



And Baby Makes Three: Adopted Baby, Convenient Wife Playboy's Surprise Son

By Rebecca Winters, Lucy Gordon

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- Sales Rank: #4201136 in Books
- Published on: 2011-06-07
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.62" h x .50" w x 4.21" l, .20 pounds
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 192 pages

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Rebecca Winters lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. With canyons and high alpine meadows full of wildflowers, she never runs out of places to explore. They, plus her favourite vacation spots in Europe, often end up as backgrounds for her romance novels because writing is her passion, along with her family and church. Rebecca loves to hear from readers. If you wish to e-mail her, please visit her website at: www.cleanromances.com

Lucy Gordon cut her writing teeth on magazine journalism, interviewing many of the world's most interesting men, including Warren Beatty and Roger Moore. Several years ago, while staying Venice, she met a Venetian who proposed in two days. They have been married ever since. Naturally this has affected her writing, where romantic Italian men tend to feature strongly. Two of her books have won a Romance Writers of America RITA® Award. You can visit her website at www.lucy-gordon.com.

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The wizened old cowboy filling his pickup truck at the service station in Elko tipped his hat back. The Bonnibelle, you say? His head turned toward the mountains. Everyone knows it's right over there in the valley, beneath those snowcapped peaks.

Catherine had heard of it, of course, but coming from the other side of Nevada she could be forgiven for not knowing exactly where to find it.

Biggest cattle ranch around, he expounded. Thirty-five thousand acres. Can't miss it. After you leave town, take the 227 and follow it all the way.

Straight as the crow flies? she wanted to respond, but quashed the impulse because the older man thought he was being helpful. To his mind, he'd given her all the directions she needed.

O ye of little faith, she chided herself before thanking him. Then she got back in the car.

Having made her visit to the ladies' room, plus purchasing a cold bottle of water along with the gas, she was ready to go. But who knew how many more miles she had to travel before she reached her destination?

There wasn't any point in consulting the map she'd bought before leaving Reno. It was of no further use to her now except to tell her she was headed toward the Ruby Mountains.

In the heat waves rising from the highway, Bonnie's precious little image swam before her eyes.

If your daddy's there, my darling baby girl, I'll find him. If he's not, then I'm going to make you mine no matter what I have to do.

After losing track of time beneath a sweltering July afternoon sun blazing down on miles of range-land, she finally spied an arch of deer antlers to her right, signifying the entrance to the Bonnibelle. A name like that must have come from the heart of some homesick Scotsman who'd settled here many years earlier and staked his claim.

It took another fifteen minutes before the dirt road climbed higher past alpine paintbrush and lupine to a crystal blue lake where an immense three-storied log ranch house hugged the shoreline. The spectacular backdrop of mountains against such splendor caused Catherine to suck in her breath.

Your daddy picked a piece of heaven when he decided to work here, sweetheart.

Beyond the main house there were clusters of immaculate outbuildings and a huge barn erected amid clumps of dark pines. Some of the structures looked as if they dated back to the second half of the 1800s.

Catherine surmised that it not only took a small army of hands to keep this place in mint condition, but a cattle king with exceptional gifts and an iron hand to make certain its inner workings ran with all the precision of a fine Swiss watch.

An odd assortment of luxury cars mixed with pickup trucks and horse trailers stood parked along the border of grass planted in front of the main house. Considering the ranch was such a big business concern, she didn't question their presence or the number of vehicles with the state's official seal decorating the car doors.

Perhaps she might have done if she hadn't been so intent on her desperate mission. With time running out, she needed to act fast. Otherwise she could lose Bonnie.

At the mere thought, stabbing pain brought fresh tears to her eyes.

The idea of someone else raising Bonnie was unthinkable to Catherine. Once she'd confirmed Bonnie's father turned out to be the no-account drifter she'd labeled him—once she heard him say he wanted nothing to do with his own flesh and blood—she was ready to go to court and claim the baby for her very own.

After finding a parking spot behind a blue Mercedes sedan, she levered herself out from the front seat of her vehicle and stepped out into the dry heat. At six thousand feet it was certainly cooler than in Elko.

Since she'd left her condo seven hours ago, the sun's position had altered. Catherine's willowy body, dressed in a crushproof two-piece suit, cast a shadow against the bank of cars. She headed for the main entrance of the ranch house, grateful she'd worn medium-sized heels to navigate. They made a soft crunching sound on the gravel driveway.

A deep porch ran the full length of the beautiful old structure. Upon climbing the steps, she saw the sign that told visitors to ring the bell.

Not long after she'd pressed the button a maid answered the door. Catherine caught the cool breeze of the air-conditioning and welcomed it. As she breathed in, she detected the strong scent of fresh flowers.

Beyond the young woman she noticed several massive sprays of roses and lilies placed at either side of the bottom of the grand staircase. The interior of the spacious foyer had more the look of an English manor than its rustic western exterior conveyed.

While Catherine was wondering if she'd interrupted a wedding or some such thing, the maid said, Everyone's gathered in the great room. If you'd like to follow me.

Oh, but I'm not—

Catherine stopped talking because the maid had already disappeared through two paneled doors on the right, leaving Catherine in a dilemma. Whatever social event she'd walked in on, she hadn't been invited.

Making a decision to err on the side of caution, she hurried outside again. She would wait in her car until she saw someone leave the ranch house. At that point she would approach them to find out what was going on. Depending on the answer, she might have to double back to Elko for the night and return in the morning.

Her reasons for coming here were private and personal. After suffering a troubled childhood and teenage years, Catherine had been given a second chance at life. Now, years later, she was in a position to fight for someone who couldn't.

The problem was, any information she gave to the wrong person could jeopardize everything. She refused to let that happen, not when she'd made promises to Terrie she intended to keep.

Mr. Farraday?

Excuse me, Hal, Cole said to the Lieutenant Governor and his aide before turning to face Janine, the newest member of the household staff. The tone in her voice held a certain nuance that prompted him to walk her over to one of the windows where they could be apart from the thirty or so people left in the room. What is it, Janine?

A woman I've never seen before came to the door just now. I assumed she must be a friend of the family, so I asked her to come in and follow me.

Making that kind of assumption was Janine's first mistake, but Cole let her continue uninterrupted.

When I turned around, she was gone! I don't know if she's somewhere in the house, or if she left. I alerted Mack, but thought you should know.

Cole schooled his dark features not to reveal his thoughts. You did the right thing to come to me. Give me a description.

She was a tallish blonde wearing a yellow outfit.

How old?

Janine shrugged her shoulders. Maybe twenty-five, twenty-six.

Or maybe thirty-five, thirty-six, all disguised by a series of surgical makeovers? One of Buck's bimbos from the past? Some exotic dancer his thirty-year-old brother had gotten involved with at an XXX-rated bar in Elko before he'd cleaned up his act?

Buck had the kind of looks women couldn't resist. He came from money and was always ready for a good time. For the last few years it had taken everything Cole and his brother John could do to keep Buck's nocturnal activities under wraps. In secret, Cole had even asked his uncle Richard, who lived in Reno, to take Buck under his wing for the latter part of last summer in the hope of straightening him out.

He smothered a groan of protest, because this woman had dared to trespass even though she knew Buck had married Lucy two months ago. That was all his shattered sister-in-law needed right now.

He knew how she felt. Ten years ago Cole had lost his wife, Jenny, and his dream of a family of his own had died with her. Maybe the Farraday clan was cursed after all.

While his flint-like gaze swerved to a white-faced Lucy, who was surrounded by her family and Cole's married sister Penny, a feeling of rage swept through him.

After watching his youngest brother's body being lowered into the ground earlier in the day, he'd been so full of pain he hadn't thought there could be room for any other emotion.

Thanks, Janine.

The guests were congregated in groups, among them his attorney Jim Darger and his wife. On one side of the room John and Cole's brother-in-law Rich had their heads bent together in serious conversation. On the other, he observed Brenda, a woman he'd been seeing lately, talking with a group of friends. His nieces and nephews had long since disappeared, making him wish he could have joined them.

Under the circumstances no one would notice if he headed for the nearest exit and slipped from the room. The less anyone in the family knew about this the better.

If the intruder in question was enjoying a tour of the place, like some stalking voyeur, his ranch manager Mack would quickly catch up with her.

Acting on a hunch, he let himself out of the house through the study doors and started walking toward the vehicles parked out front. In case she made a dash for one of them, he'd be waiting for her.

To his shock, a woman answering Janine's description got out of a white compact car and called to him in a slightly husky voice. Excuse me?

His jaw tightened.

She wasn't at all what he'd anticipated. For one thing she couldn't be in her thirties. For another, her suit was a pale lemon color, subtle and sophisticated. Her healthy, natural ash blond hair didn't look anything close to the cheap image that had filled his mind.

With or without clothes on her slender yet rounded body, there was an elegance to her bones. Those long legs enabled her brilliant blue eyes to meet his without difficulty, and he was a tall man.

Her upswept hair caught in a loose knot revealed classic facial features that needed no enhancement flushed from the heat. He saw intelligence in her glance. More disconcerting to him was the passionate flare of her mouth, as if she could read his mind and enjoyed confounding...

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