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# JESSIE'S DUSTY DREAMS

Dusty Dreams Ranch - Book One

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Published by Blushing Books  
An Imprint of  
ABCD Graphics and Design, Inc.  
A Virginia Corporation  
977 Seminole Trail #233  
Charlottesville, VA 22901

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EBook ISBN: 978-1-64563-258-0

v1

Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

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## Chapter 1

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Jessie Mills got out of the beat up old pickup that she still loved, cursing under her breath. She went around and raised the hood, staring at the engine in frustration. She wiggled some wires, swearing when she burned her fingers and well aware that she was not mechanically inclined enough to know what she was looking for. Hoping against hope, she climbed back in the truck and turned the key. Nothing. She got back out of the truck and stood with her hands on her hips, staring at it. Before she realized that there was another vehicle pulling up, she aimed a kick at the tire in absolute disgust.

There were slow footsteps approaching, but she didn't look up.

A deep voice drawled, "Engine trouble?"

In a voice dripping with sarcasm, she said, "No, this is how I get my exercise. Kind of like kickboxing."

"Well, then, I'll leave you to it."

Alarmed, she said, "No! I mean, don't mind me, sometimes my mouth just has a mind of its own. Please. I could use some help."

She looked up and the stranger turned to face her. She caught her breath, thinking, *oh, holy shit, this guy is hot! Like, melt-your-panties-off hot!* She was momentarily speechless.

"Well, let me take a look."

Jessie watched him fiddle under the hood, studying his tall, muscular frame, broad shoulders and cute, cute ass. He was dark haired and clean cut, with just a light stubble shadowing his jaw. He was dressed in well-worn boots and faded jeans, with a white shirt tucked in neatly, sleeves rolled up to the elbows, and top two buttons undone. She watched his strong hands in fascination, her mouth watering as she imagined them touching her.

"Okay, try turning the key."

Jessie scrambled into the truck and turned the key. The truck fired right up and she grinned broadly. The stranger dropped the hood and Jessie handed him a rag to wipe his hands with.

"Thank you so much," Jessie said. "I haven't seen you around here before."

"Stands to reason. I've never been here before. You got a mechanic?"

"Yeah, there's a guy in town."

"Have him take a look at it, I think you have a bad coil. And it's cheap to replace so if he wants to charge you much, tell him to stick it."

"Wow, thanks. I really appreciate it."

He gave her a wave and said, "No problem. Have a good day."

He was in his truck and gone before she could even ask his name. Jessie fanned herself and watched him disappear down the road.

"Damn," she said out loud. "I sure hope he plans on staying around for a while."

Jessie drove on to town and did a few errands, being sure to stop off at the mechanic's shop. Sure enough, the repair was

quick and inexpensive. She kept a watchful eye out for the stranger but never saw him in town. She bought a couple of bags of groceries and drove home then put her things away, sorted through the mail, and wondered for the millionth time how to start building up the ranch.

"Oh, Jake," she said out loud. "What the hell am I going to do? I don't have the slightest idea where to start. You were the one with all the sensible plans. I know I have to do something, but what if I do it wrong? I can't screw this up."

Jessie and her brother, Jake, had bought the little ranch together. They had both scraped and saved every penny they could, adding it to the small inheritance they had gotten from their father. Then, just weeks after they had moved into the ranch house, Jake, who was still in the Army Reserves, was deployed to Afghanistan. He died a hero's death before he was there for a full month. Jessie had received his life insurance check and immediately salted it away in the bank. But without Jake to take the lead, she was lost, unable to decide what to do first. Jake had been the only family she had left, and now there was nobody to help her.

Sighing, Jessie made a sandwich and took it out to the porch with a cold beer. She sat down to eat, propping her boots up on the railing and looking out over the countryside. The sight still brought her peace but she missed her brother with a deep ache every minute of the day.

"Dammit, Jessie, you have to do something. Maybe you just have to start. You could at least get a dog. That surely couldn't be a mistake. Then you could at least talk to somebody besides yourself."

Finishing her sandwich, she got up and threw a load of clothes in the washing machine. Then she sat down at her kitchen table with the newspaper, reading the local news and turning to the classified ads. She circled an ad for Australian

Shepherd puppies and a couple of others for well broken quarter horses. When she heard tires crunching in the gravel driveway, she got up to look out the window. Pulling up in front of her house was the stranger's pickup truck. Her mouth dropped open and she walked to the front door and pulled it open before he knocked.

"It's you," the stranger said in surprise. "You're Jessie Mills?"

"All my life. So just who are you?"

"I'm Brady Jensen." The stranger looked a little stunned.

"You're Brady? Oh my God." Jessie stared at him for a moment and then threw her arms around him in a long, heartfelt hug. After a little hesitation, Brady hugged her back, and when she pulled away, her eyes were full of tears. "Come in; please come in."

Brady followed her into the house and she gave him a huge smile. "I'm so glad to finally meet you. How are you? Are you okay now? How did you find me?"

Brady laughed and said, "Slow down. We have a lot to talk about."

"We sure do." Jessie got two beers out of the refrigerator and handed him one.

Brady held the neck of his bottle to hers and said, "Here's to Jake. He was the best."

"To Jake. And he was the best."

They sipped their beer in a moment of silence.

Jessie said, "Are you hungry? I can make you a sandwich."

"No, I'm fine. Let's find a place to sit so we can talk."

Jessie led him to the living room and they settled into the comfortable old chairs.

"Jake talked about you and this place all the time," Brady said. "He was full of plans for it. He couldn't wait to finish his tour and get back here to get started on it."

Jessie said, "This place was our dream for a long time. We

both put everything into it. But Jake was the one who always had good ideas and real plans on how to actually get things done. He was the one who had the sensible plans. I could visualize it once it's all a real ranch but getting it there? I don't have a clue how to do it."

"Jake said pretty much the same. He also said you'd work like a dog to make it happen if he just got you started."

Jessie laughed a little. "I'm not afraid of work. I'm just no good at decisions. I get too scattered."

Brady studied her for a moment. "I bet you're capable of more than you think. You just need a plan, right?"

"Honestly, a plan would be a great start. But I'm so scared of making the wrong move and screwing it up. I can't let Jake down that way. I have to do it, but it scares me to death. Sometimes I wonder if I should just sell it and use Jake's money to do something else to honor him."

Brady cocked an eyebrow and looked hard at her. "Do you really think that's the best idea?"

Frustrated, Jessie said, "No. I know it's not. I just don't know how to do this!"

"So you want to make the ranch work, the way that Jake did?"

"Yes, more than anything."

Brady said, "I have something for you. Jake made me promise to bring it to you if anything happened to him."

Brady handed an envelope to Jessie. She began to tremble and her face paled. Her eyes flew up to his face as she slowly took the envelope. "Is this from Jake?"

"Yes. I would have brought it sooner, as soon as I was recovered enough, but Jake told me that it would be best to let some time go by before I did. He could be pretty bossy when he wanted something."

Jessie opened the letter carefully and unfolded it.

. . .

*Hi, Jess,*

*If you're reading this, then I didn't make it back. I'm sorry about that; I guess I fucked up, huh? I never wanted to leave you alone, but I guess what's done is done. I imagine you're still in just the place you were when I left, aren't you? You put all the money in the bank and you spend your days fretting about what you should do first and how to do it without making any mistakes. Am I getting it right?*

*I remember when they brought you home from the hospital when you were born. I was five and they put you in my arms, and I knew right then that it was my job to look out for you. I know a lot of brothers would bitch and complain about having their little sisters tag along all the time. So I gave you a hard time about it like I was supposed to, but I really never minded. You could be a little brat, like all kids, but you were my family. With Mom gone and Dad sick all the time, it was just us, and that was okay.*

*Remember when you had the father/daughter dance when you were nine and Dad was too sick to go? You were so crushed that you didn't get to go so I got permission to take you. I think you were embarrassed to death until all your friends wanted to dance with me. It turned out okay, huh, squirt? I guess it helped that I was the best football player at school, huh?*

*And I remember when you were thirteen and that kid, Donnie, asked you to go to the spring dance. I thought you were going to kill me when I sat him down and told him how he'd better behave. You said I scared him off forever and you were so mad. But you ended up being good friends with him all through the rest of school. And the time that punk Jeremy tried to kiss you when you didn't want him to. I scared the little son of a bitch so bad that he ran all the way home.*

*And I know that I kind of took the role of being the boss and making the decisions. I think I screwed up when I did that. You're perfectly capable of making decisions and plans yourself; I just never really let you do that. Why didn't you kick my ass? So now I can picture you not being able to make the decisions that you need to be making.*

*So I figured maybe I ought to make one last decision for you. I spent a lot of late nights talking to Brady about you and me. I made him promise to find*



*you and give you this letter. And I made him promise to take over managing Dusty Dreams for you until it gets to a place where you can handle it yourself. Now you're getting pissed at me, aren't you? Brady knows what to do and how to get the ranch running. He's spent most of his life on his dad's ranch, and he's worked right alongside him. He'll do a good job of it, and he'll leave you with a place that will be what we dreamed it would be.*

*I also told Brady all about you. He knows about your stubborn streak, and he knows he's got to handle you with a firm hand when you need it. Boy, I'd love to see your face right now! I trust Brady, sis, and you can trust him too. So I'm asking you to promise to let him do this. He's going to keep you in the loop at all times, and you'll know everything that he's doing. I knew when I was five that it was my job to look after you, and this is the last way I'm able to do it.*

*I know I can't make you promise. In the end, it's your decision. If you decide to sell the ranch and walk away, I can't stop you. But I'm telling you, Jess, this is the best way to see our dreams come true. So please. Promise me.*

*I love you, squirt, and know that I'm always watching you.*

*Hugs!*

*Jake*

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THE TEARS HAD ROLLED SILENTLY down Jessie's face while she read the letter. A couple of times she laughed through them and, sure enough, at one point, she looked genuinely pissed. Brady watched her, a little fascinated with the play of emotions on her face. She folded the letter carefully and put it back in its envelope.

"Well. That was a lot to take in," she said, wiping tears from her face with the back of her hand. "I don't know what to say to you."

"You should take some time, think about it, think about Jake. I can tell you that this was really important to him. And I take

my promise to him seriously. I'll go for now and leave you alone to think."

"No, wait. Please tell me some things about over there. I know the whole story of what happened to him, but I know Jake. There have to be some good stories. I want to know some of those, not just the ending."

Brady relaxed a little and spent the next hour telling Jessie about the time Jake had spent with him in Afghanistan. He made her laugh at the outrageous things they had done together and she listened with rapt attention to stories of close calls and little victories. She got them both another beer while he talked on, and eventually, she heated a pot of soup she had made the day before and they ate soup and sandwiches together. When he finally said good night, she thanked him for bringing her brother to life for her, even just for an evening.

"I need to think; you were right about that," Jessie said. "How can I get in touch with you?"

Brady gave her his cell phone number and then said, "If I don't hear from you within a couple of days, I'll come back out here."

Jessie looked at him for a long moment. "I'll call you when I'm ready to make a decision."

Brady smiled and said, "Good night, Jessie. I'll talk to you soon."

She watched him walk to his truck and drive away, a little frown on her face. Jessie locked the doors and closed the blinds then went to the kitchen to finish cleaning up. She made herself a cup of tea and carried it to the living room to curl up in her favorite chair. She took the letter out and reread it twice.

"Just who the hell do you think you are, Jacob Mills? You're not even here and you're still making all the decisions. Okay, I can't make decisions. But you can't just send someone in here to take over my life and my ranch. Okay, our ranch. Damn it! Jake! I can't believe you told him he had to handle me with a firm

hand. You are such an asshole. God damn it, why do you have to be gone? I really need to kick your ass."

Jessie doubled over and wept, rocking back and forth in her chair, grieving for her brother. She cried until she was exhausted and finally fell asleep in the big old chair, dreaming of being a little girl dancing with her big brother.