



*J*ohnnie Girl Publishing

EXCERPT FROM *TAYLOR MADE*

The Waterfront Restaurant at Pier 7 in San Francisco offered magnificent views of the Bay, and thanks to Jackson's recommendation, Mr. Fairchild deemed it the perfect place to take Jasmine on her special evening. Shortly after the waiter arrived to collect their drink order, Jackson excused himself from the table to take a phone call, and Mr. Fairchild took his absence as an opportunity to connect with his daughter.

"I'm so proud of you," he said, staring at her from across the table.

"Thanks Dad."

"Not only have you earned your degree, but you've also succeeded at snagging quite a catch."

"Yeah, I guess so," she confirmed with a smile. At times she found it hard to believe that the man she had once tried to run from was now her very loving and considerate companion. True, he had been a ladies man, but the days of him playing the field were long gone, and she was the only woman who held his heart.

"Do you think he's the one?" asked her father, staring at her intently as he awaited her response.

She hesitated for a moment, knowing the answer but afraid to say it. Then, after taking a sip of water, she looked at him and said, "We'll see."

"What did I tell you about calling me?" Jackson spoke sternly into his cell phone after waiting until he was out of earshot of Jasmine and her father, for he didn't want either of them to hear the conversation he knew wasn't going to be pleasant. "I don't want my girlfriend getting the wrong idea—"

"Calm down, Pretty Boy. Nobody's checking for you. Been there, done that, and, it wasn't all that."

"Yeah right," he said, sucking his teeth. "Is that why you kept blowing up my phone, begging for more?"

"Huh!" The female caller gasped uncontrollably, for she knew he was telling the truth. She just couldn't believe he had the gall to say it. "You have got to be the biggest jerk I have ever met!"

"What do you want, Bianca?" asked Jackson with irritation in his voice. He was tired of having to deal with his father's bitter office manager, the same one who had taught him to never mix business with pleasure.

"I don't want anything," she snapped. "I'm calling on behalf of your father—you know, the man I work for, the man you *used* to work for? He asked me to call and see if there

was any way you could clear your schedule in the next week or so. He wants you to come home to discuss some very important business.”

“Regarding what?”

“He didn’t say. I haven’t earned the keys to the kingdom yet. Like you, he’s full of secrets, and didn’t disclose any details.”

Jackson took a deep breath then said, “Okay, well, if things go according to plan, I’ll be coming home soon anyway.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Never mind. Just let him know I’ll be in touch.”

“Okay.”

“And Bianca?”

“Yes?”

“Don’t call my cell again. Next time, send an email.”

“Go to hell,” she said then hung up.

“Have you decided yet?” asked Jackson once he returned to the table.

“Yeah, I think so,” Jasmine replied.

The waiter returned to take their order, and once the food arrived, the three immediately began partaking in their meal. The graduation ceremony had been quite lengthy, considering the various departments, faculty members and students that had been honored, so the trio had developed quite an appetite, and weren’t ashamed to satisfy it. There wasn’t much conversation during the meal, and Jasmine, who had become so enamored by the whimsical scenery and fantastic views the restaurant offered, set her fork down to take it all in.

Glancing upward, she observed the cloudless sky that hung above the city. It was growing dark out, and a cool breeze swept across the Bay. Luckily, the heat lamps that were scattered about the enclosed patio in which they sat provided enough warmth to keep them toasty, and it wasn’t long before she found herself admiring some of the couples that sat nearby. There was one couple in particular that caught her eye—an older pair in their late fifties or early sixties. She watched as the man reached across the table and grabbed the woman’s hand, kissing it softly while she giggled then playfully yanked it away. Jasmine thought how sweet it was to see two people that age in love and acting flirtatious. She couldn’t help but think of how nice it would have been had her father allowed himself to fall in love again after her mother passed away. It struck her then that she had never seen him with anyone...well, except for Miss Hall, but that was nothing.

Miss Hall was the mother of one of her elementary school classmates who happened to attend the same church she and her father attended. Even as a child, Jasmine noticed how Miss Hall had taken very little interest in her until she laid eyes on her father, who was actually an attractive man once you got past the rimless eyeglasses and Mr. Rogers sweaters he wore almost daily. Jasmine never could understand how a man with so much money, could spend so little on himself. A hardworking businessman, Mr. Fairchild rarely wore suits,

opting for business casual attire that left much to be desired in his daughter's opinion. Although she shared his almond-shaped eyes, caramel complexion, and independent spirit, his fashion sense, or rather, lack thereof, was all his own.

In any case, once Miss Hall targeted Mr. Fairchild as a prospective suitor, she immediately started going out of her way to give Jasmine rides to and from school, and began arranging play dates for her and her daughter, who was really more of an acquaintance than a friend. The way her father smiled from ear to ear whenever Miss Hall came around made Jasmine cringe. The fact that this woman was trying to take her deceased mother's place while her child encroached on her territory was more than she could handle. Needless to say, she was highly relieved when Miss Hall's ex husband took a job out of state, forcing her to follow so that her daughter's relationship with him wouldn't be compromised.

As Jasmine glanced across the table at her father shoveling a big piece of juicy steak into his mouth, she couldn't help but wonder how he must have felt having gone all those years without a mate. He worked so hard that he barely had time for much if any play. Aside from work, she was the only thing he seemed to truly care about despite the fact that he never really knew how to provide her with the emotional support she needed after her mother passed away. Although at one point she may have felt threatened by anyone or anything that seemed to absorb his time and attention, she now felt a little sad knowing that he wouldn't have anyone around to keep him company. It was hard enough making the decision to leave him once she settled on a school four hundred miles away, but now that college was over, her future, and how it would impact their relationship, was unknown. For one, moving back to Los Angeles hadn't proven to be a priority given that all the interviews she had lined up were for companies located in the Bay.

Jasmine didn't know what the future held for she or her father, but in that moment, she truly felt happy. As she watched him devour his meal, a huge grin swept across her face, for she was thrilled to have him share in one of the greatest moments of her life. After taking a sip of water, she glanced over at Jackson, who she expected to see eating just as frantically as her father was, but was surprised to discover that he wasn't eating at all. Instead, he appeared to be in deep thought, as he pushed the food around his plate with a fork.

"Hey you," she said, gently nudging his arm.

"Hey," he replied, as if jolted out of a trance. He then looked at her and smiled.

Shortly thereafter, the trio finished their meal, and Jasmine thanked her father once more for making her graduation day truly special. He had the limo driver take them back to the lot in Berkeley where Jackson's car was parked, then wished the young couple a goodnight before heading back to his hotel.

"Are you tired?" asked Jackson, once he and Jasmine entered his vehicle.

"Not really."

"Good," he said before cranking the engine. "Now it's time to *really* celebrate."

Jasmine didn't know what Jackson had in store for the rest of the evening, but knowing him, she knew that whatever it was, it would be something she wouldn't soon forget.