



## CHAPTER FIVE

**Kate stood** at the dining room window and looked out over the ranch yard toward the corrals and the big red barn where Jake was leading a pair of harnessed horses out through the double doors of the barn. He shoved one door along the track to the center of the opening and then moved to the end of the other door and pushed it to the center. She shivered, feeling chilled and raw inside. Pulling her zippered sweatshirt closer around herself, she fought back a dreadful uneasiness that she might have to bear the indignity of another harsh encounter with Jake. She coiled a long strand of her sable brown hair around her finger.

Kate hoped that Jake and Charlie wouldn't be gone long so she could be on her way right after lunch. She even began to rethink working in Jackson. A little over a hundred miles away, the town seemed too close to Jake McClary for Kate's comfort. Kate continued to watch as both horses followed Jake in perfect unison through a gate in the corral. He held their halter ropes in a loose grip. The horses waited for him to close the gate and then resumed their steady plodding toward a hay sled several yards away. One big bay stepped easily over the tongue and stopped, while the other one sidestepped into place on the near side.

The scene reminded Kate of watching her grandfather hitch his favorite team to a wagon. He and Ben would spend half the summer irrigating so the hay would grow, then during August and early September they would cut and stack the hay so they could dig it out of the stack in the winter to feed his cattle. "We have to feed them every single day. The snow is way too deep for them to paw down where they might find some grass," he'd say. The teams they