



Texas Wild (Westmorelands)

By Brenda Jackson

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Editorial Review

About the Author

A New York Times and USA TODAY bestselling and award-winning author of more than seventy-five romance titles, Brenda is a recent retiree who divides her time between family, writing and traveling with her husband. Readers may write Brenda at P.O. Box 28267, Jacksonville, Florida 32226, by email at WriterBJackson@aol.com or visit her website at www.brendajackson.net.

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"Dr. Westmoreland, there's someone here to see you."

Megan Westmoreland's brow arched as she glanced at her watch. She was due in surgery in an hour and had hoped to grab a sandwich and a drink from the deli downstairs before then. "Who is it, Grace?" she asked, speaking into the intercom system on her desk. Grace Elsberry was a student in the college's work-study program and worked part-time as an administrative assistant for the anesthesiology department at the University of Colorado Hospital.

"He's hot. A Brad Cooper lookalike with a dark tan," Grace whispered into the phone.

Megan's breath caught and warm sensations oozed through her bloodstream. She had an idea who her visitor was and braced herself for Grace to confirm her suspicions. "Says his name is Rico Claiborne." Lowering her voice even more, Grace added, "But I prefer calling him Mr. Yummy...if you know what I mean."

Yes, she knew exactly what Grace meant. The man was so incredibly handsome he should be arrested for being a menace to society. "Please send Mr. Claiborne in."

"Send him in? Are you kidding? I will take the pleasure of *escorting* him into your office, Dr. Westmoreland."

Megan shook her head. She couldn't remember the last time Grace had taken the time to escort anyone into her office. The door opened, and Grace, wearing the biggest of grins, escorted Rico Claiborne in. He moved with a masculine grace that exerted power, strength and confidence, and he looked like a model, even while wearing jeans and a pullover sweater.

Megan moved from behind her desk to properly greet him. Rico was tall, probably a good six-four, with dark brown hair and a gorgeous pair of hazel eyes. They had talked on the phone a number of times, but they had only met once, three months ago, at her cousin Micah's wedding. He had made such an impact on her feminine senses that she'd found it hard to stop thinking about him ever since. Now that he had completed that case he'd been working on, hopefully he was ready to start work on hers.

"Rico, good seeing you again," Megan said, smiling, extending her hand to him. Grace was right, he did look like Brad Cooper, and his interracial features made his skin tone appear as if he'd gotten the perfect tan.

"Good seeing you again as well, Megan," he said, taking her hand in his.

The warm sensation Megan had felt earlier intensified with the touch of his hand on hers, but she fought to ignore it. "So, what brings you to Denver?"

He placed his hands in the pockets of his jeans. "I arrived this morning to appear in court on a case I handled last year, and figured since I was here I'd give you an update. I actually started work on your case a few weeks ago. I don't like just dropping in like this, but I tried calling you when I first got to town and couldn't reach you on your cell phone."

"She was in surgery all morning."

They both turned to note Grace was still in the room. She stood in the doorway smiling, eyeing Rico up and down with a look of pure female appreciation on her face. Megan wouldn't have been surprised if Grace started licking her lips.

"Thanks, and that will be all Grace," Megan said.

Grace actually looked disappointed. "You sure?"

"Yes, I'm positive. I'll call you if I need you," Megan said, forcing back a grin.

"Oh, all right."

It was only when Grace had closed the door behind her that Megan glanced back at Rico to find him staring at her. A shiver of nervousness slithered down her spine. She shouldn't feel uncomfortable around him. But she had discovered upon meeting Rico that she had a strong attraction to him, something she'd never had for a man before. For the past three months, out of sight had meant out of mind where he was concerned—on her good days. But with him standing in the middle of her office she was forced to remember why she'd been so taken with him at her cousin's wedding.

The man was hot.

"Would you like to take a seat? This sounds important," she said, returning to the chair behind her desk, eager to hear what he had to say and just as anxious to downplay the emotional reaction he was causing.

A few years ago, her family had learned that her great-grandfather, Raphael Stern Westmoreland, who they'd assumed was an only child, had actually had a twin brother, Reginald Scott Westmoreland. It all started when an older man living in Atlanta by the name of James Westmoreland—a grandson of Reginald—began genealogy research on his family. His research revealed a connection to the Westmorelands living in Denver—her family. Once that information had been uncovered, her family had begun to wonder what else they didn't know about their ancestor.

They had discovered that Raphael, at twenty-two, had become the black sheep of the family after running off with the preacher's wife, never to be heard from again. He had passed through various states, including Texas, Wyoming, Kansas and Nebraska, before settling down in Colorado. It was found that he had taken up with a number of women along the way. Everyone was curious about what happened to those women, since it appeared he had been married to each one of them at some point. If that was true, there were possibly even more Westmorelands out there that Megan and her family didn't know about. That was why her oldest cousin, Dillon, had taken it upon himself to investigate her great-grandfather's other wives.

Dillon's investigation had led him to Gamble, Wyoming, where he'd not only met his future wife, but he'd also found out the first two women connected with Raphael hadn't been the man's wives, but were women he had helped out in some way. Since that first investigation, Dillon had married and was the father of one

child, with another on the way. With a growing family, he was too busy to chase information about Raphel's third and fourth wives. Megan had decided to resume the search, which was the reason she had hired Rico, who had, of course, come highly recommended by her brothers and cousins.

Megan watched Rico take a seat, thinking the man was way too sexy for words. She was used to being surrounded by good-looking men. Case in point, her five brothers and slew of cousins were all gorgeous. But there was something about Rico that pulled at her in a way she found most troublesome.

"I think it's important, and it's the first break I've had," he responded. "I was finally able to find something on Clarice Riggins."

A glimmer of hope spread through Megan. Clarice was rumored to have been her great-grandfather's third wife. Megan leaned forward in her chair. "How?"

Where?"

"I was able to trace what I've pieced together to a small town in Texas, on the other side of Austin, called Forbes."

"Forbes, Texas?"

"Yes. I plan to leave Thursday morning. I had thought of leaving later today, after this meeting, but your brothers and cousins talked me out of it. They want me to hang out with them for a couple of days."

Megan wasn't surprised. Although the Westmorelands were mostly divided among four states—Colorado, Georgia, Montana and Texas—the males in the family usually got together often, either to go hunting, check on the various mutual business interests or just for a poker game getaway. Since Rico was the brother-in-law to two of her cousins, he often joined those trips.

"So you haven't been able to find out anything about her?" she asked.

"No, not yet, but I did discover something interesting."

Megan lifted a brow. "What?"

"It's recorded that she gave birth to a child. We can't say whether the baby was male or female, but it was a live birth."

Megan couldn't stop the flow of excitement that seeped into her veins. If Clarice had given birth, that could mean more Westmoreland cousins out there somewhere. Anyone living in Denver knew how important family was to the Westmorelands.

"That could be big. Really major," she said, thinking. "Have you mentioned it to anyone else?"

He shook his head, smiling. "No, you're the one who hired me, so anything I discover I bring to you first."

She nodded. "Don't say anything just yet. I don't want to get anyone's hopes up. You can say you're going to Texas on a lead, but nothing else for now."

Presently, there were fifteen Denver Westmorelands. Twelve males and three females. Megan's parents, as well as her aunt and uncle, had been killed in a plane crash years ago, leaving Dillon and her oldest brother, Ramsey, in charge. It hadn't been easy, but now all of the Westmorelands were self-supporting individuals. All of them had graduated from college except for the two youngest—Bane and Bailey. Bane was in the U.S. Navy, and Bailey, who'd fought the idea of any education past high school, was now in college with less than a year to go to get her degree.

There had never been any doubt in Megan's mind that she would go to college to become an anesthesiologist. She loved her job. She had known this was the career she wanted ever since she'd had her tonsils removed at six and had met the nice man who put her to sleep. He had come by to check on her after the surgery. He'd visited with her, ate ice cream with her and told her all about his job. At the time, she couldn't even pronounce it, but she'd known that was her calling.

Yet everyone needed a break from their job every once in a while, and she was getting burned out. Budget cuts required doing more with less, and she'd known for a while that it was time she went somewhere to chill. Bailey had left that morning for Charlotte to visit their cousin Quade, his wife Cheyenne and their triplets. Megan had been tempted to go with her, since she had a lot of vacation time that she rarely used. She also thought about going to Montana, where other Westmorelands lived. One nice thing about having a large family so spread out was that you always had somewhere to go.

Suddenly, a thought popped into Megan's head, and she glanced over at Rico again to find him staring at her. Their gazes held for a moment longer than necessary before she broke eye contact and looked down at the calendar on her desk while releasing a slow breath. For some reason she had a feeling he was on the verge of finding out something major. She wanted to be there when he did. More than anything she wanted to be present when he found out about Clarice's child. If she was in Denver while he was in Texas, she would go nuts waiting for him to contact her with any information he discovered. Once she'd gotten her thoughts and plans together, she glanced back up at him.

"You're leaving for Texas in two days, right?"

He lifted a brow. "Yes. That's my plan."

Megan leaned back in her chair. "I've just made a decision about something."

"About what?"

Megan smiled. "I've decided to go with you."

Rico figured there were a lot of things in life he didn't know. But the one thing he did know was that there was no way Megan Westmoreland was going anywhere with him. Being alone with her in this office was bad enough. The thought of them sitting together on a plane or in a car was too close for comfort. It was arousing him just thinking about it.

He was attracted to her big-time and had been from the moment he'd seen her at Micah's wedding. He had arrived late because of a case he'd been handling and had shown up at the reception just moments before the bride and groom were to leave for their honeymoon. Megan had hired him a month earlier, even though they'd never met in person. Because of that, the first thing Rico did when he arrived at the reception was to ask Zane to point her out.

The moment his and Megan's gazes locked he had felt desire rush through him to a degree that had never happened before. It had shocked the hell out of him. His gaze had moved over her, taking in every single thing he saw, every inch of what he'd liked. And he'd liked it all. Way too much. From the abundance of dark curls on her head to the creamy smoothness of her mahogany skin, from the shapely body in a bridesmaid gown to the pair of silver stilettos on her feet. She had looked totally beautiful.

At the age of thirty-six, he'd figured he was way too old to be *that* attracted to any woman. After all, he'd dated quite a few women in his day. And by just looking at Megan, he could tell she was young, that she hadn't turned thirty yet. But her age hadn't stopped him from staring and staring and staring...until one of her cousins had reclaimed his attention. But still, he had thought about her more than he should have since then.

"Well, with that settled, I'll notify my superiors so they can find a replacement for me while I'm gone," she said, breaking into his thoughts. "There are only a few surgeries scheduled for tomorrow, and I figure we'll be back in a week or so."

Evidently she thought that since he hadn't said anything, he was okay with the idea of her accompanying him to Texas. Boy, was she wrong. "Sorry, Megan, there's no way I'll let you come with me. I have a rule about working alone."

He could tell by the mutinous expression on her face that he was in for a fight. That didn't bother him. He had two younger sisters to deal with so he knew well how to handle a stubborn female.

"Surely you can break that rule this one time."

He shook his head. "Sorry, I can't."

She crossed her arms over her chest. "Other than the fact that you prefer working alone, give me another reason I can't go with you."

He crossed his arms over his own chest. "I don't need another reason. Like I said, I work alone." He did have a reason, but he wouldn't be sharing it with her. All he had to do was recall what had almost happened the last time he'd worked a case with a woman.

"Why are you being difficult?"

"Why are you?" he countered.

"I'm not," she said, throwing her head back and gritting out her words. "This is my great-grandfather we're talking about."

"I'm fully aware of who he was. You and I talked extensively before I agreed to take on this case, and I recall telling you that I would get you the information you wanted...doing things my way."

Users Review

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