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See the next page to enjoy a sneak peek
from Harlequin® American Romance®,
a Heart and Home series.

Five hunky Texas single fathers—five stories from Cathy Gillen Thacker’s LONE STAR DADS miniseries. Here’s an excerpt from the latest, THE MOMMY PROPOSAL from Harlequin American Romance.

“I hear you work miracles,” Nate Hutchinson drawled. Brooke Mitchell had just stepped into his lavishly appointed office in downtown Fort Worth, Texas.

“Sometimes, I do.” Brooke smiled and took the sexy financier’s hand in hers, shook it briefly.

“Good.” Nate looked her straight in the eye. “Because I’m in need of a home makeover—fast. The son of an old friend is coming to live with me.”

She was still tingling from the feel of his warm palm. “Temporarily or permanently?”

“If all goes according to plan, I’ll adopt Landry by summer’s end.”

Brooke had heard the founder of Nate Hutchinson Financial Services was eligible, wealthy and generous to a fault. She hadn’t known he was in the market for a family, but she supposed she shouldn’t be surprised. But Brooke had figured a man as successful and handsome as Nate would want one the old-fashioned way. *Not that this was any of her business...*

“So what’s the child like?” she asked crisply, trying not to think how the marine-blue of Nate’s dress shirt deepened the hue of his eyes.

“I don’t know.” Nate took a seat behind his massive antique mahogany desk. He relaxed against the smooth leather of the chair. “I’ve never met him.”

“Yet you’ve invited this kid to live with you permanently?”

“It’s complicated. But I’m sure it’s going to be fine.”

Obviously Nate Hutchinson knew as little about teenage

boys as he did about decorating. But that wasn't her problem. Finding a way to do the assignment without getting the least bit emotionally involved was.

Find out how a young boy brings Nate and Brooke together in THE MOMMY PROPOSAL, coming August 2010 from Harlequin American Romance.

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Available August 2010 wherever books are sold.

Under the heading “Courtship Itinerary” Sophie had typed a neat schedule for their romance.

Tuesday: 7 p.m., bike to Maynard’s, ice cream

Friday: 7:30 p.m., movie at the old Tivoli

Sunday: 3 p.m., swim at Blue Rock, weather permitting

For a man who had taken weekend trips to Monte Carlo, who had been wine and dined in the most famous restaurants in the world, her plan should have been laughable. This was what she had come up with for excitement? This was the courtship of Miss Sophie.

But, oddly, Brand didn’t feel like laughing. He felt as if he was choking on something. The choices not made, a sweet way of life left behind.

The second sheet, also neatly typed, was titled “Courtship Guidelines.” As he scanned it, he realized these really were Sophie’s rules, starting with no public demonstrativeness and ending with the request that he not call her Sweet Pea.

“Oh, lady,” he said, crumpling up the rules, needing to regain his equilibrium. “You have so much to learn.”

Dear Reader,

I always use humor in my writing, because I think laughter is one of the best parts of all relationships. We've been together twenty years and my guy, Rob, still makes me laugh out loud. So I was thrilled to be asked to write a romantic comedy for Harlequin® Romance.

What I didn't expect was that I would be facing a tragedy as I wrote.

As you will see from my dedication, my friend Judy died while I was working on this story. I had the great privilege of being able to spend time with her every day for the last weeks of her life. When I delivered her eulogy I said I felt I had experienced love at its truest and deepest and most breathtaking in those final days with Judy.

I came away with a sense of having been inspired by Judy's courage, humility and grace. Her final gifts to me were these: spirit is in life *and* death, in joy *and* sorrow; it is profoundly present in every single sacred breath. Laughter is a light that can pierce the deepest dark. And finally, love is an energy so powerful it cannot be destroyed. Love truly is forever.

My greatest wish is that this book honors Judy by bringing you, the reader, moments where you experience each of those three elements.

I am yours in spirit, in laughter and in love.

Cara

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WINNING A GROOM IN 10 DATES

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Cara Colter lives on an acreage in British Columbia with her partner, Rob, and eleven horses. She has three grown children and a grandson. She is a recent recipient of an *RT Book Reviews* Career Achievement Award in the Love and Laughter category. Cara loves to hear from readers; you can contact her or learn more about her through her Web site, www.cara-colter.com.

In Loving Memory
Judy Michelle Moon
1949–2009

PROLOGUE

“I SEE you’ve lost the hippie hair and the face stubble and the earring, Sheridan.”

“Yes, sir.” Brand had been so deep undercover for so long, answering to his own name was difficult.

“You don’t even look like him anymore,” his boss said approvingly. “Brian Lancaster is dead. We made it look as if his private plane went down over the Mediterranean under suspicious circumstances. No one in what’s left of the Looney’s operation will be questioning why Mr. Lancaster wasn’t one of the twenty-three arrests made across seven different countries.

“Amazing work, Sheridan. None of us could have predicted this when you answered that ad on the Internet. You took FREES in a new direction.”

FREES, First Response Emergency Eradication Squad, was an antiterrorism unit made up of tough, highly disciplined men with specialty training. Brand, recruited right after his first tour of active duty with the marines, had physical prowess and a fearlessness that had made him a top vertical-rescue specialist. But it was that gift, along with his knowledge of languages, that had earmarked him for FREES.

Answering an Internet ad out of Europe that offered

to buy highly restricted weapons had changed everything. Brand had found himself moving away from his specialty, immersed in a murky world where he was part cop, part soldier, part agent, part operative.

But it had taken its toll. The truth was, Brand preferred hard assignments as opposed to soft ones—assignments where training and physical strength came together in a rush of activity, in and out, and over. It didn't mess with your head as much as the past four years had. He longed for the relative simplicity of being an expert at something as technical as rope rescue.

“Look, even though it looks like Lancaster bit the dust, we've got a bit of mop-up to do. Bit players, loose ends. You need to lie low for a while. Really low. As if you really did disappear off the face of the earth. Know any place to do that?”

Brand Sheridan knew *exactly* where he could do that. The kind of place where no one would ever look for the likes of Brian Lancaster. A place of tree-lined, shady streets, where no one locked their doors, and the scent of petunias cascading out of window boxes perfumed the night air. It was a place where the big excitement on Friday night was the Little League game in Harrison Park.

It was the place that had piqued his fascination with all things that took a man high off the ground, but it had also been the place his younger self couldn't wait to get away from.

And the truth was, he dreaded going back there now. But he had to.

“I've got some leave coming, sir.” That was an understatement. Brand Sheridan had been undercover for four years. The deeper in he got, the less the assignment had lent itself to taking holidays.

He'd been so good at what he did, had achieved the

results he had, because of his ability to immerse himself in that world, to play that role as if his life depended on it.

Which it had.

His boss was looking askance at him.

“I need to go home.”

The word *home* felt as foreign to him as answering to his own name had done.

“It’ll be safe there?”

“If you were looking for a hidey-hole, the place where someone like Brian Lancaster would be least likely to be found? Sugar Maple Grove would be it.”

“One-horse town?”

“Without the horse,” he said wryly. “On the edge of the Green Mountains, Vermont. As far as I know, they still have a soda fountain and the kids ride their bikes to school. The big deal is the annual yard tour and rose show.”

He hesitated. “My sister has been in touch. She’s afraid my dad’s not coping very well with the death of my mother. I need to go see if he’s okay.”

Not that his father would appreciate it. At all.

“Your mother died while you were out, didn’t she?”

Her pride and joy the fact her yard had been on that annual tour of spectacular gardens, that her roses had been prize-winners. “Yes, sir.”

“I’m sorry. I know we weren’t able to bring you in when it happened.”

“That’s the nature of the job, sir.” And only people who did that job, like the man sitting across from him, could fully get that.

His father, the small-town doctor? Not so much.

“Good work on Operation Chop-Looney,” his boss said. “Exceptional. Your name has been put in for a commendation.”

Brand said nothing. He’d lived in a shadowy world