



His Larkville Cinderella (The Larkville Legacy)

By *Melissa McClone*

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Adam hides from his painful past behind every role he plays. But something in Megan is threatening to smash apart this carefully constructed facade. Will he finally take his biggest risk...throw away the script and open his heart?

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Melissa McClone has a degree in mechanical engineering from Stanford University, but analysing airline engines couldn't compete with her 'happily-ever-afters'. Melissa lives in the Pacific Northwest, with her own real-life hero husband, two daughters, a son, too many oh-so-spoiled indoor cats and a Norwegian Elkhound named Chaos. Melissa loves to hear from her readers! Contact her via her website: www.melissamcclone.com.

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Malibu, California, was a long way from her family's ranch in Larkville, Texas.

Tension bunched Megan Calhoun's shoulder muscles. She would be impressed with the exclusive gated beach community if she weren't under so much pressure. She exited her car, parked on the driveway of a beachfront mansion. The breathtaking Mediterranean-inspired villa belonged to an award-winning film producer.

A breeze rustled the palm tree fronds. Gray clouds made it look more like winter than springtime, but the temperature was warm. Or maybe she was working so hard she didn't have time to feel cold.

Interning for a film costume designer in Hollywood was supposed to be a dream come true. So far this first week on the job had been nothing but sixteen-hour-long days filled with driving, picking up and delivering things and running countless other "errands."

Intern and indentured servant seemed to mean the same thing with production to begin next week. Sleep was now considered optional. If this was life before filming, she couldn't imagine what working on an actual movie set would be like.

She jammed her car keys into the front pocket of her jeans, then grabbed the large leather portfolio from the backseat of her car. Eva Redding, the woman who held the fate of Megan's internship and possibly her future career, had left the studio this morning with the wrong portfolio. That delayed a meeting with a couple of Hollywood's heavy hitters. Now everyone was waiting for Megan to arrive with the correct designs so they could continue discussing costume concerns with the proper visuals.

Hurrying toward the villa's entryway, her comfortable tennis shoes felt more like cement blocks encasing her feet.

No way would she let her nervousness about coming face-to-face with the producer and director get the best of her.

Failure wasn't an option. She was not returning to Larkville. Her family might be there, but no one else. Not even Rob Hollis, her best friend for as long as she could remember; he had taken an engineering job in Austin, Texas. Her fingers tightened around the portfolio.

She stepped onto a large, tiled entryway. In the corner, a green leafy potted plant stood as tall as her. A hanging vine with fuchsia flowers scented the air. A wrought-iron tiered shelf held terra-cotta pots filled with various flowering plants.

What if film costume design wasn't where she belonged, either? Her stomach churned as uncertainty threatened to get the best of her.

No. She had a job to do. Megan's father had always told her to do the best job possible no matter what.

She felt a pang of grief. If only her dad were here so he could give her a much needed confidence boost. She took a deep breath to calm herself and jabbed her finger against the doorbell.

As melodic, multitoned chimes rang inside the villa, she remembered the instructions given to her by the costume supervisor.

"Hand Eva the portfolio and get out of there without saying a word."

That would be no problem. Megan excelled at being silent and fading into the background. She'd been doing it most of her life. She'd never fit in at the ranch. Her dad had been the only one who seemed to get her and really care, but he was...gone.

A lump burned in her throat. Her dad, the larger than life Clay Calhoun, had died of pneumonia in October, seven months ago. She was on her own in more ways than one now.

The ten-foot-tall wooden door opened.

"About time." Eva snatched the portfolio away. In her early forties with a flawless ivory complexion and jet-black hair styled into a French twist, the woman wore a black tunic, pants and heels. African-inspired jewelry added a funky and unexpected twist to the stylish and elegant clothing. "What took you so long?"

On Megan's second day in Tinseltown, she'd learned one of the only acceptable answers for being late. "Traffic."

Her boss's hard, assessing gaze ran the length of Megan. Eva's red-glossed lips pursed with disapproval. "You're slouching. Stand straight."

Megan did.

"Is this how you dress on the ranch?"

A plain pink T-shirt, faded capri jeans and comfy tennis shoes weren't going to put Megan on any of Hollywood's best-dressed lists. But her clothing wouldn't draw any attention to her, either. Well, except for now. But she imagined nothing she wore would live up to Eva's exacting expectations. "Yes."

The word *ma'am* sat on the tip of Megan's tongue. She'd used the term with Eva on Monday, the first day of the internship. Megan wouldn't make that mistake again.

"I don't suppose you have any other clothes in your car," Eva said.

Megan had grown up on a ranch in middle-of-nowhere Texas and graduated college less than two weeks ago. All her clothing was casual except for a few of her own creations she'd never had any reason—or courage—to wear outside her bedroom. Not after being made fun of freshman year at high school for the way she'd dressed. After that happened she'd adopted Rob's and his friends' geek look as her own style. "No."

"Then let's go." Eva motioned her inside. "Everyone's out on the patio."

Panic rocketed from the brown hair piled on top of Megan's head to the tips of her canvas sneakers. She wasn't supposed to speak, but she wasn't supposed to stay, either. "I'm, uh, supposed to head back to the studio."

"Not anymore."

The cartwheels turning in her stomach would have made Larkville High's Cheer Team proud. Not that any of those girls had ever given Megan the time of day except when they were trying to fundraise for new uniforms or a competition. "My car..."

"...isn't going anywhere without you," Eva said. "Come on." Megan stepped inside the villa. The door closed behind her with a thud.

Goose bumps covered her skin.

Trapped, except she wasn't standing in some dark, musty, Gothic manor. This mansion was bright with big windows and gleaming floors. The air smelled fresh, flowery with a hint of citrus. The temperature was cooler than outside. Air-conditioning. That explained the goose bumps.

Glancing around the foyer, she pressed her lips together to keep her mouth from gaping in awe. To the right, an elaborate wrought-iron chandelier hung over a huge dining table that seated twenty. The living room on the left was filled with expensive furnishings and fancy artwork with huge windows that showed the breathtaking ocean view.

Eva strode across the gleaming wood floor at a rapid clip, an amazing feat considering the high heels on her shoes. "Don't dawdle."

Megan quickened her pace. She had no idea what was going on. Pretty much if it wasn't illegal or immoral, she would do what was asked of her. Anything to secure a full-time position.

Eva glared back. "Don't talk unless someone addresses you directly."

Megan nodded. That suited her fine. She followed her boss through glass doors out onto a massive deck overlooking the beach and ocean. A breeze carried the salty scent of the sea. The sky looked like yards of gray flannel spread out to the horizon.

The patio stretched across the backside of the house and was decorated as nicely as the interior. Seating arrangements had been set up with comfy pillow-covered chairs and chaise longues. One corner had a built-in barbecue and a bar with stools. There was even a hot tub.

Two men, who she didn't know, sat at a table. Both wore light-colored short-sleeved shirts, slacks and dark sunglasses even though the sky was overcast.

Another man and woman, both wearing sunglasses also, stood at the railing. She recognized them from the wardrobe department. The man looked all business in his dark, tailored pants, white long-sleeved dress shirt and multicolored silk tie. The cut and line of the woman's salmon-pink above-the-knee skirt and cap-sleeved jacket reminded Megan of a designer from Milan she'd written a paper on at college.

No one acknowledged her presence. Megan wasn't offended or surprised. Invisible could be her middle name.

Most people had been calling her "hey, you" or "new intern" since she arrived at the studio on Monday morning. She was, in a word, forgettable. Nothing special, as her late mother continually reminded Megan, whereas her three siblings— Holt, Nate and Jess—defined the word. Megan wondered if their new two half siblings, the Patterson twins, fathered by her dad before he married her mom, were more like Megan's brothers and sister than her.

"I finally have the designs." Eva's tone made the delay sound like Megan's fault. "We can get started now."

"Hey, you," a male voice said. "Girl in the pink T-shirt."

Megan looked at one of the men sitting at the table. He was handsome in a distinguished-gentleman sort of way. His tan skin and sun-bleached hair made her think he spent a lot of time outside. She guessed he might be the producer who lived here.

"Go get Adam," the man said.

Adam? The blood rushed from Megan's head. She had no idea who the guy was talking about.

Eva laughed. "Megan is new in town, Chas. She's from Texas and my latest intern. One of her former professors is a very close friend of mine who has an eye for raw talent. Emphasis on *raw*."

The man and woman standing at the rail looked at Megan for a nanosecond, then returned to their conversation.

Megan tried to let it roll off her. The way she used to do back in Larkville.

Here in Hollywood, she had no choice. Getting your foot in the door was all about connections. A few people managed positions on their own, but it wasn't easy. Professor Talbott had secured this internship for her. But nothing was guaranteed. She would have to prove her worth or she would find herself back at the ranch before the annual Fall Festival in October. Who was she kidding? She might be home by Fourth of July, or worse, Memorial Day.

A heavy weight pressed down on her. She struggled not to let her shoulders droop.

"Texas, huh?" the blond man Eva had called Chas said.

Megan nodded.

He gave her the once-over, but with his sunglasses on she couldn't tell what he thought about her. "Dallas or Austin?"

"Larkville."

"Never heard of it."

"You're not missing anything unless you like pickup trucks, cowboys and the smell of cow manure," she

replied.

Her comment drew a wide smile full of straight, white teeth. "Sounds like lyrics to a country song."

"Megan," Eva said sharply. "Run down to the water. Tell Adam it's time for him to join us. That's Adam Noble, our star actor. I'm sure even a small-town Texas girl like you knows who he is."

Megan had seen some of his movies, action-adventure flicks that required him to take off his shirt as many times as possible. Adam had a killer, athletic body still toned from his college quarterback days and a classically handsome face. The guy also had a habit—perhaps a hobby—of having flings with his leading ladies. Or so the grocery store tabloids reported. She nodded.

Most women would call the actor hot, but she preferred guys who were more...cerebral. Guys like her best friend, Rob. Her Mr. Right, if ever one existed. All she had to do was wait it out until he realized she was his Ms. Right.

A squawking noise sounded overhead. She looked up to see two seagulls. Their white feathers were almost lost against the cloudy sky. Very cool. She couldn't remember the last time she'd seen this type of bird.

"We don't have all day," Eva said.

Megan ran down the deck's staircase to the beach.

Eva's cackling laughter followed Megan onto the sand.

Her cheeks burned. Compassion and understanding didn't seem to exist in Hollywood. No one cared if she felt like the proverbial fish out of water, overwhelmed and exhausted. They only cared that she got the job done. If she couldn't, ten others were waiting to take her place.

Not. Going. To. Happen.

She would do whatever it took to succeed in this business. Not that she had seen any costume designs other than those hanging on the walls, storyboards and drafting tables at the work space at the studio. She'd touched only clothing and fabric bolts needed by the staff. But she knew how each coworker took their coffee or tea, what they ordered for lunch and that "Firebreather," Eva's nickname, wasn't an exaggeration.

Megan's tennis shoes sunk into the sand.

Her internship was nothing like she thought it would be. Girl Friday seemed too glorified a term for what she did. That was run errands, emphasis on the running. Gophers got more respect than she did. And she was doing this all for free...for the experience.

But paying her dues was required in the film industry.

Costume designers worked their way up in the food chain. She had to start somewhere. Whatever she was doing here was better than being stuck back in Larkville and using her sewing ability to make alterations at the nearest dry cleaners. If only Rob had wanted her to move to Austin instead of encouraging her to take this internship.

She stumbled over a piece of seaweed. Sticking her arms out to keep her balance, she managed to stay upright. No doubt she looked like an idiot. As usual. She was all limbs and hair. Always had been.

A few people stood at the water's edge. In spite of the gray sky, women wore tiny strips of fabric that showed off their toned and honey-gold tanned bodies. Megan would never have the nerve to wear a bikini like that even if the temperature had been warmer and the sun shining.

Men wore board shorts and no shirts. Muscular physiques abounded. One thing was certain. The beach was a magnet for attractive men. But she'd still take Rob over any of them, even if he were thinner with not so many muscles. He wanted to spend time with her. He was always there to give advice, offer support and hang out with. Guys like him were hard to find.

She looked at each of the men. None had Adam Noble's trademark tousled brown hair and loose curls.

Megan dug the toe of her shoe into the sand.

Where could he be?

She noticed everyone was looking at the water. A lone surfer rode a massive wave. He did a fancy move with his board. She thought he might wipe out, but he somehow stayed on his feet.

Two women cheered. Another clapped. One man whistled.

A different woman sighed. "Adam is so hot."

Megan studied the surfer, who wore some sort of wet suit. It didn't take her long to realize Adam Noble was the one riding the wave. He cut back and forth on his board, across the rolling wave, doing tricks and inspiring oohs-and-aahs from the captivated crowd.

Show-off.

She wasn't impressed. Okay, she would give him a few props for making the women drool and the men stare at him with envy. But Adam could have ridden the wave without doing so many risky moves. The guy had a starring role in a new feature film, one she would work on as part of her internship. He should be more careful, not out there endangering himself and possibly the entire production so he could perform for his adoring fans on such a big wave.

Talk about an idiot.

He reminded her of those cowboys back home who risked their lives for an eight-second ride on some bucking bull named Diablo. The guy was all brawn. He didn't have a brain cell in that handsome head of his.

No wonder his costars slept with him. They probably couldn't find anything to talk about with him and figured sex was an easy way to fill the time between scenes.

Thank goodness Adam was riding the wave to shore. The sooner she could get him to the villa, the sooner she would be able to get back to the studio.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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