I’ll be back.”

“I’m sure Gramps is going to be just as mad. I know they both think they can tell us what to do, but I’m tired of it. This fucking feud is ridiculous. We proved that a Madden and a Morris can get along just fine.” Rand kissed her lips. “Do you want me to go with you?”

“God, no. He’d shoot you on sight. I won’t be long. For now, I just need some clothes and personal items. I can get the rest later.” She stood on her toes, kissed his lips, then strode to her truck, climbed in, and drove to her grandfather’s home.

When she stopped the truck beside the porch, she stared at the door, dreading the confrontation she was sure was about to come. With a deep sigh, she opened the door, stepped out, shoved it closed, and then climbed the steps and entered the kitchen.

She was happy that her grandfather wasn’t in the kitchen. She had no idea where he was, but she needed to get her things and leave.

As she glanced around the kitchen, more tears formed and slid down her cheeks.

“What are you doing here, girl? I told you to never come back here,” Silas said when he entered the kitchen.

“I’ve come to get my things.”

“You’re leaving here for a damn Morris?”

She had to clench her jaw to keep from yelling he told her to go.

“You told me to go, Pap,” she whispered.

“You have a choice, Everly. Either you stay here and run this ranch, and eventually inherit it, or you go live on Morris

land. It's him or your family," her grandfather snapped.

"It's not my family, it's *you*. You know I love you, Pap, but this is my life. You hate the Morris', but I don't. Rand and I —"

"Get your things and get out of here. I'm telling you right now, girl, he will break your heart. This is all to get back at me."

Everly's mouth dropped open. Then she snapped it shut.

"It has nothing to do with you. It's because you and McArthur can't get over something that happened years ago and didn't even concern you."

"Didn't concern me? My mother and McArthur's father had an affair."

"And? Just what does that have to do with you? It wasn't done to you, personally, Pap. It's time to move past the... past."

"You don't even care how this hurts me," he shouted.

"And you don't care how it hurts me," she yelled back. "I'm getting some of my things, and I'll be going."

She strode past him and walked up the stairs to her room. She entered her room, pulled a suitcase from the closet, and threw clothes and personal items into it. She took a deep breath, lifted the case off the bed, and headed for the door, but stopped when she saw her grandfather standing in the doorway.

"Don't do this, Evie."

"I have to. I know you don't want to hear it, but I want to be with him, and I want to spend the rest of my life—"

"He's using you and you can't see it."

"He's not," she shouted, then pushed past him to head for the stairs.

"Everly," he shouted, but she ignored him. "You'll come back when he hurts you!"

“I’m doing what you wanted, Pap. I’m getting out of this house.” She continued down the stairs until she reached the bottom, then turned and looked at him at the top of the landing. “I’ll be back to get more of my things. I’ll do my best not to run into you.”

Everly entered the kitchen, set her suitcase on the floor, pulled her coat on, and put a beanie on her head, took a deep breath, picked up the suitcase, opened the door and stepped onto the porch.

Tears were making it difficult to see as she made her way to her truck. She put the suitcase in the back seat, opened the door, and, with one last glance at the house, drove to Rand’s place.

Rand rode Jester out of the barn. A section of fence was down, and he needed to fix it.

He halted when he saw Everly coming up the driveway. She stopped in front of the steps to the porch, but she didn’t get out. He kneed the horse and stopped Jester at her truck. Then he dismounted, dropped the reins, and tapped on the window. When she looked at him through the glass, he could see tears on her cheeks. He opened the door.

“What is it?”

She didn’t say a word; she got out, wrapped her arms around his waist, and sobbed.

“I hate this, Rand.”

“What? Us?”

“No. It would be so much simpler if that’s all it was.”

“I take it you and Silas came to a head.”

“Yes, he told me, once again, to get out. I knew that’s how it would go, but it still hurts.”

“I’m so sorry, baby, but this is our lives. We need to stay together in this.”

“I know. I don’t know how people have affairs if they have to sneak around.”

“It’s nothing new, two people sneaking around to be together.”

“Yes, but most of the time, they get caught.”

“I agree. It’s hard to keep a secret when most of the town knows you.”

She pushed back from him and stared into his eyes.

“Even the Hatfield’s and McCoy’s got caught.”

“Romeo and Juliet.”

“Did you know the story is based on the life of two real lovers who lived and died for each other in Verona, Italy, in thirteen hundred and three? William Shakespeare had discovered the tragic love story in Arthur Brooke’s fifteen hundred and sixty-two poems, entitled *The Tragical History of Romeo and Juliet*.”

“I’m married to a genius. What more could a man want? A hot wife who knows her shit.”

Everly laughed. “Thank you.”

“Anytime. I better get back to work before Gramps comes looking for me.”

“How are we going to do this?”

“I told you I’d tell him after you told Silas. I’ll tell him this evening.”

“I’ll have to stay out of sight.”

“No, you can relax here. We’re having dinner at his place. You should rest Everly.”

“I will later. I told Pap I would be back to get more things[m6]. I only have a few clothes and some personal items, but I’ll need to pack more suitcases.”

“Are you sure you want to go back now?”

“I have to get my things. Maybe Pap is out working.”

“I hope so. If you need me, call.”

“Thank you.” She stood on her toes and kissed his lips. “I’ll be back in a while.”

“Okay. I have to get to the section of fence that’s down.”

“None of those Morris bison better be on Madden land.”

Rand chuckled. “Later, baby. Do you need me to carry your suitcase inside?”

“No, thank you. There’s not much in it.”

“All right.”

He kissed her forehead, strode to his horse, and vaulted into the saddle. After touching the brim of his hat, he kneed the horse and rode off.

Everly watched him ride away and then got her suitcase out of the truck. She carried it to the door and set the case beside the bench inside the door. Then she walked to her vehicle and drove to Pap’s ranch. It wasn’t her ranch, and it never would be. She hoped Silas didn’t keep it from her parents, but she didn’t know if her father wanted it or not. He was one of the best attorneys in the area. Her mother taught at the local community college. They both seemed content to do their own things than think of taking over the ranch.

After starting her vehicle, she drove to the road and stopped. A tear rolled down her cheek as she thought about the confrontation she knew was coming.

When she pulled up beside the porch, she parked and stared at the door. Was he in there or out working?

With a heavy sigh, she opened the door, shoved it closed, and climbed the steps, and entered the kitchen. The house was eerily quiet.

She walked to the living room and looked around. Either he was out, or he's sulking somewhere. She quickly made her way upstairs and entered her bedroom.

Opening the closet door, she reached inside to get the other two suitcases she had and put them on the bed. She opened each one and then got busy, throwing her clothes and other items into them.

Everly got as much as she could in them, then lifted them off the bed and started for the door. She wanted to get out of here as fast as she could and not see her grandfather. She set one case on the landing and carried the other one. She'd have to come back for the other one.

As she started down the stairs, she was so upset this was happening. This feud had to end, and it was going to for her and Rand. She was about to switch the case to her other hand so she could hold on to the banister, but her boot heel caught on the step. She could feel herself falling and she heard her grandfather shout her name, but there was nothing she could do. Letting go, she tried to grab the rail, but she fell against it, knocking the wind out of her, and she tumbled down the stairs, hitting her head sharply on a spindle. At the bottom of the stairs, she fell into a heap. She looked at her grandfather's ashen face. She knew she was losing consciousness.

"Call Rand... please. The baby," she murmured, then passed out.

The dinner Rand was eating with his grandfather could have been sawdust for all he knew. It was now or never. He took a deep breath, then blew it out.

"Gramps? Can we talk?"

"Sure. What about?"

Rand swallowed hard.

"Uh, Everly Morris is pregnant—"

“Who cares if she’s pregnant? Whose baby is it, or does she even know?”

Rand clenched his jaw to keep from yelling at him she knew exactly who the father was.

“She knows.”

MacArthur set his utensils on the table, and his eyes narrowed.

“How do you know she knows? We don’t give a damn about the Madden’s.”

“I do,” Rand said in a low tone.

“What? Did you just say you care about them?”

“Just Everly. We, uh, have been seeing each other.”

His grandfather’s eyes looked like they would pop out.

“Are you telling me you’ve been sneaking around seeing her? What is wrong with you?”

“Gramps—”

MacArthur pushed to his feet and glared at him.

“I don’t want you seeing her.”

“I’ll do what I want.”

“She’s pregnant—hell, is the baby yours?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You need to leave my home. Now. I’m so disappointed in you, Rand. You knew better.”

“Yeah, I do, but she means a lot to me—”

“Well, until you stay away from her, stay away from me.” MacArthur tossed his napkin onto his plate, and without another look or word, he walked out of the kitchen. Rand heard a door slam.

Rand folded his arms and stared at his plate, then stood, picked it up, and set it on the counter as he cleaned the rest of the dinner up. What a waste of two nice, thick Ribeye steaks.

He knew it would shock his grandfather, and he had foolishly hoped his grandfather would be happy about being a great-grandfather.

“You’re an idiot, Morris.”

Rand pulled his coat and hat on, then started out the door when his cellphone buzzed, and he pulled it from his pocket to see Everly’s number.

“Hey—”

“Rand Morris, I didn’t want to call you, but Everly wanted me to. She fell down the stairs and is on the way to the hospital,” Silas said.

Rand could feel the blood draining from his face.

“Is she all right?”

“The EMTs didn’t say. She’s unconscious. I’m following them. I don’t want you there, but she will.” Silas disconnected.

He stuck the phone in his pocket and ran for his truck. He had to get there and be with her. She and the baby had to be all right.

After arriving at the hospital, he parked and ran across the parking lot. The doors whooshed open in front of him, and he quickly made it to the desk.

“Can I help you?” She smiled at him.

“Yes, could you tell me where they’ve taken Everly, uh, Madden?”

The woman looked at the computer, then back at him.

“Are you family?”

“I’m her husband.”

“Oh, all right. She’s on the third floor, room three fifteen.”

“Thank you.” Rand strode to the elevator and pushed the button for the third floor.

Once it stopped on the right floor, the doors opened and he saw the wall plaque that had which direction her room was,

and he headed that way. He'd never been so afraid in his life. He couldn't lose her.

At the door to her room, he stopped and tried to calm himself before he saw her. After taking a few deep breaths, he entered the room and stared at her. He moved around to the side of the bed, and took a seat in the chair beside it, and reached for her hand, and noticed his own hand was shaking.

"Everly, sweetheart, I'm here for you," he whispered.

She looked so pale, and he wasn't going anywhere until she awoke. He hoped the doctor would be in soon.

A sound had him looking at the doorway to see Silas standing there.

"How long has she been unconscious?" he asked.

"She told me to call you when she hit the floor, then she passed out. As soon as the ambulance got her here, they put her in this room. She's been out a while."

Rand saw him staring at her, and even though they were in an argument, he knew Silas loved his granddaughter. As he did.

"Did they mention the baby?"

"Not yet. I'm going to the cafeteria to get some coffee." Silas started out the door but turned to look at him. "Do you need anything?"

"I bet that hurt like a bitch, didn't it, Silas? No, I don't need anything, especially from you." Rand looked back at Everly, ignoring Silas.

Rand heard him huff and leave the room, and he was glad Silas had left. He had no desire to make small talk.

He scooted the chair closer to the bed, folded his arms on it, then laid his head on them. He wasn't sure how long he'd been sitting here, when he heard his grandfather's voice.

"Son, you need to come home for a while."

Rand raised his head to look at his grandfather.

“Why are you here? You told me to stay away from you. How did you even know I was here?”

“A ranch hand told me. I’m not sure how he knew.”

“That still doesn’t tell me why you’re here.”

“You’re my grandson, and I wanted to make sure you were all right.”

“Well, I’m not and I won’t be until she wakes up. I still need to talk to the doctor.”

“We have our arguments, Rand, but you know I love you. You just made a mistake.”

Rand shot to his feet. “She is not a mistake. My mistake is in believing you’d be just a little happy about having a great-grandchild. What was I thinking?”

“Rand—”

“I’m not leaving her,” Rand said as he resumed his seat and laid his head back on the bed.

“All right. Let me know when you get home.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What the hell are you doing here, MacArthur?” Silas Madden asked when he entered the room.

“Trying to get my grandson away from your granddaughter, Silas.”

“Well, on that, we agree. Rand Morris, you get away from her.”

Rand raised his head, got to his feet again, and stared at Silas Madden.

“I will not. Whether you like it or not, this is *our* baby and Everly needs my support. I think it would be best if you both got the hell out of here,” he growled out.

“I was leaving anyway. I’ll see you later, Rand.”

Rand shifted his eyes to his grandfather, then shifted them back to Silas Madden. He watched him huff, nod, and leave the room. He was about to sit back down when he heard them

arguing outside the door. Taking a deep breath, he stepped into the hall to see his grandfather and Silas Madden standing toe to toe, arguing.

“Stop it,” Rand snapped.

Both men turned to look at him.

“Go home. Both of you. Everly needs to rest, and if she wakes up and hears you two arguing, I can guarantee it will piss her off. Now, go.”

“You don’t have the right to make me leave, Rand Morris. Just who do you think you are?” Silas Madden’s eyes narrowed.

“Who do I think I am? I’m her *husband*. We got married right after she found out she was pregnant. So, yes, I have every right to make you leave.”

“You married a Madden?” McArthur Morris asked him.

“I did.”

“Well, you need to get divorced,” Silas snapped.

“Both of you go home, and don’t come back unless you can be civil.”

The men looked at him and then walked off in different directions. Rand took a deep breath and blew it out.

Later, as he sat beside the bed, holding her hand, he heard a noise and looked to the door to see Everly’s parents and mentally groaned as he got to his feet.

“Mr. and Mrs. Madden. I’ll leave the room so you can visit with her,” he said and headed for the door.

“No need, son. You stay right where you’re at,” Benjamin ‘Bam,’ Madden said.

“Benjamin’s right, Rand. You stay here. Unless you’re uncomfortable being here with us,” Linda Madden stated.

“No, ma’am. I didn’t want to be here if you didn’t want me to be.”

“It’s fine.” Linda smiled at him.

“Thank you,” Rand said.

He watched as Everly’s parents slid two chairs up beside the bed on the opposite side and sat. Linda reached for Everly’s hand, and Rand saw a tear slide down her cheek.

“I would like to know what’s going on, Rand,” she said.

“The doctor said she hit her head hard on the banisters when she fell. She hasn’t been awake yet. That’s why they’re keeping her,” Rand told her.

He watched Bam stare at his daughter, seeing pain in his eyes. At one time, Bam and Rand’s father had been best friends in elementary school, as their fathers were, until they drilled it into their heads they couldn’t be friends.

Rand glanced to the doorway to see his parents standing there. He pushed to his feet, walked toward them, and hugged them.

“We’ll wait,” Dinah Morris whispered.

“It’s fine, Dinah. Please come in,” Linda said.

“Thank you,” Randall said as they entered the room.

Bam stood, stared at Randall, then stuck his hand out, and Randall shook it.

“It’s good to see you, Bam.”

“You too, Randall. I think it’s time this damn feud was over.”

“I agree, but you know our fathers. They’ll never let it die.”

“I don’t think so either,” Bam said.

“Rand, do you know exactly what happened to Everly?”

“Silas said she fell down the stairs at the house and hit her head along the banister. He said she hit one of them so hard that she broke it.” Rand shook his head as he reached for Everly’s hand.

“She’s tough, Rand,” his father said, placing his hand on his shoulder.

“I just want her to wake up, Dad.”

“Concussions are tricky, Mr. Morris,” the doctor said as he entered the room. “Since hers was severe, it could take a while for her to wake up.”

“How long?”

“Now, that we don’t know. We just take it day by day. There’s no bleeding in the brain, so that’s a good thing. I’ll be back around to check on her.” The doctor left the room.

“She’ll wake up, son. Just give it time,” Randall said.

“I’m trying, Dad,” he said, and the words lodged in his throat.

“Did she just slip on the stairs?” Linda asked him.

Rand took a deep breath and looked at her.

“She was leaving there to move in with me. Silas and her probably had an argument about it.” He shook his head. “I don’t know for sure. Silas didn’t say, and until Everly wakes up, I won’t know exactly what happened.”

When no one said anything, he glanced at the four people staring at him.

“She was... *moving* in with you?” Dinah asked him.

“Yes, ma’am.” He took a deep breath. “We got married right after we found out about the baby. She’s my wife, and we want to be together.”

“Your... *wife*?” Bam said.

“Yes, sir.”

Rand watched as Bam looked at Randall, and saw him glance away, then back at him. It shocked Rand when a smile lifted his father’s lips.

“Congratulations, son.”

“I would have told you...”

“No need to explain, Rand,” Linda said as she stepped forward and hugged him, then stepped back from him.

“No need at all,” Dinah said as she hugged him.

Rand let out a relieved sigh as he hugged her.

“Thank you. Silas thinks we should divorce.”

“Don’t you dare. If you two want to be together, I think it’s great.”

“I do too, Dad.”

“Maybe this shit will end finally,” Bam said.

“Don’t swear, Daddy.”

Everyone turned to the bed to see Everly with her eyes open.

“Everly,” Rand choked out as he took the chair beside the bed and held her hand.

“What happened, Rand?”

“You fell down the stairs at your grandfather’s house. Don’t you remember?”

“I remember running down the stairs. Pap and I were arguing about me moving in with you.” She touched his cheek, then she gasped. “The baby—”

Rand looked at both sets of parents and watched them leave the room. He took a deep breath and held her hand.

“Everly, the baby is fine.”

“Thank God,” she said, but her voice caught.

“Come here, sweetheart.” He pulled her into his arms and held her while she cried.

Everly raised her head and looked into his eyes. His head lowered, and he lightly kissed her lips.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know why I’m such a babbling fool.”

“Probably the hormones.”

Everly looked toward the doorway to see her mother standing there, smiling.

“You know, don’t you?” Everly looked at her parents and Rand’s.

“Yeah, we know, and we’re all happy, Everly,” Randall Morris said.

“You’re okay with this? Mom? Dad?”

“We are. Maybe it will end this once and for all. Something needs to,” Bam said.

“We didn’t know how to tell you,” Everly said.

“Well, this was a hell of a way to do it, but we will not stand in your way.” Dinah smiled at Everly.

Everly touched Rand’s cheek.

“I’m so sorry,” she whispered.

“For what?”

“Ending up here. I ran down the stairs.”

“But why did you run down those stairs, Everly? I want to know what happened.” Rand gazed into her eyes.

“It was my fault. I was trying to get out of the house before Pap saw me.” She ran her hand over her belly as fresh tears ran down her cheeks.

“All right. I’m going to head home, shave, and get something to eat. Do you need anything?”

“Just for you to come back.”

Rand leaned down and kissed her lips.

“I will always come back for you, if you want me to,” he murmured above her lips, then pressed his lips to hers. When he raised his head, he looked into her eyes, kissed her nose, then walked out of the room.

Everly watched him go and missed him already. It’s funny how much he meant to her. She looked at her mother to see her staring at her.

“Randall, why don’t you and Bam go get yourselves a cup of coffee? Dinah and I are going to talk with Everly for a few minutes.”

“Oh, sure, hon. Bam, how about a coffee?”

“Sounds good to me.”

Everly’s father winked at her, then left the room with Bam following him. She looked to see her mother and Dinah Morris, sit in chairs on opposite sides of the bed.

Linda reached for her hand. “Everly, I wanted to make sure this is what you and Rand want.”

“I know, Mom. Rand and I will have to talk. We flew to Vegas and got married because of the baby, and I haven’t regretted it. The only thing I regret is that we kept it a secret, but you know why we had to do that.”

“I can’t imagine how Silas and McArthur are coping with this,” Dinah said.

“I can. It’s betrayal. I know how my father-in-law is about this feud, and if he was throwing Everly out of the house, it’s not something he’s going to get over quickly... if at all.” Linda stared at her.

“Mom, Mrs. Morris—”

“Dinah, I am your mother-in-law, after all.” She smiled at her.

“Dinah. This thing with Rand just happened one day, and we discovered we like each other. We’d get together when we could.” She looked at her mother. “Mom, I’m sorry I didn’t tell you.”

“I understand, Everly. With your grandfathers not liking each other, it’s understood, but it’s going to be tough on you and Rand.” Linda shook her head. “Where are you going to live?”

“With Rand at his home. He owns the land his house sits on, and McArthur can’t do anything about it,” Dinah said. “Isn’t that right, Everly?”

“Yes.” Everly smiled.

“I didn’t know that.” Linda nodded. “Good. I know you hate hurting your grandfather, but he does not run your life.”

“Funny, Rand said the same thing. I know we got married because of the baby, but I’m hoping he wants to stay married.”

“Divorce is not something you need to think about,” Linda said.

“Pap is just so angry, and I was trying to get out of there before he saw me. I was in a big hurry, and I could have hurt the baby. I remember telling Pap to call Rand after I fell.” She shrugged. “I suppose he did, but I can also remember his face when I mentioned the baby.”

“So, he knows. I wonder if McArthur does?” Dinah frowned.

“I’m not sure. Rand was going to tell him, I’m not sure he did yet, though.” Everly yawned.

“Get some sleep, honey.” Linda kissed her head. “We’re all happy for you.”

“I agree.” Dinah looked at Linda. “I think we should find our husbands and go home for a while. Everly, call us if you need anything.” She touched Everly’s hand.

“Thank you, both. I can’t believe I’m so tired.”

“Your body took a shock. Rest, honey. We’ll see you soon.”

“All right, Mom. Thank you all for coming.”

Both women smiled, then left the room. Everly turned on her side, yawned again, closed her eyes, and drifted off.

Rand pulled up to his porch, parked, and stepped out. He heard a vehicle and looked to see his grandfather driving toward him.

“Great, just fucking great,” he muttered.

He watched as his grandfather stepped from his truck, got out, and slammed the door, then made his way to him.

“Rand McArthur Morris, just what the hell were you thinking?”

“About?” Rand folded his arms and stared at his grandfather.

“Don’t give me that shit. You know what I mean. Of all the women in Clifton, Hartland, and Spring City, you could have knocked up. You get a Madden pregnant.” He glared at him. “And if that isn’t bad enough, you... *marry her*.”

“It was the right thing to do,” Rand snapped.

“So, get a divorce. No Madden is going to be on my land.”

“That’s fine. This isn’t your land, Gramps. It’s mine, and if I want my... *wife* living here, then she will.”

“I don’t understand you at all. How long have I driven it into your head to stay away from that family?”

“Too fucking long!” Rand shouted. “I’m tired of it. This is mine and Everly’s life and if it’s in my power, we will stay married.”

“But why did you even touch her to begin with? You had a different woman every night. Why her?”

“I didn’t have a different woman every night. Stop making me sound like a damn man whore. As for Everly, it just happened, but I have been happier with her than any other woman. Either you accept it—”

“Well, I don’t. I will never accept this. You knew better. I am so disappointed in you.” McArthur turned and walked back to his truck, climbed in, then took off, throwing gravel up behind the truck.

Rand ran his hand around his nape, feeling the muscles tensing up. He knew this wouldn’t be easy, but he wanted to stay married to Everly. She meant so much to him. He loved her. He looked into those beautiful blue eyes, and he was well on the way to falling for her.

He wanted to make it work. With or without their grandfathers. At least there would be no interference from them. Rand was sure Silas Madden wanted nothing to do with Everly, either.

“Damn it,” he swore as he tilted his head back and looked up at the sky.

Now that everyone knew, he and Everly can get on with their lives, and Rand would take care of her and their baby.

It would be hard not talking to his grandfather. They’d always been close, but he knew he had to put Everly and their baby first now.

Chapter Nine

Everly sat in the truck and watched as the scenery flew by. She hadn't said a word since leaving the hospital. She knew Rand had to be wondering why she was so quiet.

All she knew was she wanted to get home and rest. She was tired so much lately but knew it was because of the pregnancy.

"Are you feeling all right?"

She glanced over at him, then out the windshield.

"I'm fine. Just a little tired."

"You can rest when we get home."

She nodded but said nothing. *Home*. Everly hoped it would be her home for a long time because she'd gone and done it. She fell in love with him.

When he hadn't left her side during her hospital stay, she knew he was the man she wanted to spend the rest of her life with. Would they have more kids? She had always wanted a bunch of them since she was an only child. She cleared her throat and looked at him again.

"Rand?"

"Yeah?"

"Are we going to have more kids?"

He quickly glanced at her, then back to the road.

"Do you want more?"

"I've always wanted a big family, but if you don't, that's fine."

He startled her by pulling over on the berm. After putting the gear into Park, he looked at her and took her hand.

"I've always wanted a big family too." He sighed. "Everly, I want to make this work."

"I do too."

“Good. Then we’ll make it work and have a bunch of kids.” He grinned at her.

Everly laughed, and it felt great. She had been through so much lately. Her grandfather hadn’t been back to the hospital. Rand told her about Silas and McArthur arguing and how he made them leave.

Would her grandfather ever speak to her again? A tear rolled down her cheek, but she wiped it away.

“What’s wrong? Tell me.”

“I’ll probably never see Pap again.”

“I’m sure I won’t see mine either. He’s beyond mad.”

“I knew it would happen.”

“I did too, but I had hoped they’d be happy about a great-grandchild.” He shrugged. “I was wrong.”

“I’m sorry. I know you and McArthur were close.”

“He’s a good man who can let most things go, but not this. He’ll never get over this. But there is no reason for you to be sorry. We both knew how this would go.” He squeezed her hand. “I know you’re upset about Silas, but we’re married, and we have to take care of ourselves and our baby boy.”

Everly narrowed her eyes. “It’s a girl.”

He tilted his head. “Do you know?”

“No, and I don’t want to. I want to be surprised.”

“As long as the baby is healthy, I’ll be happy. We haven’t even discussed names.”

“I honestly didn’t even think of that.”

“Plenty of time. Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Rand, I’m telling you, you’d better get used to my moods during this pregnancy.”

“I’ll tiptoe around you.”

“Sure, you will.” She laughed.

He winked at her, checked for traffic, and then pulled onto the road.

Rand's truck ate up the miles along the two-lane blacktop, then he pulled into the driveway, drove up to the house, and parked beside the porch.

"Come on, sweetheart, let's get you inside, and you can rest. I have to get back to work."

"All right." Everly reached for the door.

"Sit tight. I'll get it and help you in. You must be sore."

"It felt like being in a clothes dryer."

"Is that right? And how would you know what that feels like?"

"I don't, but the way the clothes tumble around, I'm sure that's how it would feel on a body."

Rand chuckled. "Okay."

He opened the door, walked around the truck to her side, opened the door and put his hand out for her.

She placed her hand in his and stepped down from the truck. Rand led her up the steps into the kitchen and then to the living room.

"Do you want to stay on the couch or go to the bed?"

"Here is fine. I'm not an invalid, Rand. I'm just sore."

"All right, but you call me if you need something. I'll be close since I have to check on you."

She touched his cheek, and he felt it to his toes. He helped her with her coat and placed it on the back of the sofa. He'd hang it up in a while.

"Thank you. I might take a nap."

“Rest is the best thing for you. I’ll get your things from the truck and put them in our room.”

“That sounds good.” She smiled at him.

“Okay. I’ll be right back. You rest, please.”

“I will.” She lay on the sofa, and Rand pulled the afghan off the back and covered her with it.

He gazed at her, picked up her coat, then turned, headed out to the kitchen to hang it up. Then he went outside to the truck, got her suitcases, and carried them inside.

When he checked on her, she had fallen asleep, and he stared at her, wondering about their future. He hoped she would stay, but as of right now, he wasn’t sure about anything. They both wanted this to work, but their grandfathers sure didn’t, and Rand wouldn’t put it past either of them to do all they could to sabotage this marriage. He knew how much they despised each other, and he didn’t know how this would work, but he wanted it to. He wanted Everly by his side.

Rand was happy their parents accepted it. Their grandfathers were on a whole other level. He couldn’t stop having a little hope they’d come around.

“Wishful thinking,” he muttered as he headed to the kitchen.

Later, he mucked out the stalls, but his thoughts were still on Everly. She hadn’t called, so he supposed she didn’t need anything.

It was close to four, and he was about finished. He’d get done as soon as possible, so he could go to the house.

“Hey, Rand.”

Rand turned to see Kaden striding toward him.

“Kaden, what’s up?” Rand leaned the rake against the wall, pulled off his work gloves, then stuck them in the back pocket of his jeans. He removed his coat from the hook and shrugged it on.

“I was heading home and thought I’d stop to see how you’re doing.”

“I’m fine.” Rand told him about what had happened.

“Is she all right?”

“She said she’s sore, which I’m sure she is after falling down the stairs.”

“The baby?”

“Is fine.”

“So, Silas and McArthur aren’t speaking to you?”

Rand shook his head. “Gramps said I won’t see him until I stop seeing her.”

“Damn. What about Silas?”

“He threw Everly out of the house. She fell when she was trying to get her things. She told him to call me.”

“And he did?”

“Yeah, surprised the hell out of me,” Rand said.

“I’m sure. I just wanted to see how you were doing.”

“Stop by anytime.”

Kaden nodded and strode from the barn.

Rand worked for another hour and called it a day. He was hungry, dirty, and needed a shower.

When he entered the house, it was silent, so he quietly walked to the living room to see Everly still asleep on the couch.

He headed for the bedroom and entered the bathroom to shower. It was cold outside, but he had worked up a sweat and definitely needed a shower, but he needed to wake her up to make sure she wasn’t experiencing any symptoms that could be harmful to her. There was no doubt she had a headache, and the physician at the hospital told him to check on her every two to three hours.

Rand was in earlier to wake her. He had only to ask her simple questions, like her name, and what day it was. Everly answered all the questions earlier, but it was time to do it again.

He leaned over the back of the sofa and gently shook her shoulder. She opened her eyes and looked at him.

“My name is Everly Morris. I’m pregnant and I have to answer these questions to show you I’m okay. I still have a headache, but the doctor said that was normal.”

“And?”

Everly sighed. “If it gets worse, I’m to call him. Did I pass?”

“The smartass test? Yes, with flying colors.” He chuckled when her eyes narrowed. “Seriously, are you feeling all right?”

She sat up and leaned against the arm of the sofa.

“Just the headache, but it’s manageable.”

“Are you hungry?”

“I’m starving, but something light. I’m too tired to eat too much.”

“Chicken noodle soup?”

“Perfect. You know, Pap would want—” she abruptly stopped and Rand saw her bottom lip quivering.

He walked around the sofa, sat on the edge, and took her hand.

“I know how this is hard on you. I’m sorry.”

“Have you talked to McArthur?”

“Not since the first day you were in the hospital. He was here waiting for me.”

“What did he say?”

“Does it matter?” At her look, he sighed. “He said as long as I’m seeing you, I won’t be seeing him.” Rand shrugged.

“I’m so sorry.”

“It’s not your fault. We knew what we were doing.”

“I know I’ll miss Pap.”

“Give it time, Everly. I have to hope that once those two see their great-grandchild. Maybe that will soften them.”

“It would be nice, but I can’t see that happening.”

“What can we do? I love my grandfather, but this is my family. You, the baby, and me.”

“I’m glad our parents were okay with it.”

“I am too. I need to get a shower, then I’ll make you some soup.”

He turned to walk down the hallway, but when she spoke, he looked back at her.

“What did you say?” he asked.

“I said I could use a shower.”

Rand frowned, then saw a smile lift her lips.

“Could you?”

“Oh, yes. I think we should conserve water.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive. Help me up, Morris.”

“Okay, Morris.” He grinned when she laughed. He strode back to the sofa, around the front of it, then held his hand out to her.

Everly grabbed onto his hand. She needed the support. *Then why are you taking a shower with him? You could fall and bust your ass in the shower.*

When he pulled her to her feet, she looked into his eyes. Then she saw his eyes glance down to her lips, and back into her eyes.

“Kiss me, Morris,” she whispered.

“Yes, ma’am.”

His lips pressed to hers, and she couldn’t stop the moan. He smiled against her lips.

“What’s funny?”

“Nothing. Let’s shower, sweetheart.”

“Yes.”

She smiled as he led her down the hallway, through the bedroom, and into the master bathroom. He closed the door, folded his arms, and stared at her. The heat in her cheeks made her want to fan herself.

How did she ever think she hated him? She loved him and she could see herself with him until she died. Then she would wait for him to join her. A tear rolled down her cheek, and she swiped it away.

“What’s wrong?” Rand cupped her face in his hands.

“Not a thing.”

“You’re crying for no reason?”

Everly burst out laughing. “You’d better get used to it. Pregnancies make a woman crazy.”

“Wonderful,” he muttered.

“I think we need to get that shower,” she said, then put her hand over her nose.

Rand reared back from her. “Are you telling me I smell bad?”

“I don’t think I need to tell you.” She put her hand on his chest and gave him a little shove.

“Hey, sweetheart, you look a little green. Is it your head?”

Everly looked at him and frowned. “My head is fine. I look green because of you.”

“Okay, you lost me.”

“Rand, baby, it’s the horse manure and your sweat—” She pushed him out of the way and got to the toilet in time to throw up.

She could feel Rand pull her hair back from her face. God! Could she do anything worse than this in front of him?

“Everly? Do you need anything?”

“I don’t suppose you have any ginger ale?” She sat on the floor beside the toilet and refused to look at him.

“No, but I could run down to the convenience store. It will only take me about ten minutes.”

“I don’t want to make you go out. The weather station said there will be snow tonight.”

“Then let me get going. Is there anything else?”

“Just you, so hurry back to me.”

“I will.” He got to his feet and helped her up. “I’d kiss you goodbye, but...”

She laughed. “I get it. I’ll try to brush my teeth while you’re gone, but first I need to lay back down.”

“Let me help you back to the sofa.”

“I can get there. Don’t you think you should shower before you go?”

“Sweetheart, I’m a rancher. They’ve seen or smelled worse. Trust me on that,” he said as he helped her up from the floor and led her to the couch.

“Thank you.” She smiled when he leaned over and kissed her forehead, then strode out of the room.

Then she heard him go out and start his truck. Everly heard him drive off. She didn’t like him going out, and especially to that store. Several times, it’s been robbed.

“Please be careful,” she whispered, though she knew he didn’t hear her.

She scooted down and pulled the afghan over her. It was awful feeling so tired, but her body went through a shock, plus

the pregnancy was wearing her out, and she was only a little over two months. What was she going to feel like in later months? Rest was the best. Yawning, she closed her eyes to wait for Rand. She'd brush her teeth in a minute...

Rand entered the house, set the pack of ginger ale on the counter, and removed his hat and coat, then hung them up. He headed for the living room and saw her asleep on the sofa.

He walked around the couch, sat on the coffee table, and watched her sleep. How did it come to this? Not the pregnancy, just... everything. Rand knew without a doubt he was in love with her.

He hoped it would work out because the thought of his grandfather not speaking to him hurt, and he was sure Everly felt the same about Silas.

It would be hard, but Rand knew it had to be this way. If their grandfathers didn't want to speak to them, that's how it will be.

Leaning forward, he touched her shoulder, and her eyes opened. She smiled at him, and his heart hit his stomach.

"I'm back."

"I can't believe I fell asleep."

"You need your rest, Everly. I don't want you out working the ranch."

"I'm fine."

"No, you're not. You might feel fine, but you've had a nasty fall, and you don't need to push it. Please."

"What am I supposed to do all day, Rand?"

"If you want to ride the fence and check the bison, that's fine, but no heavy labor." He frowned. "Are you allowed to ride?"

“Yes. Doc Anderson said I could for a couple more months.”

“All right. I got your ginger ale.” He got to his feet. “Would you like a glass of it now?”

“No, thank you. If it’s all right with you, I’ll take a glass of it to the bedroom when we go to bed.”

“Of course, you can. Everly, this is your home too. Do whatever you want.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Anything you want to change or add is fine with me.”

“I won’t do anything without discussing it with you, though.”

“If that makes you more comfortable, that’s fine, but honestly, it’s fine to do what you want.”

“Okay. That recliner has to go.” He widened his eyes, and he could see she was doing all she could not to laugh. “I’m kidding. I love everything about this house. It’s so gorgeous.” She glanced around the room.

“Thanks.”

“Did you build it?”

“Some of it, but Riley Madison’s company did most of the work.”

“I know Riley. I’m friends with Katie.”

“They’re a great couple. I’ve known both for years.”

Everly nodded. “Oh, any snow yet?”

“None tonight, but tomorrow we have a winter weather advisory, which is fine for you.”

“What?”

“The snow will keep you inside and I won’t have to worry about you being out there and trying to wrestle the bison.”

When her eyes narrowed as she stared at him, he laughed.

“I’ll ride the fence. At least, that way I can get outside.”

“Good enough. Now, I need a shower. I got some strange looks at the store.”

“Well, I didn’t take one yet, either.”

They stared at each other, then Rand strode around the sofa, and scooped her up in his arms.

“Let’s save water—” He came to a halt in the hall and frowned at her.

“What?”

“Did you call me, *baby*, earlier? Did I hear that right?”

Everly nibbled on her bottom lip, then shook her head.

“I don’t recall that.”

Rand laughed. “I must have heard wrong.”

“Must have,” she said.

She placed her head on his shoulder. He carried her through the bedroom and into the bathroom, then set her on her feet. She kept her arms around his neck and leaned into him, but he stepped back.

“Did you brush your teeth?” he asked her.

Everly stared at him, then put her hand over her mouth and shook her head.

“I didn’t think so.” He laughed when she swatted her hand at him.

“You start the water, and I’ll brush my teeth. I fell asleep. I’m sorry.”

Rand’s hand wrapped around her nape.

“No need to be sorry.”

Once they stripped, Rand started the water and made sure it was the right temperature, then he turned to her and put his hand out for her to help her step into the stall.

She took his hand, stepped into the stall, and moved under the warm spray of water. She picked up the shampoo, squirted

a little in her hand, and washed her hair, but Rand moved her hands away and washed it for her.

“That feels so nice,” she murmured.

He leaned down, put his mouth against her ear, and whispered in her ear.

“I’ll wash every inch of you, Everly.” His hand moved down her belly, to her slit, and when he touched her clitoris, she almost screamed. She wanted him so much, but she was worried how this marriage would go.

“I’ll do the same,” she whispered.

“I’ll let you.”

His lips slid across her cheek to her lips, then gazed into her eyes.

“Kiss me, please.”

“You never have to say please, darlin’. I’ll kiss you anytime.” Then he pressed his lips to hers.

Everly moaned as he kissed her. When his tongue slid into her mouth, she sucked on it, making him groan. She pulled back from him and frowned.

“What?”

“I’m not sure.”

“What do you mean?”

“I thought I felt something...” She glanced down at his hard cock against her belly.

Rand laughed. “All it takes is a look from you, sweetheart.”

“As long as it’s always me.”

He cupped her face in his hands. “Everly, I told you; I want this to work. I will not cheat on you.”

“I want this to work too, and I’ll be faithful.”

“Good. Now, can we get back to what’s between us?”

“Oh, yes. That is if you’re talking about this.” She gripped his cock in her hand.

Rand grinned, and moved his fingers against her clitoris, making her gasp. He kept at it until she cried out when she came.

Everly put her face against his chest as she came down from her orgasm.

“You okay?” His voice rumbled under her ear.

“Yes.” She raised her head and gazed into his eyes. “You’re good at that.”

Rand burst out laughing. “I’m glad to hear you think so, because if you didn’t, this marriage wouldn’t last.”

When she squeezed his dick, he groaned.

“We need to do something about this,” she said, and squeezed him again.

“Definitely.” He slid his hands down her back to her ass, grabbed it, and lifted her, placing her back against the wall.

The water pelted them, but nothing mattered except her. He never thought he’d fall in love with the enemy. Mentally shaking his head, she was not the enemy anymore. She was his wife, the mother of his child, and she belonged to him, and he hoped she would stay with him.

As he stared into her eyes, he inched into her, and she felt so good. Her arms wrapped around his neck, and her legs encircled his waist. She held on while he took them over, and he pressed his lips to hers, and took her hard. His orgasm almost brought him to his knees. Everly followed him over, then her lips caressed his cheek.

“Rand, a time is coming when we can’t do this.”

“What? Sex in the shower?”

“Yes. Once I start getting bigger, you won’t be able to lift me.”

“I could, but I wouldn’t want to hurt you or the baby.”

“It can get slippery in here. I’d hate to fall.”

“Everly, I would never let you fall.”

“I believe you. I need to get down, please. I’m the one who needs a shower now.”

Rand helped her get to her feet, but she kept her arms around his neck. He couldn’t stop himself from kissing her.

When he raised his head, she was frowning.

“What?”

“Do you realize if our families hadn’t been at war, we could have been doing this a long time ago.”

“Don’t say that. Everly, I was attracted to you a long time ago, and now we know how hot it is between us, I should have made a move on you.”

“Pap would have shot you.”

“Hell, he still might.”

“I miss him, Rand.”

“I know, baby. I miss Gramps too. I just don’t know what we can do.”

“I don’t either.” She removed her arms from around his neck and looked at him. “I don’t regret this, though.”

“I sure as hell don’t.”

After they washed each other off, Rand helped her from the shower, and entered the bedroom to dress. He pulled a pair of grey sweatpants out of the chest of drawers and pulled them on. Then a green T-shirt.

He strode to the bathroom door, and leaned his head in.

“Are you going to be all right?”

“Yep. I’m hungry.”

“Do you still want soup? I’ll fix it for you.”

“You’re going to spoil me.”

“I will, and my son too.”

“You really think it’s a boy?”

“I’m hoping for a boy, but a little girl would be nice.”

“I don’t care what it is, as long as it’s healthy.”

“Same here. Dinner?”

“I think I’d like a sandwich instead of soup. I think my... shower made me work up an appetite.”

“Okay. I’ll make us sandwiches.”

“Thank you.”

“What do you want to drink?”

“Just water for now. I want to sip on a little ginger ale later.”

“All right.” He couldn’t take his eyes off her. She was beautiful, and he had never thought it was true when someone told him pregnant woman glow. But he believed it now because he could see Everly glowing.

Rand smiled, kissed her forehead, then strode from the room to head for the kitchen.

“You have to tell her how you feel,” he chastised himself as he entered the kitchen.

If she didn’t feel the same, how in the world would this marriage survive? He got the meat, cheese, mustard, and mayo out of the fridge, then set it on the counter and made the sandwiches.

He was finishing up when she entered the room, and when their eyes met, he knew he could never let her go.

She walked over to him, stood on her toes, and kissed his lips.

“What was that for?”

“Nothing. Can’t I kiss you when I want?”

“Anytime at all, sweetheart. Go sit in the living room, I’ll get everything.”

“Baby, you can’t carry all of it. I’ll get the drinks.”

Rand nodded. He wanted to shout it from the rooftops he was head over heels in love with her, but he had to get the guts up to tell her first.

Everly got two bottles of water out of the fridge, then carried them into the living room.

Rand watched her as she walked to the living room. He took a deep breath and blew it out. He needed to tell her, but he was too chickenshit to do it. What if she said, that’s nice, and let it go?

Shaking his head, he set the sandwiches on plates with some chips, and headed for the living room.

Chapter Ten

Everly sighed as she tried to sit up, but her belly was in the way. Her due date had passed, and she wanted this baby out.

She heard the back door open. Then Rand appeared in the doorway to the living room.

“Hey, how are you feeling?”

“I’m feeling like a whale. This kid must be huge.”

Rand chuckled. “I’m sure most mothers feel that way.”

“I suppose. I’m hungry, and I’d love a burger from the diner.”

“If you want a burger, we’ll go now.”

“Together?”

“Yes. Let’s show them who the father of this baby is.”

“You want to go inside the diner? Sit down and eat?” At his nod, she continued. “They’d know for sure, wouldn’t they?”

“They won’t know what to think. I don’t know how it hasn’t gotten out yet.”

Everly laughed. “That’s because the only people who know won’t talk about it. The people in the diner will be whispering; is he the father? How in the world did they get together? We’d be the talk of the town.” She smiled and nodded. “Let’s do it.”

“Yes, ma’am. Let me grab a quick shower, and then we can go.”

“Do you need someone to wash your back?”

“Uh, no offense, sweetheart, but it’s getting crowded in there.”

“I’m ten months pregnant. Build a bigger shower.”

“Ten months?”

“Feels about right.”

When Rand laughed, she grinned. They'd been married almost eight months, and she'd never been happier.

At least she could still talk with her parents, and they loved Rand. Everly loved his parents too. It seemed their parents were happy about becoming grandparents. Though she hoped her grandfather would forgive her one day. She knew she'd hurt him, and for any other reason, he'd forgive, but her being with Rand had to cut to the quick.

"It's his loss." She shrugged, picked up the remote, and watched TV while waiting for Rand.

"Hey."

Everly looked over her shoulder to see Rand rubbing his hair with a towel and he was naked. *Oh, my.*

"You'll have to get dressed if we're heading for the diner."

"I'll get dressed in a minute. I wanted to check on you."

Everly smiled. "I'm okay, really. Just a backache. I'm excited about going into town. I hope the diner is full, and they all go speechless."

"You seemed lost in thought. Are you sure you're all right?"

"I'm fine. I was thinking how our parents had no problem accepting this, but I'm tired of worrying about our grandfathers." She sighed. "I have finally gotten to where I no longer care, and it's their loss."

"I wish I could fix that for you, Everly. I really do."

"It's fine, Rand. I've dealt with him ignoring me enough. I've concluded that it's his loss."

"Good. I feel the same about mine. I'll be right out."

Everly watched him walk along the hallway; she smiled when she saw his tight ass.

"I know you're looking at my ass."

She burst into laughter. "Busted."

A little while later, as Rand drove them into town, he couldn't help but think about his grandfather since Everly mentioned Silas.

He knew she missed Silas as much as he missed McArthur. He always enjoyed any time they spent together. But she was right. It was their loss.

On days it was his turn to ride the fence, he'd been hoping his grandfather would be around and he could try to get him to talk. Either he was out somewhere else, or he checked with the hands to see which day it was Rand's turn.

"Damn hardhead," he muttered.

It was a good thing he owned half of the herd. He had tried telling his grandfather he didn't need to split the bison, but he told him it was just good business. McArthur even insisted on Rand's bison having a different ear tag and brand. He blew out a heavy sigh.

"What's wrong?"

He glanced at her and back to the road.

"I guess talking about our grandfathers made me realize how much I miss mine. But, darlin', since neither has spoken to us in months, I don't think that will change. We have to live our lives with our child."

"I'll always miss him, but I'm fine if that's how they want it. I know I hurt him, but he's hurting me by ignoring this baby and me."

Rand nodded as he pulled into the diner parking lot and found a spot. He drove into the spot, shut the truck off, and looked at her.

"Ready?"

Everly glanced at him, took a deep breath, and nodded.

"As much as I can be."

“Good. Let’s shake up the town, baby.”

“I’m surprised no one suspected you’re the father.”

“Why would they think it’s me? We’re bitter enemies, and no one except Grant, Jessa, our parents, and our grandfathers know about us. None of those people would say anything to anyone for different reasons.”

“Yeah, you’re right. The last time I was in the diner was when I was three months along. Connie took my order, and she kept looking at me. She asked me if I had anything to tell her. The woman is too astute.”

“What did you tell her?”

“I told her the truth. She didn’t ask who the father was. She just said congratulations. I don’t think Connie would tell people, so maybe someone overheard us.”

“All it takes is one, then the rumors take off, but in this case, the rumors are true. You *are* pregnant.” He touched her hair. “Now, let’s put the rumors to rest.”

“All right.” She reached for the door handle.

“I’ll get it. You’ll need help to get out.”

Everly snorted a laugh. “Ya think?”

Rand grinned. “I do.”

Everly watched him get out, walk around the front of the truck to her door, and open it. He held his hand out to her, and she placed her hand in his, then stepped out of the truck.

“Are you sure you want to do this?”

“Fuck them, Rand. I want a damn burger.”

“All right. I’m game if you are.” He held her hand as they walked to the door.

He pulled it open and nodded for her to enter. She took another deep breath and walked inside with Rand behind her. The bell above the door jingled, announcing their presence, and the restaurant went silent.

Rand placed his hands on her shoulders, and she welcomed the support.

“Don’t let them see you sweat,” he whispered beside her ear.

“Right,” she whispered back, then glanced around the room. “Yes, I’m pregnant and due any time. I know most of you have been wondering who the father is. Well, the baby is Rand’s, and we’re married.”

“And none of that is your business,” Rand said.

“Thank you,” she murmured.

“Let’s get a table. I don’t think you can sit at the counter or in a booth.”

“There is no way I will try a booth or the counter. A table is fine.”

They made their way through the tables and sat at an empty one. Everly looked around and raised her eyebrow when she saw people staring.

“Hey, you two. What can I get you?” Connie asked them when she reached them.

“I’d love my usual, Connie.” Everly smiled.

“Rand?”

“Same, Connie.”

Connie leaned forward. “I’m glad you two got together. That feud has gone on long enough.”

“Thank you, Connie. We have our own little feud going on with our grandfathers.”

“They’ll come around. Once they know the baby is born, it will change their minds.”

“We don’t care anymore, Connie. Rand and I are happy.”

“Wonderful! I’ll be back with your drinks.” She strolled to the metal wheel, pinned the orders, and spun it around.

“Well, we did it.” Everly grinned.

“I wonder what the rumor will be tomorrow.”

She laughed. “I don’t give a rat’s ass as long as it’s not me.”

A few minutes later, Connie set their dinners on the table. She winked and made her way to the other patrons.

Everly picked up her burger, took a bite, chewed, then moaned.

“Good?”

“Fantastic,” she said and took another bite.

“Can’t get a better burger anywhere.”

“You got that right.”

A little while later, Everly picked up a French fry, dipped it into ketchup, then stuffed it in her mouth.

“God, this is so good,” she said, then gasped and grabbed her belly.

“What is it?”

“I think I’m in labor,” she whispered.

“*What?*”

“Don’t panic. It’s okay.”

“It’s... *okay*? It’s not if you’re in labor. Should we get to the hospital?”

“Probably. My contractions are about four minutes apart.”

“Are you fucking kidding me? Why didn’t you say something?” Rand hissed out.

“Because of this.” She waved her hand between them.

“What?”

“You’re going into panic mode. I have time.”

“We’re leaving now.” He got up from his seat and helped her up.

“Yes, please.” Everly grabbed her belly again.

Rand raked his fingers through his hair and put his hat on his head.

“Rand, get her to the hospital,” Connie said when she walked to them with towels. “Take these with you. Just in case.”

“In case of what?”

“In case we don’t make it to the hospital.”

Rand felt physically ill. *Don’t make it?*

“Snap out of it, Morris. We need to go.” Everly sat down at an empty table.

“Uh, okay. I need to pay for our meals.”

“Never mind that. I know you’re good for it. Just go,” Connie said.

He looked at Everly to see her face was flushed. She bit her lip and groaned.

“Rand, please,” she said. “I need to go, or you’ll deliver this baby.”

That shot him into action. He helped her up, then led her to the door. Everyone in the diner was telling him to go.

Once he got her to the truck, he helped her climb into the cab. Then he ran around the pickup and slid behind the wheel.

After starting the truck, he pulled out of the parking lot onto Main Street, then floored the gas.

“Rand, slow down. We don’t need to have an accident,” Everly said, then another groan came from her.

“Everly, baby, tell me what to do.”

“Drive, Rand. Just drive.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Rand nodded, but he knew she didn’t see it because she was clutching her belly, and each time she had a contraction, she’d groan.

“I’ll get you there in time, Everly. Because I am not delivering this baby.”

“The contractions are closer now,” she said, then moaned.

“I’m driving as fast as I can on this road.” He glanced in the rearview mirror to see blue and red lights flashing. “Shit.”

“What?”

“I’m getting pulled over.” He pulled onto the berm, parked, and stepped out.

The cruiser pulled in behind him, and he couldn’t tell who it was since the headlights were shining in his eyes.

“Rand? What’s the hurry?” Deputy Nevada Shelton asked as he reached him.

“I’m trying—” He quit talking when Everly let out a bloodcurdling scream that sent shivers down his spine.

“What the hell?” Nevada quickly walked around Rand to peer into the truck. “Everly? Are you in labor?”

“Yes.”

Nevada turned to look at Rand.

“Your baby?”

“Yes. Her contractions are three minutes apart.”

“We need to get moving, then. You follow me. I’ll run the siren.” Nevada walked past Rand to head for the cruiser, but he stopped and turned back to Rand. “Now, Rand. Let’s go. Stick with me.”

Rand nodded, jumped into the truck, and once Nevada pulled onto the road, he followed him. He didn’t look at the speedometer. They were flying.

“I could kiss Nevada for this,” Everly said.

“Hell, so could I.” Rand chuckled when she laughed.

Nevada drove to the emergency room doors, and Rand parked behind him. When Nevada got out of the vehicle, he strode back to Rand.

“Go get someone. I’ll get Everly.”

“I can get her.”

“Rand, you need to let them know she’s here and how close her contractions are. You’ll probably have to sign the paperwork. *Go!*”

“All right.” He ran to the double doors, and they slid open.

He got to the desk, gave them information, then turned around to see Nevada carrying Everly.

“Is that your wife?” a nurse asked him.

“Uh, yeah.” He frowned as he watched Nevada stroll to the desk with *his* wife in his arms.

“I’m not sure my husband would be happy if he saw that man carrying me, and a deputy at that.” The nurse laughed.

Rand whipped his head around and glared at her. She shrugged.

“Her contractions are three minutes apart.”

“We’ll get her to a room and make her comfortable.” The nurse handed him papers to fill out. “Once you finish, I’ll take you to her room. Who is her doctor?”

“Doctor Anderson.”

“Okay, we’ll call her. We need to get your wife prepped and check how much she’s dilated.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He watched another nurse get a wheelchair, then Nevada set Everly in it.

“I’ll be with you soon, Everly.”

She nodded, then clutched her stomach.

“*Holy fuck!*” She cried out, then a nurse wheeled her away.

“The sooner you get those papers filled out, you can see her, Rand.”

“Yeah. Hey, Nevada, thank you so much for getting us here.”

“No problem.” He cocked his head. “I heard she was pregnant, but no one knew who the father was.”

“I’m sure no one expected it to be me.”

Nevada grinned. “I think it’s great. At least some of you have let that feud go.”

“Not the grandfathers, though.”

“It might change after the baby is born. Boy or girl?”

“We don’t know.”

“Keep me posted. I have to get back to work. Good luck, Rand. Tell Everly I’m happy for you.”

Rand shook his hand. “I will. Thank you.”

“Yes, sir.” Nevada touched the brim of his hat, then left.

Rand took a seat in a plastic chair, filled the papers out, and then took them to the desk. The nurse took them from him and another nurse had him follow her.

Everly lay on the bed, biting her bottom lip at the pain and trying not to scream. Where was Rand? God, she needed him.

“Where’s my husband?” she got out between cramps.

“I’m here,” Rand said as he strode into the room.

Everly put her hand out to him. He took it, and she held onto it like a lifeline.

“Are you all right?”

Everly frowned. “Do I look all right, Morris?”

She saw him tip his head down and knew it was to hide his grin. Then he raised his head and looked at her.

“You always look good to me, sweetheart.” He kissed her palm.

Everly blinked her eyes, but a tear escaped down her cheek.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“Anytime.” He let go of her hand, pulled a chair to the side of the bed, and sat.

“The nurse said I was dilated to eight centimeters.”

“And it needs to be ten, right?”

“Yes. So, maybe it will be over soon, and we will have our little girl—”

“Boy,” Rand interrupted. She couldn’t stop laughing until a cramp hit her hard, and she gripped his hand.

When the contraction passed, she let go.

“I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have to apologize for anything, Everly. I’m here if you need anything to get you through this.”

“I’m so happy you are.”

“I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.”

“I couldn’t believe it when Nevada picked me up and carried me inside.”

“I could have done that,” Rand muttered.

“You had to fill out paperwork. He didn’t want to hand me off when he could just get me to the wheelchair.”

“Uh, huh.”

Everly laughed. “I thought you were friends.”

“We were until I saw him carrying my wife.”

She grinned. “He is so handsome.”

“I guess. If that’s what you like.”

“What? Tall, dark, and gorgeous?” She raised an eyebrow at him.

“I’m done with this conversation.”

“Do you know I always thought that way about you? Those eyes are lady killers.”

“You’re just saying that, so I’ll forget about another man carrying my pregnant wife.”

Everly was about to say something when she saw Dr. Anderson enter the room.

“Let’s see where you are, Everly.” Dr. Anderson strode to the bed and looked at Rand. “You’ll have to step out, Mr. Morris.”

“Why?” Everly asked. “He’s been down there before.”

“Damn, Everly,” Rand said.

“I get that, Everly. A lot of women ask the same question. For me, it lets the patient and physician speak freely.” The doctor pulled on latex gloves.

“But—”

“It’s all right, Everly. I’ll be right outside the door.”

“He can come back after I check on you.” Dr. Anderson smiled.

Everly sighed, nodded, and watched Rand leave the room. She lay still when Dr. Anderson examined her, but a gasp tore from her.

“Relax, Everly.” Dr. Anderson tugged off the gloves and tossed them into a bin. “You’re dilated to nine.”

“That’s good, right?”

“Yes, and no. Yes, because you’re getting close, but it’s your first baby. It could take a while to get to ten. I want you to relax. I’ll have the nurses get you some ice chips.”

“You don’t know how long it will take me to get to ten?”

“Every woman is different. I had a patient who was dilated to nine when she came to the hospital, but it took her until that

night to get to ten. Others just pop them out with no trouble.”

“Wonderful,” Everly murmured.

“I’ll check on you later. I’ll tell your husband he can come back.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

After the doctor left, Rand entered the room and sat in the chair he’d been in earlier.

“Did she tell you it could take a while?”

“Yes, but we’re here, and you can relax. If you can sleep, go ahead. I’ll be here for you.”

She touched his lightly whiskered cheek.

“If I thought I could nap, I’d do it.”

“Do you want the TV on?”

“Yes, please.”

He found the remote, aimed it at the TV and pushed the button.

“Anything particular you want to see?”

“Not really. I’m hoping it takes my mind off this.”

Rand placed his hand over hers. He wanted her to know he was here for her. She squeezed his hand, and he looked at her to see her staring at him.

“Are you feeling all right?”

“I—” She hissed in a breath. “Cramp.”

He held her hand while she got through the pain.

“Okay?”

The look she shot him should have killed him where he sat. He cleared his throat.

“Stupid question, huh?”

Before she could tell him just how stupid the question was, a nurse entered the room and set a Styrofoam cup on the tray beside the bed. Then she moved it closer to the bed.

“If you need anything else, Mrs. Morris, please use the button, and we’ll be right here.” The nurse left the room.

“Rand?”

“Yeah?”

“I think you should call our parents.”

“Oh, sure. I didn’t even think about it.”

“I want you to know that anything I say during this is not meant to hurt you,” Everly said.

He frowned. “What?”

“Right now, I want to punch you for doing this to me. This hurts like a bitch, and I want something for the pain.”

“Call the nurse.”

Everly pushed the button, and a voice came over the speaker in the bed.

“Yes?”

She cleared her throat. “Can I have something for pain?”

“I’ll check with Dr. Anderson.”

“Thank you.” She lay back on the pillow.

“I’m going to call our parents. I’ll be right back.”

“Please hurry.”

He leaned down and kissed her lips.

“Yes, ma’am.”

Rand stepped into the hall with his phone, found her parents’ number and pressed *Send*.

“Hello?”

“Mrs. Madden, it’s Rand. Everly is in labor, and we’re at the hospital.”

“How far along is she?”

“Nine centimeters.”

“Oh, my. She might have a long night ahead of her. This being her first child.”

“We figure we’re going to be here for a while.”

“It will be worth it. Keep us posted.”

“I will.” He disconnected, called his mother, and she said the same thing.

Taking a deep breath, he put the phone back into his pocket, entered the room, and saw Everly glaring at the TV.

“What’s pissing you off on the TV?”

“Everything, anything. You name it. It’s pissing me off. I am never having another baby. Do you hear me, Rand McArthur Morris? Never again.”

“Whatever you want.” He took a seat in the chair.

“I want to go home.”

“That’s not possible, baby. I’m sorry.”

“Whatever,” she muttered.

Rand sighed. It’s going to be a long night, for sure.

Six hours later, Everly gave birth to a girl. She leaned back against Rand, who held her up for delivery. Dr. Anderson smiled as she placed the baby on Everly’s chest. Everly held her and cried when the doctor let Rand cut the umbilical cord.

Looking at Rand, she saw a tear rolling down his cheek. She touched his face.

“This is our daughter, Rand.”

“She’s beautiful,” he choked out.

“Have you picked out a name?” Dr. Anderson asked them.

Everly shook her head. “We need to.”

“I’ll let you get some rest. Someone will take you back to your room. Take a nap. You deserve it.”

“How much did she weigh?” Everly asked.

“Eight pounds, six ounces, and she is twenty-one inches. A perfect little girl.”

“Thank you.”

“I didn’t do it. You did.” Dr. Anderson smiled. “But it never gets old. I’ll check on you tomorrow. Rest.” She shook Rand’s hand, then left the room.

“She’s so precious, Rand.” Everly wanted to hold her close forever.

“I can’t believe I love her so much. I just met her.” He grinned.

“Same here. I’m so tired, but I don’t want to let her go.”

“She needs to rest too, baby.”

“I know.” She yawned.

The nurse came to stand beside the bed and smiled.

“Let me take her for now, Mrs. Morris. We have to check on her and get her what she needs for now. She’ll be brought to you later. I see you’re not breastfeeding.”

“No.”

“All right. Someone will take you to your room where you can get some rest. She’ll be brought to you later, and you can feed her a bottle. Mr. Morris, I’m sure you’re tired too.”

“Why should he be tired? He had the easy part, knocking me up.”

The nurse burst out laughing.

“That’s the way it is. They do the fun part, but we women have the hard part.”

Everly watched the nurse lift the baby from her and wrap her in a pink blanket with a matching beanie.

She wanted to cry, and she didn’t know why. She was never emotional, but the little bundle wrapped in pink had her biting back tears.

“I have to call her grandparents,” Rand said with a smile.

“Yes, please do. I’m sure they’ll want to see her.”

“How long will you be staying?”

“Doc Anderson told me if everything went well, I could be out in twenty-four hours.”

“You feel fine, though, right?”

“I do. Just tired.”

“Everly?”

“Yeah?”

“I love you.”

“What?” She looked at him.

“I love you. I have for a while. You don’t have to say anything. I didn’t tell you to see if you returned my feelings.” He shrugged. “I had to tell you. You’re my wife, my daughter’s mother, and I love you both.”

A tear rolled down her cheek, and she touched his hand, making him look at her.

“I love you too.”

“You do?”

“Yes. I’m sure I have for a while, but I fought it.”

“I’m happy to hear you love me. This is going to work for us.”

“I believe that.” She yawned again.

“Get some sleep. I’m going to head home, shower, and get some food, then I’ll be back. Do you want me to bring you anything?”

“I want a strawberry milkshake.”

Rand grinned. “I can get that for you.”

He got to his feet, leaned down, and kissed her lips.

“I’m going to get some sleep. Maybe you should take a nap once you get home, Rand. It’s been a long day.”

“I’m afraid I won’t get up until tomorrow morning if I fall asleep.”

“I’m not sure that’s a good idea.” She narrowed her eyes.

“I know it’s not. My wife is tough. She’d kick my ass for sure.”

Everly laughed. “And such a fine ass it is.”

“Later, darlin’. I’ll bring your milkshake. Rest.”

She nodded and watched as he strode out the door. She missed him already. He loved her. What a perfect day, she thought as she drifted off.

Chapter Eleven

Everly sat in the truck, staring at the little cabin, and trying to get her nerve up to get out. It wouldn't surprise her if McArthur threw her off his land.

"Do it, or leave," she muttered, then glanced over her shoulder at her daughter, sleeping soundly in the car seat.

With a sigh, Everly opened the door, stepped out, then opened the back door. As soon as she unbuckled the straps, Ella opened her eyes, then smiled when she saw her mama.

"Hi, sweet girl." Everly kissed her little nose. "We're going to introduce you to your great-grandfather. I hope." She sighed again. "If we can get him to answer the door this time." She lifted Ella into her arms and shoved the door closed with her hip. She walked to the steps, climbed them, and walked across the porch.

After taking a deep breath, she knocked on the door and waited. She stepped back and glanced around. It was quiet.

Going back to the door, she knocked again and called out.

"Hello? Mr. Morris, are you here?"

She turned to leave but heard a noise inside the cabin, so she knocked on the door again.

"I know you're in there, McArthur. I can hear you. This is the third time I've been by, and each time you've ignored me. Third time for you is the charm. I'm taking my daughter, your *great-granddaughter*, home. We will not be back."

Everly shook her head as she stared at the door.

"You're missing out on watching her grow up. You've already missed the first two months. I know you hate me because I was born a Madden, but this precious little girl has blood from both of us. You can hate me all you want, but Ella doesn't deserve your hatred. I know you don't want to hear this, but I love Rand very much, and we will not let you or my

grandfather tear us apart. Please don't punish her because of me and Pap."

When she heard nothing, she huffed, walked across the porch, down the steps, and to her truck. She opened the back door but spun around when she heard the cabin door open, and McArthur Morris stepped onto the porch.

And she had no clue what to say to him. Her stomach was in knots as she watched him look at Ella, and she swore she saw him wipe away a tear.

Everly slowly walked back to the porch and stood at the bottom of the steps. She gazed down at Ella, then shifted her eyes to him.

"This is Ella Aileen Morris. Ella was Pap's mother's name, and Aileen—"

"Was my mother's name."

"Yes. I thought you should meet her."

She watched him move down the steps and walk to her. He stared at the baby, and Everly could see sadness in his eyes. He didn't take his eyes off Ella as he stood there.

When Ella smiled at him, he looked at Everly with a big grin.

"Would you like to hold her?"

"Could I?"

"Of course."

He took the baby, held her close to his chest, and slowly swayed back and forth.

"Let's go inside. It's way too hot. I'd like to get acquainted with the new family member." He looked at Everly. "*And* my great-granddaughter."

A tear slid down her cheek, but she smiled.

"I'd like that."

"Good. Come on in. Maybe I can tell you some things about Rand."

Everly chuckled. “Oh, I am all for that.”

McArthur laughed, then nodded for Everly to go in first.

Rand walked across the yard and noticed Everly’s truck was missing. She didn’t mention going anywhere. Maybe she needed to pick up some things. He was sure she’d be home soon, so he needed to get cleaned up before she got back.

An hour later, she still wasn’t home, and he started to worry. He pulled his cellphone from his pocket, scrolled until he saw Everly’s face on the screen, and pushed *Send*.

“Hi,” she said.

“Hey, where are you?”

“We’re heading home. Just a few more minutes.”

“Okay. I didn’t know you were going anywhere today.”

“Am I supposed to check with you before I leave the ranch?”

“Don’t be a smartass, Everly. It’s just that you usually tell me when you’re going out.”

“It was a last-minute thing. We’re fine.”

“All right. I’ll see you soon.”

“Yeah, you will, Morris.” She disconnected.

Rand grinned, hit *End*, then picked up the remote to turn on the TV, and hit the button. He’d wait here for her and Ella. He smiled as he thought of his little girl. She was daddy’s girl. He never thought he’d love her and her mama so much. They’d been together for a while now, and he had no idea what he’d do without Everly.

A few minutes later, he heard a vehicle outside, and hoped it was Everly. He put the footrest down, got up, and headed for the kitchen to look out the door. He smiled when he saw it was his family.

Opening the back door, he stepped onto the porch and watched her step from the truck. She waved at him, then opened the back door to get Ella from her car seat. Everly shoved the door closed and walked to the steps. She stared at him and smiled.

“Hi.”

“Hey, darlin’. Where have my two favorite girls been?”

“I’ll tell you after we eat. I’m starving.”

“Me too.”

Everly walked up the steps, and Rand reached for the baby. Ella smiled when she saw her daddy.

“Hey, baby girl.” He kissed her forehead, then looked at Everly. “Do you have anything in the truck I need to get?”

“Uh, no.”

“Where did you go then?”

He watched her fold her arms across her chest and raise an eyebrow.

“What?”

“We’re married, Rand, but that doesn’t give you the right to question me. I said I’d tell you after we eat.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He ran his fingers through his hair. “I was worried, that’s all.”

“No need to worry, babe, but next time, I will let you know.”

“Thank you.”

Later, as they sat at the table, while Everly held Ella, feeding her. Rand kept glancing at Everly. But she was feeding Ella, so she wasn’t paying attention to him.

“She seems to like that formula,” Rand said.

Everly laughed. “She does.”

After Everly finished feeding Ella, she stood, and put her in the floor-seat. The thing was a godsend. It let the baby recline,

and she could watch what was going on around her. But Ella kept fussing.

“Someone’s cranky. I’ll take her,” Rand said as he squatted down in front of Ella. “Hey, sweet girl, are you ready to go to bed?” Rand laughed when she smiled at him.

“She probably needs a diaper change too.”

“We can do that, can’t we, Ella?” He carried her to her room where he changed her, then put her in the crib. “Sleep tight, baby girl. Daddy loves you.”

Rand stared at her and smiled. He and Everly had created a beautiful child. He watched her close her eyes, and he knew she was sound asleep, so he tiptoed from the room and headed for the living room to see Everly sat on the sofa.

“She’s out of it,” Rand said as he took a seat beside her.

“We had a good day.”

“So, are you going to tell me where you were?”

“I went to see a man.”

“What?” He frowned.

“Yes, I didn’t want you to find out this way, but I’m having an affair.”

Rand cocked his head. “You’d better be fibbing, darlin’.”

When she burst out laughing, he chuckled.

“Tell me.”

“I don’t want to make you angry,” she said in a low tone.

“Why would I be angry? Unless you *are* having an affair.”

“No. I wouldn’t do that to you, and I hope you’d never do it to me.”

“I believe in those vows, Everly.”

“So do I.” She remained quiet.

“Everly,” he growled out. “Tell me.”

When she looked at him, he could see the struggle she was having in telling him where she was, and it worried the hell out of him.

Everly blew out a breath and looked him in the eye. She wasn't sure how to begin.

“Rand, since Ella was born, I've been hoping our grandfathers would mellow a little. I've been going to McArthur's place—”

“What? Why? Why would you do that?”

“I wanted him to see his great-granddaughter, and each time I'd go, he would never answer the door.”

“I could have told you that, Everly.”

She smiled. “But he did today.”

“He did? Are you sure it was my grandfather?”

“Please. I had a baby. I'm not losing my mind.”

“What happened?”

“Well, at first he didn't answer again, so I yelled through the door that he had already missed two months of her life, and no matter how much he hated me, Ella didn't deserve it.” She touched Rand's hand. “We had a splendid afternoon together. He held Ella the entire time. When we got ready to go, he didn't seem to want to let go of her. I told him I'd come back with her.” She squeezed his hand. “Babe, he cried, and I put my arm around him. He held me tight, and I could feel him shaking. He loves her Rand.”

“I can't believe this. I suppose I should go see him too, then.”

“I want you to visit Pap.”

“Oh, no way, Everly. That man would fill me with buckshot.”

“Not if you’re holding Ella. I did it, Rand. I want you to do it for me.”

“Damn.” He sighed. “All right, then what? We get them to hold Ella and fall in love with her, but they are still enemies, Everly.”

“I think we should work on getting them together.”

“Everly, you are reaching for the moon, sweetheart.”

“I reached for it today and got it. McArthur is smitten, and I bet Pap will be too. Please.”

“I hate it when you do that.”

“Do what?”

“Say please. You know you’re going to talk me into it.”

She held up her pinkie finger, making him laugh.

“Yes, you have me wrapped around that finger.” He laughed.

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to. I want them to know her. If you can’t do it, I’ll go to see him.”

“No. I’ll do it. You will not do that and make me look bad.”

“You, Rand Morris, could never look bad.”

“Right back at you. I’ll do it for you, but if you don’t hear from me by the next morning, call Sam.” He laughed when she punched him.

“If I can do it, you can. Your grandfather is a very intimidating man, but he melted, holding Ella.”

“Well, I hope your grandfather does the same.” He sighed. “I’ll do it tomorrow. You can relax.”

“You have never lied to me, so I don’t care when you do it, just do it.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he muttered and Everly burst out laughing.

“You’ll do fine. But, Rand, if you put it off too long, I’ll do it myself.”

“I said I’d do it. Damn, woman.”

“I’m hoping Pap will be smitten too. You should have seen McArthur, Rand. He loved seeing her and holding her. When she smiled at him, he crumbled.”

“I can understand that. I crumble just looking at her.”

“I hope Pap will. If not, we’ll live with it. He can’t tell me what to do.”

“I know. What do you want for dinner?”

“How about you go to the diner, and get our usuals?”

“Sounds good. I’ll be back soon.” He kissed her, then walked out.

She heard the back door open and close, then his truck started, and he drove off.

Since it was late summer, the days were longer and still plenty of light, but the idea of him driving into town in the dark always scared her. Copper Ridge was a horrible road, and there was no way she’d have him go into town if it was dark. That road had taken quite a few lives. She wished the counties would do something about it.

A little later, she heard his truck pulling up, and she breathed a sigh of relief. She got up from the sofa, walked to the kitchen. The door opened, and Rand stepped inside.

“It’s raining.” He set the bag of food on the counter.

“You weren’t too long.”

“I called Connie while I was driving there. She had them ready.”

Everly peered into the bag and inhaled.

“That smells so good.” She pulled the foil wrapped burgers out of the bag, set them on the counter, then took the French fries out.

They headed for the living room to eat and watch TV until it was time for bed.

The next morning, Rand was sure he would throw up. Why did he say he'd take Ella to see Silas? That man hated him, and Rand didn't feel like getting shot. But he told Everly he'd do it.

There weren't too many things that scared him, but going onto the Madden property had him sweating bullets.

Silas Madden wouldn't want to see him, but Rand hoped that once Silas saw Ella, he'd soften a little.

"He needs to soften more than just a little," Rand said aloud as he drove into the driveway and up to the porch. "Here goes Ella. Let's see if we can win him over. Grow some balls, Morris. If Everly can do it, you can."

He opened his door, stepped out, then opened the back door to get Ella from her car seat.

After lifting her, he made his way to the door, and inhaled a deep breath, and knocked. He glanced around but saw no one. It was too hot to be out in the sun, but a ranch didn't stop running because of the weather.

Rand heard the door opening, and turned to see Silas standing in the doorway, looking at the bundle he had in his arms.

"Mr. Madden, I want you to meet your great-granddaughter, Ella Aileen Morris."

"Ella?" Silas stared at the baby.

"Yes. Ella for your mother and Aileen for my grandfather's mother."

Silas looked over his shoulder to the truck, then back at Rand.

"Is Everly with you?"

"No, sir. She took Ella to see Gramps yesterday, and I brought Ella to you."

Rand watched him as he stared at the baby, then a tear rolled down his cheek.

“Come in, please.”

Rand nodded and followed him inside the house.

“Can I—” Silas cleared his throat. “Can I hold her?”

“Of course.” Rand handed Ella to Silas.

He looked at the baby, and then at Rand.

“She’s perfect.”

“We think so. The only thing to make this more perfect is if you and Gramps stop this bickering and share Ella with each other. I’m sure Gramps is going to spoil her, and I know you will too.”

“I’m going to spoil her rotten.”

Rand grinned. “I’m going to, for sure.”

Silas chuckled. “Have a seat, Rand. Let me get acquainted with the new family member and you.”

They went into the living room, and Silas sat in the recliner while Rand took a seat on the sofa.

He’d never been inside the house. It was nice. The epitome of a farmhouse. He liked it.

As they sat there talking, Rand decided he liked Silas. The man didn’t hold his tongue. It must be where Everly gets it. He heard a vehicle outside.

“Are you expecting anyone?”

“No. I’ll see who it is.” Silas got up from the chair, but as he headed for the kitchen, Rand heard the door open and he heard Everly’s voice, so he got up and walked to the kitchen to see her and his grandfather. *Oh, hell.*

“I see you’re holding your great-granddaughter, Pap,” Everly said.

“Gramps? What are you doing here? Both of you.” Rand raised an eyebrow as he looked at his grandfather, then at Everly.

“Right after you left, I got to thinking that letting them see Ella separately would not stop this ridiculous feud. You have

to know, Pap, and McArthur, that you are the only two who are still not speaking. Both sets of our parents are friends. The past is the past. Let it go. You can both enjoy having Ella. Please.”

“You were friends at one time. It was your fathers who didn’t get along and separated you.” Rand folded his arms across his chest.

“I don’t want to miss out on Ella growing up, Silas. I hope you feel the same, and we can let the past go. Everly and Rand are both right. We’re the only two not speaking. This marriage was a shock to both of us, but look at what we have now,” McArthur said.

Rand stared at Silas but sighed with relief when Silas nodded.

“I think that can be arranged. I’m tired of the hate. We were friends when we were kids, so maybe we can get that back, Mac.” Silas put his hand out to his old friend, and McArthur shook it.

“Now, can I have her?” McArthur looked at Ella.

“I just got her, Mac. Come into the living room, and we’ll catch up. While *I* hold her.”

“Come on, Silas—”

“In a little bit. You always were an impatient prick.”

The room went silent until McArthur busted out laughing.

“Same to you, Silas.”

Silas grinned and motioned for McArthur to follow him.

Rand turned to look at Everly to see her crying.

“Were you checking on me to make sure I came here?” He walked to her, slipped his hand under her hair, and squeezed her nape.

“Oh, no. I knew you’d do it because you told me you would.” She shrugged. “I knew we still had to get them together, so I went to see McArthur and convinced him to come here with me.”

“I can’t believe you did that, but I’m so glad it worked out.”

Both looked to the living room when they heard laughter.

“I am too. I want to have everyone at the house for dinner one night.”

“Anything you want, sweetheart.”

Everly’s arms wrapped around his waist, and he kissed her forehead.

“I love you, Rand,” she said, then laughed.

“Why is that funny?”

“It used to be I hate you, but I didn’t. I never hated you.”

“Same here. We’re meant to be together.”

“I want more kids.”

“That is not what you said in the hospital.”

Everly laughed. “I wasn’t going to let you anywhere near me.”

“I know. Some words that came out of this mouth were not very ladylike.”

“You know, I was in a lot of pain, but once I held her, I forgot all about it. She’ll need a little brother or sister in the future.”

“How about two years?”

“Sure, but we can practice, right?”

Rand laughed. “I love practicing with you.” He cupped her face in his hands. “I love you, Everly more than I thought it possible, and I can’t tell you how much I love our little girl.”

“I love you too. You gave me a beautiful daughter.”

“She looks like her mama, so of course she’s beautiful.”

“Let’s go join them.”

“All right, baby.” Rand held his arm out to her, and she hooked her arm through his.

As Rand entered the room with her, he couldn't keep the smile off his face. Their grandfathers were fussing over the baby, and the woman he loved was beside him. Life was perfect right now. Like his family.

Epilogue

Rand pulled on the door to the town hall to open it. He motioned for Everly to go inside, and he followed her.

As soon as the people inside saw them, they cheered. Everly looked at him and smiled. He took Ella from her and made their way through the crowd. It seemed like everyone wanted to congratulate them on the marriage and the baby.

He saw his grandfather heading for him with a grin on his face.

“Let me have Ella,” he said, and Rand handed her off, then took Everly’s hand to get to a table.

“Hey, Rand.”

He glanced over to see Maggie Russell. He smiled and hugged her.

“How are you, Maggie?”

“Wonderful. I can’t wait to see the baby.”

“Gramps has her now, so good luck getting him to let go of her.”

Maggie grinned. “I’m sure no one else gets a chance between him and Silas.”

“You’re so right. Hey, do you know Everly?” he asked when Everly stepped up beside him.

“No, I haven’t had the pleasure.”

“Everly, this is Maggie Russell. Maggie, my wife, Everly.” The women shook hands.

“That is something I never thought I’d hear coming from you,” Maggie said.

“What can I say? She stole my heart.”

“You wouldn’t have said that a year ago,” Everly teased.

Rand laughed. "It was a rough road, but we made it."

"I'm going to get something to eat." Maggie glanced around. "I think everyone's here."

"They want to see if we've killed each other yet," Everly said with a laugh.

"I'm glad it's over. Everly, it was so nice to meet you. You two make a great couple. Everly, let's have lunch one day."

"I'd love it."

"Maggie, is Kaden here?"

"He said he would be here, so I'm sure he'll show."

"Great. Have a good time, Maggie."

Maggie nodded, then made her way back to a table.

"She's beautiful," Everly murmured.

"She's a wonderful person."

"Did you date her?"

"No. I knew her husband."

"Knew?"

"Yes. Scott was killed in Afghanistan."

"Oh, I'm so sorry."

"It was years ago. I'm surprised some man hasn't snatched her up. Let's find a seat, baby."

Rand took her hand, led her to a table, and they sat down. Just about everyone wished them well, but most wanted to see Ella. The little girl was being passed around, and she seemed to love it. He could hear her giggling, and it made him smile. It was her first birthday, and he and Everly invited everyone.

Everly watched as people held her daughter. It surprised her that McArthur gave her up. She jumped when someone

touched her shoulder, and she looked up to see her grandfather. Everly stood and hugged him. He squeezed her tight, and she held him close.

“Where’s Ella?”

Everly looked around. “Connie has her.”

“Damn. I’m not sure Connie will give her up.”

“Pap, you can see her anytime, so let everyone enjoy her. She seems to love the attention.”

“I’ll give her back to Connie. I want to hold her.”

“All right. Uh, Pap?”

“Yeah?”

“You’re okay with me now, right?”

He huffed. “I am. Honey, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have acted that way, but I snapped when you told me a Morris got you pregnant. Now, I think I was just being stubborn—”

“You? Stubborn? Please.” She smiled when his eyes narrowed. “Pap, I love you, and you know it. I was hurt, but I wanted you back in my life after I had Ella.”

“Evie, I have never been out of your life. You were right. I thought I hated Rand, but the day he brought Ella to see me, I knew I didn’t. That feud had nothing to do with me. It was a big mistake on both sides, and it should have been buried with the people who wronged the families.”

“I’m so glad you and McArthur are getting along. He’s not so bad.” She grinned.

“We’ve been spending a lot of time together. We go fishing once a week. We let all that hate go and became the friends we used to be. I’m happy because you’re happy. Rand is a good man. He’ll take care of you and Ella.” He kissed her cheek. “I’m going to hit the buffet. We’ll talk later.”

“All right, Pap.”

She watched him until he disappeared into the crowd. She resumed her seat and tried to find Rand, but she didn’t see him

anywhere. Getting to her feet again, she walked to the punchbowl, picked up the ladle, and scooped some punch out and into her cup.

As she sipped it, she smiled, looking at the people. There was a lot of laughter, and she was so happy.

“What are you smiling about?” Rand whispered in her ear from behind her.

She leaned back against him. “I love this town.”

When he put his lips against her ear, she shivered.

“Um, can we talk?”

“About?”

“I need to tell you something.”

“That doesn’t sound good.”

“I’ll tell you when we get home.”

“Hell, no. Tell me now.”

She spun around to wrap her arms around his waist and stared into those green eyes.

“I’m not sure this is the right place.”

Rand took her arm and led her down the hallway to the bathrooms. He put her back against the wall, his hands on it, blocking her.

“You don’t have a choice. You can’t tell me you need to talk, then tell me it’s not the right place. Tell me. You’re scaring the hell out of me. Why did you even mention it if you don’t want to tell me now?”

Everly put her hand on his lightly whiskered cheek.

“I don’t want to scare you. I’m just trying to figure out how to tell you.”

“For God’s sake, Everly, spit it out.”

She gazed into his eyes. “I’m pregnant.”

“Come again?”

“I’m pregnant.”

She met his eyes, then he smiled.

“Are you sure?”

“Positive. Ella is getting a baby brother or sister earlier than we planned.”

“Didn’t you get on birth control?”

“Yes, but it’s not one hundred percent. Apparently, it failed me.”

“Are you okay with it?”

“I am.”

“Then I am too. We’ll wait before telling anyone, though. This is Ella’s day.”

“I’m happy, Rand. I love you and Ella so much. This one is a bonus,” she said as she rubbed her flat belly.

“I love you too, darlin’. I told you we could end this feud.”

“Yeah, you did, and I’m so glad it’s over.”

Rand grinned, kissed her lips, then led her back to the tables. It was about time for Ella to get her cake. Sloane James had made it, and Rand knew it would be good. The woman was a hell of a baker.

Sitting there, he glanced around the room and saw most of his friends. He loved this town too, and Hartland and Spring City.

It shocked many people when they discovered Everly was pregnant, but it was an even bigger shock when told Rand was the father. He didn’t care. He loved his family. Now, they were adding to it.

He couldn’t wait for this baby to arrive. It was a boy; he was sure this time, and he couldn’t wait to teach him the running of the ranch.

That was a long way off, but his son would learn when it was time. Like he did.

When everyone cheered, he laughed when he saw Sloane carrying a big cake and set it in front of Ella, sitting in a highchair, and slid to the table.

Sloane set the cake on the table, and Rand smiled when Everly slid the cake in front of Ella. The little girl screamed and dug her hands into the cake, making everyone laugh.

“God, I don’t know what I did to deserve this, but thank you,” he whispered, then made his way to his daughter.

He kneeled beside the chair. “Hey, baby girl.”

Ella giggled, then threw cake at him, making her laugh harder.

Rand wiped his face, scraped up a little icing on his finger, and put it on her nose. She screamed and clapped her hands.

Rand saw Everly laughing and winked at her. He laughed when she winked back.

Life was good. Better than good. He knew he’d always love his family. Feud or no feud, they were right to ride it out. Everything worked out for the best.

The Maddens and Morris’ were families now, and they always will be.

*****The End*****

[[m1](#)] In the next chapter he asks for her cellphone number so I’m going to suggest you take this sentence and change it to “I’ll let you know when I feel safe enough”

[[m2](#)] Too many ‘a while’s too close together

[m3] They also have veils, you could add that too if you wanted

[m4] bahahahaha

[m5] That's why they make little blue pills lol

[m6] Why not just take them when she packed? Why go and come back?