

George Washington keeps staring at me.

Every day for the past two weeks, his eyes have followed me as I twisted my key in the lock of Nugget Collectibles, but this morning his shaded gaze is especially grating on my nerves. At least ol' Tom Jefferson has the civility to pretend to contemplate the morning sky. I should be used to the granite interlopers—I grew up beneath their stony countenances—but my day hasn't started out well. My alarm didn't go off, and I was already late to open the store when my Kia's battery decided to pull a pout and stop dead on the highway incline. A nice retired couple who were parked in the pull-off, the silver-haired lady snapping morning pictures while her husband sipped coffee from a thermos cup, offered to give me a jump, and I basically coasted downhill to Rockbridge.

I hadn't wanted to come home—ever. Where wide-eyed tourists saw a canopy of ponderosa pine and inhaled their earthy scent, I saw a tangle of dead ends I couldn't wait to escape. I did—for a while.

Then my mother absconded with an itinerant jewelry salesman and Dad took to downing whiskeys “neat”, and Grandpa Taylor rang me up at my perfectly pleasant PR job at the U of Wyoming and ordered me to return home. Grandpa had no patience for “feelings” or “dependencies” and business was business, after all. He'd turned Nugget Collectibles over to Dad nineteen years before, a little souvenir shop he'd snagged in 1943 in the depths of the Second World War, when nobody was taking scenic trips and the original owner was desperate to unload it. And he'd turned it, appropriately for the Black Hills, into a goldmine. But now Dad was impossible to rouse from his sodden

mattress and Grandpa Taylor was legally blind. That left me to tuck myself into the void and save the Taylor legacy.

I could've said no, theoretically. But nobody said no to Grandpa Taylor. His presence lingered like an incubus, even skittering across digital frequencies three hundred miles away. If I didn't do as he commanded, his ashen face would hover over my bed at night as I flipped from side to side and buried my head under my pillow. Terrifying as he was, his only son was sensitive and broken, and I had to return.

I managed to steer my sputtering compact into the bay of Farley's Gas Up, where it wheezed to a halt and surrendered.

My old high school classmate Gil was suddenly at my window, having sprinted out the front door of Farley's and beelining to my dying lump of metal.

"Got some trouble, Drea?"

My anxiety skyrocketed, knowing that Grandpa had somehow discerned my tardiness. "I—I'm sorry, Gil, but can you move my car out of the way? I'm late!" I had three blocks to hoof and if I missed a sale, the devil's ledger would forever be stained in blood.

"Sure! No prob—"

I'd already doffed my heels and was in mid-sprint when I turned and offered Gil a wave. "I owe you!" I yelled.

A boy of about five or six stood on his tiptoes trying to peer inside the darkened shop, while an older boy attempted a skateboard kickflip in front of his clearly exasperated mother parked on the wrought iron bench out front.

“Sorry, I’m late!” I forced a smile, ignoring eagled-eyed George’s scrutiny.

“Oh, thank God!” the woman exhaled. “My husband’s out searching for tram tickets and these kids are jangling my every nerve! I thought maybe a souvenir could—”

“You can buy tickets for the tram inside, ma’am.” Every store in the entire four-block town sold tickets for the aerial tramway; we were all reciprocal; it was a time-honored tradition. Of course, Nugget Collectibles was the only business open—almost open—at this time of the morning, so the family—minus hapless Dad—had taken rest at the exact right spot.

I breezed in, the three of them behind me, the little guy deciding to hop a pathway to the counter, Skateboarder managing to knock over a transparent tumbler of pencils embossed with “Mount Rushmore”, sending blues and oranges and reds catapulting through the shop like freshly popped corn.

“Devin!” his mother exclaimed.

“It’s fine, ma’am. Really,” I said. It truly was fine. Though the store carried the name “collectibles”, most of our merchandise was cheap and plastic, designed to appeal to kids like Devin and his little brother, whom my eyes could no longer locate.

As I collected the woman’s money for four tram tickets, a purple set of mini-robot walkie talkies, some kind of parachute toy I’d yet to figure out, plus two adult-sized

commemorative tee shirts, I noticed the message light on the phone blinking red.

Probably a wrong number...or spam. Nobody ever called the store. Why would they?

“Did’ja ever eat buffalo meat?” Devin popped up beside his mom to ask.

“Yes. I have.” Only once. A pop-up café in town had served me an obviously undercooked slab along with my scrambled eggs one morning, and I gagged all the way back to the store. “It’s really good!” I lied. Buffalo was a town specialty, not only on restaurant menus, but very much alive and roaming nearby Custer State Park.

Once the family had exited, I dove through the aisles collecting wayward pencils, then remembered the message light.

“Drea! Where the hell are you?!”

Damn. Grandpa Taylor was checking up on me. Here I was, thirty-three years old, a perfectly capable independent woman, and this churlish curmudgeon couldn’t bring himself to trust me. No wonder Dad drank.

“Call me ASAP!” he barked.

At least I had a good excuse, I reasoned as I punched up Grandpa’s number. Not that he wouldn’t blame me for an unreliable alarm and car battery.

“Close up and get home!” he gruffed before I even said hello.

“What’s wrong? Grandpa?”

What had happened to my dad?

“Never mind that. I’ll see you when you get there.”

“I—I don’t have a working car,” I stammered.

“Just haul your ass home, Missy. However you need to.” Then he hung up.

My hands shook as I swirled the “Closed” sign to the outside and locked the door behind me. I had no choice but to hoof it back up to Farley’s and beg Gil or anyone on the premises to clock me the nine miles back to Dad’s.

I kept asking myself why Grandpa hadn’t called an ambulance from my house, instead driving illegally all the way back to his bungalow, then calling the store and waiting in his orthopedic chair for me to call him back. My nerves were on fire, and I gnawed at a hangnail until I tore the skin. Blood circled my cuticle.

Gil reached out and patted my other hand. “Almost there,” he reassured me. “You need me to come inside when we get there?”

“I—that might be a good idea.” I couldn’t escape the notion that Dad was dead, and I couldn’t face that alone. Gil was sweet and steady. It seemed he’d always been there for me, all the way through high school, especially when I’d needed a shoulder to cry on.

Gil whipped his pickup up the circular driveway and screeched to a stop in front of the house. I jumped out with him close behind.

“Oh, there you are finally!” Grandpa Taylor stood on the front porch, one hand on his hip, the other leaning on his cane. I could take no more of his scolding. “What did you do to my dad?” I screamed.

He stared at me for a second before his expression softened. “Child...I didn’t do anything to your dad. I’m here to save him.”

I sensed Gil’s footsteps retreating down the steps, as if he had stepped into the middle of something he had no right to observe. I turned around. “No, stay here, Gil. Please. My grandfather and I have nothing to hide.” I turned back to Grandpa with a steely gaze. “Do we, Grandpa?”

Now it was Grandpa’s turn to look at Gil. “Drea’s right, Gil—is it?” He knew damn well who Gil was. Grandpa’d had a standing game of pinochle with Gil’s grandfather every week for almost twenty years. “My granddaughter and I’re gonna need some help.”

I was done playing games. I lurched toward the front door, but was blocked by Grandpa’s outstretched cane. “No, no, Drea. We’ve gotta talk first.”

Dad hadn’t stirred, even with all the noise, and I was sure Grandpa had lied about him not being dead, in some sort of perverse gesture of “comfort”.

“Your dad is going to rehab.”

I stopped struggling with the surprisingly rigid outstretched cane. Apparently Grandpa wasn’t the withering old man I’d thought. I looked at him with my mouth agape.

“Didn’t wanna call attention to that fact.” Grandpa stole a glance at Gil, who was nervously kicking at a clump of loosened sod. “I could’a had their people retrieve him, but you know how the neighbors are, and your dad don’t need no pryin’ eyes. I know I sure as hell don’t.”

Ahh, there it was. The Grandpa Taylor I knew. Worried about his own reputation.

I bit my lip and peered through the window glaze. There was no sign of movement inside, nor any packed and ready suitcase in the front hall.

“Well, where is he?” I asked.

“Still in bed, I figure.”

“Are you telling me my dad doesn’t know?”

“Course he doesn’t know! Ya think he’d agree to somethin’ like this if he knew? Think, Drea.”

“You can’t—”

“I can and I have. Judge Vallum granted me conservatorship yesterday afternoon. All that was left to do was make the arrangements. Now, let’s go in—bring Bill there—”

From the bottom of the steps Gil cleared his throat. “It’s Gil, sir.”

“Bring Gil there with us. You don’t mind, do you Gil?”

No, sir. I’m here to help Drea.” He looked at me. “Are you okay with this, Drea?”

Was I okay with it? This was not the way. I could have talked to Dad, convinced him. It was true I hadn't seen him sober once since I got back to Rockbridge, but my mother's mortal wound was still fresh. It was true that late at night, night after night, I heard him on the phone in the kitchen, pleading with my mother to come back, until his voice trailed off and I knew she had hung up on him. Then I'd hear the clanking of bottles on the back porch and the sounds of stumbling, bumping up against the back of the house. But it would get better. Dad just hadn't reached that last stage, acceptance. Not yet. But it was only a matter of time.

Grandpa was a telepathic savant. His words broke my reverie. "I didn't call you in Wyoming, Drea, until it had gone on for five months. That's when I broke my hip and I couldn't come over and check on him.

"So man up. And get in there."

I'd almost begun to believe that Grandpa had a soft side until he addressed me like a drill sergeant. It was strangely comforting.

[LIES AND LOVE](#)

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REVIEWS:

1. Good quick cozy read. If it hasn't happened to you then you know someone like this! Lost up in a good looking, charming man and not seeing the whole picture until it blindsides you. Thank goodness for good friends. Good story and writing. Going to check out the author's other books!

2. Drea was a young woman running her grandpa's souvenir shop. With a dad in rehab, a mom that took off, and a grumpy grandpa always getting on her case, she dealt the best way she could. Then she meets the new, local businessman named Alex and falls into a relationship with him. Everything seemed perfect for Drea. But the thing was that Mr. Perfect wasn't so perfect, and Drea had to learn that the hard way. Lies and love are certainly tricky things.

A short and sweet story about learning what's really important and going for it. It's a nice read. I look forward to more from this author.

3. If you are looking for great quick love/romance/chick lit novel then give this one a go!

The author is great at setting the scene and making you believe you are there. The characters are easy to like or dislike and the story flows nicely.

Following Drea's love life was exhausting but made me remember what it's like to be young, free and single (of which, unfortunately I am not (not the free bit!)) again.

Drea's love life is a disaster until 'Mr Perfect' comes along and sweeps her away whilst her long time friend, Gill, watches on dismayed, being in love with her himself.

This novel is a great, quick read that will not disappoint.

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