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Introducing DADDY BY CHRISTMAS by Patricia Thayer.

MIA caught sight of Jarrett when he walked into the open lobby. It was hard not to notice the man. In a charcoal business suit with a crisp white shirt and striped tie covered by a dark trench coat, he looked more Wall Street than small-town Colorado.

Mia couldn't blame him for keeping his distance. He was probably tired of taking care of her.

Besides, why would a man like Jarrett McKane be interested in her? Why would he want to take on a woman expecting a baby? Yet he'd done so many things for her. He'd been there when she'd needed him most. How could she not care about a man like that?

Heart pounding in her ears, she walked up behind him. Jarrett turned to face her. "Did you get enough sleep last night?"

"Yes, thanks to you," she said, wondering if he'd thought about their kiss. Her gaze went to his mouth, then she quickly glanced away. "And thank you for not bringing up my meltdown."

Jarrett couldn't stop looking at Mia. Blue was definitely her color, bringing out the richness of her eyes.

"What meltdown?" he said, trying hard to focus on what she was saying. "You were just exhausted from lack of sleep and worried about your baby."

He couldn't help remembering how, during the night, he'd kept going in to watch her sleep. How strange was that? "I hope you got enough rest."

She nodded. "Plenty. And you're a good neighbor for

coming to my rescue.”

He tensed. Neighbor? *What neighbor kisses you like I did?* “That’s me, just the full-service landlord,” he said, trying to keep the sarcasm out of his voice. He started to leave, but she put her hand on his arm.

“Jarrett, what I meant was you went beyond helping me.” Her eyes searched his face. “I’ve asked far too much of you.”

“Did you hear me complain?”

She shook her head. “You should. I feel like I’ve taken advantage.”

“Like I said, I haven’t minded.”

“And I’m grateful for everything...”

Grasping her hand on his arm, Jarrett leaned forward. The memory of last night’s kiss had him aching for another. “I didn’t do it for your gratitude, Mia.”

Gorgeous tycoon Jarrett McKane has never believed in Christmas—but he can’t help being drawn to soon-to-be-mom Mia Saunders! Christmases past were spent alone...and now Jarrett may just have a fairy-tale ending for all his Christmases future!

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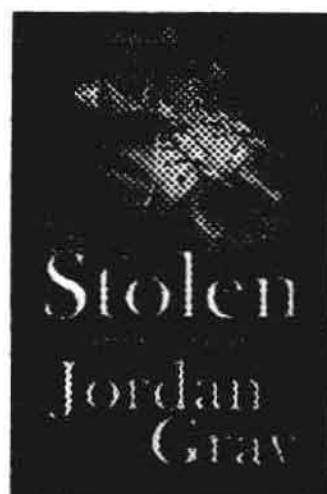
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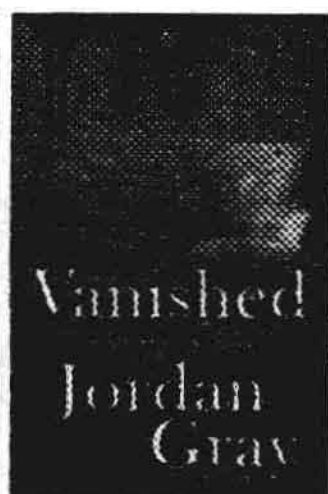
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Just the sight of her still stirred a desire in him like no woman ever had.

Her hair was still the color of sunshine, and he knew the feel of it between his fingers the same way he knew the feel of her skin beneath his lips.

"It was good to see you," he said. Good and painful.

"You, too, Jack." She studied him for a moment, her smile running deep.

As he watched her walk away, he felt all those old feelings rush at him like fighter planes.

He turned toward his rental SUV and told himself, as he had twelve years ago, that he would have hurt her worse if he'd married her and stayed in Whitehorse.

As he reached for his keys, he felt it again. That insane sensation that someone was watching him.

He thought for a moment that he'd imagined the feeling of being watched...but across the street was a silver SUV like the one he'd rented. And someone was sitting behind the wheel, watching his every move....

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**B.J.
DANIELS**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

USA TODAY bestselling author B.J. Daniels wrote her first book after a career as an award-winning newspaper journalist and author of thirty-seven published short stories. Since then she has won numerous awards, including a career achievement award for romantic suspense and many nominations and awards for best book.

Daniels lives in Montana with her husband, Parker, and two springer spaniels, Spot and Jem. When she isn't writing, she snowboards, camps, boats and plays tennis.

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†Whitehorse, Montana

*Whitehorse, Montana: The Corbetts

**Whitehorse, Montana: Winchester Ranch

††Whitehorse, Montana: Winchester Ranch Reloaded

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Jace Dennison—The former rodeo cowboy turned government operative's life takes a turn when a mystery woman follows him home to Montana.

Kayley Mitchell—The elementary-school teacher had given up hoping that the man she loved would ever return to Whitehorse.

Ava Carris—She'd never gotten over the loss of her husband. Until she saw a man who reminded her of him.

Ty Reynolds—He'd always wanted what Jace Dennison had—especially his girlfriend.

McCall Winchester—The sheriff hated to give Jace Dennison the bad news.

Virginia Winchester—She's believed for thirty years that her baby had died.

Cade Jackson—He worries about his old friend Jace—and with good reason.

Eva Hart—She promised her twin she would always be there for her—even from the grave.

Chapter One

Jace Dennison saw the woman staring at him as he took a seat to wait for his flight to Montana. He immediately opened the book he'd picked up to avoid being forced to talk to anyone.

But as he did, the letter from his mother fell out. Jace felt a wave of guilt along with grief as he bent to pick it up. If only he had read it and been able to return to Montana before it was too late.

Unsteadily, he opened the envelope and pulled out the letter. What surprised him was that it wasn't one of her usual cheerful letters that ended with "I hope you can come home" for whatever birthday, holiday or other event.

No, this letter was different. There was an urgency in her words. She must have known she was dying. Jace read the letter again. Over the years, he had managed to make it home for his mother's birthday and a few other occasions...though not many, he thought with regret.

What bothered him about this letter was what his mother wasn't saying. Apparently, there was something she needed to tell him, something that had weighed

heavily on her for years, making him even more convinced that she'd known she was dying. Why hadn't she let him know before it was too late?

He studied the letter and frowned. His mother almost made it sound as if she had a secret. Jace found that hard to believe. Marie Dennison wasn't the kind of woman who could keep a deep, dark secret, especially not from her only child. Not that cheerful, loving woman who'd raised him after his father had died. She'd already raised her younger brother, Audie.

But what had set off alarms was that his mother had insisted that she needed to tell him in person.

With growing regret, he realized he might never know what that secret was. When he'd landed in Miami, he'd been notified by his superior that there had been another tragedy at home. His uncle Audie Dennison had apparently been killed. The details were sketchy.

All Jace knew was that he was going home to bury the only family he had left—and he hadn't been there when they had needed him the most.

"Excuse me."

He looked up and was surprised to see it was the same woman who'd been staring at him earlier. She appeared to be close to his own age, early thirties, a petite, slight woman with dark hair cut in a chin-length bob. Her wide brown eyes had a haunted look to them in a face that was painfully beautiful.

"Excuse me," she repeated, her voice soft and apologetic. "I hate to bother you, but you look so much like my late husband. My husband's name was Carris. John Carris."

He smiled sympathetically. "No, I'm sorry. I'm afraid I've never heard the name before."

She nodded, looking disappointed. "I was so sure..." Her gaze moved over the contours of his face. "You look so much like him you could be brothers." She quickly took a step back. "My mistake. I'm sorry to have bothered you."

"It was no bother. I'm sorry to hear about your husband." It was clear that her loss had been recent.

"Thank you." She turned and walked away.

He stared after her for a moment, sympathizing with her in a way she would never know. Several people sitting nearby had been watching him and the woman, he realized, but they soon went back to what they had been doing.

Jace glanced again at the letter he'd been reading before she'd approached him then carefully put it into his jacket pocket.

As his flight was called, he rose to join the line of people preparing to board—and hesitated. Ahead of him, the widow Carris showed the attendant her boarding pass, and Jace had the strangest sense of foreboding.

He'd stayed alive this long by trusting his instincts.

"Sir?" the man said behind him when he failed to move forward.

"Sorry," Jace said as he stepped aside to pretend to dig out his boarding pass, knowing he couldn't trust his emotions right now. Not having just recently lost not only his mother, but also his uncle. Not with that letter in his pocket worrying him.

He'd never been afraid of flying—not even after his