

What a Texas Girl Wants

By Kristina Knight

Chapter One

Jackson Taylor's toes clenched as he came abruptly awake, the left side of his body shivering. The right, however, was delectably warm. A soft weight held his shoulder down, the feel of a woman's curves pressed hard against his chest. Cold water tickled his feet and wet sand dug into his butt. The tangy, salty smell of the ocean filled his nostrils. Another tickle of water. A slight shiver came from the curvaceous woman beside him before she settled back into sleep.

A flash of red hair, spinning lanterns and Latin dance music raced through his mind before it went blank. The infernal pounding started again behind his right temple.

Must have been a great night. The naked body lying next to his on the beach said as much.

Jackson levered his eyes open as the first fingers of yellow touched the white sand beach. He winced as intense sunlight hit his eyes. Another postcard perfect day in Puerto Vallarta. He would be perfectly happy spending it with the drapes closed and a couple gallons of hair of the dog. If he could just get back to his hotel room.

Damn. Thirty was years too old to be waking up, hung-over, not knowing where he was or how he had gotten there.

Pretty chestnut hair hid the woman's face. At least the woman he almost remembered seemed to be the woman he was with, but for the life of him Jackson couldn't draw a mental picture of her. Just what the hell had he done last night?

Well, the what was fairly simple to answer if the sand digging into his butt was any indication. No clothes tempered the feel of her soft skin against him. It had been a long time since Jackson had woken up beside a woman unable to recall who she was or how they had met. He had never liked the feeling, and liked it even less this morning.

Chilly water washed over his feet to his ankles. As the water returned to the sea, his heels dug deeper into the sand creating tiny tide pools.

He had to move. But if he moved he would disturb the woman sleeping softly on his right shoulder. Somehow he didn't think she would appreciate his jumping up and running for the nearest rock to answer the call of nature, leaving her alone in the chilly morning tide.

Another flash, this time of long, smooth leg sliding over his hips and sinking into the sand. Jackson squeezed his eyes together, trying to make the vision last. But no matter how hard he tried he couldn't follow the woman's leg up her body to her face.

Had he picked up a random woman on the Malecon the previous night?

Where were their clothes? If he could get up, he could at least cover the woman with a shirt or something before running for the rocks rimming the beach. Jackson angled his head but couldn't see anything except sand and some seaweed on either side of them. Sunlight glinted off glass high above.

A villa. They were probably trespassing on a private beach. He had to get out of here. The quicker the better.

This was not going to go over well with the nameless woman.

Water splashed over his ankles to his calves. He didn't have much time. Why wasn't she waking up? Jackson bent his neck and saw that her legs barely reached below his knees. No wonder she was still asleep. She was dry.

Taking a deep breath, Jackson tried to wriggle his arm free. He managed to gain a couple of inches of freedom before she burrowed back into his chest. Great. A cuddler.

Her left hand rested over his sternum, sunlight glinting off the thin gold band on her ring finger.

He hadn't just had a one night stand; he had apparently had a one night stand with a married woman. He sank back onto the sand, the rising tide forgotten for a moment.

Jackson Taylor liked sex, everyone knew that. But he drew the line at having sex with married women. Some things were meant to be sacred. Damn it, how drunk could he have been not to notice a wedding ring?

And why hadn't the husband been hanging all over her? How had Jackson been allowed not only to dance with her but to take her away?

Another snippet of music flashed in his brain along with a wide, laughing smile. Perfectly shaped lips, head thrown back, beautifully shaped neck. And then everything went black again. Jackson didn't have to see her face to know the woman lying on his chest was a beauty. He felt her soft curves and silky skin against his body. If she were his woman he would be hounding any man within a twenty mile radius who got too close.

Not that she, whoever she was, would ever be his woman. Jackson wasn't built for permanent. He rubbed his eyes with his free hand. He had to get out of here. Now.

Yanking a little harder, Jackson managed to free his arm to the elbow. The red-head's hand clasped and unclasped over his chest as if she were reaching for something. Probably him. A couple more tugs and he would be free of her. Jackson didn't feel so bad about leaving her, naked and alone, on the beach now that he knew she was married. What kind of woman did that?

What kind of man sleeps with a woman he doesn't even know? an ugly voice in his head asked. The voice made him pause. What kind of man, indeed.

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The earth was moving. And not in a good way.

Kathleen Witte reached out, trying to grab on to something. Anything. But her hands met only with air.

She shifted, and her shoulder dug into damp sand. Where was she? Her eyes flew open, and she winced at the bright sunlight.

The beach? What happened to the villa? And her. . . Sweet Mary, Mother of God, what happened to her clothes? Quickly, Kathleen flipped over so she was laying stomach-down on the sand. She shivered as a splash of water reached her feet. Looking left and then right, Kathleen scanned the area. No white dress. No strappy sandals. Had they been washed out with the tide? Had she come to the beach naked? No. She wouldn't have.

She took a deep breath. Her clothes had to be here somewhere. Maybe she had decided to go skinny-dipping. She was in Mexico, after all. What better way to blow off a little steam than with some late night skinny-dipping? The villa included a private beach, it wasn't as if she'd run into anyone. The old Kathleen would have balked. Said no with a quiet smile and watched as her sisters had all the fun. The new and improved Kathleen wasn't leaving life to her sisters, and God knew she had plenty

of steam to blow off. So maybe that was all this was. Blowing off a little steam with a naked swim in the warm Pacific. Colorful lights and a heavy bass rhythm filled her heard before everything went dark. The feel of a man's hands are her waist, leading her around the dance floor echoed in her memory.

With sudden certainty she knew she hadn't spent the night alone and that she'd not been innocently skinny dipping last night. Oh, God.

Seven months of fighting with Grandfather about running the ranch, of twisting her life inside out to prove she had the heart and commitment to become the all-work-no-play girl Grandfather needed had blown up after only a couple of nights in Mexico.

Seven months without the feel of a man against her body, holding her close. She shivered, imagining the phantom lover from her dreams.

Seven months of no life was long enough. She was getting one, even if it were only for the next week. That's what this whole trip to Mexico was about. Declaring her independence. And damn the whole family if they didn't get on board.

But waking up naked on a Mexican beach was a little too large a statement.

Kathleen took a harder look around. Her dress and shoes had to be here somewhere. Even in her most inebriated state – and with the amount of pounding in her head she had to have been on one huge bender – she wouldn't have paraded around Puerto Vallarta in the buff.

She saw a crescent-shaped rocky enclave on one side of the beach, and the other side stretched as far as she could see. Above was a thatch of greenery with a path leading upward. Probably to a road. A reflection high above caught her eye. Twin A-shaped V's rose out of the bushes and trees on the cliff, both filled with high windows. Her villa. Thank you, God.

Chewing on her lower lip, Kathleen weighed her options. She could stay here in the wet sand, risking getting caught by some fisherman or family of four who'd wandered onto her property, or she could get up and run as fast as she could toward the house. The villa staff would not have arrived this early so there was a good chance she might be able to snatch a towel poolside. No one needed to know about last night.

Surreptitiously, Kathleen looked left then right. She angled her head around, but didn't see anything except clear blue water behind her. Ahead there was only the path leading to the house. The sun rose higher. No time like the present.

Kathleen jumped up from the sand, ignoring the heavy drum beats in her skull, and took off across the sand. She'd only taken a few steps when a male voice stopped her cold.

"Leaving so soon?" The voice was filled with laughter.

Crap! She had waited too long. She covered her breasts with one arm and used the opposite hand to cover her pubic area. She didn't turn around.

"I. . .um. . ." She couldn't think of a plausible reason she was naked on the beach.

"Don't worry about it. I guess we had some night, huh?"

We? Crap. She'd half-convinced herself it was just skinny-dipping – after all there was no man present until five seconds ago. She racked her brain trying to recall something, anything from last night. But all she remembered were whirling lanterns, a crisp, white shirt and wrinkled khakis. Happy, Latin music bounced through her mind, warring with the drum beats already in residence.

She was going to give the new and improved Kathleen a stern lecture. Just as soon as she got off this beach.

". . .so I guess our clothes are up there, because they certainly aren't anywhere down here." So Mystery Man had been looking for their clothes while she panicked on the sand. She supposed she couldn't blame him; she wanted her clothes, too.

Kathleen squeezed her eyes closed. She wanted to pinch the brim of her nose but was too self-conscious to move either of her arms. Even with her back turned, she wasn't comfortable being exposed to a strange man.

"Could we just-" she tilted her head toward the path, keeping her gaze riveted on the sand at her feet. "I just want to get out of here."

He didn't say anything, simply walked ahead, leading the way up the path. Taking charge of a situation she couldn't believe she'd gotten herself in to. She took a moment to admire his firm glutes and tight thighs. At least she'd picked up a great looking random guy and not some pot-bellied loser who was the last man left at closing time.

With his back safely turned away and the cover of several low trees, Kathleen shoved one hand into her hair and clenched her fist. What had she been thinking?

Obviously she hadn't been. She had taken this fling vacation too far. It was one thing to declare her independence, to take a much needed vacation before beginning the final training leg for her horse, Jester. It was quite another to go home – or to the beach – with a man she didn't know. Did they take precautions? She didn't know, but that they had sex was obvious from the tightness in her thighs and the leftover heaviness in her breasts. Her nipples were still hard for Pete's sake, and not from the chill of the early morning breeze.

The incline grew steeper, and the trees gave way to low bushes and ferns. As they rounded a corner, the villa came in to view. Mr. Gluteus-Maximus stopped dead and whistled low. Kathleen made an abrupt move around him.

Now this she remembered. Two A-frames, attached in the middle by a low breezeway, opened to a wide courtyard. Bright morning sunlight created rainbows on the structure's many windows. Deep purple peonies lined the drive along with more ferns. Violets spilled from pots flanking the door. Around back, the infinity pool practically slid off the cliff and into the ocean below. Heaven on earth. If she could just get rid of Naked Man before the staff arrived.

Kathleen was almost to the front door when she stopped dead in her tracks. Sitting in the corner of the drive under an elm tree was an unfamiliar car. The low-slung coupe was too nice to belong to any of the staff. Eyeing the front door, she quickly walked to the car, placing her hand on the hood. Still warm so it couldn't belong to Mystery Man. A tiny blue and yellow sticker in the bottom corner of the windshield caught her eye. A rental.

With sickening clarity, Kathleen knew who the car belonged to. The question was why had he come here? And could she get Mr. GoodBuns to one of the cabanas poolside before they were caught. Only one way to find out.

"The pool's around back," she said, hurrying back to Naked Man to lead him around the house. Modesty be damned, she needed both of them clothed not standing around in the courtyard where anyone could see them.

"Our clothes could be there," he said.

Give that man a gold star.

He walked calmly ahead of Kathleen. Was that to protect her from prying eyes if anyone happened to be around? Or was he just used to being in charge?

It was obvious he knew a little about the house. Hmmm. He sounded calm. As if walking into a stranger's rented home happened every day. Gigolo, maybe? It would be the cherry on top of her morning so far. Kathleen shook her head and followed.

The greenery gave way to smooth tile surrounding an oval swimming pool. The blue water of Mismaloya Bay was still in the morning light. There were two cabanas and a shower to one side, the louvered doors a crisp white. A rock grotto led from the pool to a waiting hot tub. Several lounge chairs were spaced evenly along the other two sides of the pool. On the side facing the ocean, the pool spread to a ledge, making it look as if whoever was swimming could fall over the side of the cliff and into the ocean below.

Kathleen stumbled, bright sunlight singeing her eyes. At once, the man's hand caught her elbow righting her world. Lockhardt, Texas, a small ranching community just outside San Antonio, had nothing on Puerto Vallarta. Or the man at her elbow.

The brief touch sizzled up her arm, leaving a warm glow around her heart. Realizing her breasts were suddenly exposed to the warm ocean breeze and sunlight, Kathleen jerked free of his grasp, trying in vain to cover herself. Her eyes flew to the man's face and she froze.

His startled gaze locked on hers.

"Jackson!"

"Kathleen!" They said at the same time.

What was Jackson Taylor doing in Puerto Vallarta? Shouldn't he be in a New York studio, torturing single women across the city? He couldn't be here. This couldn't be happening.

Kathleen did the only thing she could do under the circumstances. She dove inside the nearest cabana, prepared to stay there the rest of her life if she looked back outside and saw Jackson Taylor, her college crush, standing beside the pool.

Pressing her back against the closed door she tried to convince herself that the man out there wasn't Jackson. It was a trick of the early morning light. The hangover.

Maybe she was still asleep. Dreaming. Yes, that was it. This had to be a dream. She'd dreamed about him often enough in the past.

Lord knew, most of the female population at the University of Texas-El Paso had dreamed about Jackson at one time or another. He was sensitive, brooding. Artsy. And all male. Deep brown hair, intentionally kept a little shaggy, chocolate brown eyes a girl could melt into and a runner's lean physique made him a picture perfect man.

Secrets surrounded him – he never went home for holidays, didn't get care packages, didn't seem to need anyone. He was also funny and blessed with enough charisma that he could have headed to Hollywood and become People's Sexiest Man in the Universe ten years in a row.

Please, please, please don't let that be Jackson Taylor. She would do anything, would gladly give up the new Kathleen, if the man outside would just be a stranger. She would never come back to Mexico. Never drink tequila or whatever she had drunk last night. She would give up her hopes of running the ranch for Grandfather. Just as long as Jackson Taylor wasn't standing naked beside that pool.

With her eyes closed, Kathleen twisted around and pressed her face to the door. She pried one eye open, lifting one of the louvers at the same time.

It was him.

Crap, crap, crap. She needed to reevaluate New Kathleen. The entire idea of coming down here and sowing some wild oats before she lost them all suddenly seemed like the worst idea in the world. She should have stayed home. Turned seven months of celibacy into seven years if she had to. She was an experienced woman. Knew how to satisfy herself. She didn't need a man to help her run the ranch so why did she need a man for the ultimate gratification?

Because all the sex toys in the world don't equal one touch from a man's hand.

Especially the memory of the man standing outside, tanned body fully exposed to the rising sun. Jackson Taylor.

And sleeping with Jackson Taylor was the biggest mistake this Texas girl could make.

