



My Big Old Texas Heartache

By GERALYN Dawson

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One minute she's dating the sexiest bachelor in Dallas and the next she's back in her small hometown surrounded by grannies, gossip, and green bean casserole.

It's not enough that she's been forced to finally return to the scene of her Scandal. Now her cantankerous father needs nursing, her pregnant-for-the-first-time-at-forty sister wants coddling, and her brother, Mr. Perfect, requires rescuing from a situation that threatens the family's future.

And guess who else is back in town? None other than Max Cooper, former high school football star and the father of her teenage son. And Max is looking to date her.

Over the course of a long, hot Texas summer, Kate has the chance to finally make peace with her past and open a door to her future. But will a second chance at love stand in her way?

MY BIG OLD TEXAS HEARTACHE is a full-length novel of approximately 100,000 words.

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Editorial Review

Review

Joan Johnston Absolutely delicious! -- *Review*

About the Author

Geralyn Dawson is the critically acclaimed author of more than a dozen novels. The three-time RITA finalist has won numerous awards, including the National Readers' Choice Award and a Career Achievement Award from *Romantic Times*.

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Chapter One

Kate Harmon often thought that living the good life was like putting on a pair of panty hose. Just when she finally wiggled her way to a comfortable fit, she'd invariably get a runner.

At least tonight's runner was literal rather than figurative. Scowling, she kicked off a heel and eyed the spot where her little toe poked through nylon. "It's Monday night. I shouldn't have to wear hose on Monday night. That should be a law. A Constitutional right. Number seven in the Women's Bill of Rights."

"What's number six?" her seventeen-year-old son asked.

"It involves underwire bras."

"I don't think a Women's Bill of Rights exists," called Adele Watkins from the kitchen. Ryan's former nanny and Kate's dearest friend in the entire world, Adele completed the family of three who lived in a new house in a North Dallas suburb.

"We don't have a Women's Bill of Rights? See, that's the problem. Ryan, maybe you should study law rather than engineering. Think how proud I would be if my son freed the women of America from Monday night panty hose."

"Quit babbling, Kate, and get ready for your date. You have no reason to be nervous."

Kate made a face toward the kitchen and Adele.

Ryan shot her a cocky grin from the sofa, where he lounged on his spine. "I'll free you now, Mom. Don't wear 'em. Show a little bare leg with that snazzy black dress and make him drool."

"Ryan Scott Harmon. What a thing to say to your mother."

He shrugged. "Face it, Mom. You're hot. All my buddies think so."

She hesitated, pleased, then preened just a bit. "Really?"

"Yeah. For an old lady."

She threw a sofa pillow at him. "Brat. Don't you have homework to do? If not, I can find you some chores."

"Can't do it." He flashed her that devilish grin that invariably reminded her of his father, then sauntered toward the stairs. "I've got a ball game in half an hour."

"You do? Oh no. I'm going to miss it. I thought your weekday baseball games were all on Thursday this season."

"They are. This is basketball. Girls nine-to-eleven church league. I'm subbing as a referee because Mark Johnson has a big chemistry test tomorrow."

"Oh, Ryan. I'm sorry I can't be there. You know how much I hate to miss -- "

"Mo-om," he interrupted, pivoting around. He placed his hands on her shoulders, leaned down, and pressed a kiss to her forehead. "I'm a ref; not a player. Parents don't come to games where their kid is only refereeing. You don't need to feel guilty about this one. In fact, I'd be embarrassed if you went."

"I don't care if you're embarrassed," Kate grumbled. "I love attending your ball games. I'm a proud member of the Bleacher Butt Brigade."

She'd labored long and hard to get to this point. Single mothers who worked full-time and attended college missed out on most Little League and Pee-Wee events. Only during the last couple of years had she been able to watch his games with any regularity.

"You're almost a senior in high school, so my opportunities to play proud-mother-in-the-stands are coming to an end all too soon. When you're in college back East, I won't be able to make many intramural games in Cambridge or New Haven."

"C'mon, Mom." He looked away and shrugged. "Go change your panty hose so you're perfect for your date."

"It's not a date," she insisted. It couldn't be. "It's a business dinner."

"Uh-huh. With *Dallas Magazine's* 'Hunk Lawyer of the Year' at one of the hottest restaurants in the Metroplex."

Kate shot him a chastising look.

He grinned back at her. "I heard you talking to Adele."

"You shouldn't eavesdrop, and of course I have to wear panty hose."

"I could make a comment here about garter belts that would probably get me in trouble." He kissed her forehead and moved away. "Enjoy yourself. You don't go out nearly enough. You can come to my ball game on Thursday, and Saturday we have a doubleheader."

A doubleheader. She loved doubleheaders. As Ryan bounded up the stairs to don his official's black-and-whites, Kate's gaze once again snagged on the run in her stockings. She sighed and glanced at the clock. Nicholas Sutherland was due to arrive in half an hour, and she still hadn't decided if she had a client meeting or a hot date. Her stomach staggered at the thought.

She'd taken the call from the offices of Sutherland, Mason, and Post expecting a question about one of her accounting clients. Hearing Nicholas Sutherland's resonant voice requesting the pleasure of her company for

dinner to discuss a matter of mutual importance had her all but oozing from her chair. She'd met the man briefly twice before, once at a Dallas charity 10K run, and once at a United Way leadership meeting. He'd never paid particular attention to her. Not that kind of particular.

Her mind a fuddle, Kate had stammered an acceptance and hung up without clarifying the reason for the invitation. Could he possibly intend to offer her a job? Kate couldn't imagine that. While she considered herself a competent -- okay, a damned fine -- certified public accountant, she'd handled nothing of such professional significance as to put her on his law firm's radar screen.

But what else could he want? If he hoped to fish for personal information about one of her clients, he was out of luck. Kate had learned long ago the value of discretion. She never betrayed a client's privacy.

"Ryan is right, you know." Adele marched into the family room from the kitchen. "You need to get out and enjoy yourself more. This is the first date you've had in at least six months."

A year. Over a year. And that date had been with a local golf pro, not with a chiseled-jaw, Armani-clad attorney. "This isn't a date. It's a business dinner."

"You need to have more fun," Adele continued, eyeing her strappy stiletto heels with approval. "I thought I'd see some action in your social life after you finished up your degree and passed your CPA exam. But you're set on pursuing a partnership at Markhum and Frye instead of a sex life."

"Don't start."

Adele flicked one of her dangling earrings, a pink rhinestone star. "Somebody has to start because you certainly aren't."

"I'm going out tonight, aren't I?" Kate tucked an errant strand of blonde hair behind her ear. "On a Monday night, no less. In a little black dress and panty hose."

"What color underwear?"

"Adele!"

"Probably white. Really living on the wild side there, aren't you, honey."

Knowing she wore her best black lingerie, Kate lifted her chin, and declared, "Maybe. Maybe I will. Maybe I'll just turn on the charm and seduce Nicholas Sutherland. I could do it. I have it on good authority that I'm hot. You can ask anyone on the Milam High School baseball team."

Adele chuckled. "Oh, go change your stockings. You're as likely to vamp for that man as the Rangers are to win the American League pennant this year."

"Don't count the Rangers out already. The season just started." Maybe if the Rangers got lucky this year, she would, too. Stranger things had happened.

Kate scooped up her shoes and headed upstairs to her bedroom, exchanging see-you-laters with her son as he breezed past her, heading for the garage and his pride and joy. The rebuilt '56 Ford pickup made her shake her head in wonder every time she caught sight of it. She didn't understand the love affair between her son and his beat-up old truck. Well, except for the pride factor. That she understood all too well.

Ryan had turned down the offer of a new Mustang from his father on his sixteenth birthday, choosing instead

to use his paper route money for a set of wheels -- to use the term generously. Since Ryan would rather eat dirt than accept anything from Max Cooper, Kate hadn't been shocked. The surprise came six months later when, following her promotion, she offered to help Ryan upgrade his mode of transportation. He'd chosen to stay in the junker, despite its consistent breakdowns. For a teenager, Ryan was unusually considerate of a parent's purse, plus he had a good measure of her own stiff-necked pride.

"He's not taking that truck off to college when he goes," Kate murmured as she tugged an unopened package of stockings from her lingerie chest. Of course, she needn't worry. That truck couldn't make it north of the Red River, much less all the way to New Haven, Connecticut.

So why was she even thinking about it? Maybe because Ryan's collegiate future was her favorite fantasy of late -- a sad comment on her sex life, true, but nobody needed to know about that. More likely, she was concentrating on old trucks to avoid thinking about sexy lawyers.

This had to be a business meeting. What would she do if Nicholas Sutherland offered her a job?

She tore the plastic from the package, then removed the stockings. Stripping off the ruined hose, she sat on the side of her bed to begin the slow process of smoothing the stockings up her legs and over her hips. She wriggled, hopped, jumped, and tugged.

Breathing like she'd run a marathon, Kate slipped into her come-hither shoes, flipped off the bedroom light, and started back downstairs. The doorbell rang. *Business dinner. It's just a business dinner.*

She peeked out the window and her stomach did a flip. Nicholas Sutherland could have come straight from a photo shoot for GQ magazine. Though tall and broad-shouldered, he had that fine-boned elegance that shouted breeding and class. He wore an Armani suit, Bruno Magli shoes, and a slim Piaget watch, and when Kate opened the door, his deep blue eyes took her breath away.

Business dinner. Business dinner. Business dinner.

With Mr. Tall, Dark, and Delicious.

"Hello, Nicholas."

"Good evening, Kate. You look lovely. I'm so pleased you were able to join me this evening."

Hmm...a compliment. That leaned more toward the "date" side of the equation, didn't it?

She invited him in and introduced him to a very curious Adele, who covertly shot her two thumbs up on their way out the door.

Kate noticed the neighborhood kids congregated at her curb before she noted the object of their fascination. "A limo?" she asked.

Nicholas shrugged. "I hate traffic this time of night."

He'd made reservations at a cozy French bistro in the Fort Worth Cultural District, a good forty-minute drive from Kate's house. She settled into the comfortable leather seat, surreptitiously tugged her hem hoping to cover more of her thighs, and accepted a glass of wine. He put her at ease with small talk about local sports teams and their mutual interest in long-distance running. By the time they reached Fort Worth, she'd forgotten all about business.

Danged if he didn't go and bring it up.

"I know you're probably curious about why I invited you to dinner," he said.

Because you've fantasized about me since our last meeting at the United Way party? Oh, get hold of yourself, Kate Harmon. You're acting like a teenager.

"I have a double purpose. I've wanted to see you again since the United Way event, but business demands have kept me from having much of a personal life."

Oh, my. Kate swallowed hard.

"Also, I do have business to discuss with you."

"Business?" she repeated, an embarrassing squeak in her voice.

Nicholas topped off her wine. "I'm on a quest, and I believe you are just the person to assist me. We'll talk about it more at dinner, all right? It appears we are almost to the restaurant. I cannot recall a time when the drive to Fort Worth passed so quickly."

She could have kept going all the way to Amarillo, Kate decided as she glanced out the window to see the graceful facade of the Kimball Art Museum. Then, just as the limo pulled into the restaurant parking lot, the cell phone in Kate's purse softly chimed. Oh, no.

"Excuse me, Nicholas," she said, reaching for her bag. "I know it's rude to take a phone call under the circumstances, but I'm the mother of a teenage son with a driver's license. I dare not..."

"By all means."

The phone number displayed on the cell phone's screen was her home number. Adele, this better be good. "Hello?"

"Kate, honey," Adele said, tension in her tone. "Your brother-in-law called. There's been a car accident. In Cedar Dell."

"An accident?" Kate sat up straight, her eyes rounded in fear. Her sister? Her dad? Oh, God. "What happened?"

"Honey, you need to go home. Fast."

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Users Review

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Carolyn Lew:

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