

**SEIZED, A Romantic Suspense Novella**

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“What you need is a man in your life, Emma.”

Emma Lewis rolled her eyes at the comment and stacked a pile of celery to chop.

Luckily, she had her back to her boss, Lorna Doone—named after the cookie—the owner of the Peaches ’N Cream café. Not that Lorna would fire her for the action. Lorna thought of herself as the unofficial matchmaker of Weston. Almost daily, she carried on about some part of someone’s life in the small Ohio town.

Apparently today was Emma’s turn.

“What I need is to get this prep work done before the lunch crowd gets here.” She looked through the pass-through window to where her twin sons sat on stools eating their breakfast at the café’s counter. “Benjamin and Brian, I better see all that oatmeal gone or no cookies for later. You hear me?”

“Yes, ma’am,” they both muttered, shoving spoonfuls of oatmeal in their mouths.

She glanced at the elderly lady seated next to the boys. Her mother stared off into space, something she’d been doing a little more since Daddy passed away back in the spring. “You okay, Mama?”

Isabelle Lewis blinked then smiled. “Why yes, dear. And Lorna’s right. You do need a man in your life.”

“Not you, too, Mama.” Emma shook her head and began chopping. “Besides, I already have two men in my life.” She winked at her sons, which sent them into fits of small boy giggles.

“Mom’s right, Em,” Rachel, Lorna’s daughter, chimed in as she filled the ketchup bottles lined up in a row on the lunch counter. “You need someone, tall, dark, handsome...”

“Like the doc’s nephew,” Harriett, the doc’s nurse, said between sips of Lorna’s sweet tea.

“Yeah, him.” Rachel leaned one elbow on the counter. “He’s so...hot. That’s who you need to hook up with, Em.”

“Harriett, don’t you have patients to see?” Emma peeled two onions and halved them on the cutting board.

“Clint’s never been married, has he, Harriett?” Lorna carried out a tray of clean glasses and

began lining them up next to the soda fountain.

“No. He came close about a year ago then it all sort of fell apart. Doc and Caroline were concerned about him for a while, but now he’s staying in Weston while the Doc takes Caroline cruising around the world.”

“The poor guy’s heartbroken and in need of a good woman.” Rachel looked at Emma through the pass-through. “Someone like our Em, huh?”

“Of course. Besides, Emma works too hard. A man to take care of her would be so wonderful.” Mama picked up her toast and scooted down next to Harriett. “How long will Clint be in town this time?”

Emma diced the onion into smaller and smaller pieces.

Dear God, save her. Lorna, Harriett and now her mother. The only person missing was the minister’s wife and there’d be no stopping them until they had her dating and marrying the fill-in doctor. Been there, done that, got the T-shirt. Her ex, Dwayne Hazard, cured her of ever trusting a doctor under fifty again. Especially not one as handsome as she remembered Clint Preston.

For a moment she studied her sons, their copper-colored hair shining in the early morning light, heads bent together as they whispered something back and forth. Those were the only two good things she’d gotten from her ex.

She grabbed three roasted chicken breasts and peeled the skin off, then the bones.

“The poor girl hasn’t dated anyone since coming home with the boys. Of course they were so small then, they took both of us all day to care for. And they certainly need a father,” her mother said.

“That was nearly seven years ago, Isabelle. It’s time for her to find someone.” Lorna leaned over the counter.

“I’m standing right here,” Emma called from the kitchen as she lined the chicken up and chopped with a vengeance.

“What we need is a way to get her to meet the doc’s nephew.”

“Maybe she could come down with something,” Rachel chimed in, her shoulders shaking with hidden mirth.

Emma shot her an I’m-going-to-hurt-you glare.

Rachel’s shoulders shook harder.

“No, we wouldn’t want him to see her sick,” Lorna said, slipping a straw between her lips

and chewing on the end. Since she stopped smoking, she'd taken up straw chewing to fill the need for oral fixation.

"Oh, dear no," Mama agreed. "The poor child gets all pale and splotchy when she's running a fever. You remember last winter when she had bronchitis, don't you?"

Harriett nodded. "Sure do. Wasn't a pretty sight at all. What we need is a minor injury."

"I can *hear* you, you know."

What she needed wasn't a man. What she needed was a month's vacation in a sunny place, with a masseuse, good margaritas and a hot tub. Somewhere far away from Weston.

"Oh, yes. Something where he'll have to stitch her up."

"See her as a damsel in distress."

"That's it! Lorna, I'm taking my break." Emma dropped her knife, pulled off her apron, grabbed her tea and stomped out the back door.

"What are we going to do with all these chopped vegetables and chicken?" Lorna called after her.

"Add mayo and cranberries for chicken salad, or make potpie. I don't care!" Emma yelled over her shoulder just before the screen door slammed.

"Poor dear, she really does need someone to help her."

"A man to love her."

"What we need is a good accident."