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JENNIE MARTS

"FULL OF HOPE, HUMOR,
AND UNDENIABLE SWOON"

—A.J. PINE,
USA Today bestselling author,
for *How to Cowboy*

LOST
AND
FOUND

Cowboy

LASSITER RANCH





JENNIE
MARTS

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Cover Design & Interior Format: [The Killion Group, Inc.](#)

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This one is for the misfits, the strays, the fiercely loyal, and those who choose their family through love...



*And to those who are still searching...
may you find the place where you truly belong*

Chapter One

Family meant everything to Mack Lassiter, which is why he'd just driven fifteen hours to make it back to Colorado for his brother's wedding, but if he didn't get a move on, he was going to miss the whole thing.

It had been less than a year since he'd found out he had three half-brothers and a grandfather running a ranch in the mountains of Colorado, and it meant a lot that they'd included him in the wedding party. Which is why he'd driven all night and most of the day, pounding coffee and Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, to get back from the ranch he'd been working in Texas, determined to be there for Chevy's wedding. He'd only just found his brothers—he wasn't about to lose them.

Although he may have already lost the woman he'd also found in this small town of Woodland Hills, Colorado—the one who had filled his thoughts the past seven months he'd been toiling away in Texas. She'd stopped texting him—or maybe he had stopped texting her—days spent working a ranch are long and demanding and tended to blend together.

Fresh out of the shower, he scrubbed his hair dry with a towel then pulled on the new pair of jeans that had been left on the bed for him next to a black garment bag bearing his name. Being the new guy in town, and to this family, he was thankful he'd at least get to feel like himself in jeans and his

own cowboy boots instead of dressed up in a fancy tux, which he'd never worn in his life.

His brother had told him the wedding would be held on their family's ranch and would be a more casual affair, but Mack was a little confused when he unzipped the garment bag, expecting to find a blue men's shirt with a silver vest and navy tie, and instead pulled out a small formal gray dress.

Hmmm. He glanced down at the garment bag again. The tag clearly read *Mack Lassiter*.

His brothers were famous for playing pranks on each other—and a small frisson of pride filled his chest to think they now considered him close enough to prank—but there was no way anyone expected him to wear this tiny dress.

It obviously wasn't meant for him.

Beyond the fact that the style of the light gray dress, with its high neckline and matching jacket, looked like something his former neighbor lady—who had to have been ninety, if she was a day—would wear to church, the thing was miniscule. There was no way it would fit any part of his well over six-foot frame.

The door of the bedroom flew open, and Lorna Williams, the single mom he'd been thinking about, and the sister of the bride, burst into the room. He wasn't sure if she'd taken her maiden name of Gibbs back, but Chevy had told him that her divorce from the no-good snake who'd run out on her while she'd been pregnant, had gone through while he was gone.

And it was no wonder he couldn't get this woman out of his mind.

She looked gorgeous in a silvery-blue dress that clung to her tall, curvy frame in all the right places. Her blonde hair was pulled up in some kind of fancy twist, but a few wisps had come loose and the sight of them resting softly against her bare neck sent his pulse racing like the lead car on the track at Daytona. He'd never seen her in high heels, and the strappy, silver sandals she had on made her legs look even longer.

"Ford, we've got a problem, and I need your help," she blurted, then froze as she must have realized that, although Mack was standing in his bedroom,

he was *not* his oldest brother, Ford.

“Wow. I mean...hi.” He shook his head and tried to clear his suddenly dry throat. “I mean, hey Lorna.” He fumbled for the right words to say to the woman he’d thought about every day since he’d been gone. The same woman who’d deposited him firmly in the ‘friend zone’ before he’d left. “You look...stunning.”

Still frozen, she stared at him, her eyes wide. Her mouth opened to speak, then closed again, then opened once more. “Mack,” her voice came out in a whisper. “What are you doing here?”

His brow furrowed. Surely, she didn’t think he’d miss seeing his brother get married. “I’m here for Chevy’s wedding.”

“I wasn’t sure. I mean, I didn’t know if you were really coming. I hadn’t heard from you...” Her voice trailed off then her stance changed as she pushed her shoulders back and the set of her mouth tightened. Her gaze shifted to the dress he was holding up, and her eyes narrowed. “Nice dress. Does it belong to your date?”

“My *date*?” His glance flicked to the dress then back to Lorna as he shook his head at the absurdity of the idea that he would bring a date to this event when she was the only woman he couldn’t seem to get out of his mind. It also seemed crazy, judging by the style of the dress, that she thought he would be dating a woman old enough to be his grandmother. “No, this was in the garment bag labeled with my name. There must have been a mix-up.” He dropped the dress and grabbed the new white T-shirt that had also been on the bed. “What do you need help with?”

“What?” she asked, her gaze locked on his chest as he pulled the shirt on. She shook her head, as if to clear it, then waved away his question. “Oh, it’s nothing. Never mind.” Her expression hardened again as she turned to go. “I’ll find Ford.”

“You’ve already found me,” he said, taking a step towards her. “And you know I care about Chevy and Leni. You said there was a problem. I’d like to help, if I can.”

She turned back to him. He wasn't sure what was causing all the animosity, but there were definitely waves of iciness in the glare she directed at him. The temperature outside was already warm for late spring, but it was downright chilly in this room.

She held his gaze, and he could practically see her mind weighing the options of accepting his offer to help versus continuing to search for Ford.

Her shoulders fell, then once it seemed her mind was made up, her words came out in a panicky rush. "The guy who was bringing the convertible that was supposed to drive Leni out to the meadow where the wedding is set up just called, and he can't come. He said either his kid or his cow was sick. Not that it matters. I mean, of course, I don't want his kid to be sick. *Or* his cow. But, once he said he wasn't coming, I couldn't really hear anything over the blood rushing in my ears."

Okay. This didn't seem like a total emergency and definitely didn't warrant the frantic tone of Lorna's voice. "Can't she just walk out to the meadow?"

Lorna raised an eyebrow in an expression that smacked of pure '*you're an idiot*' vibes. "Not in the heels she's wearing *or* dragging that gorgeous dress."

"Got it," he said, thoroughly chastised. "So, we need a new way to get her from the house to the meadow?"

Lorna nodded. "Correct."

"Well, I can drive her," he offered, although his truck was covered in highway dust and bug guts from the drive from Texas.

Lorna shook her head. "She wouldn't fit. Well, *she* would fit, but the dress wouldn't. It's got a long train and needs lots of open space around it. The convertible was perfect."

Open space around it? How long was this train? Like the Trans-Siberian Railway?

"What about one of the tractors?" he offered.

Her brow arched even higher, apparently either confirming or amplifying his earlier 'idiot' status. "My sister is *not* arriving to her fairy tale wedding on

a tractor.”

He tried to think of how a woman *would* want to arrive to a fairy tale wedding.

“This is the first wedding I’ve ever been to, so I’m not sure what the hell a fairy tale wedding even means,” he told her. “Like a princess marrying a prince?” He tried to imagine his all-cowboy brother, who primarily wore jeans, boots, and T-shirts, in royal carb riding a gallant steed.

“You’ve never attended a wedding?” Lorna asked. “I’ve been to a million. And yes, every bride imagines herself as a princess.”

An idea suddenly came to him. “I know,” he said, reaching for a fresh pair of socks and his good cowboy boots and yanking them both on. “Follow me,” he told her, leading the way down the hall and out the front door.

The farmhouse was a large rambling two-story that sat nestled against a backdrop of tall mountains. The stone and wood exterior with huge windows looking out over the ranch gave it a cabin-type feel, and the long wrap around porch had been the location of many sunrise cups of coffee and sunset glasses of iced tea or cold beer.

The huge white barn with the Lassiter brand painted on the front sat across from the house. Corrals extended off either side, and two of his brother’s horses stood calmly munching hay as they watched Mack and Lorna race across the yard. White fences ran along both sides of the driveway, enclosing green pastures, and several hundred head of cattle could be seen dotting the grassland leading up into the mountainside beyond the house.

A chicken coop and vegetable garden sat off to the right of the house, neat rows of spring plants already showing tiny bits of growth. The ranch was well-taken care of, all the Lassiter men took pride in it and worked hard to maintain its upkeep.

This place had taken in three boys whom no one had wanted, and Mack wished he would have had a chance to meet the grandmother who had raised his brothers.

He was the only one who had been raised by their mother, but there were lots of ways to abandon a child, and Mack had come searching for the family he'd never known the summer before, not knowing if they would accept or reject him. His brothers, and their grandfather, Duke, had taken him into the fold as one of their own, and he'd fallen in love with the Lassiter ranch and the mountains of Colorado.

He just wished he wouldn't have had to leave it, and the woman hurrying to keep up with him, so soon and for so long. But he was back for good now, and that was all that mattered.

He led Lorna down the alley of the barn then stopped in front of a stall holding a large white horse. "Would Leni arriving on a white horse count for like something from a fairy tale wedding?"

Lorna's eyes widened, and her voice came out as a hushed whisper. "Wow. He's beautiful. And perfect." She turned her gaze back to Mack. "Where did he come from? Who does he belong to?"

"He's mine." He reached his hand over the stall door and the horse nuzzled his palm. "Lorna, I'd like you to meet Zeus. The best friend any guy could ask for."

"Hi Zeus," she said, giving the horse's neck a pat. "You are beautiful." She arched an eyebrow at Mack. "I never pictured you as a white horse kind-of-guy."

He'd never considered himself one either. "I am most definitely *not* a white horse kind-of-guy, and I've never been accused of being one. And technically, Zeus is gray. He's just such a light gray that he looks white. If that helps erase that image from your mind."

She narrowed her eyes, as if trying to figure out something about him, then turned back to the horse. "He's perfect. Leni will love riding up to the wedding on his back. Are you sure it's okay for her to use him?"

He nodded. "Heck yeah. He—and I—would be honored." He nodded toward the tack room just inside the barn door. "I can have him saddled and ready to go in about ten minutes."

“Great. I’ll go find something to fancy him up a bit,” she said over her shoulder as she turned and hurried from the barn. “Be back in five.”

Mack had the horse saddled and ready by the time Lorna came rushing back into the barn carrying a tote bag overflowing with blue and silver décor.

“I don’t know how you’re planning to *fancy* him up,” he said. “But I gave him a quick brush and hooked a saddle bag around the saddle horn in case Leni needs a place to hold her bouquet while she gets on and off the horse.”

“That’s genius. Do you think Zeus would mind terribly if I braided a few of these into his mane?” she asked, holding up a handful of silver and blue ribbons.

Mack laughed. “Nah. He’s pretty secure in his manhood. I think he can handle it.” He brushed out the horse’s tail as Lorna twisted ribbons and silk flowers into his mane, the silver and blue decorations blending perfectly with his light gray coat.

He tried to keep his focus on the horse, he knew they were under a time crunch, but he kept getting distracted by the scent of Lorna’s hair and the softness of her skin every time she brushed past him.

They’d spent quite a bit of time together when he’d first come to town, but they’d usually been in a group setting with the whole Lassiter clan. This might be the first time he’d been alone with her, and he was suddenly nervous.

He’d thought she was pretty from the first day he’d met her, but this afternoon, with her hair swept up and in the silky silver-blue dress that was the same color as her eyes, she was staggering.

And he couldn’t seem to think of a single intelligent thing to say.

They’d had a comfortable flirty rapport from the start, but it had seemed easier to tease and joke around with her when she was barefoot or wearing jean shorts and one of her funny T-shirts that usually read something about how much she loved reading and coffee.

Now, she just seemed way out of his league.

Not that it mattered. She’d specifically told him she only wanted to be friends before he’d left, so there was no reason to be nervous. But his palms

were still sweating, and his brain was still refusing to give him any clever conversational crumbs.

"I'll text Leni and tell her we'll meet her by the front porch," Lorna said, breaking into his thoughts. "I already told her the convertible was a no-show, but I promised she'd love this idea more."

"I hope you're right," he said, picking up the reins and leading the horse out of the barn.

"My sister may be a rocket scientist and a total brainiac nerd. But she's still a sucker for romance. And she's going to love riding up to the ceremony on a white horse."

Lorna was right.

The front door opened as they walked up to the porch, and Eleanor (Leni) Gibbs, the bride-to-be, stepped out in a beautiful flowing white dress. A huge smile broke across her face, and she opened her arms as she walked down the steps toward them.

"Mack, I'm so glad you made it." She pulled him into a tight hug. "It's so good to see you."

"It's good to see you, too," Mack said, still not quite used to the easy affection shared among the Lassiter's and their partners. All his brother's girlfriends had accepted him, and the whole bunch of them had drawn him right into the family. "Congratulations."

"Thank you. I couldn't be happier to be marrying your brother." She beamed a broad smile at him then turned her attention to Zeus. "Wow. He's gorgeous. Where'd he come from?"

"He's mine," Mack told her. "I brought him back from Texas with me. You sure you're okay riding him? He's not quite as impressive as a convertible."

"He's perfect. Lorna was worried about the car not being here, but this is a thousand times better." She leaned into him and lowered her voice. "And to be honest, I don't care all that much about *how* I get to the meadow—as long as I get there. If you all wouldn't have found a solution, I would have just taken these fancy shoes off and raced barefoot to the altar."

“You’ll do no such thing,” Lorna told her as she spread a large blue tablecloth across the saddle. “I thought you could sit on this. I found it in Duke’s kitchen, so it’s something borrowed *and* something blue.”

Mack pulled the horse up to the steps and helped Leni into the saddle.

She hooked one knee over the pommel to affect a side-saddle position. “This is great,” she told him as he tucked her bouquet into the saddle bag hanging next to her. “I love it.”

Lorna pulled a blue button-down shirt and a navy tie from the depths of the tote bag and passed them to Mack. “I didn’t have time to track down your wedding clothes, so this was the best I could do. I found this stuff in Chevy’s closet.”

“It’s great. Thanks.” He pulled the shirt on and quickly buttoned it as Lorna fussed with Leni’s dress, spreading it out to lay perfectly around her legs and the saddle.

He ran into the house and grabbed the gray cowboy hat that had been left for him on the kitchen table then looked up at Leni as he finished knotting the tie he’d slipped around his neck. “Is this okay? I don’t want to mess up the look of the wedding. I can stay in the back if you want.”

“Don’t you dare,” Leni told him. “Chevy wants all *three* of his brothers standing up there with him. Lorna told me your outfit got mixed up with someone else, but this is close enough, and really, no one will care or probably even notice.”

“They won’t notice me because no one will be able to take their eyes off the gorgeous bride,” he told her, appreciating the comment about Chevy wanting *all* his brothers with him enough to ignore the fact she’d just called his clothes an *outfit*.

In his world, an outfit was his pickup and trailer, *not* his clothing choice.

“Thank you. You’re sweet,” Leni said. “Now, if you two are done fussing around, let’s go get me married. The ceremony is starting any minute, and you’re supposed to be walking up the aisle first,” she told Lorna.

“All right, I’ll go, if you’re sure you’re okay,” Lorna said, still holding on to Leni’s leg.

“I’m fine. I trust Mack.” Leni smiled down at him. “He’ll take good care of me.”

Mack nodded, a rush of pride at her comment warming his chest. “Absolutely.”

“Okay, I’ll see you at the altar. I love you, Sister,” Lorna called over her shoulder as she hiked up her dress and hurried toward the meadow where the ceremony was set up.

Mack smoothed the front of his shirt. Of the four half-brothers, he and Chevy looked the most like each other and had the same build, so the shirt fit as if he’d bought it for himself. Ford and Dodge both had blondish hair, but Chevy and Mack must have gotten their dark hair from their mother’s side of the family.

Their mother had a lot of problems, like being a drunk and making the poor decision to name her four sons after the types of trucks that each of their dead-beat dads had driven away from them in—oh, and then abandoning three of them—but she was a gorgeous woman and had passed the Lassiter good looks to all four of her sons.

The ceremony was set up in the meadow with the best view of the mountains behind it, which put it on the other side of the barn and made it so the guests couldn’t see the house from where they sat. So, he and Leni had to walk around the far edge of the barn to get to it.

The light strains of piano music filled the air as they saw Lorna disappear around the side of the barn. Mack recognized the song as “It’s Your Love” by Faith Hill and Tim McGraw.

He took hold of Zeus’s reins and smiled up at Leni. “You ready?”

Chapter Two

Mack couldn't imagine a more radiant smile than the one Leni flashed down at him.

"If you don't start walking, I might grab the reins and gallop this horse to the altar," she teased.

"Let's go then," Mack said, laughing as he imagined Leni charging down the aisle on the huge white horse.

He led the horse across the driveway then paused at the corner of the barn, not sure how to proceed.

"We won't go until the song ends and they start playing the traditional "Wedding March"," Leni told him. "But you can peek around the corner to see if it looks like they're ready."

Mack stuck his head around the side of the barn and caught his breath at the sight of the meadow in the faded light of dusk, the mountains rising behind it. Every evergreen tree twinkled with tiny white fairy lights, and bouquets of purple lupine stalks were tied to the sides of the chairs lining the center walkway.

Hundreds of chairs were set up in the freshly mown grass making a vast emerald-green carpet beneath them. A simple arch constructed of cedar planks stood at the front, adorned with more twinkling evergreen boughs, white roses, and a wooden sign that read, "Love Abides Here".

Under the arch stood his brother, Chevy, looking excited and happy and not one bit nervous. Next to him were Ford and Dodge. They all wore jeans, square-toed brown leather cowboy boots, blue button-downs with silver vests, navy ties, and gray felt cowboy hats. At least Mack had the same hat, jeans, and boots. His shirt was a little lighter shade of blue and he didn't have a matching vest, but he didn't think he'd mess up the aesthetic too much.

And between how gorgeous Leni looked and the array of beautiful women in silvery blue dresses on the bride's side, no one would even notice him. Ford's girlfriend, Elizabeth Cole, and Dodge's girlfriend, Maisie Graham, were already standing at the front, facing the audience, and Lorna had just taken her place next to them and turned around.

"How does it look?" Leni whispered from her perch on the tall horse. "Did my groom show up?"

"You mean the guy standing at the altar with the goofy grin on his face?"

"Yeah, that's him," she said, her own grin bursting across her face. Then her brow furrowed. "Are any of the chairs filled? I think we put almost everyone we know in the wedding party."

Mack laughed. "It looks like most of the town of Woodland Hills is here. I'm not sure if there's even one empty chair."

"You're kidding?" She twisted her hands together. "Shoot, now I'm suddenly nervous. Mack, do *not* let me fall off this horse."

"I won't. I promise," he told her as the last chorus of the song started, which Lorna had told him was their cue to walk in. "You ready to marry my brother?" It had been nine months since he'd found his family, but it still sometimes felt weird to use the term 'brother'.

Leni didn't notice as she pushed her shoulders back and sat up straighter in the saddle. "I've been ready to marry Chevy Lassiter for most of my life. Wild horses couldn't keep me away."

He clucked his tongue, and Zeus fell into step next to him as he kept one hand securely on Leni's leg, keeping his promise to not let her fall, and led them around the corner of the barn.

A collective gasp went up from the wedding guests at the vision of the gorgeous bride astride the huge white horse. Chevy's face lit with wonder and delight, but Mack wasn't sure if he even noticed the horse.

He only had eyes for Leni.

And the sight of the love shining there had emotion suddenly burning Mack's throat.

He smoothed down the front of his shirt and led the horse toward the silver runner where Duke was waiting, his eyes also shining with love for his new granddaughter-in-law. He tried not to think about the several hundred people from Woodland Hills who were watching them approach and either wondering who he was or judging his mother for abandoning another son, born out of wedlock and given a ridiculous name.

Stop. He tried to convince himself they were all looking at the bride and that no one was paying him any attention, but he spotted a few wayward glances directed his way.

He caught the eye of Dodge, who smiled like he was happy to see him, and Duke gave him a giant bear hug as he made it to the end of the runner. That was all Mack needed.

He didn't give a crap what this town, or anyone else thought of him, as long as these men accepted him. It had been so long since he'd felt wanted or cared about by anyone resembling family.

"Good to see you, Son," Duke said, beaming at him as he released him with a clap on the back. Matt couldn't help but grin back. He'd only discovered the existence of his half-brothers and his grandparents the year before, but Mack had loved Duke from the moment he'd met him.

Everyone loved Duke. He was an old cowboy with a hearty laugh, a warm personality, and a penchant for baking cookies and the perfect pie crust. In his mid-seventies, and thanks to all those pies and cookies, he had a bit more of a belly than he used to, but he was still tall and strong as an ox. With his pure white hair, full beard, and a wide mustache, he looked like a cross between Sam Elliott and Santa Claus.