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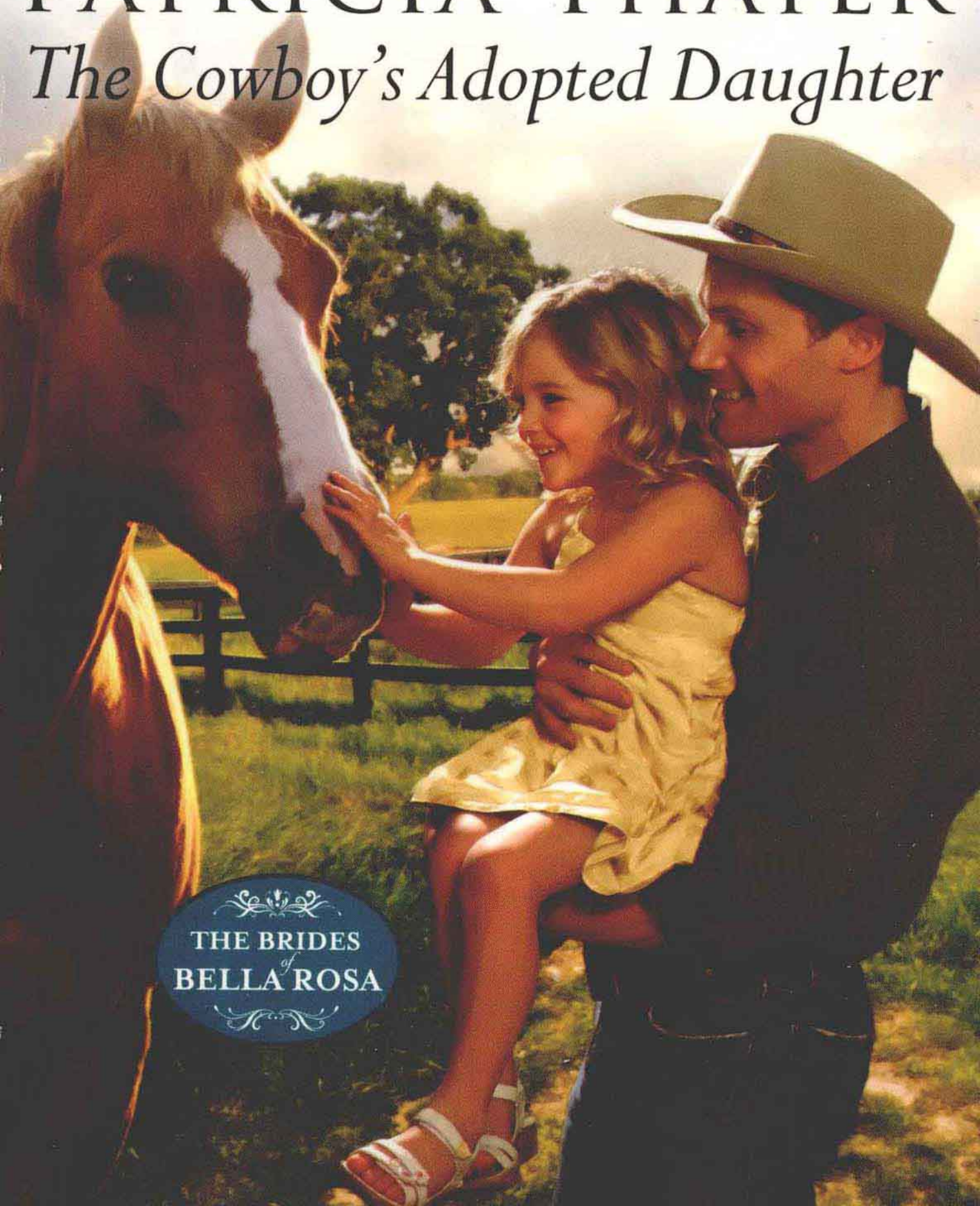


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Police chief Juliette Tremblant recognized the shape of the man strolling down the street—in as calm and leisurely fashion as if it were the middle of the day rather than midnight. She slowed her car, convinced her eyes were playing tricks on her. It had been a long time since Tyler O'Neill had been seen in this town.

As she pulled to a stop at the curb, he turned toward her, and her heart about stopped.

“What the hell are you doing here, Tyler?”

“Well, if it isn't Juliette Tremblant.” He made his way over to her, then leaned down so he could look her in the eye. He was close enough to touch.

Juliette was not, repeat, *not* going to touch Tyler O'Neill. Not with her fingers. Not with a ten-foot pole. There would be no touching. Which was too bad, since it was the only way she was ever going to convince herself the man standing in front of her—as rumpled and heart-stoppingly handsome now as he'd been at sixteen—was real.

And not a figment of all her furious revenge dreams.

“What are you doing back in Bonne Terre?” she asked.

“The manor is sitting empty,” Tyler said and shrugged, as though his arriving out of the blue after ten years was casual. “Seems like someone should be watching over the family home.”

“You?” She laughed at the very notion of him being here for any unselfish reason. “Please.”

He stared at her for a second, then smiled. Her heart fluttered against her chest—a small mechanical bird powered by that smile.

“You’re right.” But that cryptic comment was all he offered.

Juliette bit her lip against the other questions.

Why did you go?

Why didn’t you write? Call?

What did I do?

But what would be the point? Ten years of silence were all the answer she really needed.

She had sworn off feeling anything for this man long ago. Yet one look at him and all the old hurt and rage resurfaced as though they’d been waiting for the chance. That made her mad.

She put the car in gear, determined not to waste another minute thinking about Tyler O’Neill. “Have a good night, Tyler,” she said, liking all the cool “go screw yourself” she managed to fit into those words.

It seems Juliette has an old score to settle with Tyler.

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to see how he makes it up to her.

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Or are there more secrets to be revealed?

*The doors to the restaurants are open,
so take your seats and look out for secrets,
scandals and surprises on the menu!*

The Brides of Bella Rosa saga
continues next month in

Passionate Chef, Ice Queen Boss
by Jennie Adams

“You’re scared. You trusted your husband and he let you and Cherry down.” His gaze held hers. “I’m not him. I want to try to prove it to you. We need a chance to see where this leads. I won’t let you down. Don’t desert me now.”

“Oh, Alex.” She had trouble keeping a clear head.

His mouth closed over hers, tasting the traces of her mint toothpaste. He drew her closer, holding her against him as if she would disappear. He couldn’t let that happen—not now and, if he had the opportunity, not ever.

When he finally pulled back, he saw the want and need in her pretty emerald eyes. “A couple of days, Allie,” he said. “Give me a couple of days—that’s all I ask. I promise you and Cherry will enjoy it.”

She rewarded him with a smile. “My daughter is a pushover.” She wrapped her arms around his neck. “It’s me you have to convince, cowboy.”

He smiled, too. “I’ll do my best, ma’am.” His head lowered to hers and he did as he promised.

PATRICIA THAYER

The Cowboy's Adopted Daughter



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THE COWBOY'S ADOPTED DAUGHTER

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Originally born and raised in Muncie, Indiana, **Patricia Thayer** is the second of eight children. She attended Ball State University, and soon afterwards headed West. Over the years she's made frequent visits back to the Midwest, trying to keep up with her growing family.

Patricia has called Orange County, California, home for many years. She not only enjoys the warm climate, but also the company and support of other published authors in the local writers' organization. For the past eighteen years she has had the unwavering support and encouragement of her critique group. It's a sisterhood like no other.

When not working on a story, you might find her traveling the United States and Europe, taking in the scenery and doing story research while thoroughly enjoying herself accompanied by Steve, her husband for over thirty-five years. Together they have three grown sons and four grandsons. As she calls them, her own true-life heroes. On rare days off from writing, you might catch her at Disneyland, spoiling those grandkids rotten! She also volunteers for the Grandparent Autism Network.

Patricia has written for over twenty years and has authored more than thirty-six books for Silhouette and Harlequin Books. She has been nominated for both the National Readers' Choice Award and the prestigious RITA[®] Award. Her book *Nothing Short of a Miracle* won an *RT Book Reviews* Reviewer's Choice award.

A long-time member of Romance Writers of America, she has served as president and held many other board positions for her local chapter in Orange County. She's a firm believer in giving back.

Check her Web site at www.patriciathayer.com for upcoming books.

To the Scissor Sisters,

Michele Braithwaite, Lindsay Fulmer,

Amy Lawrence, Barbara Marshburn,

Karren Mitchell, Margaret Russell, my sister-in-law,

Pat Wright and Kay Yu Kim for letting me visit
your group, and answering all my questions.

You sure aren't your grandmother's quilting bee.

CHAPTER ONE

ALEX CASALI sat atop his stallion, Diablo, as he looked at the pasture below where three hundred head of prime Herefords grazed contently. In another few months the herd would be moved again at fall roundup, and the yearlings shipped to his feedlot outside Kerry Springs.

He shifted in the saddle and looked over the hill country. With each season came the familiar routine he needed to keep order in his life. He glanced around the hundreds of acres that made up his ranch. In Texas, his cattle operation was considered average, except the A Bar A Ranch purebred steers weren't average. Casali beef demanded top dollar, and got it.

It had taken years of hard work and struggle to get a piece of Texas land. He'd hired on to several cattle outfits and saved every dime for his own place. Little by little he'd restored this once rundown ranch he'd bought at auction until it suited his tastes. After ten years and some good investments, he'd built an empire.

He leaned his forearm against the saddle horn. Yet, the Casali Cattle Company wasn't enough to satisfy him. He'd begun breeding horses a few years back. Now, another new venture. He'd soon be opening a

guest ranch. He looked past the grove of trees at the dozen new cabins that would soon be open to strangers.

He had to be crazy for letting Tilda talk him into this project. Yet, his one-time housekeeper, ranch bookkeeper—and now partner in the guest ranch—had come up with some good ideas over the years to stimulate revenue. It still didn't change the fact that what he liked the most about this life was the solitude, having no need to be around many people. Outside of his brother, Angelo, he preferred to be alone.

Diablo danced impatiently and Alex tugged on the reins to get him under control. That was when he caught sight of a vehicle coming down the main road toward his house.

He didn't recognize the car. That meant they had no business on his land.

Allison Cole glanced out of the window as she drove her small SUV through the large stone and wrought-iron archway announcing the A Bar A Ranch. Cedar and oak trees lined the narrow road from the hot sun. Rows of pristine white rail fences ran alongside the road as horses roamed contentedly in the grassy pastures.

"This is really something, isn't it, Cherry?"

She glanced into the rear-view mirror to see her daughter watching the countryside from her safety seat. Most four-year-olds were inquisitive and asked a lot of questions. Not Cherry. And Allison missed hearing her child's tiny voice. Outside of her cries in the night, Cherry hadn't talked since the accident. Nor had she walked.

When Tilda Emerson called her early this morning, Allison couldn't turn down her intriguing invitation. Coming here today was for her daughter, as much as for the new business she was trying to launch in town, her